

Someone close to you has an addiction:

What can you do?

**Alcohol, drugs, medication, gambling...
someone close to you is addicted.**

- Do you feel overwhelmed? Helpless?
- Do you have the feeling your life has been turned upside down?
- Do you feel unsure about what is «normal»?
- Do you no longer know how to talk to the person concerned?

**It is estimated that in Switzerland several
hundred thousand people live with someone
who has an addiction.**

**This means there are many others who are
experiencing the same thing as you.**

You are not alone!

What's going on?

Those close to people with an addiction are often severely affected as well. Their daily lives are also burdened by the addiction. It can affect not only their own well-being and their relationship with the addicted person, but also practical and material aspects of their lives.

Often family and friends will do their utmost to get the addicted person to change their behaviour. Yet these efforts are often to no avail. They are left with a feeling of helplessness and despondency but often also anger. Many friends or family members relate so closely to the problem of the other person that they get caught up in the problem themselves.

It is important for them to distance themselves from the problem and adopt a new attitude. Because: no-one can stop drinking, taking drugs or gambling on behalf of someone else.

What can you do?

Setting boundaries instead of controlling

At first you might think it's a good idea to try and control the addicted person in a bid to tackle the problem. If, for example, the person concerned drinks less or goes out less, you may regain hope. But the very next day everything can change again. When, for example, the addicted person comes home late again and falls asleep on the sofa, the sense of disappointment is overwhelming. You start to lose trust, feel more and more helpless, and become angry.

- I can set boundaries so that I suffer less. I can, for instance, refuse to go out with the person concerned when he or she has been drinking. Or I can walk away if the person's behaviour becomes embarrassing for me.
It is important to find a good opportunity to explain to them why you are distancing yourself.
- I focus on my own needs and do not always think only of the person concerned.
- I accept that I cannot stop drinking, taking drugs or gambling on behalf of the person concerned.

Talking about yourself instead of them

The situation is difficult and stressful. It isn't easy to find the right words. It is understandable if you get angry and blame the other person. But often that just leads to more and more quarrelling.

- I talk about my own feelings. For example:
«I don't feel understood», instead of «You don't listen to me»; «I'm worried», instead of «You should stop»; «I'm under a lot of stress», instead of «You're doing everything wrong». This can be the start of a dialogue and endless quarrelling can be avoided.
- I express **my own** feelings and do not judge the other person.



Handing over responsibility instead of shielding them

Often friends and family do things for the person concerned, taking responsibility away from them. They make excuses for them, for example, when they cannot meet their obligations. When friends and family always think for the person concerned and want to protect them, they risk exhaustion.

- I do not have to bear full responsibility. I do not have to do everything for the person concerned.
- I make the person concerned accountable for any consequences of the addiction.

Making the person accountable for their own problem also gives them the chance to be aware of the consequences. Being accountable for these consequences can motivate them to change the situation and seek support.

Seeking help instead of hiding

Out of a sense of shame or guilt, many people are afraid to talk about the issue with outsiders. However, the price of silence is isolation and suffering. It is important to seek help.

- I am not responsible for the addiction of the person concerned.
- I can find support to relieve the burden on me and suffer less.
- Support can help change the situation. Talking about the problem is the first step towards change.



And if children are around?

Even if many children do not show it, children suffer from their parent's addiction. Even very young children notice that something is not right. Often children do not understand what is going on. They cannot put a name to what they are going through.

- It is important to explain to children that the person concerned is ill. It is important for them to know: I am not to blame for this problem.
- Give children the opportunity to talk about the stressful situations, about their fears, their shame, their anger and their feelings of guilt. Listen to the children and help them to understand what is going on.
- You can also give a child access to specialists. Talking to specialists, or even to other children who are experiencing similar things, can give a child much-needed support (www.mamatrinkt.ch / www.mamanboit.ch, www.papatrinkt.ch / www.papaboit.ch, Tel. 147).



Finding support

Even if it is the other person who is the addict, you as a relative or close friend also suffer from this situation.

We would like to encourage you to seek help:

- **Someone you trust**, for example in your circle of friends or in religious or cultural communities, can lend a kind ear to your problems.
- **Addiction centres** are open to both addicts and their relatives. You can find addresses on www.suchtindex.ch. By contacting the counselling centre in your region, you or someone you trust can find out whether there are opportunities for counselling in your mother tongue. You can also call Sucht Schweiz / Addiction Suisse. We will be happy to give you suitable addresses (021 321 29 76).
- **Self-help groups** for relatives and friends of alcoholics can be found on www.al-anon.ch, Tel. 0848 848 843 (German), www.alanon.ch, Tel. 0848 848 833 (French), Italian and English. See websites.
- You can talk about the situation affecting you with a **doctor** you trust.
- **Psychotherapists** may also provide support. Addresses of psychotherapists (according to region and languages spoken) may be found for example at www.psychologie.ch (Föderation Schweizer Psychologinnen und Psychologen FSP / Fédération Suisse des Psychologues FSP) or at www.psychotherapie.ch (Assoziation Schweizer Psychotherapeutinnen und Psychotherapeuten ASP / Association Suisse des Psychothérapeutes ASP).

- Some **hospitals** offer an interpreter service for consultations with specialists.
- Facilities that specialize in providing **healthcare and counselling** for sans-papiers:
www.sante-sans-papiers.ch
- If you are the victim of domestic violence, protect yourself and your children. Call the police (Tel. 117).
Victim counselling services can advise you:
www.opferhilfe-schweiz.ch / www.aide-aux-victimes.ch / www.aiuto-alle-vittime.ch
Information about domestic violence:
www.migesplus.ch > Publications > Mental Health & Crises > «Domestic Violence» leaflet in various languages
- Information about domestic violence in various languages:
www.violencequefaire.ch/fr/vic/

All these people and institutions are there to help you and will treat your case confidentially. Many services are free of charge. You can decide what type of support suits you best.

It is important to seek support and take time for yourself. It will then be easier for you to let go; you will feel much better for it. You may even be able to give the addict some hope too. Perhaps the addict will also see that it is worthwhile seeking help.



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Further information

www.migesplus.ch – health care information in various languages (website in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Albanian, Serbian/Bosnian/Croatian, information also in other languages).

Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz
Werkstrasse 18, 3084 Wabern
info@migesplus.ch, Tel. 031 960 75 71

**www.suchtschweiz.ch / www.addictionsuisse.ch /
www.dipendenzevizzera.ch** – Information about addictions
(German, French and Italian)

Leaflet «What should I know about alcohol?» (English, German, French, Italian, Albanian, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish)

This leaflet and the leaflet «What should I know about alcohol?» can be downloaded as PDF files from www.migesplus.ch or www.suchtschweiz.ch / www.addictionsuisse.ch or ordered by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Sucht Schweiz / Addiction Suisse, CP 870, 1003 Lausanne.



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