

700,000
AUSSIE MEN DRINK
ALCOHOL EVERY DAY

How to talk to men about

ADDICTION

From alcohol and gambling to social media and pornography, different types of addiction require different tactics by loved ones, discovers David Smiedt



Fact: Addiction doesn't discriminate between men and women. But the way men and women face up to, and overcome, addiction can differ markedly. Traditional (and toxic) masculine notions of stoicism and 'dealing with issues quietly' not only make it tough for men to accept they need help, but also tough for those trying to give it.

"Men may use the strategy of 'I'm fine, don't worry about me' as their first response and the important thing to recognise when talking to anyone about an addiction is that it's going to be potentially confronting," says psychotherapist Dan Auerbach of Associated Counsellors & Psychologists Sydney. "Men may be a bit dismissive at first, but that's not a reason to end the conversation there."

We asked the experts how to address common addictions experienced by men.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We can all get lost in our devices, but addiction rears its head when we begin to miss the stuff happening around us. **WHAT TO SAY:** "Start by pointing out the impact of the person's social media use and help them appreciate the missed opportunities," says clinical psychologist Dan Martin of Personal Enrichment Services in Sydney. "Begin with broad statements such as [how] loved ones are feeling second class to a screen, but have specific examples ready as well – things like 'you missed out on our son's soccer game because you weren't mentally present with him.'"

If your concerns are dismissed (and there's a high chance they might be the first few times), Martin advises: "Add the observations you've collected since your last conversation so you can help them appreciate that it's continuing to have a negative impact – it's not just a one-off decision to be on the computer for an hour one day, it's a pattern of behaviour over time that carries weight."

PARTY DRUGS

One of the things that makes this particular addiction so insidious is the stridency that accompanies the 'it's under control' assertions – especially if the addict also maintains that 'it's only a weekend thing'.

WHAT TO SAY: When it comes to helping, Martin says it's as much about what you don't do: "Trying to confront them when they're under the influence or recovering from the drug's effects will likely not work well." Instead, he advises that you "begin by expressing your concern over a pattern of behaviour", but be prepared for the counterargument that they 'only occasionally use'.

"Express concern for the negative effects you see it having on their life, like impulsive decisions, decreased performance at work or being less present in their relationships," he recommends. "It's also a good idea to be prepared with information on what the drugs are doing to them physically, emotionally, and socially."

ALCOHOL

The body+soul 2018 Men's Health Report found that 8 per cent of men (700,000) drink every day, which backs up existing data that alcohol is the most common addiction for men in Australia.

WHAT TO SAY: The idea of seeking help for alcohol issues is often seen by men as a sign of weakness, which is why it can take many years for the issue to be confronted, says clinical hypnotherapist Adrian Jackson. This idea is compounded by Australia's pub culture, in which holding your booze is still largely considered a 'sign of masculinity'. Because facing up to alcohol addiction can be a shameful thing, a non-judgemental approach works well, advises Jackson. "You could ask what life might be like, or who they could be, if they were to curtail certain drinking behaviours. This gives someone a chance to safely rehearse an alternative future with no fear of judgement."

SIGNS OF ADDICTION

- ➔ Denial
- ➔ Secrecy
- ➔ Obsession and an inability to stop
- ➔ Using the addiction to deal with other issues
- ➔ Always maintaining access to the drug of choice
- ➔ Withdrawal from social/recreational activities

Source: Medical News Today

MARIJUANA

Because of what Auerbach terms a "laissez-faire" social attitude to this drug, he says there's a tendency for it to create a "comfortable state to be in". This often leads to addicts feeling like "they've stalled in their life and are no longer progressing in the things they used to be motivated to do," he adds.

WHAT TO SAY: "You can bring up that lack of progression and say, 'I've noticed you don't come out with your family/friends any more. Do you think marijuana might be having a bit of an impact?'"

Auerbach adds that it's vital you don't make changing a behaviour sound easy: "Respect that it's difficult, talk about the things you've noticed and express a commitment to help."

GAMBLING

It used to be that you had to find a casino, TAB or pub with pokies to place a bet. Now it's also a quick tap away on your smartphone, which makes it a lot easier to keep hidden from loved ones.

WHAT TO SAY: "Straight-talking prepares the ground," advises Natalie

Clays, a therapist with the addiction-recovery program Allen Carr's Easyway. "Pretending there isn't really a problem, and being reluctant to assert that there's a big problem, helps the gambling addict keep their head stuck in the sand."

To marshal the evidence, government-funded support service Gambling Help Online advises looking for signs such as: money missing from accounts, unpaid bills/disconnection notices, and being secretive about absences.

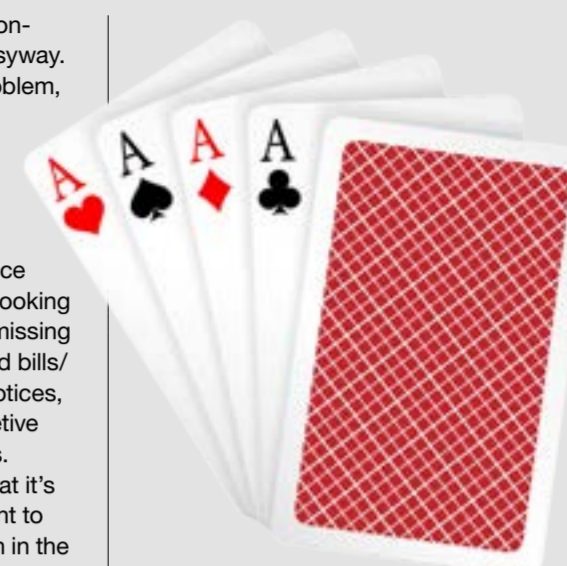
Clays adds that it's equally important to point the person in the direction of help and build trust so the addict doesn't feel as if you're always looking over their shoulder. "Be there for the long run and if they have a bad day, remind them that their world is still better than it would've been if they were still gambling," she says.

PORNOGRAPHY

Let's not be naïve – most of us have had a look, but when it becomes compulsive, you're dealing with a proper addiction.

WHAT TO SAY: "Partner to partner, the issue normally comes to a head naturally

"Respect that it's difficult to talk about the things you've noticed and express a commitment to help"



and a huge row erupts when certain behaviours come to light," says Clays. "As part of the reconciliation that follows, gentle and calm words that are spoken with kindness are most powerful."

Because this addiction carries with it a great deal of shame for the person who's been discovered, it can help to know that it's increasingly common and there are well established treatment protocols in place to aid recovery.

Clays adds that men with a porn addiction can be more comfortable speaking with a therapist alone rather than with their partner present.

WHERE TO GET HELP

FOR 24 HOUR SUPPORT
Call Lifeline (131 114) for crisis support, or contact Counselling Online (1300 789 978, counsellingonline.org.au) for any alcohol- or drug-related concerns.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL SUPPORT
Alcohol and Drug Foundation information and referral service (1300 858 584, adf.org.au)
• Narcotics Anonymous Australia (1300 652 820, na.org.au) • Alcoholics Anonymous (1300 222 222, aa.org.au) • crystalmeth.org.au • cannabisupport.com.au

GAMBLING SUPPORT
Anyone affected by gambling should call 1800 858 858 or visit gamblinghelponline.org.au

FIND A PSYCHOLOGIST
To find a local expert in addiction treatment, visit psychology.org.au