



Addictions

People can become addicted to almost anything that produces a rewarding outcome. Common addictions include drugs, alcohol, gambling, work, success, sex, shopping and pornography. Most people engage in these activities or behaviours without causing major disruption in their lives. However, the person who becomes addicted becomes dependant on the behaviour, activity or substance to the detriment of relationships, responsibilities and other interests.

People are especially vulnerable to developing addictions if they have underlying difficulties, stresses or grievances which they feel they are unable to manage. If this is the case, dealing with the underlying difficulty can go a long way towards giving the person with the addiction a sense of being back in control of their life once again.

People are often ashamed of their addictions or are worried about the consequences of an addiction being discovered by others. Frequently those with addictions resort to lying to family and friends in order to conceal the addiction, a behaviour which is detrimental to their relationships with others.

If you are struggling with an addiction it may be helpful to:

- Carefully weigh up the pro's and con's of making a change in your life versus maintaining the addiction. You may decide that you do not want to change your behaviour at present and hence are willing to accept the negative aspects of your addiction. Alternatively, you may decide that the addiction is bringing too much negativity into your life and are willing to participate in the process of change.
- Carefully think about the time in your life when the addiction started. Consider any difficulties, stresses or grievances you were experiencing at this time. It is important to do what you can to deal directly with these difficulties in a proactive way. This may mean grieving for a loss you experienced at the time, apologizing for behaviour of which you are ashamed, or sorting out a lost relationship of significance in your life.



- Recognise that an addiction tends to play an important role in a person's life. It is important to understand the need which is met by having the addiction in your life and find alternative ways of addressing that need. For example, a person may get anxious in social situations and become dependent on drinking to deal with this anxiety. To assist in reducing a dependence on alcohol it will be important that this individual learn more positive ways to deal with their nervousness in these situations.
- Understand that engaging in addictive behaviour generally involves justifying to yourself that your behaviour is acceptable. Think about how you give yourself permission to feed your addiction and start giving yourself more realistic and helpful messages about the implications of your addiction.
- Identify your high risk situations, that is, those situations in which you are most likely to engage in your addictive behaviour. Think about how you will deal with these situations and plan what you will do as an alternative to lapsing back into addictive behaviour. For example, a person who deals with family stress by avoidance through over investing in their commitment to work would benefit from recognizing this behaviour and identifying more constructive ways of dealing with stress within the family.
- Recognise that breaking an addiction involves breaking habits. Consider carefully the way that your day to day life allows you to participate in your addiction and make as many changes as you can such that your life style no longer supports your addiction.
- Understand that blame and shame tend to be extremely unhelpful for dealing with addictions.

Please feel free to contact Life Supports if you would like to discuss your situation with a professional counsellor.