

Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 27 (Dec 7th) Relationships & Substance Use Disorder

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this week's session, facilitators KJ Thomas, MSW, RSW and Jillian Crabbe, MSW, RSW, were joined by guest speaker; Chris Curry, Registered Psychotherapist at The Royal Ottawa, speaking on Relationships and Substance Use Disorder. Addiction can affect the family, friends, colleagues and partners of the person who is struggling. Chris discussed the many ways addiction affects the family unit as well as helpful tips to encourage healthy conversations among family members. As Chris is a returning guest speaker, if you would like further information, please feel free to reach out to us to request an earlier *Family Voice Bulletin: Issue 7- Substance Use & Addiction*.

The *Stages of Change* is a tool used to help determine where a person is in their thoughts towards their substance use. It can help assist in knowing what steps may be able to be taken to support the person. In order for a person to address their substance use, they must be ready to consider it; meaning, they need to, at least, be in the contemplation stage. Certain TV shows have made concepts of “intervention” popular, however, interventions often do not work - a person with a substance use issue is likely already aware. Trying to shame someone, or threaten the connection to them, can often lead to increased use. Instead, showing unconditional love has a great impact. Another common misconception is the use of rehabilitation centers (rehab). While many do find success in rehab, that success is not found in fancy programs, or even within specified buildings. Rather, the greatest indicator of success comes down to a person's readiness to seek change. Outpatient programs, and individualized counselling have been found to be just as effective as highly priced rehab centers for this reason.

If a person's use is impacting your own well-being, setting boundaries is healthy, but keep in mind boundaries are not meant to be rules to control another, but rather keep yourself well, and safe. This can look like a negotiation between you, and the person (e.g. you cannot demand someone to stop using substances, but you can ask them to not use around you). For more about boundaries, please see *FVB: Issue 11*.

It can be very difficult knowing someone we love is struggling with an addiction. It can also feel helpless when there is little we can do to intervene. In these situations, learning about the *Stages of Change*, and *Harm Reduction* can help, as well as maintaining a non-judgmental stance, and focusing on small daily changes, rather than hoping for a big change all at once. It is greatly beneficial, and important, to focus on our own wellbeing; finding a therapist to talk to, or joining a support group can help us to find the support we need.

Resources

- A tool to find therapists: www.psychologytoday.com
- Substance Use and Concurrent Disorders - [The Royal Ottawa](#)
- Help with Substance Use - [Connex Ontario](#)
- CAMH Centre for Addiction and Mental Health <http://www.camh.ca/>
- Canadian Addiction Counsellors Certification Federation www.cacfc.ca
- Wellness Together Canada – mental health and substance use support <https://ca.portal.gs/>