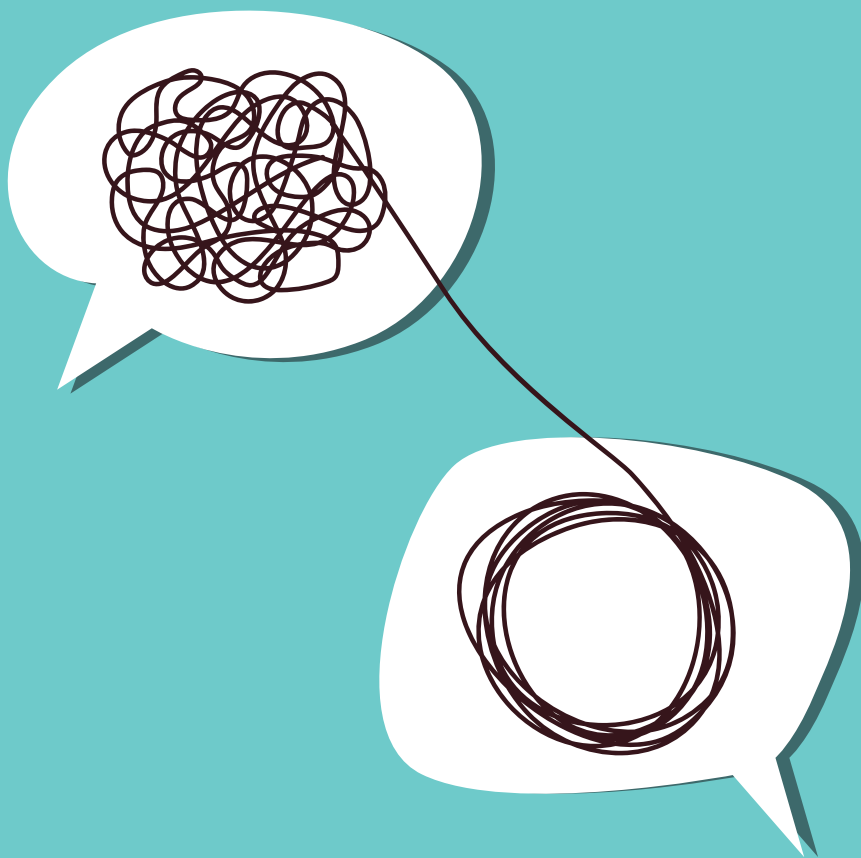


UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

Early Awareness and
Protective Approaches



Understanding Addiction Early Awareness and Protective Approaches

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Inside This Guide

Addiction is a complex issue that affects individuals, communities, and society as a whole. It is not limited to substances such as tobacco, alcohol, or drugs; behaviors like gambling, gaming, and excessive technology use can also become addictive. All forms of addiction have common effects on the brain and behavior and should not be underestimated.

Addiction often begins early in life and can affect anyone, regardless of personality or willpower. It alters brain function, influences decision-making, and can create patterns that are difficult to break. Addiction is not merely a matter of choice; it is a brain-related condition, and anyone may be at risk under certain circumstances. Addressing and preventing addiction requires understanding the risks, recognizing early warning signs, and fostering supportive environments at home, in schools, workplaces, and communities. Adults, caregivers, and professionals all play important roles in modeling healthy behaviors, setting boundaries, and supporting individuals in developing skills that help them cope with challenges without turning to addictive substances or behaviors.

This guide provides an overview of different types of addictions, their characteristics, and common misconceptions. Increasing awareness and knowledge across all levels of society is a fundamental step toward protecting individuals from the potentially harmful effects of addiction.

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KNOWING ADDICTION



Which addiction do you think is more harmful?

- a) Tobacco addiction
- b) Alcohol addiction
- c) Substance addiction
- d) Gambling addiction
- e) Digital addiction

Correct answer: All of them

In fact, all addictions have the potential to be equally damaging. Addictions have common effects on the brain and behavior, and so they can open doors for each other. Consequently, all of them are harmful, and protecting yourselves from all of them should be a primary family goal.

- **What is addiction?**

Addiction can be briefly defined as the loss of control over an object used or an action performed and the inability to quit even if the damage is clearly visible.

- **Addiction is a serious problem.**

Addiction causes problems in all areas of life. Numerous studies have been carried out into the prevention and treatment of addiction, which is considered a global public health problem.

Research has shown that the factors that can cause addiction begin to appear at an early age.

- **Addiction is a process.**



Which of the following children do you think is at a greater risk of having an addiction problem?



Correct answer: All of them

Anyone can have an addiction problem. Addiction is a brain disease rather than a personality disorder or a problem related to willpower. Although different risks and protective factors are involved, anyone is at risk of having an addiction problem due to our common brain mechanisms. Hence, it is important to gain awareness about protecting ourselves and our family from addictions.

- **Patterns of addiction are modeled.**

If children see you use an addictive substance as a problem-solving and coping mechanism, they will copy this behavior pattern.

- **Addiction is a brain disease.**

Addictive substances alter the structure and functioning of the brain. At first, the brain craves the substance or activity because it derives pleasure from it, but then it cannot stop itself, even if it is no longer enjoyable. Addiction is thus a brain disease, and anyone can have an addiction problem.

- **Addiction is a recurrent disease.**

Addiction is a disease that follows a course of recovery and relapse, and its treatment requires patience. Therefore, it's crucial to recognize the condition before reaching the level of addiction through prevention efforts.

- **Addiction can be prevented.**

It is possible to prevent addictions by reducing the risk factors that can lead to addiction and increasing the protective factors.

- **Prevention starts in the family.**

A family environment with positive relationships, in which parents take an interest in their children and support their skills, provides a strong basis for efforts to protect children from addictions.

Negative consequences that can be seen in children if addictions are not prevented:



Health problems



Unhappiness and unwillingness to do anything in life



Making wrong choices



Inability to establish healthy relationships



Having difficulty coping with challenges



Academic failure

How Do We Recognize Addictions?



TYPES OF ADDICTIONS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS



Addictions can be categorized under two headings, namely, chemical addictions and behavioral addictions:

Chemical Addictions

A substance is taken into the body and the individual becomes addicted to that substance.

Tobacco, alcohol and drugs, etc.



Behavioral Addictions

A behavior is repeated again and again, and the individual becomes addicted to that behavior.

Internet, gaming and social media, etc.



TOBACCO ADDICTION

Cigarettes, hookahs and electronic cigarettes are widely used tobacco products currently. The addictive substance in tobacco products is nicotine. It causes pleasure-inducing chemicals to be released in the brain, making the person feel good for a short time and thus to crave more nicotine. It is this dependence on nicotine that makes it difficult to quit smoking or other tobacco products. When the use of tobacco products is reduced or stopped, physical and emotional adverse effects such as stress, dejection and irritability develop. In fact, tobacco products trick our brain's reward system, and the feeling of happiness is not real.



Tobacco addiction is a common problem around the world. Currently, about 1.5 billion people worldwide smoke. More than 8 million people die every year due to tobacco-related diseases.

The earlier a person starts using tobacco, the greater the risk of nicotine addiction. Studies have shown that the average age at which people start smoking in Türkiye is 16.7 for men and 17.9 for women.

One of the causes of the early onset of tobacco use is the tobacco industry. It targets children and young people because they are easier to manipulate. Think about the TV series and movies you watch. You may have seen smart, beautiful and cool characters smoking cigarettes and other tobacco products. Who do you think their target audience is? What is the purpose? Of course, they target young people, aiming to develop positive perceptions towards tobacco products.



"I tell my child that I smoke because of stress, and that I will quit in the future."

Actions speak louder than words, especially with children. As such, it is not enough to say that you will quit. Telling your children about the effects of smoking cigarettes or any tobacco product, such as stress reduction, may result in them developing a positive perception about smoking in the future.



ALCOHOL ADDICTION

According to historical data, alcohol is the oldest and most common substance known to be abused. As it gained popularity, it was noticed that it gave rise to various health problems. Studies show that alcohol use is on the rise, and the average age of initiation is as low as 12.

Alcohol use is much more harmful to young people because their brains have not yet fully developed. Alcohol use by young people can damage the parts of the brain related to memory, control and coordination. This can lead to significant health problems.

Young people usually start to use alcohol as a result of misconceptions put forward by friends and peer pressure: “let’s have fun together”, “you will forget your problems”, “it will make you feel stronger”.



“If I don’t let him/her drink, I’ll look like a very strict, prescriptive parent.”

Having rules about alcohol in your family does not make you a strict parent. On the contrary, it shows that you are a parent that sets boundaries for the good of their children.



The best solution is to not start at all.



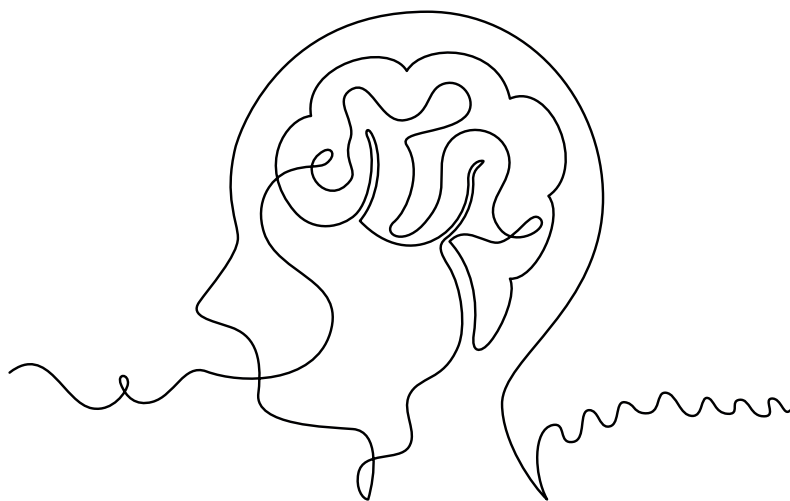
Alcohol consumption is estimated to be the seventh leading cause of death and disability around the world.





"His/her friends may drink, but my child would not."

Being accepted into a group of friends is very important to children. Since alcohol is a substance that is usually consumed in social environments, there is a high risk if more than half of the friend circle consume alcohol. Often, alcohol use can become a tool of acceptance among this age group, so children may be under pressure to drink.



"If s/he drinks with me, s/he will learn to drink in moderation."

Although drinking families think that it may be safer for children to consume alcohol with them, studies have shown that it may cause children to drink more without family supervision. Regardless of the amount, starting to consume alcohol at an early age and its acceptance in the family may lead to alcohol and substance addiction in later years.



SUBSTANCE ADDICTION

Drugs can contain various chemicals and have different uses. When a person uses drugs, they feel pleasure, happiness for a short time, and may increase the amount used to get more pleasure. Despite increasing the amount, the person fails to draw as much pleasure from the substance as the first time, and a physical and emotional addiction thus develops. In addition to physical and psychological harm, the risk of death also increases.

Research has shown that people who try drugs at least once in their lifetime are most prominently in the 15–34 years age group. Young people may have close friends who introduce them to substances and encourage their continued use. Despite being afraid, young people may try them to avoid being excluded from their circle of friends, thinking that just one time will not hurt. However, trying drugs even once can lead to addiction.



“If my child had used drugs, s/he would act very differently and we would certainly recognize it.”

Note that not every substance has the same effect on every person. Merely observing the presence of physical effects is inadequate. The person may not only face physical and psychological problems, but may also lose their ability to interact with their family, friends and society.



According to a 2020 research report compiled by the Department of Combating Narcotic Crimes of Türkiye, 85.5% of those who use narcotic substances at home live with family members.



“My child would never do it!”

Social pressure and the desire to fit in are quite dominant in adolescence. Adolescents may deviate from their usual character or general behavior, depending especially on the social context. You should thus be aware of your child's circle of friends and support their ability to say no.



DIGITAL ADDICTION

Technology and the internet are indispensable parts of our lives today. The dangers of technology are related to the manner of use, purpose, duration and content rather than the use of the technology itself. When not used in moderation, technology and internet give rise to problems.

The mechanism of digital addiction is the same as that of chemical addictions. Moreover, the Internet can facilitate access to addictive substances. For example, although the sale of e-cigarettes is prohibited in Türkiye, these products are accessible through websites.

Digital addiction covers the fields of digital gaming, social media, mobile device, online gambling and online sexual addictions.



A study conducted in Türkiye found that the highest risk group for technology addiction is adolescents aged between 12-18 years. Internet addiction is three times more common in men than in women.



“Phones and tablets are a good way to keep kids busy.”

When phones and tablets are used under family supervision, they can be beneficial for your children. When used alone for long hours and outside family supervision, they can give rise to problems such as attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), speech disorders, behavioral disorders, anger and aggression.



GAMING ADDICTION

Digital games are becoming more and more popular. The fact that games are designed to keep the person in the game for longer periods increases the risk of addiction. Some digital games have structural features that compel gamers to play them obsessively. For example, massively multiplayer online games are never ending games in which the players gain reputation among online players as a result of their trophies and achievements. One of the factors that make online games more attractive is that it is easy for players to achieve success. In online games, people can easily experience feelings of success that they believe they cannot experience in real life.

The pleasure felt by playing digital games affects the reward system of the brain, resulting in changes in its functioning over time.



“A child that can use a smartphone is intelligent.”

Smartphones have been developed so that everyone can easily hold and use them, and the ability to use them has nothing to do with intelligence. On the contrary, spending too much time with technology at an early age has been shown to have adverse effects on the brain and on the development of mental skills.



With the blurring of the boundaries between gambling and games, young children are now more exposed to gambling. *Research has shown that children and teenagers are highly vulnerable to transitioning from gaming to gambling.*

Gambling and Gaming Convergence

In recent years, loot boxes have gained a great deal of popularity in games. They are virtual chests containing random rewards that participants purchase to access in-game items. The value of the contents is unknown at the time of purchase, and while it may contain a very rare and valuable item, an ordinary and worthless item may also come out of the box.

Given the similarity of loot boxes with gambling and the age group that such games target, loot boxes are completely or partially banned in some countries. It is, therefore, necessary for families to be informed about the subject and the content of the games their children play, and to be aware of the risks that may be encountered if they are to protect their children.



“Instead of acquiring harmful habits outside, it is better that they are around us at home, even if they are in front of a monitor.”

While surfing the Internet, windows may appear on some sites and they may accidentally click on them and enter harmful sites. Similarly, inappropriate sites may use the most searched words on their sites to trick children into visiting them, thus giving them access to inappropriate content, such as sex and gambling.



Use Technology with Purpose and Sufficiency!



GAMBLING ADDICTION



In recent years, the popularity of gambling has increased all over the world. The average age at which people start gambling has fallen to 9 years. Gambling addiction is more common in teenagers than in adults. Since children and adolescents are a risk group, families should be informed about gambling and its consequences.

Any activity in which anything is risked to gain something of higher value can be considered gambling. For something to be considered as a gamble, it needs to involve:

- wagering of money or anything else of material value;
- a goal to gain additional money or items of material value by attempting to make accurate predictions; and
- an uncertain outcome of the event.

Card games such as poker, dice games, horse racing, betting, lottery, numerical lotto, instant win, roulette, craps, games played against the house or on electronic slot machines, etc. are all examples of gambling.

There are different types of gambling available today. Although they may seem to be relatively less or more harmful, they all have the potential to lead to addiction. False beliefs and the tendency to remember only winnings play a key role in gambling addiction. For example, feeling that you will win, believing that a lucky necklace will bring luck, thinking that there are lucky/unlucky days, believing that knowledge and skills will affect the result, believing that trying repeatedly increases the chance of winning, etc. cause people to distort the facts and to continue gambling.



“Children or adolescents do not become addicted to gambling.”

Approximately 10-15% of young people experience gambling-related problems, and 1-6% show signs of gambling addiction. Online gambling in particular is more common among children and teenagers.





“Gambling addiction is easy to notice.”

Gambling addiction is known as a covert addiction. Unlike alcohol and drug use, it is easier to hide because it has fewer noticeable symptoms. Many gambling addicts do not realize they have a gambling problem, and often deny it after it is discovered.



The number of non-money gambling games is growing. Many gambling operators also offer free trial versions of their games. This also opens the door to risky advertisements aimed at promoting gambling to younger age groups. Such games encourage gambling with real money, and give rise to gambling problems by offering a limited number of free trials of gambling games, allowing players to play poker in online rooms and placing slot machines in adventure games, among other different methods.

Addiction is an effect, not a cause. It is the result of poor relationships with one’s family and friends, academic failure and a lack of essential life skills, such as problem-solving.



“It’s okay if you don’t gamble every day.”

A person with a gambling addiction may gamble frequently or infrequently. If a person’s gambling causes psychological, economic, emotional, legal or family-related problems, or similar difficulties for themselves or those around them, it means the person has a gambling addiction problem.



CONCLUSION

Understanding addiction and its effects equips individuals, families, and professionals with the knowledge to identify risks, prevent harmful habits, and support healthy development. Awareness allows for modeling positive behaviors, setting clear boundaries, and guiding others in making safe and responsible choices.

Prevention is an ongoing process that requires attention, patience, and consistent effort. Every step taken to build resilience, whether through education, communication, supervision, or skill development, strengthens the ability to resist addictive behaviors. Creating supportive environments in homes, schools, and communities helps children, adolescents, and adults develop the confidence to make healthy choices and cope with challenges without resorting to substances or harmful behaviors.

The benefits of prevention extend beyond avoiding addiction. Individuals and communities that focus on awareness and guidance foster stronger relationships, improved emotional regulation, and better decision-making skills. Proactive measures reduce the potential harm of addiction and create opportunities for healthier, more fulfilling lives.

Knowledge alone is not enough. It is equally important to share what we have learned, raise awareness, and support others in making informed choices. By taking action, spreading knowledge, and encouraging positive habits, we can create safer and healthier communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive free from the risks of addiction.

Addiction affects individuals and communities in many forms, including substance addictions such as tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, as well as behavioral addictions like gambling, gaming, and excessive technology use. This booklet provides a clear overview of these addiction types, explains how addiction impacts the brain and behavior, and challenges common misconceptions. By focusing on early risks, warning signs, and practical prevention through supportive environments at home, in schools, workplaces, and communities, it offers a concise and concrete guide to promoting healthy choices.



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