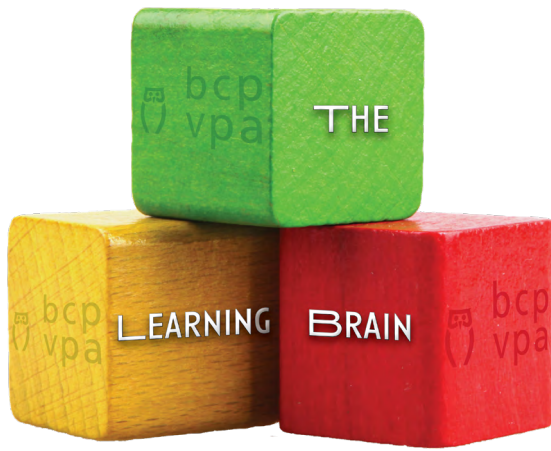




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THE LEARNING BRAIN

Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and self-assessment tools that will help our members to better understand the mental health continuum, and to use the resources that are available.

bcpvpa.bc.ca/thelearningbrain

Friday May 8, 2020

SELF-SOOTHING AND ADDICTIONS

From the time we were babies, whenever we felt pain or discomfort, we needed to learn how to soothe ourselves by crying, sucking our thumbs or rocking. As adults, we also seek to self-soothe when we feel physical or psychological pain. Some of our methods of self-soothing may be very healthy, while some may be harmful.

HEALTHY SELF-SOOTHING

Self-soothing is a tool we can use to calm ourselves when we're **anxious** or distressed, without using medication or resorting to any negative coping strategies. It's a way of comforting, nurturing, and **being kind to ourselves**.

Self-soothing, understandably, looks different for each of us. [Click here](#) to review **9 examples of ways some people find comfort**.

- However, sometimes our tactics are not as healthy, and can even be harmful. Examples of unhealthy ways of soothing ourselves include behaviours that release our endorphins - the 'feel good' chemicals released in our brains. Sometimes, we self-soothe by 'numbing' ourselves to — or escaping from — our pain.

Examples of these techniques include:

- Eating fats, carbohydrates and processed sugars
- Shopping
- Excessive exercise
- Using alcohol, cannabis, illegal and prescription drugs
- Increasing our screen time, gaming, and gambling

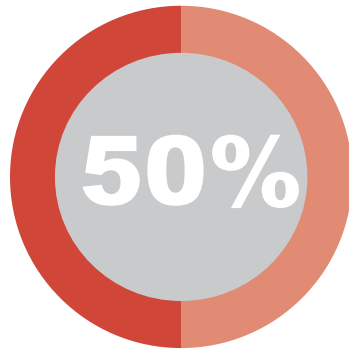


Personally, I find mindfulness helpful in helping me calm and soothe my emotions. [Here is the Calm.com short meditation on just this subject.](#)

[Here is a great article](#) on the downside of self-soothing through these behaviours. Personally, I find mindfulness calms and soothes me.

Unfortunately, those with mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety, may get into an unhealthy pattern of self-soothing as they try to ease their mental pain.

Sometimes self-soothing may show up in the form of an addiction.



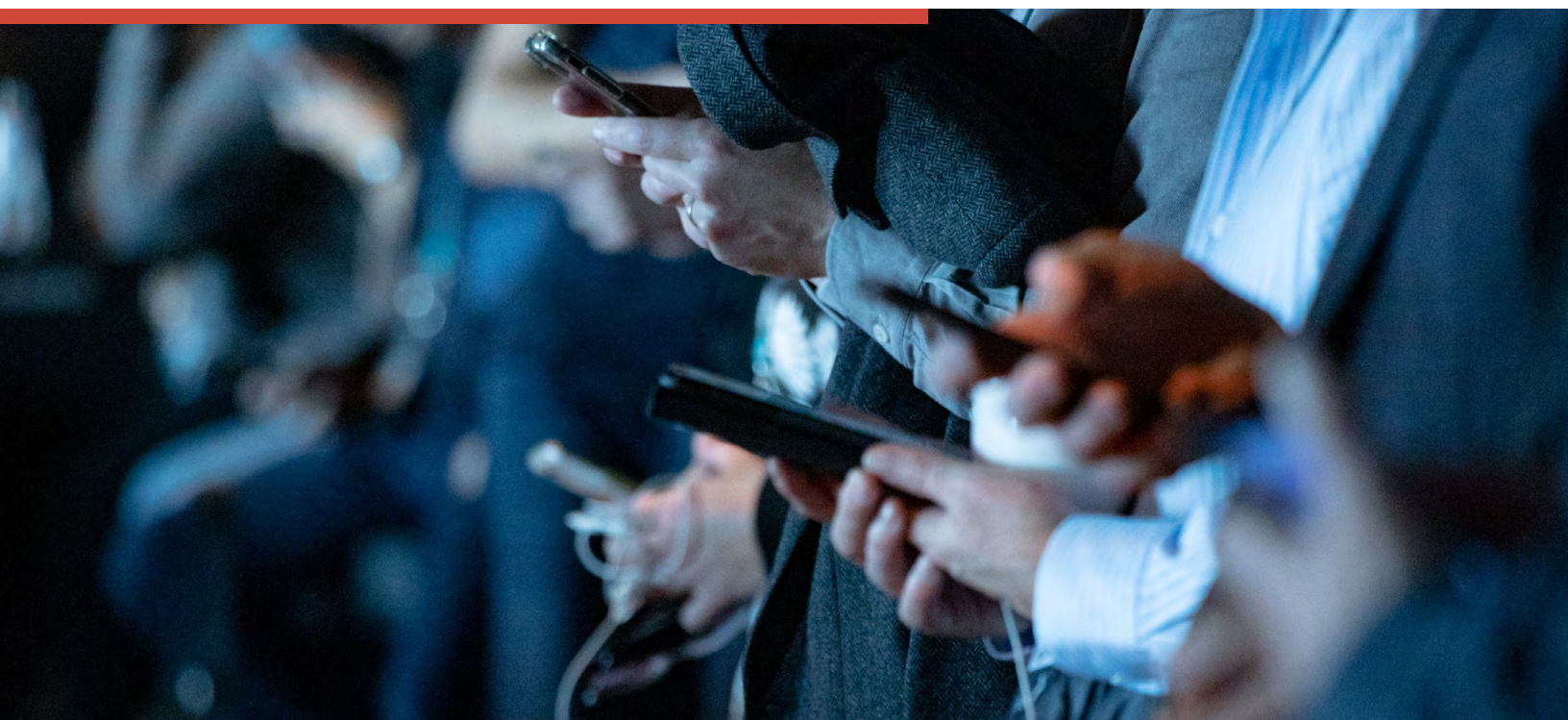
Mental health and addiction are connected. More than half of people with addiction also have mental health problems – in particular, anxiety or depression.

ADDICTION

Addiction can be broadly defined as a condition that leads to a compulsive engagement with a stimuli, despite negative consequences. This can lead to physical and/or psychological dependence. Addictions can be either substance related (such as the problematic use of alcohol or cocaine) or process-related, also known as behavioural addictions (such as gambling or internet addiction). Both can disrupt an individual's ability to maintain a healthy life, but there are numerous support and treatment options available.

Source: [CMHA](#)

Here is a quick, [interesting video](#) on reconsidering our thoughts on addiction.



A common way to identify addiction is the presence of ‘four C’s’:

- 1 Craving**
- 2 Loss of **Control** of amount or frequency of use**
- 3 **Compulsion** to use**
- 4 Use despite the **Consequences****

Alcohol

You can recognize alcohol abuse when drinking evolves from having the occasional drink to becoming an enduring habit.

Drink responsibly by following [Canada’s low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines](#).

If you struggle with alcohol addiction and need support, visit [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) to take the first step.

Gambling

It’s important to recognize when gambling shifts from a social, entertaining activity to a problematic addiction.

There are a number of gambling self-help tools available through [CAMH](#).

Digital

Social media is highly addictive, and people of all ages are suffering from digital addiction. If your screen time is interfering with other life priorities, try to be intentional about why you’re using your device rather than just using it to pass time.

See this article on [Digital Addiction](#) for more information and tips to help you cope. This [second video](#) provides a quick description of this ailment.

Cannabis

Contrary to popular belief, it is possible to become addicted to cannabis. An estimated one in 11 cannabis users will become chronic users.

Learn more about the effects of excessive cannabis use on the [Government of Canada website](#)

Prescription drugs

Prescription drugs can be highly addictive. The most common types of prescription drugs that can lead to addiction include:

- Opioids, which treat certain kinds of pain
- Benzodiazepines, which treat anxiety and sleep disorders
- Stimulants, which treat attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Prescription drugs are also popular among teenagers who take them from their parents.

Always make sure to:

- Follow your doctor’s instructions
- Keep track of your prescription drugs by counting the pills
- Keep medication in a safe and secure place
- Return any unused or expired medications to your pharmacy

To learn more about prescription drug abuse and its effects, visit the [Government of Canada website](#). If you need support, contact your physician or community resources for addiction.

GETTING HELP

If when you read this week's 'The Learning Brain' issue on self-soothing and addiction, you felt uncomfortable or started questioning if you need help, then reach out to learn more. Do not let it fester. Do not harbour guilt. This type of thinking will bring more psychological pain and a greater need to self-soothe.



Reach out and talk to a professional or one of the many community and non-profit groups that can support you. Particularly during this pandemic, there are so many great resources available to help! Ideally, the first person you should speak to is your family physician. They will know the variety of treatment options and can work with you through the process.

Here are some local and community resources and treatment options to review:

[BC Government](#)

[Canadian Centre of Substance Abuse and Addiction](#)

[Here is a direct link to their help for substance abuse during COVID-19](#)

[Centre of Addiction and Mental Health](#)

Do you have a family member struggling with an addiction? [Here is a website that may be helpful for you.](#)



WHAT OTHER HEALTH TOPICS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?



We'll be posting this question on Twitter and Instagram this week! Follow **@bcpvpa** to read, engage, share and comment!

**Next week on #theLearningBrain
Play and Laughter: "Serious"
Stuff for your Mental Health**