

# The Family Experience



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# Addiction & Mental Health Problems as a Family Experience



# Why is it important to understand the Family Experience?

- Families are involved
- The impact on families is tremendous
- Supporting the Family can improve recovery for their relative - research has shown since the '70's that family interventions work
- Preventing serious emotional and physical health issues for the Family

# Serious Issues in Someone You Care About

- In some ways it is harder to suffer the serious issues of someone else than it is to suffer our own
- The illness of someone we care about will likely impinge on how our own lives are lived
- In some ways, illness can challenge us to get in touch with what is really important in life
- But just as likely, illness can threaten and undermine life as we had previously known it, making us feel more afraid, more alone

# The Impact of Mental Health and/or Addictions on the Family

- The “Make or Break” effect:
  - The challenges related to severe illness in one family member can negatively affect relationships with other family members, but also can be a negative factor in relations between other members
    - Crisis mode
    - Chronic distress and burden
  - Or, challenges can make family ties stronger...

# The Impact of Addictions and/or Mental Illness on the Family

- Guilt
- Fear
- Shame
- Stigma
- Grief
- Conflict
- Frustration
- Anger
- Childcare issues
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss
- Demoralization
- Preoccupation
- Isolation/secretcy
- Stress
- Loss of income

# Looking for Help: Impact on Family

## Negative Experiences

- Confusion/frustration in understanding the system
- Feeling Blamed/judged
- Excluded
- Disappointed
- Despair
- Helplessness

## Positive Experiences

- Learn and understand about their relative's experience
- Learn about recovery
- Feel empowered and supported
- Understand their role
- Find Peers - no longer feel alone
- Find Meaning

# Uniqueness of Each Family

- While there are many generalizations that we can make about the impact on families - their experience will differ depending on:
  - Culture, ethnicity and race and social status
  - Relationship, age, gender
  - Family Strengths/resilience
  - Prior problems or other current issues
  - Stage of relative's issues

# Impact on Individual Family Members

## PARENTS

- Grief and loss
- Primary caregiving
- Guilt and responsibility
- Intrusions into the family life space, and marital stress
- Mothers prone to “tend and befriend”
- Fathers prone to “fight or flight”

## PARTNERS

- An estimated 30 - 35% of hospitalized persons are discharged to live with their partners
- Little research on partners
- Marriage problems are inevitable
- Grief and loss, difficult choices, “single parenting” and financial distress
- Feelings of frustration, isolation, exhaustion and depression

# Impact on Individual Family Members

## Siblings

- Grief and loss
- A sense of being the forgotten family member
- "Survivor's" guilt
- "Replacement" Child - devastated parents look for replacement

## Children

- May be the most vulnerable family members
- Grief and loss
- "Survivor's" Guilt
- Parentification
- Caregiving

# Impact Depending on Stage

## Early Stage

- Denial
- Arguments
- Believing excuses as reasons
- Confusion and ambivalence
- Anxiety
- Protecting the family member from having to face the consequences of his/her use/behaviors

## Middle Stage

- Vague, unclear communication
- Unresolved conflict; deterioration of relationship
- Gradual shift in role and responsibility
- Rescuing and cleaning up behaviours
- Nagging, threatening (periodically reinforced) become vicious cycle
- Reporting on use and user
- Counting drinks, marking bottles, checking on amount of drugs consumed

# Impact Depending on Stage

## Late Stage

- Attempts to control the relative become more extreme
- Anger, depression, burnout
- Self-neglect—physical, social and emotional
- May increase own use of drugs or alcohol

# ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

The Family Journey



# FAMILIES AND THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

- Recovering relatives and families can move beyond maintenance of symptoms to a worthwhile & enjoyable life - there is now a greater appreciation for the potential of those with mental health / substance use disorders and their families

# FAMILIES AND THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

- With the belief that a condition is incurable or that an overwhelming disability is chronic  
→ Hopelessness, anguish, despair
- But, through a process called 'recovery', relatives / families are able to manage their difficulties and achieve meaningful goals

# FAMILIES AND THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

- **RECOVERY** is a familiar idea in physical illness and disability e.g. is not unusual to consider someone with a spinal cord injury to be 'in recovery' - although people suffer ongoing disabilities, they often go on to adjust & to develop new meaning & purpose in life as they grow beyond the catastrophe of the injury

# RECOVERY DEFINED ...

- "Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and / or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life *even with limitations caused by illness*"

- Anthony, 1993

# FAMILIES AND THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

What does / what might 'recovery' look like for you?

*Other common elements of recovery include:*

- **Courage**
- **Self-care**
- **New Skills** e.g. setting limits / boundaries
- **Education** (including learning about what triggers problems, developing successful coping strategies)
- **Sense of control** / taking responsibility for actions
- **Support** (understanding, unconditional acceptance by others, validation, respect)



# The Supporting Families Project

- Goal: to develop psycho-educational and support group resources to support families affected by concurrent disorders & to make them available across Ontario
- Currently, recruiting participants for study

# Themes in “Supporting Families”

- Mental health problems
- Substance Use problems
- Interaction between MH & A problems
- Impact of concurrent disorders on family
- Family self-care
- Medications
- Stigma
- Crisis management
- Relapse & relapse prevention
- Family recovery

# The CD Family Support & Psycho-educational Manual

**Plan:** to disseminate manual and support group protocol to interested agencies across Ontario

- Public Forums and Professional Workshops in Fall 2005 (North Bay, London & Ottawa)
- Family Manual and Facilitator's Guide

# Family Outreach and Response Program

- Individual and Family Support
- Family Mental Health Recovery Series
- Alumni Group
- Community Development
- [www.familymentalhealthrecovery.org](http://www.familymentalhealthrecovery.org)



**Final Chapter**

**Charlottetown**



**P.E.I.**

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**LAST MAN STANDING**



Thank You!