

November/December 2019

NAVIGATING ADDICTIVE DISORDERS OVER THE HOLIDAYS

While the holiday season, from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day, can be a beautiful time of year, it can also come with social and emotional pressures. From the financial challenges that may accompany buying presents and planning a feast, to the potentially complicated relationships and interactions around the dinner table, the holidays can be exhausting and even a dangerous time for those with an addictive disorder. It's also typically a time of overindulgence that can lead to temptation, particularly for those early in recovery. And mental health issues that may co-occur with addictive disorders can complicate matters further.



Capital Area Human Services (CAHS) offers a variety of programs and services to support wellness and help adults and teenagers with addictions and mental health concerns navigate the holidays and make them a safer and more enjoyable time. CAHS also has clinics that serve children's behavioral and emotional needs.

Whether the issue is a substance such as alcohol, opioids, or a behavior such as gambling, gaming, or some combination, it's important to take extra precautions to avoid relapse over the holidays.

What, exactly, is an addiction?

Many struggle to understand that addiction is a brain disease and not a character flaw. Addiction creates distortions in thinking, perceptions, and it alters one's mood. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), mental health and substance use disorders affect people from all walks of life and all age groups. These

Executive Director's Corner Jan M. Kasofsky, PhD

Enjoy this second newsletter in our new format. For our holiday issue, our topic is substance abuse and addiction. Holiday time, while typically joyful, brings with it stressors and temptations.

How we, our family, and our friends deal with it is of utmost concern. Make it a point to better understand the disease of addiction and learn how you can assist and support others or ask for help for yourself. Let's make this holiday season healthy, safe and happy for all.

[Please click here to hear a moving testimonial of a woman who struggled and prevailed to live her dream of an opioid-free life.](#)



illnesses are common, recurrent, and often serious, but they are treatable and many people do recover. Mental disorders involve changes in thinking, mood, and/or behavior. These disorders can affect how we relate to others and make choices. Reaching a level that can be formally diagnosed often depends on a reduction in a person's ability to function as a result of the disorder.

People with an addictive disorder should be treated with the same level of compassion that we would treat someone with diabetes.

Dr. Jan Laughinghouse, CAHS Clinical Director of Addiction Recovery Services, says when we're hungry or thirsty, we satisfy those urges by eating or drinking and the body sends the "feel-good" hormone dopamine, to the reward center in the brain. For our survival, the brain tells us to repeat those behaviors the next time we're



thirsty or hungry. For people with an addictive disorder, psychoactive substances, narcotics and behaviors like gambling and gaming can trigger that same response from their brains.

"The addictive process actually perverts that very normal thing our brain does," Dr. Laughinghouse says, "and substances and behaviors rise to the level of survival in the subconscious mind of the person with an addictive disorder." Dr. Laughinghouse says people with an addictive disorder should be treated with the same level of compassion that we would treat someone with diabetes who needs insulin to survive, or has another physical health problem.

Substance Addictions

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the substances to which one can become addicted include opioids (heroin and prescription pain relievers), tobacco (nicotine), alcohol, stimulants (cocaine, methamphetamine, among others) and cannabis (marijuana). There are existing medications and those in development for many of these substances that can decrease cravings and help re-establish normal brain function. It's very common for people to become addicted to more than one drug, which requires treatment for all substances used.



Tobacco and Vaping

Like alcohol, tobacco is a legal substance as are the electronic cigarettes with which people vape tobacco (and federally illicit substances, like marijuana). According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the nicotine in any tobacco product stimulates the brain's reward circuits, as do illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin. Tobacco use is therefore highly addictive and can lead to diseases that include lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, and emphysema as well as heart disease and cancer. A combination of counseling and medication is most effective in helping people quit using tobacco, whether smoking, vaping, chewing or sniffing it.

Many addictive disorders start in adolescence and young adulthood and can cause chronic struggles throughout life. There has been an alarming rise in vaping among adolescents which can cause problems with normal brain development, according to the National Institutes of Health. And

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

there have been 23 deaths in the United States in 2019 related to vaping, one of them a 17-year-old.

Behavioral Addictions

The main characteristic of a behavioral addiction is the inability to resist an impulse to act in a way that may be harmful to yourself or others and to do so repeatedly, interfering with normal functioning. These behaviors may include compulsive gambling, gaming, sexual behavior, eating, shopping, stealing and Internet addiction. Behavioral addictions have many similarities to substance addictions, both of which usually begin in young adulthood and are characterized by spontaneous quitting and relapse. For more information about Capital Area Human Services' outpatient Center for Gambling Treatment visit: <http://www.cahsd.org/about/about-our-services/adult-behavioral-health/compulsive-gambling-treatment/>.



Compulsive online gaming, also known as Internet Gaming Disorder, is also especially prevalent among young people and can have consequences that affect both their physical health (eye strain, repetitive stress injuries and headaches) and their mental health (depression, anxiety and social phobias).

Co-occurring Disorders

Up to 80% of people with addictive disorders also have an underlying mental health disorder, according to Dr. Laughinghouse. These untreated mental health conditions may include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and personality disorders. In combination with addiction they are considered co-occurring disorders. The addictive disorder may be an attempt to self-medicate the mental health disorder when it is not addressed by a physician or mental health professional.

ADDICTION IS A FAMILY DISEASE

Addictive behavior disorders have a genetic component and can be passed down from one generation to another, with one person's addiction affecting the entire family.

"In the field, we say that genetics loads the gun, but environment pulls the trigger," Dr. Laughinghouse says.



FAMILIES CAN BE COMPLICATED

Not everyone comes from a family that will be supportive of recovery. For a lot of people in dysfunctional families, it can be emotionally challenging to be around family members during the holidays, particularly if they don't see them during the rest of the year.

"I have had to counsel some people to love their difficult family members from a distance and detach with love," says Dr. Laughinghouse.

Sometimes it's possible to limit a family visit to a short period of time, or avoid a particular family member who may be problematic. Most important of all is to be honest with oneself and have a relapse prevention plan in place. If that means you can't be around your family during the holidays, let trusted people know how they can assist you and consider spending time with friends. "A family is not just something you were born into," Dr. Laughinghouse says. "It's also the people you choose to have in your life."



WHAT IF YOU SLIP?

If you've been sober for one month, one year or 10 years and you slip, you start your sobriety day over. But the important thing is not to get bogged down in guilt and shame, which can make you use more. "One drink, for example, is a violation of abstinence," Dr. Laughinghouse says, "but it is not a relapse, which is returning to full use. With a momentary lapse in judgment, you can get right back up and keep walking."

Opioid addiction is different from the other named substances of abuse, and a relapse can be deadly. Opioid use and abstinence causes changes in the chemistry of the brain. Those in recovery who have a slip up are at a high risk of overdose, which can cause breathing to stop, leading to death. Narcan nasal spray is indicated for the emergency treatment of a known or suspected opioid overdose, but is not considered a substitute for emergency medical care. Narcan should be available to every individual with an opioid abuse/addiction or to their family to ensure a safe overdose reversal.

SUPPORT DURING THE HOLIDAYS

In the first year of recovery the brain is healing and those with an addictive disorder should avoid people, places and things that act as triggers for their disorder. Following this advice during the holidays is a good idea too in order to avoid relapse. Dr. Laughinghouse says, "In 12-step programs, the saying goes that if you're not working on your recovery, you're working on your relapse."

To give yourself the best chances for making good choices in your recovery during the holidays:

- Attend 12-step programs and other support groups
- Stay in close contact with your sponsor
- Avoid high-risk situations
- If you can't avoid an office holiday party where alcohol will flow freely, use coping strategies like asking a sponsor or a sober friend to attend with you.
- Ask family and friends you will be visiting to help by emptying their medicine cabinets of narcotics and other dangerous substances.
- If you know alcohol will be served, bring your own non-alcoholic beverages to drink and monitor them. Sometimes well-intentioned family members are misinformed and may think that while you may have had a problem with cocaine, you may be able to have a beer. This is incorrect and why it's so important to involve family members in treatment. "Sometimes they do the wrong thing with the right motivation, Dr. Laughinghouse says.
- If you have a gambling addiction, you can ban yourself from the casinos by registering with the Louisiana State Police here: <http://www.lsp.org/gaming/exclusion.html>. Among other things, doing so will remove your name from direct marketing lists for casinos and you will be prohibited from engaging in gaming. If you show up at a casino and attempt to gamble, you will be escorted from the gaming floor and may be subject to arrest.

Keep in mind that if you're triggered, the best coping skill is to reach out to someone who can help you redirect and deal with your craving in a healthy way. "Pick up the phone," Dr. Laughinghouse says. Reach out to someone you know will help support you in your recovery. And if you hear yourself saying you can have just one, remind yourself that having just one is not possible when it comes to an addictive disorder."



CAHS TREATMENT SERVICES AVAILABLE

Capital Area Human Services has a variety of treatment programs and facilities to address addictive disorders.

CENTER FOR ADULT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Addiction Recovery Services provides outpatient substance abuse treatment both long term and short term in mid-city Baton Rouge focused on addiction recovery and continued sobriety. For more information, visit <http://www.cahsd.org/about/about-our-services/adult-behavioral-health/#addictionrecovery>.

Call (225) 925-1906. East Feliciana Addiction Recovery Services offers these same services located in Clinton. Call: (225) 683-3874.



Center for Gambling Treatment provides outpatient treatment for individuals and families. All gambling treatment services are provided at no cost to Louisiana residents. Call (225) 362-5360 for an appointment within 24 hours. For more information, visit <http://www.cahsd.org/about/about-our-services/adult-behavioral-health/compulsive-gambling-treatment/#gamblingservices>.

Mental Health Services provides treatment for co-occurring mental health and addictive disorders. There are two mental health clinics in Baton Rouge, one in Gonzales, and four satellite clinics in Plaquemine, Port Allen, New Roads and Donaldsonville.

CAPITAL AREA RECOVERY PROGRAM

Capital Area Recovery Program (CARP) is an inpatient addiction recovery program for men providing social detoxification services and comprehensive clinical treatment for substance abuse and addiction recovery (including gambling). CARP also provides care for people with a co-occurring mental health problem, has physicians on staff and uses Medication-Assisted Therapy (MAT) when needed for an opioid addiction. Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance is accepted, and no-cost and sliding fee scale is available based on household income. For more information, call (225) 922-3169 or visit: <http://capitalarearecovery.com/>

realhelpbr.com

HOW TO HELP IF SOMEONE YOU LOVE HAS AN ADDICTIVE DISORDER

KNOW WHEN YOU'RE IN TROUBLE AND NEED HELP.

Think you or someone you love may have an addictive disorder?

LOOK FOR THE FOUR Cs:

- Do you/they **CRAVE** the substance or activity?
- Have you/they lost **CONTROL** of the amount or frequency of use?
- Do you/they feel a **COMPULSION** to use?
- Do you/they use despite the **CONSEQUENCES**?

The best thing for loved ones to do when a family member has an addictive disorder is to ask if the person wants help. "Sometimes the person does not want help, and you have to be okay with that," says Dr. Jan Laughinghouse, CAHS Clinical Director of Addiction Recovery Services. "They must understand they're sick as well, and to get help when they believe they need it.

For the family member, she recommends counseling, support groups and programs that include Al-Anon and Nar-Anon, designed to help family members of those with addictive disorders. These programs offer support in an environment where others understand first-hand what loved ones are going through and offer strength, hope and experience in how to cope with loving someone who has an addiction.

If the person with the addictive disorder does want help, there are many ways in which to be supportive. Because of the features of the addictive process, sometimes people are not able to care for themselves and that's where a loving family member or friend can step in. "Just trying to navigate the process of getting into treatment can be difficult and overwhelming," Dr. Laughinghouse says. "Make the phone calls if they need that, walk with them, support them in their recovery. And remember that any worthwhile treatment program is going to have a family component." All treatment programs at CAHS include family groups and family therapy to address this powerful aspect of the disease of addiction.



This information is produced by Capital Area Human Services to enhance and expand communication on mental health, addiction recovery, and developmental disabilities.