

Parenting in Recovery

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Growing up in a household with substance use challenges can adversely affect children's well-being. Parental recovery, while beneficial, does not automatically repair the damage experienced by these children. The recovery process brings about significant shifts in family dynamics, replacing inconsistencies with newfound stability. However, children may resist changes to routines they once enjoyed and need help to readjust their roles and habits. Parents must acknowledge and validate their children's emotions and observations while learning new parenting skills and finding a middle ground between extremes. Children who have shouldered adult responsibilities and faced instability within the family system may have difficulty adjusting to their roles as children and letting go of adult burdens.

Parents can recognize the challenges of early recovery for everyone in the family and support their children throughout the process. By actively considering the needs of children and seeking appropriate guidance, families can create a nurturing environment that promotes healing and resilience. Parents are crucial in reversing the prohibition of emotional expression by providing a safe space for emotional expression, modeling open communication, and encouraging verbal sharing. Parents who acknowledge their mistakes give their children permission to identify, own, and accept their mistakes, which helps build self-esteem and self-efficacy. Parents can request behavioral changes with kindness, understanding, and patience.

As recovery unfolds, parents should actively teach their children about substance use disorder, considering each child's level of understanding. These discussions help children understand the goals, prepare them for the changes and uncertainties of recovery, and reassure them that their well-being remains a priority.

Parents must address the issue of trust with their children. Just as the non-substance-using spouse may doubt the recovering individual's ability to maintain sobriety, children may also struggle with trusting each parent to maintain changes, given the past behaviors they witnessed. Rebuilding trust takes time and consistency as parents demonstrate their commitment to recovery and trustworthy behavior.

Recovering parents may discover that their upbringing lacked adequate training and role modeling, especially if they also grew up in families with substance use disorder. Learning appropriate responses to various parenting scenarios and finding a balanced approach can be a process of trial and error. Parents can acquire the necessary skills to create healthier family dynamics by seeking professional support and utilizing available resources.

In conclusion, parenting in recovery requires patience, adaptability, and continuous growth. By prioritizing children's needs, seeking support, and actively acquiring new parenting skills, families can create an environment that fosters healing, resilience, and stronger connections. Embracing the recovery journey as a united family unit provides the opportunity for positive transformation and brighter futures for all.

One of the most important roles parents play in the aftermath of addiction in the family is fostering emotional connections within the family. Parents are responsible for encouraging their children to talk about their experiences, identifying, owning, and expressing their feelings so that they work through them and not carry them around as old, unresolved attachment injuries. If children do not know how to deal with their feelings appropriately, parents must teach them. If parents do not know how to manage emotions, learning how to do that appropriately becomes a crucial early recovery skill to develop. Like anything else, what you practice, you get good at. That's where Family Feelings Meetings come in handy. This regularly scheduled relationships-first event encourages the development of essential aspects of healthy relationships. "Family Feelings Meetings: A Brief Lesson" is a guide offering a straightforward approach to regular family gatherings aimed at enhancing emotional connections and encouraging open communication. By prioritizing emotional connections, setting structure and rules, and utilizing effective communication techniques, these meetings provide a platform for expressing and understanding feelings without the pressure of problem-solving. Emotional management skills are crucial for personal growth, resilience, and mental health. The changes in the family in early recovery make it the perfect time to begin.



\$2.95

Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2011 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.