

## 1 WHY WORK WITH CSO?

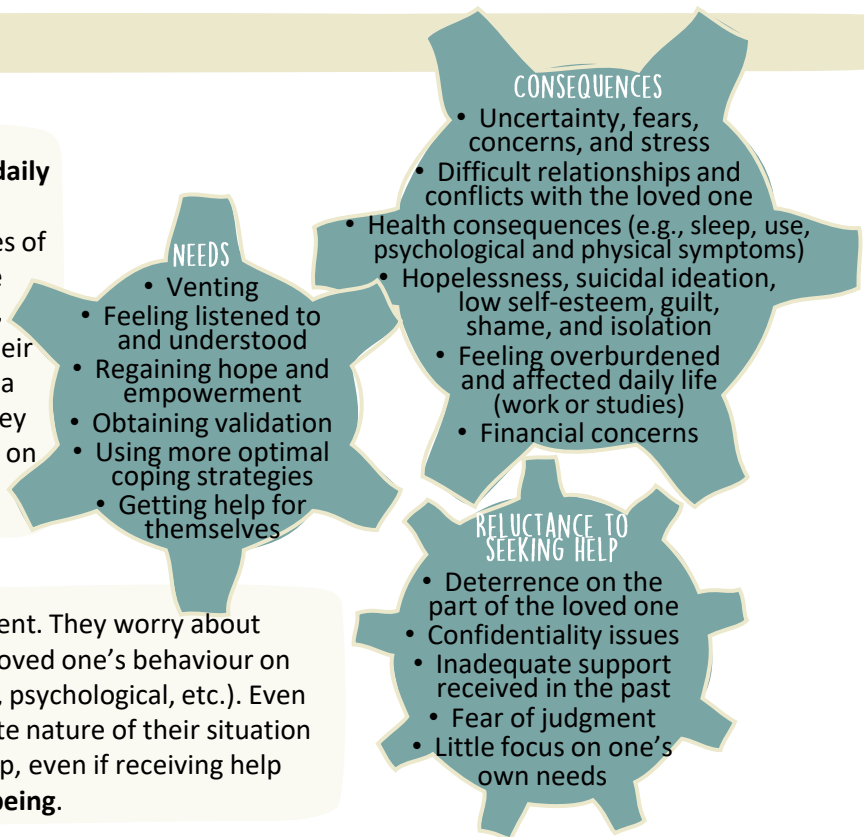
- CSO experience various consequences related to their loved one's use.
- CSO experience significant distress and may feel powerless in their role and in the face of their loved one's situation.
- CSO are key allies in their loved one's recovery and can influence their use. Including them in their loved one's treatment is part of best practices.

## 2 A BIT OF THEORY

### THE COMPLEX REALITY OF CSO

Having a loved one who struggles with use brings about **daily stress**. The consequences of use on the lives of CSO are tangible. Sometimes, these consequences surface in times of crisis and at other times, they may persist even when the loved one changes their use. Despite their hopes, efforts, and goodwill, their love relationship or friendship with their loved one is inevitably disrupted. CSO find themselves in a **dilemma regarding their loved one**. On the one hand, they want to help and see them overcome their struggles, but on the other hand, repeated unsuccessful attempts to help them can be discouraging.

The **anxiety** and **distress** experienced by CSO are persistent. They worry about their loved one's health, safety, and the impact of their loved one's behaviour on themselves and their family (financial, material, physical, psychological, etc.). Even though CSO have a pressing need for support, the delicate nature of their situation with their loved one may prevent them from seeking help, even if receiving help **would be beneficial for their personal and family well-being**.



## 3 WHEN WORKING WITH CSO

### ASK FOR CSO'S FEEDBACK

Too often and for a multitude of reasons (e.g., lack of staff, service prioritization, absence of requests for help or lack of training), **CSO do not receive all the help they need**. Some of them feel that help should be offered to their loved one instead. Indeed, since it is this person who is experiencing use-related difficulties, CSO don't always feel concerned as part of the solution. Others are uncomfortable with the services offered or simply don't know about them.

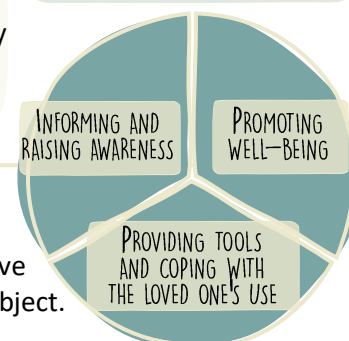
When you meet a new person with use-related issues, it is a good idea to **assess their social and family network** and how it is affected by their use. Next, explain the advantages of involving CSO in their treatment. With the person's agreement, contact the CSO and **validate their needs**. If the person is reluctant, try to understand why and intervene accordingly. You could also inform the loved one of the services available to their CSO and ask them to tell them about it.

It is possible to involve CSO at varying degrees, from occasionally to in part or throughout their loved one's entire treatment. Following the assessment, the intervention plan should aim to **support them in their issues** and **help improve their well-being**.

## CLINICIAN'S POSTURES TO ADOPT

Different intervention methods can be used with CSO: individual, family, couple or CSO group interventions. To intervene, use your basic relational skills. However, given the complex reality of CSO, **certain postures are recommended** to help you develop a good therapeutic alliance with them.

## INTERVENTIONS TO PRIORITIZE WITH CSO



### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND LISTENING

- A loved one's use causes CSO to experience an accumulation of negative impacts and places a very heavy weight on their shoulders. For many, it is a shameful and highly sensitive subject that they are reluctant to talk about. CSO rarely open up about this often-taboo subject.
- Provide a **safe, non-judgmental space** where they will feel comfortable to vent.
- CSO are used to things being about their loved one. **Take an interest in them** and give them their moment.
- Find out about their situation, their feelings, and the impact of their loved one's use on their daily life and needs. Identify their needs, clarify their dissatisfactions and plan changes.

### ACCEPTATION AND EMPATHY

- CSO **feel a great deal of guilt about their loved one's situation**. They doubt their abilities and continually question what they could have done or could do differently to help their loved one.
- Pay particular attention to **understanding the CSO's perspective** and the dilemma in which they find themselves. This **situation has undoubtedly been going on** and affecting them for quite some time.
- **Value the love** they feel for their loved one. Without love, they wouldn't put anything in place.
- View them in an unconditionally positive way and **acknowledge their benevolence**.
- Show them that you accept them and believe in their ability to change their behaviour towards their loved one.

### VALIDATION AND NORMALIZATION

- CSO make many unsuccessful attempts to help their loved one. While some of their actions may be clumsy, **recognize the positive intent** behind them and value the effort and support they offer their loved one.
- CSO tend to isolate themselves. However, they appreciate knowing that they are not alone in experiencing this kind of situation with their loved one. **Normalize their experiences**, frustrations and discouragement about the situation.
- Emphasize the importance of taking time for themselves to **regain their personal well-being**. Explain that this is a positive and healthy way to "recharge" their batteries, take a step back and better manage their emotions.

### BUILDING HOPE

- The CSO you meet are likely to feel discouraged and hopeless. Be encouraging and help them see that things can get better. They appreciate knowing they can make a difference for their loved one.
- Help them **act on what is in their power**, which is **learning new strategies** to promote their well-being and deal with their loved one's use.
- Reinforce their sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem by identifying situations where they felt competent.
- Set easy goals and realistically anticipate obstacles to increase their sense of achievement.

### COLLABORATION

- **Welcome CSO's concerns** and let them ask you questions.
- Work with them via a **problem-solving approach**. Explore the strategies they want to implement.
- **Refer CSO** to additional resources as needed.