

Notes



For the entourage of a person with an addiction issue

TO BETTER GUIDE YOU



santemonteregie.qc.ca/ouest

Centre intégré
de santé
et de services sociaux
de la Montérégie-Ouest

Québec 

E101 – MARS 2024

Québec 

This guide is intended for the members of the entourage and is designed to:

- Help you express what you're feeling
- Provide some information about addictions
- Help you understand how change happens
- Recommend possible solutions
- Give you a list of recommended readings

Enjoy!

If a person knows there are consequences to their addiction, why don't they just stop?

That's a very legitimate question. There are many possible reasons. When it comes to addictions, not everyone is equal, which is what makes them so complicated. It is important to know that **many factors** can contribute to a person developing an addiction:

- age
- sex
- mental health
- genetics
- environment
- personality traits specific to substance/gambling/Internet addiction, etc.

An addiction sets in gradually over time and can even go unnoticed for many years. Consider the example of a person who is dealing with a problem: it will bring up emotions such as grief, anger, and anxiety. Instinctively, that person will seek out all sorts of ways to lessen or eliminate their discomfort and stress.

They may use methods or strategies like drinking alcohol or taking drugs, gambling, or spending time on the Internet: all of which provide quick but temporary relief. These addictive behaviours can serve **several purposes**, for example:

- managing emotions
- killing time
- feeling pleasure;
- escaping reality
- pain management
- feeling more relaxed, etc.

Addictions can also be explained by **dopamine: known as the “feel-good” or “happy” hormone**. Secreted naturally in our body, dopamine activates the reward circuit in our brain, a sort of “pleasure highway.” As a basic survival mechanism, our brain releases dopamine in response to natural sources of pleasure such as food, water, sex, and affection.



What does dopamine have to do with anything?

It's important to know that addictive behaviours activate the same reward circuit as natural sources of pleasure. This means that they also release dopamine: only more of it and more intensely; making people want to use and start using substances again, gamble, etc. By now, you've no doubt realized that alcohol and drugs, gambling, and Internet use provide a quick hit of pleasure. But dopamine isn't the only explanation. It's also important to know that a person with an addiction can also develop a tolerance to the substances they're using.

Once a tolerance has set in, it is not uncommon for a person who stops using to experience physical and psychological symptoms. This phenomenon is called withdrawal.

The **withdrawal** symptoms vary depending on: the substance, how often and how much the person consumes, and their physical and mental health.

If a person with an addiction wants to stop using, it is recommended that they consult a health professional (e.g., doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or 811) to make sure the withdrawal process is completed safely.

Okay, I get it, but I want the person to change!

If you try to confront the person, they may not admit to their problem. They're probably feeling ashamed, stressed, and helpless. They are also likely in a lot of pain. There are many ramifications to an addiction, all of which affect different spheres of a person's life.

Change—no matter what kind—is a process that happens in stages. **Think of a change you've wanted to make in your life. Now read the following stages:**

Stage 1

Precontemplation. The person doesn't think they have a problem (why would I change?). At this stage, the person doesn't see the problem and hasn't experienced any consequences or losses because of their addictive behaviours. They'll often defend themselves and make excuses, but they don't yet think they need to make a change.

Stage 2

Contemplation. The person is ambivalent (yes, but...). They're slowly starting to see the disadvantages of their addictive behaviours and question themselves, without necessarily wanting to change these behaviours.

Stage 3

Preparation. The person wants to change. They start thinking about it and making a mental list of the resources at their disposal and the people who might be able to help them.

Stage 4

Action. The person takes concrete action to change their addictive behaviours. At this stage, the support, understanding, and patience of their entourage and network can increase the person's commitment to making a change

Stage 5

Maintenance. The person has made changes in different areas of their life. The changes have been put in place and are being respected and maintained. However, the person needs to stay alert to anything that could cause them to waver and ultimately, go back to using.

Stage 6

Relapse. This last stage may or may not be part of the person's journey. It's defined as a return to the addictive behaviours, and more often than not, it's the rule rather than the exception. That being said, it shouldn't necessarily be seen as a failure. Instead, the person can use it as a learning experience.

Some strategies to complete your toolbox



First of all, surround yourself with people.

Having people around you whom you know and trust is one of the keys to finding comfort and support. The case workers at the rehabilitation centres (CRD) can also support you, even if the person with the addiction doesn't want help or won't admit to having a problem.

At first, it might be hard to stand up for yourself, set limits, and do things for yourself, because you're afraid of the fallout or how the other person will react. Asking for support from a case worker can be part of the solution. The case workers can help you to understand the situation better, come up with strategies for you, your relationship, or even your family, and identify ways to "let it go" and cope better with the situation, all of which will improve your quality of life.

Here are six attitudes and behaviours that could help you gain some perspective:

1. Put yourself first

It's only normal to want to help a person struggling with addictive behaviours. We recommend that you start by telling them how you feel about the situation, to make them aware of how their addictive behaviours are affecting your relationship as a couple or your family.

Are they still refusing to change their addictive behaviours? It may be time for you to take a different approach and a step back, which will help you to see things more clearly. Remind them that you're still there and willing to help if they need you. As for you, why not take the first step by reaching out to case workers at the CRD to explore different avenues (confidentially, of course)?

2. Set boundaries instead of trying to control

There's no point in trying to **restrict or control** the other person's addictive behaviours. This often leads to conflict. Instead, try setting boundaries as a way of protecting yourself. For example:

- You can refuse to do an activity with the person if they've been using. You can leave a place if the person starts behaving in a way that's upsetting you and explain why. **"I'm happy to go out with you when you're not drunk/high."**
- You can end a phone conversation if you realize the other person is drunk or high. **"We'll pick this up when you're in a better frame of mind."**
- You can refuse to give or lend the person money if you know they're still engaged in the addictive behaviours.

3. Talk instead of blame

It can be hard to find the right words to talk about the situation. It's normal to feel angry, frustrated, sad, and helpless. Sometimes, words can sound like accusations or recriminations. The other person feels like you're attacking them, so they react strongly. The arguments can escalate and start to happen over and over.

Instead of blaming, try using effective communication strategies:

- Talk about yourself and what you're going through. **"I'd like you to listen to me"** instead of **"You never listen to me."** **"I'm worried about you"** instead of **"You need to stop."**
- Express your feelings and needs without judging the other person.
- Explain to the other person what's bothering you and what you're worried about. Tell them about the things you've noticed and how they make you feel. **"I notice you've been drinking a lot, and I'm worried about it."**
- Avoid saying things like **"You gamble too much"** or **"How many drinks have you had?"**
- Talk to the person about what you want and expect from your relationship, what's worrying you, and what you think is missing.
- Work on your listening skills. Be patient and respectful and try to be understanding instead of always wanting to have the last word.

4. Take care of yourself

It's very important to look after your own physical and mental health. This will help prevent a burnout and keep you feeling satisfied with the different areas of your life.

Some people reject the idea of self-care and needing to make changes themselves: **"It's the other person who has a problem."** But we firmly believe that making changes yourself opens the door to improving your quality of life. It's crucial to identify different ways to cope with the situation better.

Without pointing fingers, it is also important to examine your role in the situation. You might ask yourself questions about how the addictive behaviours play into your relationship or family dynamics.

Empowering yourself and taking care of yourself means:

- Thinking about your own needs;
- Pampering yourself;
- Participating in social activities;
- Building a support network for yourself;
- Asking for help and support when you need it.

Make the other person step up instead of always stepping in for them

You might be tempted to:

- Forgive them if they don't show up for something;
- Pay their bills or rent (if they've been chronically late with their payments);
- Make excuses for them when they miss school or work;
- Do things for them;
- Compensate for their lack of involvement in household tasks.

When you're always stepping in for the other person, exhaustion and frustration can quickly set in. It can be hard to set boundaries knowing the consequences could also affect you and your entire family. For example, if you don't call your spouse's boss to explain why they're late or absent, your spouse may lose their job. This would lead to financial issues for your family.

Whenever possible, let the person face the consequences of their addictive behaviours. If you think it will help, have an honest talk with a trusted person or a case worker; this could help you to see the situation more clearly and figure out how to make everyone accountable for their own actions, so you're no longer carrying the entire load. Remember that admitting that there's a problem is the first step in taking action and getting help.

5. Seek support

You may be holding back from talking about your situation out of shame or guilt. Talking about what you're going through and seeking help and support from professionals, or your entourage is both normal and healthy. We encourage you to do so.

When kids are involved...

While they may not say so, children—even very young ones—can be affected by an addiction issue in their family. According to studies, children from families dealing with an addiction appear to have a higher risk than other children of developing an addiction problem themselves later in life. However, with the right support, they can overcome these challenges and thrive. You and your child can ask for help and support from the case workers at the rehabilitation centre; their job is to be there for your family.

We recommend that you:

- Tell your child that the situation is not their fault;
- Let them talk about the things that are upsetting them and their feelings of fear, shame, anger, and guilt, without making them feel like they're betraying or "telling on" their family;
- Listen to them and reassure them.



Contact information

To request information or services

- **Montréal** (French and English)
450-443-4413 | 1-866-964-4413
- **Montréal** (English)
514-486-1304

Outpatient services

- **Candiac**
450-619-6009 | 1-877-619-6009
201 boulevard de l'Industrie, 3rd floor
- **Longueuil**
450-651-3113 | 1-888-651-3113
1525 rue Joliette
- **Montréal** (English)
514-486-1304
3285 boulevard Cavendish, Suite 100
- **Saint-Hubert**
450-443-2100 | 1-800-363-9434
5110 boulevard Cousineau
- **Saint-Hyacinthe**
450-771-6622 | 1-866-770-6622
2115 boulevard Casavant Ouest, Suite 202
- **Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu**
450-348-1600 | 514-875-6678
202 rue Saint-Louis
- **Salaberry-de-Valleyfield**
450-373-5934 | 1-877-343-5934
11 rue de l'Église, 3rd floor
- **Sorel-Tracy**
450-746-1226
61 rue Morgan

Website:

santemonteregie.qc.ca/services/dependances

Reading suggestions

CLAUDAIS, M. (2010). Un jour la jument va parler, N. éd. Québec/Amérique.

D'ANSEBOURG, T. (2001). Cessez d'être gentil, soyez vrai!, Homme

D'AUTEUIL, S. et LAFOND, C. (2006).

Vivre avec un proche impulsif, intense, instable.

LAMARRE, S. (1998). Aidez sans nuire, Marguerite Lescop

LAVENTURE, M. et PLOURDE, C. (2019).

Vivre avec un proche ayant une dépendance, Bayard Canada.

TREMBLAY, R. et BÉRARD, D. (2015). La chaise rouge devant le fleuve, Guy Saint-Jean Éditeur

Content taken and adapted from the documents listed below by Addiction Suisse, which can be found on their website addictionsuisse.ch/:

- Vivre avec un homme alcoolique (2016)
- Vivre avec une femme alcoolique (2016)
- Alcoolisme : les proches sont aussi touchés (2016)
- Vivre avec un conjoint alcoolodépendant
- Proche d'une personne dépendante : que faire ?