



Common Themes in Addictions

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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It doesn't matter whether the addiction is to substances, gambling, alcohol, shopping, or sex. All those with an addiction share common things:

1. **Strong Feelings** - Everyone has a wide range of feelings that can be positive or negative. People who lead with their feelings, however, often end up living in the ditch! I have found, over the years that many of my clients who suffer from an addiction state that their anxiety motivates them to turn to unhealthy coping strategies. Their unmanageable feels often play a key role in their addiction pattern.
2. **Lack of skills** - Those who don't know how to deal with their feelings in a healthy way, look for alternate methods. For example, someone who has problems with relationships and doesn't have a good self-image, might be a likely candidate to become a workaholic. They might become very valuable in the workplace and learn specific work skills but doesn't solve their other personal problems.
3. **Enablers** - Most people with addictions can name the person who first introduced them to the substance or activity that led to an addiction. They also usually have people in their lives who have contributed to or allowed the addiction to continue with their inappropriate behaviours.
4. **Fantasy and Cravings** - When a person is thinking about the addiction in an obsessive manner and has cravings to use their focus is not available for their responsibilities.
5. **Detachment** - Sometimes it may seem like the addict has two people living inside. There is the public person who presents well and the private person who is involved in a secret lifestyle. In many cases, the person has been able to detach one from the other and sometimes even doesn't remember doing specific things because they have become so good at separating the two. This is common with a number of problem areas such as eating disorders and sexual addictions.
6. **Tolerance** - Over time, the amount or strength of a substance or activity that is needed to produce a high will need to be increased in order to get the same effect. Those who begin by looking at pornography, for example, may increasingly require more frequent or more powerful images. Some may advance into chat lines and affairs, begin hiring prostitutes or add violence to their sexual experiences.
7. **Withdrawal** - Distress can occur when the addiction is not fed. A person may become frustrated, angry, or unable to function when they are abstaining. Withdrawal can be physiological and/or psychological in nature.
8. **Consequences** - Those with addictions often also experience relationship problems, financial and employment issues, legal encounters, deteriorating health, shame, and self-loathing. Over time, their lives can become unmanageable.
9. **Defense Mechanisms** - Denial, projection, blaming, repression, rationalization, intellectualization, minimization, deflection, and manipulation are some of the ways that the person avoids facing reality and getting treatment.

10. Temptations - A person who is addicted has formed a life that promotes the addiction. Their friends, activities, schedule, and habits all revolve around the addiction. S/he are able to get a short-term "fix" easily as that has been their pattern. Recovery therefore involves facing one day at a time, knowing that commitment to change long-term will be difficult.

11. Opportunities to change - It doesn't matter where one goes in the world, there are supports and resources to help the person who is addicted. But that person has to be ready and willing to change. Alcoholics Anonymous, group therapy, public agencies and private therapists are only a phone call away. Employers offer Employee Assistant programs and insurance companies usually recognize addiction as a medical issue that qualifies for disability benefits.

12. People who love them - If you are worried about someone who is involved with an addiction, you need help. You cannot change another person, but you can work on yourself. The best thing you can do today is book an appointment with a psychologist who specializes in addictions so you can begin working on your healthy future.