



# **phases** **OF CHEMSEX**

**Ways to think about  
crystal meth use and sexuality  
or to offer support**



Chemsex, also called Party n' Play or PnP by the community, refers to the use of psychoactive substances in a sexual context, particularly crystal meth, GHB and ketamine, among sexually diverse men, as well as trans and non-binary people.

"4 phases of chemsex" is a tool developed by people with PnP/chemsex experience. This «by and for» tool has been enriched through discussions with stakeholders and researchers committed to the well-being of the community.

This tool presents 4 different moments linked to the practice of chemsex. These are not fixed and can vary greatly from person to person and over time. Nevertheless, they can serve as milestones to help chemsexers reflect on their own experience. They can also help those who wish to accompany and support them better understand their experiences and needs.

The milestones discussed in this tool are: exposure to chemsex, initiation into chemsex, regular use, and phases of recovery. Each milestone provides a synthesis of the elements to be considered in the practice of chemsex, as well as presenting the main needs of people at these different points in their consumption trajectory.



# Exposure to chemsex

Exposure to chemsex is the moment when someone comes into contact with this phenomenon, often indirectly, through encounters, discussions, or dating apps. For some, it is a discovery marked by curiosity or questions, while for others, it represents a response to needs for socialization, pleasure, or connection. This phase highlights the importance of providing clear, non-judgmental information.

## Characteristics of newly exposed people

- Men who have sex with men and sexual diversity
- Trans and non-binary people
- Experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity
- Sexualized use of alcohol and other substances (cannabis, cocaine, etc.)
- Use of dating applications (Grindr, BBRT, Scruff, Squirr, etc.)
- Use of sexualized spaces (saunas, cruising spots, etc.)
- Young adults, retirees, newcomers, recent coming-out
- Looking for encounters, socialization and community
- People living with HIV

These characteristics, and their combination, contribute to potential exposure to chemsex.

# Exposure to chemsex



## Key need: prevention

- Welcome, openness, non-judgment and awareness
- Accessible resources
- Information on chemsex, related substances, their effects and repercussions
- Continuum of resources (community activities, online awareness, social spaces)
- Community involvement
- Initiatives by and for - Community knowledge



## Initiation to chemsex

The initiation into chemsex represents a first experience where pleasure, discovery, and sexual liberation may coexist with doubts or feelings of shame. Each experience is unique: some individuals may perceive this stage as a positive exploration, while others might feel discomfort or a crossing of boundaries. Listening, support, and the normalization of experiences are essential to providing appropriate assistance.

### Characteristics of people initiated

- Lack of knowledge about substances, their effects and their repercussions during the first chemsex episodes
- Sense of pleasure, sexual liberation and performance
- Possible emergence of shame about use and sexuality
- Difficulty talking about experiences
- Exceeding sexual limits and taking risks
- First crashes and cravings
- First repercussions and potential harm, particularly to sexual health
- Development of a new social circle around sexuality and consumption
- Erosion of the usual social circle

# Initiation to chemsex



## Key need: support

- Listening, welcoming, kindness, openness, support
- Appropriate information about substances, their effects and potential repercussions, based on the person's questions, without being alarmist about the practice of chemsex
- Validation and normalization of experiences and emotions
- Support services tailored to the individual's pace
- Discussion between people practicing chemsex
- Access to sexual health care (STBBI screening, PrEP, PEP, etc.)
- Access to sterile and harm-reduction equipment (meth pipes, syringes, paraphernalia, condoms, lubricants, gloves, etc.)

The needs of chemsex users are varied and multifaceted. It is essential to involve the person in order to provide follow-up that meets his or her specific needs. Collaboration with other resources is desirable to meet the needs of the person.



## Regular use

Regular use develops when chemsex practices become more frequent, sometimes impacting various aspects of personal and social life. Pleasure and distress may intertwine, creating ambivalence and new challenges. This phase calls for responses focused on safety, harm reduction, and support, enabling each person to regain control over their use at their own pace.

### Growing impact on people with more regular and sometimes problematic consumption

- Gradual increase in frequency and quantity of use - Addiction
- Cohabitation of feelings of pleasure and distress (ambivalence)
- Change in sexual boundaries and self-assessment of risks and needs
- Shift to new modes of consumption (Booty bump, slam, etc.)
- Possible repercussions on mental health: depression, anxiety, psychosis, etc.
- Possible repercussions on physical and sexual health: recurrent STIs, seroconversion, etc.
- Adherence to treatment may be compromised
- Financial insecurity and potential job loss
- Social isolation
- Judicialization and institutionalization
- Episodes of crisis and loss of bearings

# Regular use



## Key needs: safety and care

- Access to care and services that are welcoming, safe and adapted to the needs of people who practice chemsex
- Rapid care and recovery when needed
- Plurality of options - Continuum of approaches
  - - Short-, medium- and long-term services
- Referrals to complementary resources and services
- Response to physiological needs (sleeping, drinking, eating)
- Support to help the person understand their chemsex practice
- Accessibility to tools - Regaining control over one's consumption according to one's goals
- Community support: support groups, speaking out
- Hope





## Stages of recovery

Recovery is an individual path to becoming comfortable with one's use and sexuality. For some, abstinence from use and chemsex will be the desired orientation, while others will want to modify their chemsex practice in a harm-reduction perspective. Recovery belongs to each individual, and his or her choices must be respected.

### Challenges faced by people changing their chemsex habits

- Period of individual and social change
- Cycle of falls, relapses and periods of abstinence - Trials, errors and adjustments
- Coexistence of feelings of discouragement and hope (ambivalence)
- Redressing harm
- Questioning desires, relationships and sexuality
- Search for belonging
- Re-learning and rebuilding

# Stages of recovery



## Key need: community

- Informed and caring support
- Safe spaces
- Time and space to try, understand, make mistakes, repeat, make sense of experiences...
- Access to new milestones, examples, models, peers
- Access to concrete tools (cravings management, feedback on applications)
- Professional support with a clear understanding of the issues associated with chemsex
- Definition and reappropriation of one's sexuality in recovery
- Distances from the chemsex milieu - New socialization and activities
- New projects and community involvement
- Empowerment



Le Cri de ralliement is an initiative set up by people with PnP/chemsex experience and resources involved with the community to offer a response adapted to the needs of people practicing PnP/chemsex.

The collectif de réflexion et d'intervention (CRI) sur le chemsex brings together people with PnP/chemsex experience, community workers, health and social services professionals, researchers and public health representatives, working towards a common goal: to contribute to the development of concrete solutions to better support people practicing PnP/chemsex.

# CRI!

de ralliement

Visit our website for  
many resources and tools  
about chemsex!

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