

Family Support for Behavioral Health Across the Lifespan: A 3-Part Learning Series

Session 1: How to Be Present for Children Who Experience Emotional and/or Substance Use Challenges



MaryAnn Badenoch

Clinical Director, Peer and Group Services

Partnership to End Addiction



Molly Bobek

Clinical Implementation Specialist

Partnership to End Addiction



Henry Moore

Director of Family-driven Practices

Families as Allies

Disclaimer

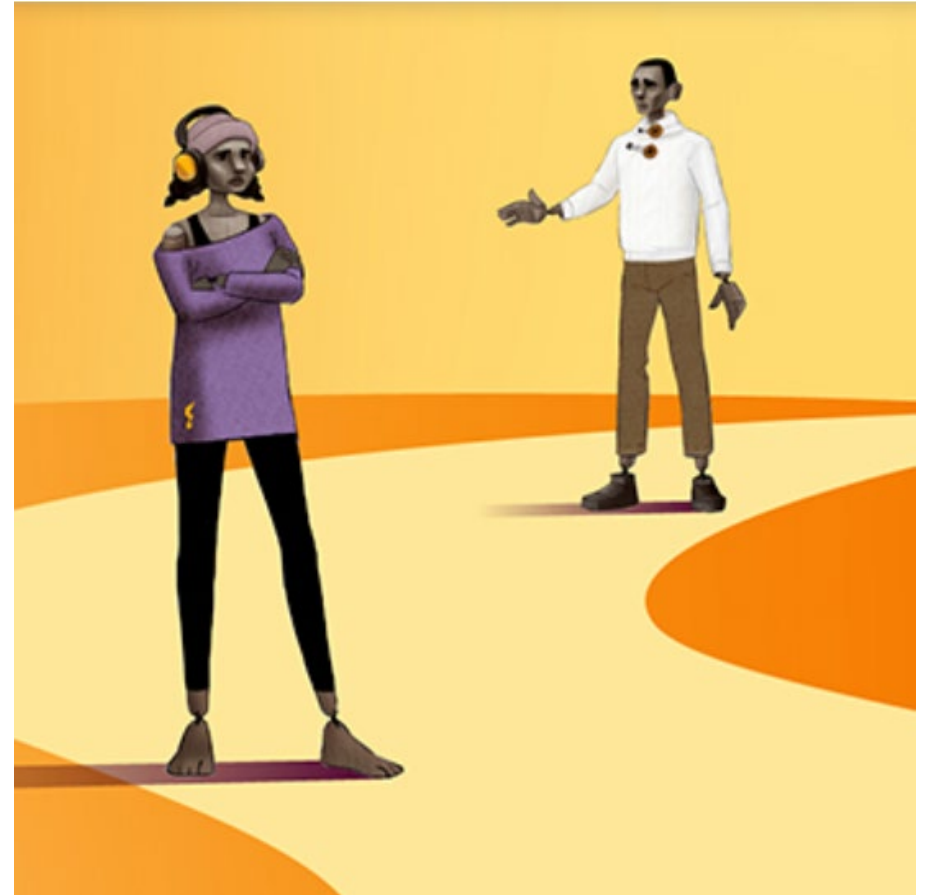
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A brief self-care moment



My Roles As a Caregiver

- **How do I recognize what my child needs?**
 - The Observing Caregiver
- **How do I stay connected to my child?**
 - The Relational Caregiver
- **How do I take care of myself too?**
 - The Self-Caring Caregiver



How Do I Recognize What My Child Needs?



- You are the expert on your family
- There may be observable changes in your child that can help alert you to their struggle
- As you stay attuned to your child's behavior, keep in mind that all behaviors make sense and occur in important contexts
- Rather than embodying a stance of a detective, how can you take a curious and caring posture towards your child?
- Partnering with a professional can help you understand, make meaning of, and meet your child's needs

How Do I Stay Connected to My Child?

- Your relationship is the most important tool you have available to support your child
- Keep in mind a frame of effectiveness: what is working for me as I relate to my child and what works less?
- A support network for you (Family Peer Specialist, Parent Group, or MH/SU clinician) can support you in working on your relationship with your child
- You can model skillful communication for your child
- Think of other ways you can stay connected in addition to verbal communication: quality time, physical affection, what else?



How Do I Take Care of Myself Too?

- Your life outside of your identity as parent is important, too
- Cultivate the capacity to observe your own internal experience:
Am I triggered? What do I need to parent in the way I want to?
- While it may seem like 'one more thing,' connect with other parents
- Five Protective Factors for You: Resilience, Relationships, Knowledge, Support, Communication



Example Case

Michael is a 16-year-old cis* white male who lives with both parents and a 14-year-old brother in Manhattan. Michael's parents are becoming concerned about his use of marijuana and changes in mood over the past year. They have set limits that Michael has not observed, particularly his continued smoking on weekdays and in their home. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Michael stopped playing hockey after experiencing two concussions, and as a result he stopped seeing his long-time friend group. Michael now spends a lot of time alone in his room, sleeps well into the day, and stays awake most nights. He becomes tearful and tends to have temper outbursts when his parents seek to engage him in conversation about his substance use. Still, he is seemingly candid when he shares with his parents that he smokes 2-3 times per week "because it's fun and helps me relax." Michael and his parents find themselves in a constant struggle; Michael contends he smokes less than his peers and argues that marijuana is not a dangerous drug, while his parents fear his level of use is problematic and potentially becoming a form of self-medication.

Michael's uncle died of a heroin overdose and his parents are worried about his health, the trajectory of addiction, and the impact of his marijuana use on his school performance, and whether or not he is severely depressed. Michael's mother, Katrina, lost her job managing a small theater after it closed in March 2020, and his father, Paul, works long hours at a midsize law firm. Paul and Katrina used to be connected to their Episcopal church community but have drifted away in recent months. Both of their families live in the Midwest. Katrina believes the rest of the family is functioning fine and Michael's drug problem is the only issue; she wants him to work on his anger as well as his drug use. Paul believes they have different rules for Michael's brother because he is more respectful and harder working. Paul feels that Michael unfairly blames him for Michael's own explosions and drug use.

* *cis*: a person whose gender identity matches their assigned sex

Breakout Rooms

Optional Prompts for Discussion

- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed?
- How are my family's needs impacted by our identities (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.)?



Let's Talk

- What were the major takeaways from breakout rooms?
- What is developmentally unique across age groups?
- What are core elements that cut across the entire lifespan?



Follow Up and Next Steps

In our follow up email, within 3 – 5 business days, look for:

- A link to the recording of today's presentation
- Today's presentation slides
- Invitations to upcoming events
- Additional resources
- Ways to stay connected with us
- A letter of participation for your records

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