



Addictions

Addiction is a condition that can be classified as any activity, behaviour or substance that becomes a fixation, creates dependence and leads to withdrawal if the person does not engage in or use it; indeed, the physical and psychological need or reward can be so strong that the person continues to “use” despite the addictions harmful or dangerous effects on a personal, relational, professional, and/or social level.

There is huge variance in what a person can be addicted to (e.g., alcohol, nicotine, opioids, gambling, sex, shopping) and how it might affect or show in them. However, there are commonalities within addictions. A key feature is that brain pathways for reward and reinforcement are intensely activated, typically involving the neurotransmitter dopamine. Furthermore, continued “use” affects the brain’s ability to plan, inhibit, and think divergently or globally, and therefore diminish a person’s ability to see the harm they are doing to themselves and potentially others; overtime the pursuit of fulfilling the addiction dominates.

The signs and symptoms are often obvious and/or oblique, blatant and/or subtle, and dreadfully debilitating. If you or a loved one shows any of the following, perhaps consider your activity, behaviour or substance “use”. Look at the table below and tick the box “yes” or “no” to consider if behaviour change needs to occur.

Signs	Applies to Me?	Applies to Other?
Tolerance.	Yes	No
Intense cravings.	Yes	No
Physical dependence.	Yes	No
Withdrawal symptoms.	Yes	No
Isolating behaviours.	Yes	No
Neglecting responsibilities.	Yes	No
Financial trouble related to use.	Yes	No
Engaging in increasingly risky behaviours.	Yes	No
Doing things you normally wouldn't to get a “fix”.	Yes	No
Secrecy.	Yes	No
Mood swings.	Yes	No
Using to block out other thoughts or feelings.	Yes	No
Maintaining a supply or access.	Yes	No
Failing in stopping use.	Yes	No
Continued use despite harmful effects.	Yes	No

Whilst there are many contributing factors to becoming addicted—genetic, social, psychology, circumstances, choice, personality, coping skills—there are also many resulting emotional factors in being addicted—feelings of shame, guilt, remorse, hopelessness, helplessness, depression, sadness, and failure. As such, to overcome the addiction, one must explore and resolve many issues in own life and not only focus on the addiction.

There are many recovery routes. For instance, some people go solo, the “natural recovery”, others get support from family, friends, groups; some people go for intense treatment as a patient in a residential setting, others go for less intense one-to-one professional help; some people go for medical assistance, others for non-medical assistance. Whichever way suits, typically the road to recovery is seldom easy, but often worthwhile and achievable.