

Yesterday The importance of recognizing--and getting help with--addiction



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Addictions can take many forms, and for some, it might not be exactly what you'd expect. The word "addiction," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means "the state or condition of being dedicated or devoted to a thing, esp. an activity or occupation; adherence or attachment, esp. of an immoderate or compulsive kind." But even with a definition, it's not always easy to recognize when a behavior has crossed the line into addiction, and it's even harder to recognize if your own addiction has become harmful—both to yourself and to others.

"Addiction to anything, whether it is a substance or an activity, generally will display itself through physical, psychological, and behavioral changes," says Lisa Schrader, [Middle Tennessee State University](http://mtsu.edu/) 's director of Health Promotion. "A person who is addicted to something may experience withdrawal symptoms when they don't have access to the substance or the activity. Those symptoms could range from anxiety and shakiness to physical nausea, sweating, or insomnia."

One sign that addiction is becoming harmful, according to Kate McCarthy, [Lasell College](http://lasell.edu/) [Counseling Center](http://www.lasell.edu/campus-life/health-and-wellness/counseling-center.html) health educator and clinical counselor, is if the addiction "is interfering with daily activities." She says, "For college students, this may include missing classes, not completing assignments or withdrawing from friends to participate in the activity to which they are addicted."

Author and relationship advice columnist April Masini of [AskApril.com](http://askapril.com/) says, similarly, that addiction is identifiable when it becomes the most important thing in one's life and begins to interfere with other relationships and activities.

"An easy relationship sign that there's addiction going on is if the relationship with the substance or the addictive behavior becomes more important than other relationships," she explains. "For instance, if a person's relationship with alcohol, in an alcohol addiction, becomes more important than taking care of other relationships, that's a sign that there's an alcohol addiction underlying the problems in the relationship."

Substance addictions are certainly not the only addictions that can interfere with relationships and life in general.

"If the addiction behavior plays out with, say, shopping, and a person's shopping behavior is more important to them than their relationship with school, romantic partners or family and friends, then that's a sign that there's an addiction underlying the behavior," says Masini.

When it comes to breaking an addiction, one of the most important resources for an addict is his or her family and friends. Those who are in relationships with people struggling with addictions can also help, Masini suggests, by calling attention to direct consequences of the addiction.

She says that when an addiction becomes harmful, both for the addict and for those around him or her, "the person in the relationship with them needs to gently, but firmly, call them out on what's happening and explain that they are not going to enable the behavior by allowing themselves to be part of it. It's only when an addict realizes the consequences of the addiction that they are best equipped to decide to make changes."

If you are concerned that you or someone you know has an addiction that is becoming harmful, helping can be as simple as offering to walk him or her to the counseling center on campus or having an honest conversation, inviting others who are concerned about that person to join as well, suggests Schrader. And if you're not sure that there is a problem, there are resources on most campuses to help you.

"Many colleges, including MTSU, offer online assessments to help students determine [whether or not they may be developing addiction \[http://www.mtsu.edu/countest/assessment.php\]](http://www.mtsu.edu/countest/assessment.php)," she says. "These screenings can provide immediate feedback to a student in the privacy of his/her home and then direct students to related resources when risk is detected."

Another way to help someone struggling with addiction is, of course, to suggest counseling, to be supportive and to be a sounding board for that person as they try to recover.

"When friends or family members think that someone is struggling with addiction they may seek counseling themselves to work through their feelings about the addiction and they may suggest that their friend or family member seek counseling," says McCarthy. "Breaking an addiction is very difficult, but with counseling and support from friends and family, it is possible."

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