

Glossary

Use: Alcohol, drugs, gambling, or screen/Internet use.
Loved one: Person experiencing difficulties related to use.
Concerned significant others (CSO): People (e.g., parents, spouse, grandparents, children, or friends) whose loved one is struggling with use.

1 WHY INFORM AND RAISE AWARENESS AMONG CSO?

- CSO know little about use and what to do about it.
- CSO want their loved one to get better and want to know how to help them.
- Understanding the issues surrounding use helps CSO to reduce stress, navigate the relationship, maintain hope that the situation can improve, and develop empathy for their loved one.

2 A BIT OF THEORY

USE-RELATED ISSUES ARE SPREAD ALONG A CONTINUUM

When working with CSO, it is important to have a **nuanced view of use**. Through an accumulation of negative experiences, worries and discouragement, some CSO have developed an amplified perception of their loved one's difficulties. Others tend to minimize the extent of the problem, refusing to acknowledge the harms that it is starting to cause.

Although many people may experiment with substance use, gambling or Internet at some point in their lives, not everyone develops difficulties in these areas. For some, experimentation involves few risks and lasts only a short time. For others, use will remain light for the rest of their lives without causing any associated difficulties. However, for some individuals, use may become a major problem when it becomes impossible to reduce or stop despite its negative consequences.

NEEDS FULFILLED BY USE

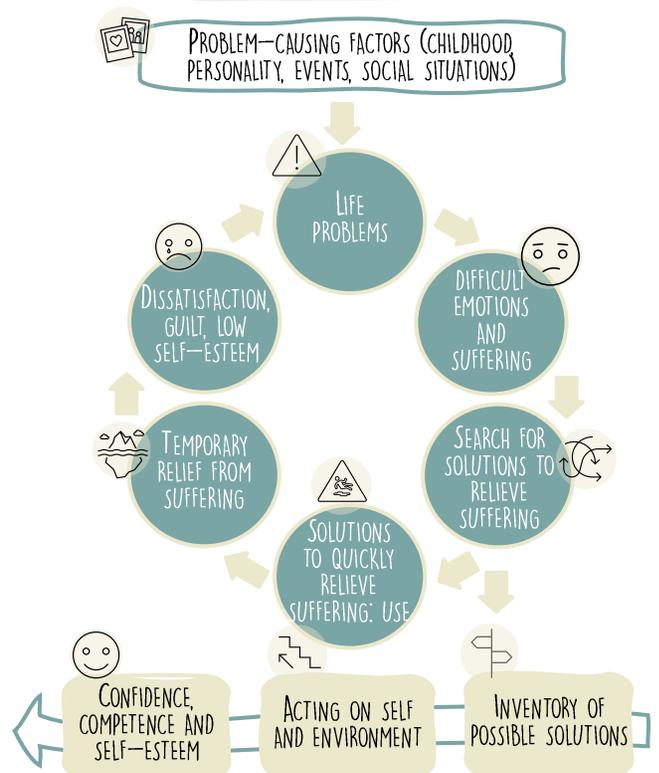
To CSO, the harms caused by use are often clear because they see and experience them. It is hard for CSO to understand and admit that their loved one also benefits from use. Nevertheless, **use does meet certain needs**. While meeting one's needs is an essential part of life and usually leads to satisfaction, this strategy only brings temporary relief and accentuates the associated negative emotions.

USE AS A PREFERRED COPING STRATEGY

According to the Addiction Cycle, difficulties with use are caused by its effect on a given person in given circumstances. **For their loved one, use has undoubtedly become a preferred coping strategy to alleviate suffering** during difficult times. To break out of this cycle, their loved one must develop and apply new coping strategies.

It is not easy to start changing one's habits. The benefits of use are immediate, while the unpleasant consequences emerge later. **Motivation to change is a dynamic phenomenon** that is personal to each individual. **It fluctuates over time, depending on the individual and the circumstances**, and often requires a lot of back-and-forth and trial-and-error.

THE ADDICTION CYCLE



(Inspired by Peele, 1982)

EXPLAIN USE

To help CSO better understand the issues surrounding their loved one's difficulties, **offer them information** on various topics concerning use. While some CSO are more familiar with the subject, others are in the dark or hold erroneous beliefs on the subject. Take the time to ask them what they know, and especially what they would like to know, and **answer their questions**.

It is also important to point out to CSO that there are different types of use, and that different consequences can stem from it. Explain how their loved one's use meets certain needs and represents a coping strategy for them.

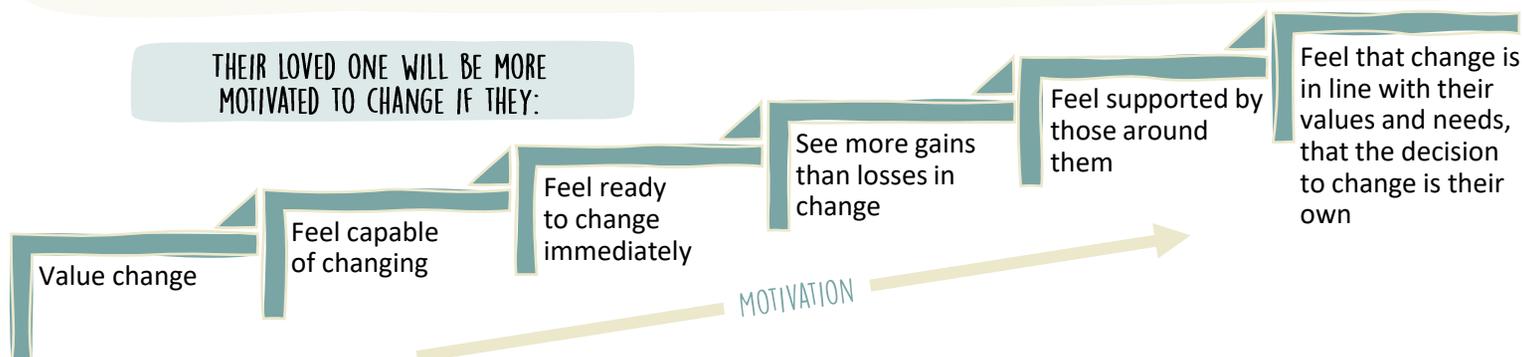
SUGGESTED TOPICS TO DISCUSS WITH CSO

- Use, its effects and the law of effect
- The cycle of change
- Intoxication, tolerance and withdrawal
- Low-risk use versus difficulties with use
- Strategies for protecting finances
- Parental support strategies

EXPLAIN THE RECOVERY PROCESS

To give back hope to CSO and empower their loved one to change, explain that some people can regain control and return to low-risk use, while others will have to stop completely, forever. It is important for CSO to understand that **abstinence or controlled use remains their loved one's choice**: they must choose what is right for them, what makes sense to them. CSO tend to compare their situation with other stories of use or treatment they have heard. Remind them that their loved one's situation is unique and encourage them to avoid comparing their loved one to others who are experiencing or have experienced similar issues.

Explain the different approaches to intervention. Have a discussion with them about **how they view the recovery process** and what is right for their loved one. Although CSO can act as motivators, their loved one must develop their own motivation to change. Consequently, CSO need to **respect their loved one's pace**, even if it may not be as fast as they would like.



NORMALIZE LAPSES AND RELAPSES

For CSO, **seeing their loved one return to their old habits of use is discouraging**, especially after an episode of control/abstinence. Explain that sustained change is not linear, that it usually involves several more or less successful attempts, and that **lapses and relapses are part of the process**. The fact that their loved one may have started using again is not necessarily a problem. If they have developed new strategies to cope with their difficulties, they may be able to use in a more controlled way.

It is important to normalize the experience of CSO by welcoming their despair, but also to teach them **to see relapse as a learning opportunity**, not as a failure. Explain that during a lapse, the individual resumes use on a temporary basis, whereas during a relapse, they revert to their old, more problematic habits. Distinguishing these concepts will help them maintain hope in the event of a lapse. It is a process for their loved one to change their habits, and each attempt helps them progress.

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