

CLINICAL GUIDE TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND FRIENDS AFFECTED BY A LOVED ONE'S USE

# PROMOTING THE MARITAL AND FAMILY WELL-BEING OF CSO

© Ferland, F., Blanchette-Martin, N., Côté, M., Côté-Dion, C.-M., Plourde, C., Laventure, M., Tremblay, J., Dufour, M. & Saint-Jacques, M. (2023).

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

## 1

### WHY ENCOURAGE CSO TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP OR FAMILY?

- The well-being of a couple or family is influenced by the interactions between its members.
- At the same time, CSO adapt to their environment, and their environment adapts to them.
- CSO remain important allies in their loved one's recovery.
- Marital and family well-being is a protective factor against the loved one's use.

## 2

### A BIT OF THEORY

#### THE MUTUAL INFLUENCE AMONG THE MEMBERS OF A COUPLE OR FAMILY

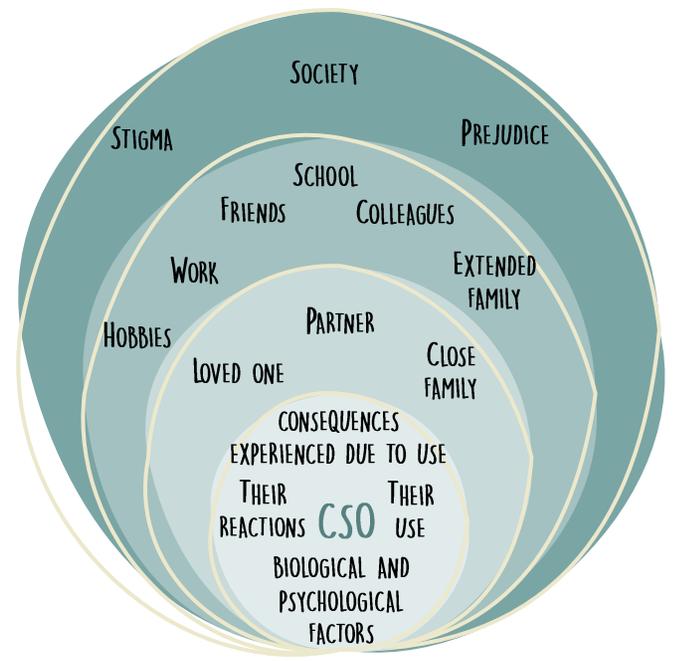
A couple or a family is a system in which all members influence one another. To establish balance within a system and ensure that everyone feels that they have their place, it is important to nurture the relationships between its members. This serves as a protective factor for both CSO and their loved one.

However, the accumulation of negative experiences, failures, lies, and blame can lead CSO to become defensive toward their loved one. Caught up in frustration and disappointment, they may focus more on the negative consequences of their loved one's behaviour, which often leads to a deteriorating relationship. They stop making an effort to bring joy to one another and gradually drift apart. This situation creates insecurity in the relationship for both CSO and their loved one.

Some CSO may feel deeply hurt in their relationship, making it difficult for them to stay committed to their partner or family. They may experience anger, struggle with trust, and feel a sense of betrayal. However, despite the rollercoaster of emotions and challenges caused by their loved one's use, CSO often still feel strong affection for their loved one and a desire to maintain their bond.

To promote their marital and family well-being, CSO may need to reassess the attitudes they adopt toward each other and their loved one. Working as a team in supporting their loved one through their struggles is an essential protective factor. A stronger and more meaningful connection between CSO enables them to better navigate difficult situations and tolerate certain behaviors they find unpleasant. The more trust and security they build in their relationship, the more open they can be about their emotions, allowing them to support, listen to, and reassure one another more effectively.

#### INTERACTING SYSTEMS



### 3 WHEN WORKING WITH CSO

#### TAKING CARE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

To promote the development of a better relationship and bring them back to a more enjoyable daily life together, CSO need **to remind themselves of what they appreciate about their loved one** and their relationship. If they maintain the relationship, it is likely because of these positive aspects.

Encourage them **to set aside blame** and instead focus on reinforcing their loved one's good deeds, efforts, and moments of sobriety. Encourage them **to cultivate gratitude** rather than focusing on what is lacking. Positive reinforcement will be greatly appreciated by their loved one and will transform the way they interact with each other.

They also need to relearn how to spend warm, positive moments together. This could help shift the focus away from their difficulties and allow them to rediscover each other beyond the problem. To step away from the issue of use, based on their shared interests, suggest that **they engage in use-free activities together**. Encourage them to identify and implement simple things that bring joy to the other person, as well as words or gestures that express their affection.

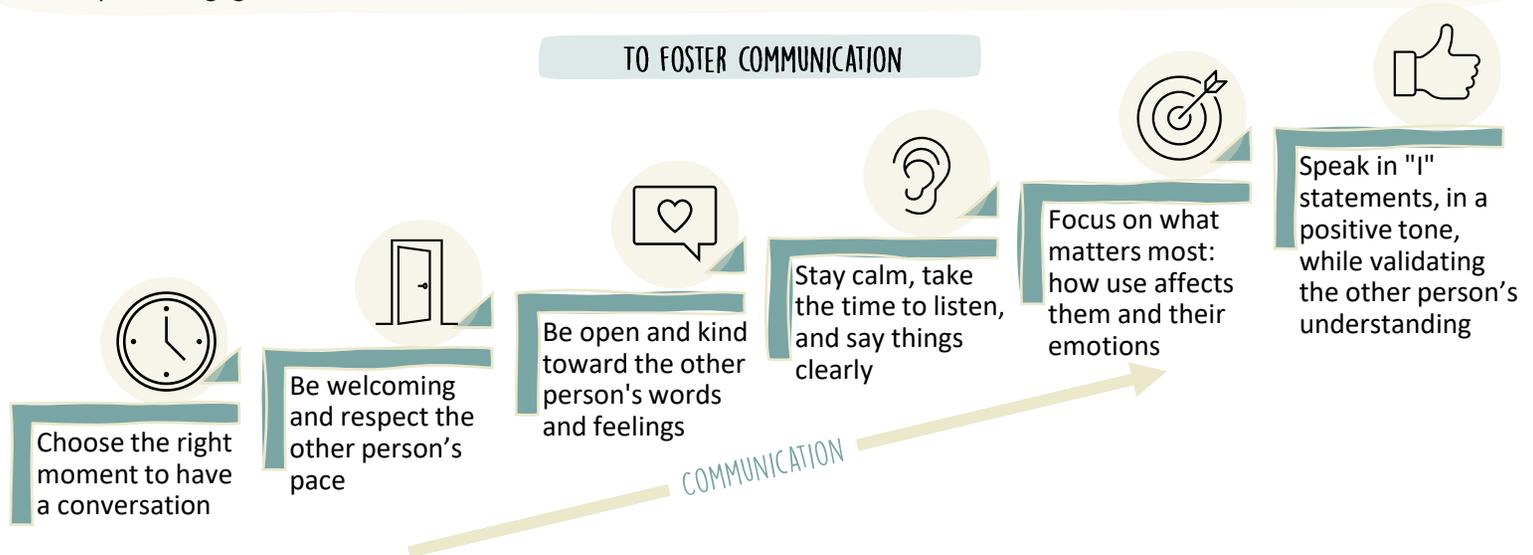
Guide them in **remaining available to support their loved one while respecting their personal limits**. This will create a warmer atmosphere, which will be more conducive to positive exchanges. To achieve this, CSO sometimes need **to let go of an idealized vision of their relationship** with their loved one and gradually accept them as they are today.

#### ENCOURAGING REFLECTION AMONG CSO

- What are the best memories they share with their loved one?
- What are their loved one's qualities?
- What is working well in their relationship?
- What do they want to rediscover in their relationship?

#### COMMUNICATION

Explain that **healthy communication is essential for maintaining a pleasant and affectionate relationship** between CSO and their loved one. Through effective communication skills, they can share what the loved one's use is making them experience and work together to find solutions. It is important to discuss how interactions with their loved one are currently unfolding and help CSO engage in new, more constructive ones.



An important note: To foster communication and ensure that they are ready to adopt these attitudes, CSO will need time to step back. They must set aside their anger and apprehension in order to connect with the other person.