

Helping the whole family heal

If your loved one is getting help for their addiction or mental health issue, they're on a path to recovery. And now it's important for the whole family system to work toward healing.

A focus on shared goals helps families recover from addiction.

Here's a scenario that might ring familiar: Someone in your inner circle is suffering from addiction. Everyone close to this person can see it, but there's no consensus on how to proceed.

In this scenario, it's important for family members to retrain their focus onto shared goals. People can best assure effective treatment and long-term recovery by deepening their own understanding of the illness and its symptoms and the varied styles of intervention offered by clinics and therapists.

Defining common goals

Family members of those suffering from addiction often have loving intentions, but their emotional responses can be all over the map, from embarrassment to fear. Anxiety and uncertainty can drive everyone's behavior in unhealthy ways. It's important to focus on three goals:

- Getting their loved one into treatment
- Ensuring long-term recovery
- Gaining clarity and certainty around their own relationship to their loved one's illness



It's not about right or wrong or dysfunction. It's about sharing goals and coming to a consensus that can lead to better outcomes for the person and the family. The illness isn't going anywhere, but it can get better. And that can start with the family members' relationships to their loved one's illness.

Five ways to support the whole family's healing.

Trust the process.

Depending on the type of treatment your loved one is going to, there may be a fairly rigid system they and you will be required to follow. This is especially true for in-patient treatment programs, which are usually very specific. That means that, even if you're paying for their treatment, the treatment center may only be able to release limited or no information about your loved one to you. It's important for families to surrender to whatever process the treatment center requires.

Don't make promises.

When a loved one enters treatment, a lot of family members want to talk about how much potential their loved one has for when he or she recovers. That can make their loved one angry because all they're hearing is how they're not good enough. It's important for family members to simply be present. They should acknowledge there are a lot of scary unknowns and their loved one is courageous for facing their issue.

Ask for help.



A behavioral health consultancy can be invaluable for families in the vacuum left by their loved one entering treatment. A behavioral health consultant can help walk family members through those crisis moments, reassure them and help them move into a healthier response state. While the loved one is in treatment, family members have their own work to do to heal.

Engage in self-care.

On that first day your loved one enters treatment, we encourage you to start practicing self-care. Family recovery starts with you being healthy. Whether it's taking a long nap, soaking in the bathtub, getting some exercise or spending time with friends, it's important to take care of yourself.

Acknowledge there's still work to do.

It's important to realize that it's not getting someone off to treatment that makes everything better. That may be an immediate concern. But families need education and support to understand the relief they feel isn't the solution. Continuous forward movement is the solution. And that holds true for family members as well as their loved one.

Six steps in the family's healing process.

Now that your loved one has started treatment for substance use disorder, here are some steps a trauma-informed family therapist can help you with to start healing the family system:

Identify the problem. Everyone in a family has their own set of steps they take to maintain balance in the entire system. It's important to identify these steps so we can have a better idea of the dance that everyone is engaged in.

Understand your reactions. You're having normal reactions to abnormal events. You've done the best you can with what you have in front of you. We want to relieve the sense of shame or guilt you might feel about the situation your family is in.

Examine your motivations. Once you've been relieved of the guilt, shame or remorse you and your family might have been feeling, you can see the situation with a fresh perspective.

Examine the underlying trauma. When we have a number of difficult events that build up over time, we can start to experience trauma. This will start to affect how we interact with each other. It's important to understand these in order to move forward in a healthy way.

Identify triggers. A single word can trigger trauma and bring the whole family back to square one, and back into the addictive cycle. Identifying these traumatizing events and the triggers associated with them is a very important part of the recovery process.

Take care of yourself. Your loved one is getting help, they're being taken care of in treatment. But who's treating the rest of your family? You and your family members need help as well, and that starts with self-care.



Should we go to the "family program?"

The treatment center your loved one is receiving treatment from may invite you to participate in its family program. For many families, this is their first direct interaction with a treatment provider—and it can be a scary prospect.



Different focuses



All family programs are different. One may be focused on educating the family about what enabling destructive behavior looks like. Another family program may aim for helping each family member identify their own parts in the family's dysfunction. Yet another might be involved in how to communicate with each other.

Everyone in the family needs help.

You may find your own healing through the family program. Many family members resist attending a family program. Thoughts like, "There's nothing wrong with me," or "This is embarrassing, why would I want to share family secrets with strangers?" are common. But a family program can be a good opportunity for other family members to acknowledge that they need help, too.



What should we expect from a family program?

Learning

You'll learn a lot about your loved one suffering from addiction or mental health issues. Education about the issues your loved one is facing is important for you to understand what they're really going through.

New language

Your loved one will be learning a whole new language for talking about recovery, and by attending the family program, you'll learn some of the words and concepts your loved one will be using. This is important so that lack of knowledge doesn't become a barrier to reconnecting.

You're not alone

You'll see that you are really not alone. Surrounded by people facing the same struggles to love an addict or someone with behavioral health issues, family members often feel a deep sense of relief and camaraderie during a family program.

Focus on you

You might be surprised to find that family program talks more about you than your loved one. The focus may be more on your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. That's the lens you need to view the program through, because that's the only thing you have control over.

Ask for help

When it's over, we recommend seeing a behavioral health professional to process it all. No matter what you get from the family program, you're going to have to apply it in the real world. And that's hard to do alone.

Get in touch with us today for a consultation. We're compassionate and experienced behavioral health specialists who help families find the right solution for them.



(888) 635-7078

(651) 294-2341

info@frre.net

<http://frre.net/>