



**Chapter 2:  
Healthy Minds**

# ADDICTION

## A Life Out of Balance

### Abbotsford Addiction Centre

Provides free counseling to youth and adults affected by substance misuse.

(604) 850-5106

[www.abbotsfordcommunityservices.com](http://www.abbotsfordcommunityservices.com)

### Impact (Adolescence Substance Abuse Program)

(604) 853-1766

[impactasap@telus.net](mailto:impactasap@telus.net)

### Kinghaven Treatment Centre

Will answer questions and share resources to find you the program you need.

[www.kinghaven.ca](http://www.kinghaven.ca)

### Youth in BC

A web-based hotline where you can talk to trained volunteers and counselors about concerns such as addiction.

[www.youthinbc.com](http://www.youthinbc.com)

### Here to Help

A site that gives information on a variety of topics including substance abuse.

[www.heretohelp.ca](http://www.heretohelp.ca)

### Centre for Addiction & Mental Health Canada

Improves the lives of those affected by addiction and mental health problems.

[www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)

It began with an innocent dare.

“Try it” whispered a friend. “I Dare you to do it!” hissed another.

“Come on Sarah—don’t chicken out on us. Just this once!” urged another

voice, swiftly moving in to close the circle of friends that stood looming over her. Paralyzed with fear, the chanting voices of her peers dropped one by one from her mind, where she was left with only *one*. With a voice she’d heard before, it speaks quickly; commanding her attention, it blurs the faces around her into shifting shades of blue-grey. Time collapsed, she extends an arm to accept the burning object, and loosely holds it between her small fingers. Scared, Sarah closes her eyes. She inhales.



*Three years later...*

Sarah sneaks a twenty dollar bill from her mother’s purse; she lies about her age to the young male cashier at the convenience store down the street from her high school; she spends her lunch hour and gym class with four others behind the green garbage dumpsters, where she inhales again; she hides her cigarettes under her mattress and worriedly prays that no one will find them.

Sixteen years old, Sarah likes butterscotch ice cream, scary movies and hanging out with friends. What Sarah doesn’t know is that she has an **addiction**.

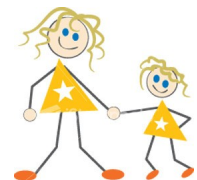
*Addiction signifies the life out of balance.*

### What is Addiction?

An addiction is a **recurring compulsion** to engage in a particular activity, despite harmful consequences to that person’s health, mental state, or social life.

There are lots of things we can potentially become addicted to, including:

- ◆ Video Games
- ◆ The Internet
- ◆ Food
- ◆ Alcohol
- ◆ Drugs
- ◆ Gambling
- ◆ Sex
- ◆ Shopping



Many of these activities (particularly drug use) can have noticeable symptoms:

**PHYSICAL DEPENDANCE** which means our bodies become used to a particular drug and go through withdrawal symptoms when we stop taking the drug.

Eg. Nicotine in Cigarettes

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDANCE**, which means our mind feels dependant. When we don’t get what we want we may experience cravings, irritability, or depression.

Eg. Internet Addiction

**Dependence** is just one symptom of substance abuse (or addiction). Other symptoms might include preoccupation with using a drug, memory loss, blackouts, confusion and mood swings.



## GOOD HABITS VS. BAD HABITS

Addiction is a **pattern** of repeated behaviour that develops over a period of time. It may be helpful if we think of addiction like a habit. Each of us has our own series of habits that become a part of our everyday behavior. Lots of these habits are **good**, in that they enhance our life by making us happy and safe. When we hold the door open for others; when we look both ways before we cross the street; when we always look on the bright side of things; when we remember to thank people without even thinking about it—when we continue to do these wonderful things, they become part of our body’s unique **routine**. A routine rich in safe and healthy habits helps us maintain strong relationships (with friends, family members, **Big Brothers** and **Big Sisters**), ensures our safety, and impacts our lives and the lives of others in a **productive** and **positive** way. We’ve all heard people express just how much they really enjoy something. *“I’m addicted to chocolate; I just love it!”*, *“Have you seen that new movie?—I just can’t get enough of it!”*, *“Wow, that video game was so much fun, it’s all I can think about!”* — energetic expressions such as these communicate an enthusiasm for things that bring us pleasure and enjoyment, and keep us excited about our lives. We refer to these things as **passions** because they bring about powerful feelings of joy, excitement, ecstasy, the famous “adrenaline rush”; however, unlike an **addiction**, passions enter our thoughts and behaviours only in **moderation**. Unique to each person, passions add depth and vibrancy to our lives, and they bring a healthy **balance** to the **duties**, **responsibilities** and **commitments** of daily life. **They tend to bring out the best in us.** There are **bad habits**, however, that can have a negative impact on our daily health, safety, and wellbeing. Frequently forgetting to brush our teeth, not telling the truth, keeping secrets, not listening to or following instructions, and walking home alone at night—these and other bad habits can significantly change the way we interact with other people, compromise the way we look at ourselves, and result in potentially serious injuries. While we tend to think of bad habits as somehow trivial or small, they bear a resemblance to addiction similar to being **“stuck in a rut”**—it’s easier to slip into them than it is to climb out. Sometimes we don’t realize that we have a bad habit until it becomes dangerous to our health and safety, or until someone (like a **Big Brother** or **Big Sister**) brings it to our attention. An addiction is like a bad habit to the extreme, when moderation is missing from our lives. The need to satisfy an addiction is a risky state of mind, where we pull away from our lives, neglect family and friends, and put ourselves in unfamiliar, uncomfortable or dangerous situations that can interfere with school, money, sleep, health, relationships, and our overall health.



## FACTS ABOUT TEEN ADDICTION

- ⇒ Almost 90% of young people have tried a full glass of **alcohol**, almost 70% have tried **marijuana**, and 56% have smoked a full **cigarette**.
- ⇒ One in three young people have tried **magic mushrooms**, and almost one in four has tried **cocaine**.
- ⇒ **Alcohol** and **marijuana** are the **primary drugs that youths report using on a daily basis**. One in six youth who use **marijuana** are daily users, and one in four use it once a week or more. **Marijuana** was the first drug tried by 94% of youth. Almost half of the youth surveyed believe there is no risk in trying **marijuana** once.
- ⇒ The three drugs that are most difficult for youth to stop or reduce using include **crack**, **crystal meth**, and **heroin**. One in four youth who tried **heroin** use it every day, and 100% of youth 16-18 who use heroin report having trouble stopping or cutting down their use of the drug. Two thirds of youth have trouble cutting down on their use of **crack**, while 75% of young people report having difficulty reducing their use of **crystal meth**.
- ⇒ **Aboriginal youth** are most likely to have tried any of the drugs included in the survey, with **Caucasian youth** second most likely.

**\*\*According to the 2006 Vancouver Youth Drug Survey Results\*\***

## Who Becomes Addicted?

Many things play a role in creating an addiction, including a person’s social environment and their genetic makeup. We see addiction in people of all ages, races, and genders. Some factors that can influence the likelihood of developing an addiction include:

- ◆ Genetics. For example, children with alcoholic parents are four times more likely than other kids to become alcoholics.
- ◆ One’s relationships to Friends and Family. Do you have a large support network to go to when you feel stressed or sad? Do your friends and family support addictive behaviors (such as smoking or gambling) or are they against them? People who live, work, or go to school with people who use drugs are more likely to use drugs themselves.
- ◆ Early Use of Drugs— The earlier a person begins to use drugs the higher the likelihood that they will develop a later addiction.
- ◆ Mental health disorders. Mental disorders (like depression or anxiety) as well as a history of traumatic childhood experiences may increase the tendencies to develop an addiction.

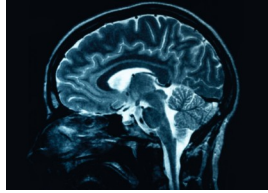


*It is important to recognize that although these things all can play a role, even people with supportive social networks and a healthy family history can fall into addiction.*



## How Does Addiction Affect my Body?

We all know how great exercise can make us feel. When we go for a jog or a hike, we often experience a feeling of euphoria, or great happiness and wellbeing. Exercise releases endorphins in the brain which gives us this “natural high”. You might decide to keep exercising in order to feel that euphoric rush again. While exercise is a healthy way to get this “rush”, some people turn to more harmful methods, like drugs or alcohol to feel good. The first time someone uses a drug, they are flooded with a feel-good neurotransmitter chemical called **serotonin**, which automatically changes the way the brain works, producing new desires. Our brains produce this chemical naturally when we don’t use drugs, so the extra boost in serotonin tricks the brain into reducing its natural production. The more you use a drug, the more the body gets used to the boost of feel-good chemicals. Over time, the brain stops producing normal levels of serotonin to prevent an overload. This means that without the drug to produce those chemicals, you might start to feel “low”, anxious or depressed. You start craving a feel-good sensation again, and now (since the body has cut back on producing serotonin) you want to get the same rush you did the first time you took the drug. Since our brains are making less neurotransmitters than before, the drug won’t be as effective as it was the first time. Instead of taking a small amount of that drug, you might start increasing the dose or frequency, in search of the good feelings – ‘the high’. This is why antidepressants called **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors** (SSRI’s) are sometimes prescribed in early treatment of addiction. SSRI’s prolong the absorption process of serotonin, ensuring our brains have the time to absorb as much of this feel good chemical as possible.



## What is Withdrawal?

When a person with a physical dependency abruptly **stops using** or **lessens their exposure** to an addictive substance, the body can react in a number of negative ways. **Withdrawal is the negative response of the body to the absence of an addictive substance or behavior.** It is serious and can even be fatal. Symptoms of withdrawal vary depending on the type of substance and how long a person has been over-using the substance, and can include: sweating, tremors, seizures, confusion, nausea and vomiting, hallucinations, and increased heart rate/blood pressure. Psychological dependence can also lead to withdrawal symptoms like anxiety, cravings and depression.

## How Many Times Does it Take to Become Addicted? Is there a Cure?

The simple answer is...no one really knows how many times it takes to become addicted to a particular behavior! It really depends on **you and your body**. There is no “quick fix” for a serious addiction, but it is definitely treatable. A counselor will help you learn behavioral and lifestyle changes to help you cut back on your addictive behavior and promote a healthier lifestyle.

## How Do I know if I have an Addiction Problem?

- Do your friends or family express concern about your behavior?
- Does your use cause stress, anxiety, or conflict in your life?
- Have you ever gotten in trouble while participating in this behavior?
- Do you try to hide or cover up this behavior so others don’t notice?
- Have you tried to stop the behavior but been unable to?
- Have you missed school or work because of this behavior?
- Have you lost interest in activities you once enjoyed?
- Has your involvement in this behavior increased in frequency or intensity in the past year?
- Do you spend more money than you can afford on the behavior?
- Do you feel depressed, guilty, shameful, or remorseful after doing the behavior?
- Have you ever been in a vehicle when you knew the driver (including yourself) was under the influence of drugs or alcohol?
- Do you participate in this behavior to relax, fit in, or feel better about yourself?
- Do you ever drink or use drugs in the morning or when you are alone? Do you spend time thinking about the behavior when you are not engaged in it?
- Do you tell yourself you can stop at any time, although you find yourself drinking or getting high when you don’t really want to?
- Have you started using more of the same drug or moved on to a different drug because it wasn’t affecting you as much as it used to?

## What if my Friend has an Addiction Problem?

Research the issue before talking to your friend. It helps to be informed. As hard as this conversation will be, you have a responsibility to your friend to speak up if you think he or she might be endangering themselves.

No one likes it when someone points out their problems without offering a solution to help resolve them. Offer your friend some resources to get them the help they need. Include a positive comment before making one that might be perceived as critical. For example, “You have always been my best friend and I care a lot about you...but I am worried your addiction is changing the person I know and love.” Realize that your friend might not be ready to listen to your advice. If you feel the problem is too big for the two of you to handle, bring it up to a parent, coach, teacher, **Big Brother** or **Big Sister**.



## **What Can Big Brothers & Big Sisters Do if they suspect their Little might have an Addiction?**

1. Talk to your Mentoring Coordinator, **Little's** Parents, Teacher, etc. to develop a shared plan on how the group of you plan on approaching the problem.
2. Choose a time to speak with your **Little** when he or she is not high, drunk, or upset.
3. Express concern for your **Little's** safety and explain why you are concerned. Listen to what your **Little** has to say. Be empathetic and be curious about your **Little's** life.
4. Meet with a professional to learn more about a technique called "**Motivational Interviewing**" that involves getting your **Little** to reflect on his or her own life by asking thought-provoking questions like what they want their life to be like right now, how their relationships/school/job, etc. are going, what areas they wish to change, etc. Get them to consider the link between their drug of choice and why they use it, to getting what they truly want out of life. Be open-minded and non-judgemental—don't patronize or jump to negative conclusions.
5. Plan and discuss how you and your **Little** are going to empower yourselves by finding out more about their addiction, and appropriate methods of response/treatment.
6. Assure your **Little** that you are here to help support them, and that you have the power to solve this problem together. The important thing is to maintain your relationship. Never give an ultimatum like "Stop using that drug or I won't be your friend anymore." Your **Little** needs your support.

### **HARM REDUCTION**

The Harm Reduction philosophy promotes healthier lifestyle choices as an alternative to more damaging ones. Always wearing a seat belt or a bike helmet are examples of harm reduction because they are safer options than the alternatives. A harm reduction model might not be successful in stopping a harmful behavior entirely, but if it is able to lower some of the associated risks related to that behavior it can be beneficial. The safe injection site in Vancouver is a high profile example of a harm reduction model. Although it does not stop the damaging behavior, it provides a safer alternative. Some people disagree with harm reduction models because they fear they mistakenly give the perception that risky behaviors, like drug use, can be safe when done in a particular way. Although any drug use is riskier than abstinence, addictive behaviors are not an all-or-none phenomena. Drinking alcohol once a week is safer than having a drink every day. Confiding your drug use to someone you trust is better than keeping it a secret. Any direction in the movement of reduced harm is to be celebrated, so any way you are able to cut back your use of or dependence on that substance is a positive thing. Not everyone is ready to give up their high-risk behaviors, but any step in the right direction should be encouraged and supported. So pat yourself on the back...and move onto the next step.

### **Resources**

*Available from the Fraser Valley Regional Library*

#### **For LITTLES (6-12)**

- *What are Drugs?* Gretchen Super. Frederick: MD: Twenty-First Century Books, 1990
- *Drugs and Sports.* Don Nardo. San Diego: CA, Lucent Books, 1990.
- *Good Answers to Tough Question about Substance Abuse.* Joy Berry. Chicago: Children's Press, 1990.
- *We're Talking about Drugs.* Jenny Bryan. East Sussex: Wayland: 1995.
- 'Learn to Say No' Series. Angela Royston. Chicago: Heinemann Library, 2000.

#### **For TEENS (13-17)**

- *Heroin: The Road of Addiction* (DVD). A video made with Vermont teens. Burlington, VT: The Noodle Network.
- *Reduce Speed* (DVD). Vancouver Island Health Authority.
- *Taking Drugs (Modern Issues that Affect You).* Pete Sanders and Steve Myers.
- *Drugs and Your Friends.* Sue Hurwitz and Nancy Shnideman. New York: Rosen, 1995.

#### **For BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS & PARENTS**

- *Teen Addiction.* San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1997
- *Just say Know: Talking with Kids about Drug and Alcohol.* Cynthia Kuhn, Scott Swartzwelder & Wilkie Wilson. NY: Norton, 2002.
- *What's a Parent to Do? Straight Talk on Drugs and Alcohol.* Henry David Abraham. New Jersey: New Horizon Press, 2004.
- *Don't let your Kids Kill You: A Guide for Parents of Drug & Alcohol Addicted Children.* Charles Rubin, 1996, *How to Save your Child from Drug Abuse* (VHS). Olympia, Wash: MBG Productions, 1988.
- *Teens under the influence: The Truth About Kids, Alcohol, and Other Drugs—How to Recognize the Problem and What to Do About It.* Katherine Ketcham and Nicholas A. Pace. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.
- *Ruined Lives: The Dangers of Methamphetamines.* (DVD) AIMS Multimedia. Canadian Learning Company, 2003.

#### **Thank you to the following members of our Panel for**

##### **Reviewing this Article:**

Tony Lapointe, MA, RCC

Dr Robert Lees

Bev Walcott

Gerwyn Mills, RN, MA