A man and a woman are standing on a sandy beach, holding hands and looking out at the ocean. The sun is setting, creating a warm, golden glow in the sky and on the sand. The man is wearing a light blue polo shirt and khaki pants, and the woman is wearing a light grey long-sleeved top and khaki pants. The background shows the ocean and a sky with scattered clouds.

Convincing Your  
High-Functioning  
Addicted Loved One  
to Get Help



SILVER RIDGE

A PREMIER PROGRAM BY PYRAMID HEALTHCARE

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## Introduction

Not everyone with an addiction ends up at rock bottom—at least not right away. Some people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol are able to hold down a job and their career may even be thriving. These people are considered to be "high functioning" despite their substance abuse.

But Dr. Steve Melemis, one of North America's foremost addiction experts, prefers to call these individuals "currently functioning" rather than "high functioning." Quoted in an article published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Melemis points out that the job is always the last thing to go.<sup>1</sup> People who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, he says, know that they need their job to continue with the addiction.

Convincing a high-functioning addicted loved one that they need help can be challenging. This eBook will help you understand how addiction affects both you and your addicted loved one. It could help you convince your loved one to make the choice to get help.



A photograph of two men in business suits standing in a modern office environment. The man on the left is older with grey hair, wearing a grey suit and a blue shirt. The man on the right is younger, wearing a dark blue suit and a red tie with white dots. They appear to be in a conversation. A dark blue rectangular box with a white background is overlaid on the lower part of the image, containing the text.

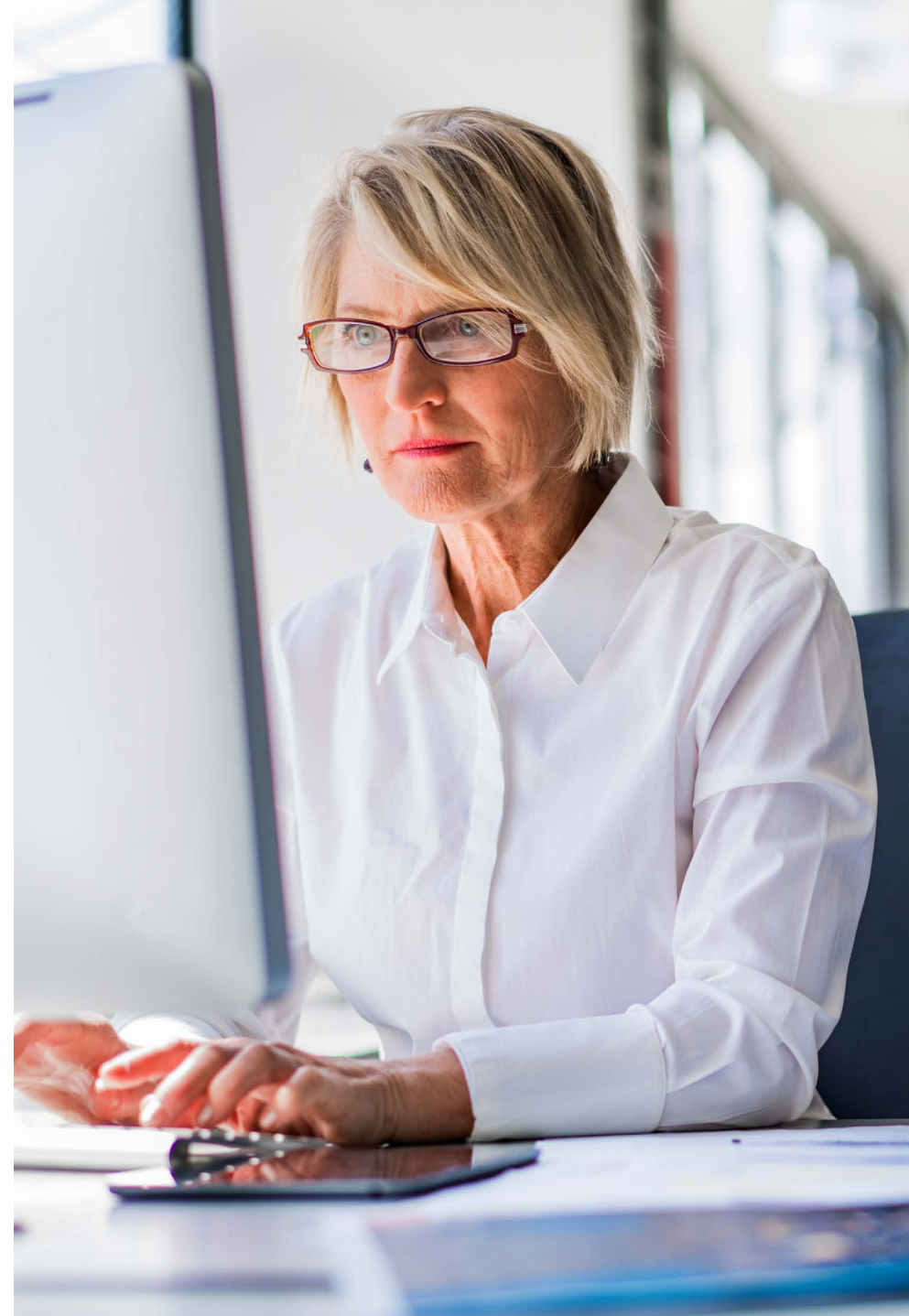
Characteristics  
of a High-Functioning  
Addicted Individual

The National Institute on Drug Abuse identifies five subtypes of people with alcoholism.<sup>2</sup> One of these is the "functional subtype." Nearly 20 percent of Americans with an alcohol addiction fall into this category. Common characteristics of this functional subtype include:

- Middle age
- High level of education
- Stable employment
- Stable family life
- Family history of alcoholism (in 30 percent of cases)
- Lifetime history of major depression (25 percent)
- Lifetime history of smoking (50 percent)

Denial is common among people with an addiction, particularly if they are high functioning. They're likely to make excuses about their drug or alcohol abuse in an attempt to minimize or justify it. These excuses include statements like:

- I work hard and play hard.
- I deserve to unwind after a long day.
- Nothing bad has ever happened due to my substance abuse.
- It's not like I use hard drugs.
- If I was addicted, I wouldn't be able to keep my job.





But the fact is, addiction takes a toll eventually. It's impossible to function optimally while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. As the addiction progresses, as it nearly always does, it will begin to affect many areas of a person's life. Convincing your addicted loved one to get help sooner rather than later can prevent serious problems down the road.





# Understanding Addiction

is Essential for Helping  
Your Loved One





Few people really understand addiction and how it changes brain function and affects thought and behavior patterns. But to help your loved one, it's essential to know how addiction develops and progresses and how it's diagnosed and treated.

## **How Addiction Develops**

In general, addiction is characterized by compulsive drug use despite negative consequences. People with an addiction will often find that they're unable to quit using even though they want to or have tried to. Most people who try to quit on their own without professional help will end up in a perpetual cycle of relapse and remission.

According to Harvard Medical School, addiction starts as a choice to abuse drugs or alcohol. However, once the abuse transitions to addiction, choice is no longer a factor.<sup>3</sup>



# S · R

Chronic drug and alcohol abuse affects brain function, especially in the brain's learning, reward and memory centers. When you use, the brain makes connections between the drug abuse and the pleasure it produces. These associations are very strong, and your brain may begin to associate enjoying using drugs with wanting them. The result is intense cravings that continue to drive the drug abuse.

These cravings are produced by the same brain mechanisms that link activities related to survival—such as food and sex—with pleasure. The brain even stores environmental cues associated with the drug use. This creates a conditioned response so that whenever you encounter those cues, or triggers, you experience an intense craving for the drug.

The brain changes associated with addiction lead to harmful ways of thinking and behaving. Addiction can lead to denial, lies, secrecy and unhealthy coping behaviors. It can cause people to take risks they wouldn't normally take. It can make them believe that the negative consequences of the addiction aren't their fault, and they may blame other people or events for their problems. They often find it easy to justify their drug abuse and minimize the problems it causes. They may masterfully manipulate others in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Addiction hijacks the brain and turns your loved one into someone else.



## Addiction is Chronic, Progressive and Relapsing

Like heart disease and diabetes, addiction is a chronic, progressive and relapsing disease that has genetic, biological, cultural and environmental underpinnings. It's preventable, diagnosable and treatable.

**Chronic** means that while addiction can't be cured, it can be sent into remission through abstinence.

**Progressive** means that without treatment, addiction almost always grows worse over time as brain function continues to change and leads to heavier abuse.

**Relapsing** means that using again after a period of sobriety can lead back to the brain changes that cause compulsive drug use despite wanting or trying to quit.

## How Addiction is Diagnosed

Addiction is diagnosed using eleven criteria, which are outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. These criteria determine whether a substance use disorder is mild, moderate or severe. Meeting two to three criteria denotes a mild substance use disorder, while four to five indicate a moderate disorder. Meeting six to seven criteria indicates a severe substance use disorder.

### The criteria are:

- 1 Using drugs or alcohol in larger amounts or for a longer period of time than intended.
- 2 Finding that you're unable to stop or cut down even if you want to.
- 3 Spending a lot of time seeking, using and recovering from using.
- 4 Experiencing intense cravings for the substance of abuse.
- 5 Neglecting duties at home, work or school
- 6 Continuing to use despite problems with health, relationships, finances or legal status.
- 7 Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- 8 Taking risks you wouldn't normally take.
- 9 Experiencing mental or physical health problems as a result of drug use.
- 10 Developing a tolerance so that you need larger amounts of the drug to get the desired effects.
- 11 Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when drug use stops.

Whether a substance use disorder is mild, moderate or severe, treatment is the most effective way to send it into remission for the long-term.



## How Addiction is Treated

The National Institute on Drug Abuse stresses that in the majority of cases, willpower and good intentions aren't enough to end an addiction.<sup>4</sup> Because addiction changes brain function and affects thought and behavior, ending an addiction requires identifying unhealthy ways of thinking and behaving and replacing them with healthier thought and behavior patterns.

**Addiction is a complicated disease with complex underlying issues that must also be addressed in treatment. Some of the most common issues that underlie an addiction include:**

- A lifetime history of trauma, such as sexual or physical abuse
- Chronic stress
- An underlying mental illness, such as anxiety or depression
- Family dysfunction





**A variety of therapies are used in treatment to address all of an individual's issues:**

**Cognitive-behavioral therapy** helps individuals identify harmful thought and behavior patterns and replace them with healthier thoughts and behaviors. It helps people address the issues behind the addiction and develop a toolkit of skills and strategies to cope with stress, cravings and other triggers for relapse.

**Family therapy** helps to restore function to the household. It helps families learn healthier ways of communicating, and it helps repair relationships damaged by the addiction.

**Motivational interviewing** helps people who are ambivalent toward recovery identify their own personal reasons for wanting to end their drug abuse.



**Complementary therapies** like art and music therapy, nature therapy, yoga and meditation reduce stress, relieve cravings, and improve self-awareness and self-confidence. These therapies help people work through difficult experiences and emotions and improve social and communication skills.

Treatment helps people find purpose and meaning in a life of sobriety, and it helps them learn to have fun and enjoy life without drugs or alcohol. It's designed to address their multiple needs and the various complex issues that contribute to the substance abuse.







## Helping Your Loved One

Starts with Helping Yourself





Addiction is a family disease, according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.<sup>5</sup> It affects the functioning of the family system by disrupting normal routines and leading family members to adopt unhealthy thought, behavior and coping patterns.

In many cases, one of the reasons an addicted loved one is "high functioning" is that family, friends and colleagues often enable the addiction. Dr. Melemis points out that in many cases, when "currently functional" people do end up hitting rock bottom, it's because friends and family have become fed up and stopped accommodating their loved one's addiction.

In addition to understanding addiction, it's equally important to understand how your own thoughts, attitudes and behaviors may be making it easier for your loved one to continue the addiction. Enabling means that you allow the substance abuse to continue without consequences. It helps keep the addicted loved one in denial about their addiction and how it affects others.

Enabling behaviors are very common among an addicted individual's loved ones. Most of the time, family and friends are largely unaware that they're enabling the addiction. Some common enabling behaviors include:

- Ignoring negative behaviors, overlooking problems and even denying that a problem exists
- Difficulty expressing emotions, especially if there are negative consequences for doing so
- Putting your addicted loved one's needs before your own
- Acting out of fear and doing whatever it takes to avoid upsetting situations caused by the addiction
- Lying to others about the addiction and the loved one's behaviors to keep the peace and present a calm, controlled exterior
- Blaming other people or situations for your loved one's drug abuse
- Removing consequences of the addiction, such as making excuses for your loved one, bailing them out of negative situations or taking on their household responsibilities
- Resenting the addicted loved one and feeling angry and hurt while continuing to enable the addiction





Breaking the cycle of enabling is a major step toward helping your loved one see that the addiction is a problem. But just as it takes time to re-learn healthy ways of thinking once you've developed an addiction, it takes time to re-learn healthy ways of coping with a loved one's addiction.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and numerous other respected organizations stress the importance of family members receiving support and counseling in order to best help their loved one come to the realization that they need help. Support and counseling go a long way toward helping you best support your loved one once they enter recovery.



## How Support Groups Help

Support groups like Al-Anon for alcohol addiction and Nar-Anon for drug addiction are specifically aimed at the loved ones of an addicted person.<sup>6,7</sup> They help you understand addiction and its far-reaching consequences. They help you identify how your own behaviors may be enabling your loved one's addiction. They offer you a place to vent your fear and anger. Support group members who are going through similar circumstances support and encourage one another, offer practical coping tips and strategies and help you stay positive and rooted in reality.



## How Counseling Helps

In addition to enabling behaviors, you may have developed unhealthy coping skills from dealing with your loved one's addiction. Maybe you've turned to unhealthy substance use yourself, or maybe you compulsively eat or shop as a form of stress relief and self-medication. Maybe you lash out at your kids or the pets when things are going poorly instead of lashing out at your addicted loved one. Maybe you've developed anxiety or depression, or maybe you move through your life like a ghost, avoiding too much contact with others or spending a lot of time tending to your addicted loved one's needs while neglecting your own happiness and well-being.

Counseling can dramatically improve your life while helping you identify and end unhealthy enabling behaviors and coping strategies. You'll learn how to evaluate your own attitudes, thoughts and behaviors and replace those that are unhealthy and unhelpful with more helpful and positive ways of thinking and behaving. You'll learn how to communicate better with your addicted loved one and offer support without enabling. You'll learn how to have productive conversations with your loved one to help convince them to get help for the addiction.







When to Consider  
an Intervention



If you've tried to convince your loved one to get help for an addiction but to no avail, an intervention may help. Whether your loved one is in denial that there's a problem or simply isn't interested in recovery, an intervention can help get your loved one into treatment sooner or later.

An intervention is a well-planned meeting between an addicted individual and a group of concerned significant others, or CSOs. The CSOs invite the addicted loved one to the meeting without revealing the purpose. Then, each CSO explains to the loved one how the addiction has personally affected their own life, citing examples. The meeting ends with an offer of treatment, along with outlining consequences if the loved one refuses to get help.

Interventions require careful planning and execution. While a DIY intervention can quickly devolve into chaos and accusations, interventions planned and held with the help of a professional interventionist have a 90 percent success rate in getting the loved one to agree to treatment.<sup>8</sup>





In many cases, the loved one will agree to treatment even if they remain in denial or are ambivalent about recovering. But research shows that treatment is effective even for those who don't really want to be there. In fact, one of the 13 principles of effective treatment set forth by the National Institute on Drug Abuse stresses that treatment doesn't need to be voluntary to be effective.<sup>9</sup> That's because once in treatment, participants take part in a variety of therapies that help resolve their ambivalence or bring them out of denial.

If your loved one refuses to get help, the best thing you can do is continue to engage with a support group and therapy. It's also important to follow through on the consequences outlined during the intervention, which may include no longer taking on extra responsibilities at home, quitting making excuses for your loved one or even asking them to move out. Allowing your loved one to experience the consequences of addiction is one of the best ways to move them closer to the decision to seek help.

Interventions aren't for everyone. In some cases, an intervention can make things worse, especially if your loved one has a serious mental illness or your family is highly dysfunctional. A professional interventionist or other mental health professional can help you decide whether an intervention might be effective for your loved one.





Family Support  
in Recovery Improves  
the Outcome

Hope is the foundation of recovery, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.<sup>10</sup> Hope is the belief that a better future is possible. Even if your loved one doesn't enter treatment right away, holding on to hope is essential for eventually helping your loved one enter recovery.

Once your loved one seeks treatment, your support will be crucial for successful long-term recovery. Engaging in family and individual therapy and joining a support group are the best ways to support your loved one. Making healthy lifestyle changes together and spending quality time enjoying life without drugs or alcohol is also important.







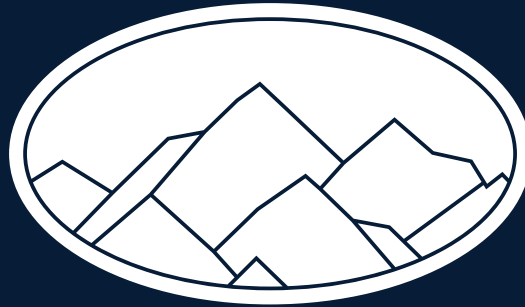
Recovery isn't easy, and there will be setbacks. Recovery is a process of learning what works, and it's a process of transforming your life from the inside out and the outside in. It's a matter of improving health and home, finding purpose, and enjoying supportive relationships with family, friends, coworkers and others in the community.

Just as addiction is a family disease, recovery is a family journey. Reinventing your life together can lead to better relationships, and it puts you on the path to a higher quality of life, a greater sense of well-being and authentic happiness down the road.



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# SILVER RIDGE

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Silver Ridge serves established midlife adults who need to retreat discreetly from their daily lives. Here, we provide the perfect setting to focus on the addictions compromising your relationships, your future and your legacy.

**Every great legacy has a strong foundation. Build yours here.**