



Walmsley & Associates

Professional Counselling - Employee Assistance Programs - Disability Management Services

~Meeting the needs of individuals, employers and communities~

Tel: 250-564-1000

Website: www.walmsley.ca

E-mail: info@walmsley.ca

To Contact Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) Call: 1-800-481-5511

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What is an addiction?

An addiction occurs when we rely on something outside of ourselves to get us “up”. This reliance is surrounded by a series of illusions or myths that allow us to practice the addiction when it brings negative consequences into our lives. We believe that the use of the substance or activity can make us more social, we can have more fun, can cope better with our problems, takes away the pain, or enhances our performance in any way, as being a positive thing in our life. Most addictions, if not all, start out in a benign way. They do help us socialize better, enjoy an event more or enhance our performance, but eventually, as an addiction progresses, we slip over the line where this is no longer true. One of the biggest illusions about an addiction is that we are in control of it and our lives, where as, the opposite is true once we have become addicted. Our addiction now controls us, as well as, our lives. Our “friend” clouds our thinking and distorts our perceptions in regards to our reality. The more we rely on a substance, an activity, or a habit, the closer we move towards being addicted to it. The more we are in an addiction, the more distorted our perception of it is. The effects on our lives becomes more negative, unfortunately, the more we rely on it, the more we justify continuing its practice in our lives. We are often the last to know what an addiction is doing to us. Often our family and friends can see the effects of an addiction on our lives much more clearly than we can.

What are examples of an addiction?

Some of the most common examples of an addiction are alcoholism, a cocaine or marijuana (or other drug of choice) addiction, smoking cigarettes, over-the-counter medications, (such as Tylenol or Gravol), workaholism, compulsive eating, pornography and compulsive gambling.

How do I know when I am becoming addicted?

An addiction typically develops over time, with a wide variance in the length it may take to become addicted. This depends on the person’s body type, gender, substance, it’s availability and notoriety, beliefs about the substance or activity, and many other factors. Few people set out to become addicted and it is a fine line to distinguish when someone is addicted. The best judge of this is the person themselves, based on an honest appraisal of their circumstances. The honest appraisal can be distorted by denial or minimization of their situation. No one plans to ruin their lives and relationships by becoming addicted, it just happens.



There is a definite process that occurs that leads one down the path of addiction. The first step is that you try it, often, “just for fun”. You find that it relaxes you, makes you feel good, and perhaps enhances your abilities or sociability. The next step takes place when you try it again. This time it feels familiar, like an “old friend”. One that makes you feel more comfortable, more relaxed and helps to enhance your enjoyment. The next step occurs when you begin to plan its use or the behaviour. You may begin to socialize less with people who do not use the same substance or practice the same behavior. You may begin to socialize or hang around with people that you would not have before you began to use the substance or practice the behavior. You think about it even when it’s not around.

Walmsley & Associates offers *Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAP)* for individuals, couples & families who may experience difficult times or a sudden crisis. **EFAP'S** are highly *confidential, professional and voluntary.*



The last stage is that you take the substance or do the behaviour more and more, even when you are alone. You may start feeling guilty about the use or the

behaviour. People around you may be nagging or making remarks about your behaviour. You may become irritable and defensive about their interference in your life. Now the use or the behaviour consumes your time and your energy. It begins to interfere with your life by creating conflict in relationships, at your job, with fulfilling your responsibilities, financially and with your health.

How can I identify the early signs?

Here are some indicators that you may be addicted:

- ☹ Comments from family members or friends about my use of a substance, or bad behaviour associated with its use.
- ☹ Anticipated the next time I will engage in the activity.
- ☹ People avoiding me or friends & associates slipping away.
- ☹ Not being successful when I try to quit or cut down.
- ☹ My use of this substance or behaviour causing health, financial, legal or relational problems in my life.
- ☹ Negative results or consequences, yet I continue to engage in this behaviour.
- ☹ Missing work or any other important occasion as a result of my use.
- ☹ Forgetting what is important to me while “under the influence”.
- ☹ Turning to food consistently “to make me feel better” when emotionally stressed.
- ☹ “Chasing my losses” when gambling – hoping “this time” I will win big.
- ☹ Borrowing money to gamble.
- ☹ Feeling I need to hide my use or activity from family and friends.
- ☹ Feeling anxious or worried on a regular basis about my use.
- ☹ Negative changes in significant relationships as a result of my use.
- ☹ Declining quality of my work, recreational habits or quality of my companions.
- ☹ Making mistakes or errors in judgment that is related to my use.
- ☹ Family, co-workers or/and friends covering up for me.

If you have noticed some of these changes or events occurring in your life, you may be addicted. The use of any substance or activity that you are doing more and more of may be a signal that a substance or activity is taking hold in your life. Often, we cannot recognize its effects because it has become worse over a long period of time. Sometimes the people around us are the first to notice and bring it to our attention. There may be some truth to what they are saying.

Perhaps a trusted friend, family member or co-worker can be helpful in shedding light on the situation. You may want to consider talking to your doctor, to a clergy, or to another professional who is familiar with addictions. It is possible to stop by yourself - getting past the denial and justification is the first crucial step.

If you are unable to quit by yourself, there is help available. You might be able to access an Employee and Family Assistance Program through your place of employment. You can seek professional help through Addictions Services in your local area. Another option would be to attend support groups that are available in most communities. Many self-help groups take place in hospitals, clinics or social service agencies. Check your local phone book for resources in your area.

Written by **Katherine Harriman, MSW (Cand.), RSW.**

Recovery is Discovery

*I found my “child within” today;
For many years so locked away.
Loving, embracing- needing so much,
If only I could reach in and touch,
I did not know this child of mine-
We were never acquainted at three or nine.
But today I felt the crying inside.
I’m here, I shouted, come reside.
We hugged each other ever so tight
As feeling emerge of hurt and fright.
It’s okay, I sobbed, I love you so!
You are precious to me, I want you to know.
My child, my child, you are safe today.
You will not be abandoned- I’m here to stay.
We laughed, we cried, it was a discovery-
This warm, loving child is my recovery.
-Kathleen Algoe, 1989*

“Recovery is, as they say, one day at a time.”

Quoted from: *Adult Children of Alcoholics*, by Jane Geringer Woititz, Ed.D.