

TOP TIPS FOR WORKING WITH RECOVERING FAMILIES

(Information collected from Moms Off Meth members)

- Remember we are human beings and while our addiction may have caused some of us to make poor choices; we love our kids.
- Be honest. Being smug and/or condescending creates a barrier. Common ground communication is important-your education and support are vital.....please don't judge. Promote dignity and work to empower us to change.
- What works for one person does not always work for another. Don't paint all alcoholics/addicts with the same brush. We did not all use the same or act the same, so our recovery will not be the same.
- Help us to become accountable. Don't use our honesty to punish us. Hold yourself accountable too. Be realistic and direct not confrontational and parental.
- Expect that you will be lied to at some point. Honesty is often much more scary than the truth. Lying is at times a deep protective action.
- Believe in our ability to get well and encourage us to believe that we can get and stay clean and sober.
- If you want our trust; be trustworthy.
- Encourage active participation in informal support groups-AA/NA, Cocaine and Meth anonymous, Christian Support groups, Moms off Meth, etc.
- Don't treat us like stupid children who need to be 'punished'.
- Model healthy skills in your sessions with us.....we at times have had to guess at how to act. Your modeling of these skills when working with us; helps us to learn how to practice them in other settings.
- Help us to be solution focused-not problem oriented. Practice this skill when working with us.
- Don't insist on medication for every feeling or behavior we have. Many times early recovery is an up and down emotional rollercoaster. Encourage us attend meetings, gain healthy support and normalize these emotional swings.
- Remember it took many years to get sick in our disease; it is going to be a process getting better. Encourage the changes you see and point out the growth you notice in us.....we are many times blind to the progress we have made and tend to get stuck in what we have yet to do. You may be the only positive person in our life at this time.
- Don't enable us. We are stronger than even we think we are. See yourself as our partner, not our parent.
- Avoid judging, shaming and guilt filled messages.
- Treat us as you would hope someone would treat your own children or family in this situation.
- Recovery is a process, not an event!

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BARRIERS TO RECOVERY

(Information collected from Moms Off Meth group members)

- Parenting is overwhelming in early recovery. Insecure about ability to be a 'good parent'; guilt and shame over actions that harmed the children.
- Financial barriers-getting into the workplace, old bills, child care issues
- Transportation-unpaid fines, loss of license, no insurance, driving illegally, no car-unpredictable support for rides.
- Loss of self-worth, very low self-esteem
- Lack of healthy support systems-family members, partners still using
- Lots of appointments-no rides, no daycare, overwhelmed with responsibility
- Housing-barriers to housing include felony convictions,
- Insurance-children removed and Title XIX is cancelled-creates barriers to participation in court ordered services.
- Poverty
- Feeling isolated and lonely in their 'new life'
- New friends in sobriety-hard to know who to trust in AA/NA meetings
- Everyone seems to speak a different language in the sober world-insecure in all they DON'T know about surviving in the 'real world'.
- Embarrassed that they don't have the skills other people seem to naturally have-feel too ashamed to admit they don't understand
- Dealing with the community-feeling judged at their children's schools by teachers and staff who know of their involvement in the child welfare/juvenile court system
- Triggers all around them-getting rid of old paraphernalia at the home, old music, old friends, old using areas-everywhere feels unsafe.
- EVERYTHING IS HARD
- Life changes quickly-go from having no responsibility to new responsibilities-everything feels out of control and overwhelming.
- Learning to have structure and follow a schedule-need appointment books and training on how to use them effectively.
- Boredom-What do "earth people" do for fun?
- Dealing with fatigue, lack of energy
- Weight gain
- Not seeing the children consistently-depressed and filled with guilt and shame and fear over where they are placed.
- Emotions-spiral up and down in feelings, one extreme to the other-many times not sure of what they are feeling or how to express these feelings.
- Knowing they don't have the 'crutch' of using again when life is overwhelming-frustrated with what to do to replace this crutch and still get the 'relief'.
- Changing old behaviors, gaining comfort with new ones; accepting that you have to change all aspects of your life.

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WHY CLIENTS CONTINUE TO USE WHEN THEY HAVE CHILDREN IN THE SYSTEM

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- Overwhelming feelings of shame and guilt over their past actions with children and others. Inability to manage or validate the importance of their emotions. Begin to believe their feelings have no value and do not understand the relapse process.
- Past sexual and physical abuse issues as children and adults bring a lot of painful memories to surface when they are not using.
- To kill the pain following visits with their children; using meth makes them quit crying and seems to help them 'manage' their feelings.
- Lack of structure in their lives. Too much time on their hands to fill when they are clean and sober and the urge to use is strong.
- Lack of healthy support systems. Many of our families come from generations of substance abuse and healthy family support is lacking.
- Fear of making new friends and losing contact with old, familiar friends or substance abusing partners.
- Drugs help maintain the weight. Weight gain is a huge problem for recovering meth addicts and also a very serious relapse trigger. Developing a healthy self-image is a process.
- Very low self-esteem and feelings of total worthlessness. They do not feel worthy of good things in their lives and have an inability to accept or maintain these events. Sometimes tend to use twice as much as when their kids were home.
- Abusive partner and old using friends seem to offer a lot of drugs at the lowest times in their lives when they didn't before.
- Enabling family members make it easier to use.
- They think they won't get caught this time. Use of Internet and word of mouth from other addicts to find ways to alter drug tests.
- After a period of sobriety things gradually get better with children, being employed and feeling good; they begin to believe they can control their use and relapse.
- The belief that they can successfully drink alcohol invariably leads many back to using meth. Many addicts say that they didn't have a problem with alcohol and believe they are still clean if they just stay away from their drug of choice.
- Keeping secrets from their past and/or present actions. Shame over keeping these secrets can lead to relapse.
- Many clients use the excuse they are too busy to go to NA/AA meetings or claim that 'everyone there is using'. Healthy support from people in some sort of recovery program is vital to those who are addicted to drugs/alcohol.
- Lack of trust in systems that could help them. Fear of telling the truth and the consequences for doing so.
- Feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities that getting and staying clean entail (i.e. housing, treatment, children's behaviors, employment, health issues, availability of services in rural areas, transportation, etc.)

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