Topics for discussion

- Challenges for parents in recovery
- Development of *Recovering Families*
- Sample pages and activities
- Evaluation efforts
- Replicating *Recovering Families*
Challenges for recovering parents

- Preventing relapse
- Discipline – not having had role models for discipline; intergenerational parenting skills
- Overindulgence - “spoiling” as a way to make up for past
- Family roles and dynamics change
- Balancing parenting and recovery needs
- Maintaining realistic expectations
- Education on parenting in recovery is helpful
- Overcoming stigma and judgments
- Establishing trust
- Others?
Factors contributing to relapse

- Overwhelmed with responsibilities. Everything is hard.
- Financial pressure – old bills/bad credit, no job
- Housing – e.g. felony convictions barred from housing
- No healthy support system – family, friends still using
- Low self-worth and lack of confidence in being able to have a “new life”
- Boredom – what do you do for fun?
- Triggers all around, no place seems safe
- Emotions up and down, not sure how to handle emotions
Factors in continued use for parents with child welfare involvement

- Overwhelming guilt and shame over harm done to children and family.
- Painful child/adult abuse issues bring pain when not using.
- To kill pain after seeing their children; using helps them “manage” their emotions.
- Fear – living life on life’s terms, rejection of children, not knowing any sober people, being honest and the consequences of honesty.
- Lack of structure and support.
Overview: Recovering Families

- **Purpose**: to help parents in recovery from chemical addiction balance the demands of both recovery and children, and offer suggestions on how to be a better parent in recovery.

- **34 pages of activities and information at fifth-grade reading level**. Designed for completion in six two-hour sessions with “homework” in between classes. Can be adapted.

- **Topics include**: talking with children about addiction; making amends; behavior and communication skills; child development.
Recovering Families Instructor Manual

- Provides outline for a six-session, two-hour per session format
  - the goals for the session and a list of materials needed
  - instructions for activities and ways to adapt the activities
  - general time frame for each section of the session
  - suggestions for “homework,” optional activities and journal questions
- Sources for additional materials and information included
- Participant feedback form in ready-to-copy form
Development of *Recovering Families*

Rationale

- Fits with Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance mission to educate, inform and lead communities to action to protect children from abuse and neglect.
- Factors contributing to abuse (substantiated reports) include marginal parenting skills, impaired judgment of perpetrator, substance abuse, and insufficient family support.
- Supplements work of local family support programs and child welfare offices.
Development of *Recovering Families*

**Process**

- Use personal experience
- Survey child welfare offices, treatment facilities and family support programs
- Collect suggestions, activities and “what works” strategies
- Draft and test each activity with parents in recovery. Solicit feedback from practitioners. Revise as necessary.
- Review by professionals in adult education, SUD treatment and family life education.
- Publish first edition 2010
Development of *Recovering Families*

- Facilitate groups in different settings
- Observe groups and interview facilitators and participants; collect suggestions for revisions
- Make changes to first edition, test new activities and continue to revise
- Work with research analyst to develop evaluation tools
- Publish second edition in 2014
- Outreach to new groups and increase direct service delivery
- Prepare for next edition
Know Yourself

- Objective: increase self-awareness
- Participants identify key words to describe themselves
- Can be used as homework, getting to know you activity in session 1, or follow up activity in session 2
- Take a few minutes to write some words that describe you on the tree
- Be prepared to share a few of the words with the group
True or False?

- Usually a session 1 activity
- Objective: Open discussion about the role and responsibility of parents
- No right or wrong answers
- Opportunity to ask follow-up questions as participants give their answers
- Gives instructor an opportunity to informally assess parents’ needs
Creating a strong family

- Session 3 activity
- Can be done as whole group or smaller groups
- Can be a hands-on activity
- Encourage specific ideas that can actually be done by families
Matching Game: Child Development

- Session 4 activity, works well with “Across the Years”
  Instructor manual includes text for cards and instructions
- Small group activity
- Supplement with specific child development materials if desired
Setting for Recovering Families

- Inpatient treatment: 18%
- Outpatient treatment: 16%
- Corrections facility: 18%
- Family support program: 27%
- Individual: 3%
- Other: 3%
- Child welfare agency: 15%

FSA Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance
Protecting children from abuse
Facilitator-identified challenges

- In early recovery, weakened condition may interfere with participation
- Clients facing poverty, homelessness, incarceration or loss of custody of children = parenting not most urgent need
- Feelings of guilt and shame can be overwhelming
- Parents who have been out of touch with children: “I don’t know where to start.”
- Unrealistic expectations for moving forward
My experience has been that parents can relate to the program since it incorporates both the steps and traditions of AA and NA. It gives me the opportunity to discuss important recovery-related topics in the context of parenting. We are sharing the same language. It also emphasizes the importance of balancing the work of recovery with the responsibilities of parenting. It helps parents see how their substance use disorders have impacted their children and how to begin the process of healing for the entire family. It speaks to parents in a supportive manner that avoids sounding judgmental. This leads to greater receptivity to change.

Bob Brinker, M.A.
Parent and Community Educator
Family Services of Western PA
We chose *Recovering Families* because it focuses on giving clients skills for working on both recovery and parenting. It’s unique. **Before we started this program, there was a big gap in our treatment.** If we don’t address our clients’ parenting and family issues, we miss a big chance to help them recover.

Clients love it. It has become **the most popular group we offer** here.

Amber Dissinger, MSW  
Quality Improvement Coordinator  
White Deer Run Allenwood
Evaluating *Recovering Families*

- Anecdotal evidence
- Use participant feedback form
- Administer pre/post test

Best outcomes when:
- Incorporated with ongoing programs
- Offered in a series over a two-month (or longer) time
- Parent-child interaction is included
Evaluating *Recovering Families*

Pre and post-test
- 12 true/false questions
- 3 short answer questions
- Basic “facts” from workbook

Participant feedback form
- Self-reported gain in knowledge and confidence level in parenting
- Feedback on instructor, logistics and workbook

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**“Recovering Families” (second edition) Pre/Post**

Name/Number: ___________________________ Score: ________

Class: ___________________________ Date: _____________

True or False
1. It is important to talk with children about addiction and recovery so they understand their parents’ behavior.

2. Children of recovering addicts often have a hard time trusting their parents or feel “lost” and don’t know how to react to their sober parent.

3. It’s important to promise a child that you will never drink/use again so they feel reassured and secure.

4. A parent can’t expect a teenager to stop being “in charge” of the family just because the parent gets sober.

5. Discipline means “teaching” not just punishing the child.

6. It is best for the recovering parent to correct all of a child’s bad behavior at one time, as soon as the parent gets home from rehab.

7. One strategy for helping a child understand a parent’s addiction is to explain that addiction is a disease.

8. Withdrawing and isolating from family and friends can be a sign that a child needs help with their feelings or emotions.

9. Feeling guilty about how your addiction hurt your children can be a trigger for relapse.

10. The best way to make amends to your children is to buy them gifts and give them privileges that they didn’t have when you were using.

11. Visits with children can be easier if you plan what you will do with the children and use the time to have fun and talk to your child.

12. The “feast & famine” is rude when a family member may play; this is a child who misbehaves and gets into trouble either at home, school or in the community.

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Learning key concepts in *Recovering Families*
Inpatient treatment setting (n=165)

**Talking with kids about addiction**
- Learned "a lot": 96
- Learned "something": 14
- Learned "a little or nothing": 4

**Making amends to children**
- Learned "a lot": 85
- Learned "something": 59
- Learned "a little or nothing": 12

**Discipline methods**
- Learned "a lot": 86
- Learned "something": 59
- Learned "a little or nothing": 28

**Preventing relapse**
- Learned "a lot": 70
- Learned "something": 59
- Learned "a little or nothing": 28
Confidence in parenting skills after Recovering Families Inpatient treatment setting (n=165)

“I am more confident now than before I participated.”

- Communicating with children: 32% True or very true, 51% Somewhat true, 65% A little or not at all true
- Disciplining effectively: 6% True or very true, 43% Somewhat true, 82% A little or not at all true
- Balancing recovery and parenting: 18% True or very true, 72% Somewhat true, 95% A little or not at all true
- Managing stress: 28% True or very true, 72% Somewhat true, 5% A little or not at all true
- Understanding impact on children: 6% True or very true, 95% Somewhat true, 5% A little or not at all true
Participant comments – *Recovering Families* book

I like that it goes deep into how you feel in recovery. I figured out that I wasn’t a bad parent...I was a good mom in a bad addiction.

Tina, recovering parent of two daughters and a son.

The best part was the explanation of how addiction effects kids.

Kaylee, recovering parent of two children, ages 3 and 6

It was hard to do. It forced me to look at things with my kids. But I’m happy I did it.

Colleen, recovering parent of three-year-old daughter
I cried a lot after I saw my kids. I talked about that in the group.

Stephanie, recovering parent of three children

I want to keep writing in it (the book) when I get home.

Ryan, recovering parent of two-year-old son

The class opened my mind to how it’s never too late. My kids are little and I can turn this around. When I heard (another participant’s) stories I could really feel it and I wanted to do it better this time out.

Scott, recovering parent of two, ages 6 months and 2 years
Toss a ball and say what you learned

• Can be done at the end of each session or in the final class session
• Form a circle, throw the ball to another person, one at a time
• As the ball is thrown, the person calls out something they learned
• Variation: imagine your child in the center of the circle. Say something you want them to know about you.
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