



Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie

How to Improve **fAMILY HARMONY**

Preventing alcoholism and addiction



**For parents of children aged
4 to 12 years old**

CPLT



MAISON JEAN LAPOINTE

Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie

The main mandate of the Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie (CPLT) is to advise the Minister of Health and Social Services regarding the major policies that should be retained in the the fight against addiction, and propose priority actions or preferable areas of intervention.

Aside from the brainstorming and exchanges conducted within its ranks or with its advisory committee, it relies on various resources in order to carry out its mandate: it commissions studies, collects the opinions of various stakeholders and experts in related fields, analyzes the data published on the development of the problem in Quebec (e.g. health surveys).

With a view to contributing to the transfer of knowledge, it regularly publishes the results of studies it commissions, of consultations, and of its brainstorming.

Maison Jean Lapointe

The main mission of the Maison Jean Lapointe is treatment of alcoholism and other addictions. However, it must not only treat the problems, but also prevent them.

It sees the family as the ideal place where such prevention can be exercised. In addition to its program for families affected by alcoholism and other addictions, the Maison Jean Lapointe supports various initiatives primarily aimed at preventing addiction.

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introduction

This brochure¹ is intended for parents and children who want to develop better relationships and greater family harmony. The capsules in this brochure are part of an overall strategy for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse by youth. In each capsule, we propose a simple self-assessment tool and suggest easy and effective ways to improve your family's situation. At the end, we also propose a scale allowing you to interpret your results for each capsule.

Despite the difficulty that parents may have in acting on all fronts, they must acknowledge the importance of their involvement and believe in the effectiveness of their actions. It is with this concern in mind that the Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, in collaboration with the authors and the Maison Jean Lapointe, proposes these capsules in a format that is easy to consult and keep. In this way we believe that we will be able to reach a large number of families and raise their awareness with regard to the importance of prevention, not only for problems with alcohol and drug addiction, but also for other behavioural problems affecting children.

¹ The content of this brochure is taken from a document entitled "La famille : un trésor à préserver", published in 1999 by the CPLT and the Maison Jean Lapointe. This document is available from these organizations upon request.

family fun

Is family fun characteristic of your family? In order to better determine your profile and, more specifically, the perception of each regarding the pleasure he or she takes in doing things with family members, we propose that you take the small test that follows. Each family member (6 years old or older) may complete the questionnaire. Each may note his or her results on a different sheet.

Add up the results (1,2,3,4,5) for each family member.

Compare the results and through discussion, try to explain the differences.

How do you currently view **YOUR** family?

For each of the 5 statements below, use the following scale and write the results on your personal sheet:

- 1- Almost never
- 2- Once in a while
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Almost always

- a) *We like doing things together.*
- b) *We have common interests and leisure activities.*
- c) *Our family often does fun things together.*
- d) *In our family, being together is important.*
- e) *It's easy to find things to do as a family.*

Would you like to have more **fun together?**

Families that are in harmony like spending time together; but being together does not happen by chance. Family activities are an important element of togetherness. Carefully examine what you devote the 24 hours of a day to. Are there things that you do that are not essential? Are there things that you could do differently and thus save more time for family?

A few suggestions

- When preparing meals or working in the yard, get your child to help you. As you work, ask him or her to tell you about his or her day. Tell him or her about yours.
- Plan your vacations with the children: recall good memories while looking at photos of past vacations. Listen to their suggestions!
- Have family discussions and find other activities allowing you to spend more time together.

Making decisions as a family

What is your family like?

Do the members of your family believe they have a voice in decision-making? In order to compare views, we propose that you take the small test that follows. Proceed in the same manner as for the questionnaire on Family Fun (1st capsule).

Compare the results and see if you have similar or differing views regarding sharing in family decisions.

For each of the 5 statements below, use the following scale and write the results on your personal sheet:

- 1- Almost never
- 2- Once in a while
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Almost always

- a) *In our family, we all participate in making decisions.*
- b) *In the face of a problem, our family listens to the opinions of the children.*
- c) *The children have their say in disciplinary rules.*
- d) *In our family, chores are divided fairly.*
- e) *We discuss a problem until the solution suits everybody.*

Who can **decide**?

When making a decision that affects all of the family members, the important thing is not who has the last word, but rather, making sure that each person's point of view was heard and respected. Parents who explain the reasons behind their decisions to their children help them to develop their own decision-making ability. Children learn to make decisions within the boundaries set by their parents. They realize that for each idea proposed there is a PRO and a CON.

A few suggestions

- Invite your child, even at a very young age, to make decisions. For example: "You can't play in the street, but you can play in the alley or in the yard. Which do you choose?"
- Get your child to think on the consequences of a decision.
- Give your child a choice only when there really is one. Thus, avoid saying, "Do you want to come to bed?" when what you really mean is, "Come to bed now".
- Draw up a contract with your child for certain decisions (household chores, curfew, etc.). Write very clearly on the contract what you agreed upon as well as what will happen if this agreement is not respected. You and your child will sign this contract.
- When you say NO to your child, persist, even if this isn't necessarily the easiest thing to do. Your child will try to see if you will "back down" and will show his or her disagreement. If you persist with your child's well-being in mind, he or she will learn to better tolerate a passing frustration. When you feel like you are going to give in, ask your spouse or a close relative for help.

Appreciating each other

Getting along as a family, having fun together, that is what we wish for. One of a child's basic needs is knowing that someone is thinking about him or her and taking care of him or her. Taking care of someone means providing support, acceptance and appreciation. We often take it for granted that children know they are appreciated. This isn't always the case. It must be said. Likewise, parents need — with reason — this same show of support from their children.

Showing appreciation for one another: is this done in our home?

Take a few minutes together to evaluate if you show your appreciation for other family members. In order to compare views, we propose that you take the small test that follows. Proceed in the same manner as for the questionnaire on Family Fun (1st capsule). Compare the results and through discussions, try to explain the differences.

How do you currently view **YOUR** family?

For each of the 5 statements below, use the following scale and write the results on your personal sheet:

- 1- Almost never
- 2- Once in a while
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Almost always

- a) *We congratulate one another.*
- b) *We do nice things for one another.*
- c) *We express our love and affection.*
- d) *We feel very close.*
- e) *We are concerned with how other family members feel.*

Knowing how to **appreciate** one another

Family members, including spouses, very often forget to tell each other that they appreciate one another. Such appreciation contributes to a feeling of family security, as well as stronger self-esteem. It is possible to say that we appreciate one another not only in certain more special moments, but also in the day to day. What's important is to be true and spontaneous.

A few suggestions

- Express your appreciation in your own words and actions.
- Do not wait for major occasions to speak to each other. Small events are also precious moments: "Good luck on your exam", "I will be thinking of you when you're in the dentist's chair", "I'm proud of you", "Bravo, that wasn't easy".
- Congratulate your children for small victories they worked for heartily.
- Do not impose conditions on your feelings: "I would love you if you didn't do that". Clearly express your disagreement: "I don't agree when you do that".
- Create family traditions. Remember that a tradition should be fun for everyone: it's a shared moment of fun, where everyone's joy at being together is felt. It's normal for the course and nature of these events to change with time, particularly with teenagers.
- Make a book on your family history. Each family member is invited to insert in this book a souvenir from an unforgettable event: a text on a major success, a drawing of a special party, an object recalling an event in family life.

family communication

We all know that good communication is essential, for a couple as well as for a family. Easy to say, but not always easy to do. Communicating is expressing needs or feelings to others (spouse or child), but the words used do not always succeed in translating what one is really thinking. Communicating is also listening to others, which is often difficult, whether for a child or an adult, particularly when we don't agree with what the other person is saying.

How well does **your family** communicate?

Take a few minutes to evaluate communication within your family. In order to compare views, we propose that you take the small test that follows. Proceed in the same manner as for the questionnaire on Family Fun (1st capsule). Discuss the results and examine suggestions that you could put into practice.

How do you currently view **your family**?

For each of the 5 statements below, use the following scale and write the result on your personal sheet:

- 1- Almost never
- 2- Once in a while
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Almost always

- a) *We can freely express our feelings.*
- b) *Everyone listens to the others.*
- c) *We believe it is important to understand each other's feelings.*
- d) *We can discuss problems without arguing.*
- e) *Our family enjoys discussing many things.*

Listening and talking to one another

If at home you often hear sentences like: “What is talking good for, no one listens to me anyway”, or even, “No need to tell me, I know what you’re thinking”, it’s clear that communication in your home is not the best. Being heard, feeling that what you are saying merits listening to the end is a good way to feel appreciated, accepted and understood.

It is possible to develop listening skills as well as skills that allow us to express what we are thinking and feeling more clearly. Achieving this requires practice and patience.

A few suggestions

- Learn to listen: some family members may have a tendency to interrupt often. Agree on a discreet signal (a wink, for example) to remind the other that he or she is interrupting instead of listening.
- Speak as “I”. Instead of saying: “You do it on purpose not to come when I call you”; rather, say: “I need you to answer faster when I call you”.
- Learn to express your disagreement in a constructive manner. First, make sure that the person is listening to you (nothing is more frustrating than talking to a wall); then, present the problem to him or her clearly and how this situation is unpleasant for you; propose possible solutions and thank him or her for listening to you.
- Congratulate yourself on efforts made to improve communication at home. How better to end supper than by emphasizing how enjoyable it was to be together and have a discussion.

When you have a problem child

Being a parent can sometimes be more difficult than one had imagined. But it is even more difficult to feel like a good parent when you realize that your child has difficulties. You may feel responsible for these difficulties or be disappointed that you do not have the child you imagined (one rarely dreams of having a child who has problems). Is it possible to be a “good parent” when your child has difficulties?

A situation difficult to accept

When a parent discovers that his or her child has a problem, he or she is overwhelmed with all sorts of emotions: guilt, anger, sorrow, etc. This is a difficult situation to face; he or she wants to know who is responsible and what led to the problem: “Why does my daughter have difficulty in school?” “Why does my son take drugs?”. Often, he or she will try to excuse the child or even minimize the difficulties. But the stress that stems from this situation does not decrease...and the tension in the family increases. The parent’s stress level becomes even higher when he or she worries over what others think. What do you do?

don't carry it ALL ON YOURSELF

- If you have a problem with your child, don't keep it to yourself. Speak to a friend or parent about it. He or she will help you to see more clearly the situation that you are living with your child.
- Be careful! Ask yourself if the person you want to confide in will lend you a sympathetic ear. Some people have a tendency to criticize, which does not help at all the person seeking support. Seek out someone who will help without judging you.
- Some problems require skills that you may not have. Ask for help! By speaking with those around us, we sometimes learn that there are resources available nearby, in our own neighbourhood.
- It is possible that when you call upon a resource that was suggested to you, you will not right away get the answer you expected. Don't give up now: you have already put in a lot of effort.
- When you call an organization that was referred to you, take care to write down beforehand what you want to ask and the steps that you have taken up until now. The stress of speaking to a stranger could make you forget the important things.
- If they cannot help you, ask them for another resource where you could get what you are looking for.
- Don't be ashamed to ask for help: on the contrary, it's a good gesture you are making for you and your family.

family profile

TEST RESULTS

How to interpret the results:

Between 5 and 15 points indicates that there are weak points; the suggestions in the capsules can help strengthen them.

Between 15 and 20 points indicates that things are going well but that there is room for improvement.

Between 20 and 25 points indicates that things are going very well; keep it up! Although try to improve other aspects that may be weaker.



How to Improve

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is published by the Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie and the Maison Jean Lapointe

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If you believe that your family is affected by alcoholism, drug addiction or other types of problems, you are not alone — ask for help.

Professional resources are available in all regions of Quebec. Contact your local community service centre (CLSC), the Maison Jean Lapointe, or call the Drugs: Help and Referral hotline toll-free from anywhere in Quebec.

Montreal and surrounding area:

(514) 527-2626

Elsewhere in Quebec:

1-800-265-2626

The english translation is a courtesy of the RCMP Drug Awareness Service — Quebec

Montreal: **(450) 926-6450**

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