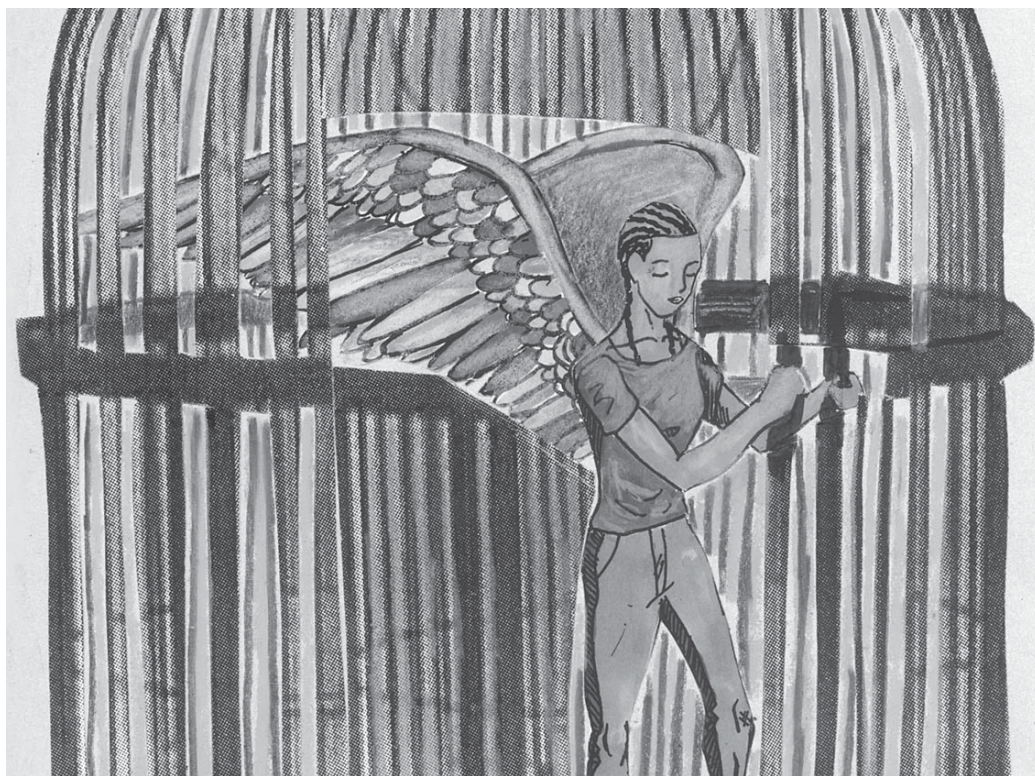


# Rise

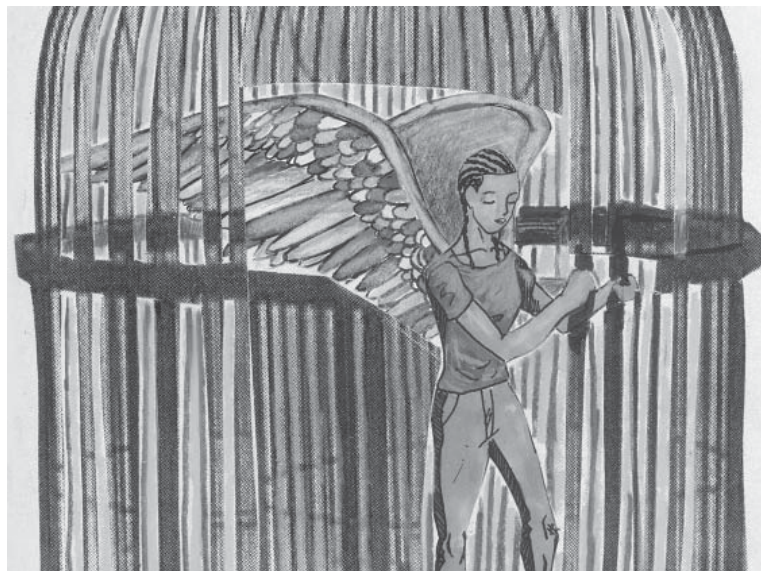
## Breaking a Painful Pattern

*A parent-to-parent guide to overcoming addiction and reconnecting with your children.*



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*A parent-to-parent guide to overcoming addiction and reconnecting with your children.*



By Rise

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## **About Rise**

Rise trains parents to write about their experiences with the child welfare system in order to support parents and parent advocacy and guide child welfare practitioners and policymakers in becoming more responsive to the families and communities they serve.

Our print and online magazine reaches parents nationwide. We work with family support and child welfare agencies to use Rise stories in support groups, parent education classes and staff training. We partner with advocacy organizations to use Rise stories in child welfare reform. Learn more about Rise at our website, [www.risemagazine.org](http://www.risemagazine.org).

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# Introduction

*Breaking a Painful Pattern* is a workbook designed to support and guide parents who are in recovery from an addiction. It includes true stories by parents who have successfully overcome addiction and reconnected with their children. It also includes interviews with experts on addiction recovery. Lessons and worksheets make it easy to use the stories in parent groups or in one-on-one sessions between a parent and treatment counselor, child welfare caseworker, or parent advocate.

The parent stories explain the steps that parents took to succeed in treatment and reconnect with children. The stories also model how parents navigated through the child welfare system; most of the parent writers reunified with children in foster care. The discussion guides and worksheets help parent participants reflect on their progress in treatment and the steps they must take to rebuild positive relationships with their children. Five stories focus on the recovery process and eight stories focus on reconnecting with children and teens.

Stories from *Breaking a Painful Pattern* can be used in structured parent groups lasting 6, 10 or 12 weeks. The Leader's Guide on page 6 guides facilitators through every aspect of organizing discussion groups. The eight stories on reconnecting model parenting skills show how the writers became more aware of their children's needs and worked to solve problems in their families. These are excellent stories to use in a parent group or in parenting classes.

The stories also can be used one-on-one with parents. A treatment counselor, foster care caseworker, or parent advocate can sit with the parent and read a story out loud, talking through the discussion questions or worksheet questions. This approach can deepen trust between the parent and professional. Saying something simple like, "I read a story that I'd like to share with you," can open up a door.



# Leader's Guide

## *How to Use Breaking a Painful Pattern in Parent Groups*

### **Support Group Format**

A support group using *Breaking a Painful Pattern* can last 6-12 weeks and include up to 10 parents. The group can focus only on the recovery process, on reconnecting with young children, or on reconnecting with teens. Or, you can pick stories with different themes to discuss in the group. See p. 8 for guidance on choosing stories to fit the group length and focus you want.

No matter what the group focus or length, the format is simple:

- On day one, participants meet one another, set ground rules for the group, and read Rosita Pagan's story, "Making My Son Proud."
- Every week, parents read a story aloud and discuss how the parent writer overcame challenges. Discussion guides accompanying each story help the facilitator focus participants on the story content.
- Writing worksheets help parents reflect on their own experiences and set weekly goals.
- The next week, participants share the steps they took to reach their goals.
- In the final session, parents can celebrate their

achievements, set future goals, and receive a certificate for participation that they can show to their treatment counselor, child welfare caseworker, judge and lawyer.

### **Recruiting Parent Participants**

**Presentations to staff:** To recruit a good group, you may want to make a presentation about the group at a staff meeting so that caseworkers, counselors and parent advocates understand the resource you're offering. If you can do a 30 or 45 minute presentation, ask the group to read one story and briefly discuss how reading the story in a group might help their parent clients. "Closer Than Ever" might be a good story to use.

**Advertising the group:** Create flyers to advertise the first day of the group. Hand out the flyers and hang them up. You can photocopy the sample flyer on page 13. It will be easier to recruit participants if you serve a meal and provide carfare/transportation.

### **Offering a Certificate**

A certificate for completion of the Recovery Parenting Group will help parent participants demonstrate to their treatment counselors or child welfare caseworker, lawyer and judge that they've taken an additional step to strengthen their own recovery process and improve their connection

with their children. A certificate will motivate parents to join the group and attend regularly.

### ***Incorporating “Helping Hand” Stories***

Two reported stories in the workbook give parents practical information from addiction experts. “One Step at a Time” explains the process of addiction recovery and “It’s Normal to Be Nervous” outlines the path to reunification without relapse. Participants can read these stories on their own, or you can incorporate these stories into groups of any length in a few ways:

- 1) If you are running a 6-week group with a focus on addiction recovery, have parents read “One Step at a Time” at the end of the first group or beginning of the second day, since you won’t begin the group on the second day by reviewing their progress on goals.
- 2) If you are running a 6-week or 8-week group with a focus on reconnecting with children, have the group read “It’s Normal to Be Nervous” at the end of the first day or beginning of the second.
- 3) If you are running a 12-week group, read One Step at a Time at the end of the first group or beginning of the second, and then read “It’s Normal to Be Nervous” to mark a separation as you move from the recovery stories to the reconnection stories. Read it before “Closer Than Ever.”

### ***Including Parents With Limited Literacy:***

Parents do not need to be literate or able to read or write well to take part in the group. When the group is reading a story out loud, the facilitator can call only on parents who feel comfortable reading. Instead of asking participants to fill out

the worksheets individually, the facilitator can lead the entire group through the worksheets and write responses on big paper or a white board. Or, if parents are not too uncomfortable with others knowing that they are limited in reading or reading English, parents can go over the worksheet in a pair with another parent.

### ***Ending the Group***

On the last day, you’ll want to celebrate participants’ achievements. Have everyone fill out the worksheet “My Achievements and Goals.” Ask participants to share their achievements and goals with each other. Take a few moments to share your own observations of growth you’ve seen in group members.

Hold a small party by serving a meal or cake and hand out certificates. You might want to make this event semi-public by inviting family members or caseworkers.

You may want to play a simple game with participants: Everyone tapes one sheet of paper to their backs and has a (non-permanent) marker. Everyone writes something nice on everyone else’s back. It’s a mad scramble. Then each person has the chance to read what others wrote about her and can keep the paper.

Finally, if the group has jelled, you may want to encourage participants to exchange contact information so that they can continue to provide peer support to each other once the group is over. Use the worksheet on p. 133 called “My Support Team.”

### **Focus and Length of the Group**

Stories in this workbook can be used in any combination. Below are suggested groupings for 6-week, 10-week and 12-week groups.

Six week groups focused on recovery, reconnecting with younger children, or reconnecting with teens can begin with the “First Day” lesson and story (“Making My Son Proud” by Rosita Pagan) and use one set of stories outlined below. On the last day (or a 7<sup>th</sup> day), extend the group and ask participants to fill out the final worksheet, called “My Achievements and Goals.” Celebrate the last day and hand out certificates.

Twelve-week groups focused on recovery and reconnecting with children OR recovery and reconnecting with teens can begin with the “First Day” lesson and story, include all five recovery stories and one set of reconnecting stories outlined below. On the last day, ask participants to fill out the final worksheet, called “My Achievements and Goals.” Celebrate the last day and hand out certificates.

Ten-week groups focused only on parenting, not the recovery process, can include all eight stories in the “Reconnection and Repair” section. Begin with the “First Day” lesson and story. End with “My Achievements and Goals” and a celebration.

### **Focus on RECOVERY**

<b>STORY</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>PAGE #</b>
Getting Through It	Choosing to change your life	23
The Little Girl Inside	Opening up	42
Building a Foundation	Recognizing your triggers	34
Powerless and Alone	Handling obstacles without relapse	49
A Long Road Home	Building a support network	56

### **Focus on RECONNECTING with YOUNGER CHILDREN**

<b>STORY</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>PAGE #</b>
Closer Than Ever	Understanding your children’s needs	66
Eat, Play, Love	Connecting through play	77
Baby Steps	Using positive discipline	84
Breaking a Painful Pattern	Changing family communication	91
Bonded for Life	Building a bond	98

### **Focus on RECONNECTING with TEENS**

<b>STORY</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>PAGE #</b>
'What Can I Do?'	Understanding teens' needs	105
Facing the Past	Acknowledging the impact of addiction	122
A Way Out of No Way	Repairing your relationship	113
Breaking a Painful Pattern	Changing family communication	91
Bonded for Life	Building a bond	98

### **Group Facilitation Tips**

- During the first meeting, you may want to prompt group members about active listening skills by saying, "How can we show each other we're listening? What kinds of body language shows people we're listening and what shows that we're not?"
- Encourage participants to speak to each other, not you. Instead of maintaining eye contact with whoever is speaking, look at that person briefly and then look at other people in the group. This will help the speaker make eye contact with other group members. Also, sit next to different group members each time. Better conversations and group cohesion can develop if participants don't focus on talking to and pleasing the facilitator.
- While participants are filling out worksheets, stand up and walk around. Gently ask to see what people are writing and give everyone encouragement. Don't allow participants to cop out on answering the questions.
- If some participants don't speak up during discussions, call on people in a nice way: "Paula, would you like to share?" "Alex, can you tell us about your visit?" "Carly, what activities are you planning to do with your children this week?" However, if there are times that no one responds, don't be afraid of silence. Try to wait for someone else to break the silence, or finally say, "Who is going to jump in?" If someone talks too much, you can say, "I'd like to hear from someone who hasn't spoken much today."

# Running the Group

Each member of the group should receive a copy of *Breaking a Painful Pattern*. Ideally, parents will bring the workbook back and forth to the group, filling in the Recovery Journal reflections at home. If you have concerns about participants arriving prepared, keep their copies of *Breaking a Painful Pattern* at the office and make photocopies of each week's Recovery Journal worksheet for participants to take home and fill out at home.

The Leader's Guides for each story include a basic guideline of everything you'll need to say to run the group. Of course, you can adapt this guideline as you feel comfortable. The guideline is there to help you move from one activity to the next.

- Prepare for the group each week by reading the introduction, story and lesson in advance.
- After week one, each workshop will begin with a discussion of the "My Recovery Journal" worksheet from the previous week. Participants should set a goal for each week related to the topic discussed in the group. During the week, they should fill out the "reflections" questions at home. Begin by asking participants to take out their worksheets called "My Recovery Journal."

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Recovery Journal - Getting Through It**

**GOAL:** Sylvia has short-term goals, like staying clean for 14 days. What is a short-term goal that you want to reach?

**REFLECTION:** What did you do to reach your short-term goal during this week? How did it go?

What's something you did during your week that you are proud of accomplishing?

Start a discussion using the questions at the bottom of the previous lesson marked "starting next week's lesson." (15-20 minutes)

**LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:**

- What experiences contributed to Sylvia's addiction?
- At the beginning, how did Sylvia feel about getting clean?
- Why do you think she found drug treatment so stressful?
- What motivated her to stay in treatment?
- What did she achieve by sticking with recovery?

**JOURNAL TIME**  
Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (What and most people are finished.)

- Who wants to share some reflections?

**ENDING THE GROUP**  
Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for the week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goal!

**STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**  
Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What were some of your goals?
- Please share an especially proud moment. Thank you for sharing.

- Then move on to this week's story. Read the day's topic and introduction out loud to the group. (2 minutes)

**Rise** LEADER'S GUIDE:  
**Getting Through It to Sylvia Perez**  
I didn't like drug treatment but it worked.

**TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:**  
Choosing to change your life

**INTRODUCTION**  
Recovering from an addiction can be a painful process. Full recovery often depends on:

- exploring the feelings, experiences and situations that contribute to your addiction;
- separating yourself from the people and places that trigger using;
- taking responsibility for the impact of your addiction on yourself and your loved ones;
- establishing new routines and coping mechanisms to get you through difficult moments.

It may take time for you to commit to your sobriety and enjoy it. Much of what you are asked to do in treatment may feel strange or uncomfortable at first. If you are separated from your child, you may feel especially sad or ashamed. Dealing with the child welfare system can be overwhelming. You may feel angry and powerless that someone else is making decisions about your life. But you will feel more positive about your sober life as you come to value yourself, develop new skills and supportive friends, and recognize the joys of spending time with your child without using. Let's read Sylvia's story about changing her life.

**READ AND DISCUSS STORY**  
Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

- Ask participants to take turns reading the story out loud. (10-15 minutes)

**Getting Through It**  
I didn't like drug treatment but it worked  
By Sylvia Perez

My first day in recovery was Aug. 15, 2001. I will never forget it. Our daughter, who we call Little Mama, was already in foster care. That morning, getting dressed, I tried to look normal. Then my husband and I got on the 4th main to 3rd Ave. since. We didn't even talk. I guess we were both nervous. I couldn't believe we were finally going for treatment.

For so long I had never thought about recovery or how to get my mind on going drug-free. At my 18th—my first time I was 12 years old—I had been on drugs. My life was just drugs. Then I knew. So my confidence was low. I was scared I wouldn't make it and would use again or stop out.

**Don't Mess With Me**  
When we got there, the husband's name was called first. Then I was by myself and a lady called me and we went to her office. I remember seeing all these addicts. Women holding plastic cups up to get to the bathroom. Men talking about relapsing—how much they used and how much time they had been away from getting their balls back. The worst was the women who had their babies or children with them at the program, while in this was in foster care. That's the biggest reason why I didn't like the Lincoln in the beginning—because I didn't have my daughter with me and other people did.

And I heard all the positive lines. I mean, everyone wanted to hug you. Make your back try to make you have a sponsor and get you to speak in the meetings. I didn't have anyone to come with me.

My roommate's name was Ft. White. She was African American, was emotional and so making and was very straightforward. My first impression was that we weren't going to get along. But soon I discovered she really was nice and 10 days later I called her to see how I was doing and to call her how Little Mama is growing.

**Telling My Story**  
That first day she asked me a lot of questions, like, "What drugs do you use?" When

- Also—as the group leader, you should note important parts of the story in the margins as you read the story. Make sure to ask readers to pause at key parts and let the sentence sink in.

- Use the discussion questions to guide a discussion of the story. Keep the discussion focused on the story writer's experiences and strengths. If participants are taking the discussion off course, use the questions to bring the discussion back into focus. (15 minutes)

**LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:**

- What experiences contributed to Sylvia's addiction?
- At the beginning, how did Sylvia feel about getting clean?
- Why do you think she found drug treatment so stressful?
- What motivated her to stay in treatment?
- What did she achieve by sticking with recovery?

**JOURNAL TIME**  
Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (Wait until most people are finished.)

- Who wants to share some responses?

**ENDING THE GROUP**  
Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

**STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**  
Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What were some of your goals?
- Please share an especially proud moment.

Thank you for sharing.

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Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

**STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**  
Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What were some of your goals?
- Please share an especially proud moment.

Thank you for sharing.

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- Ask participants to read their answers out loud, or just talk about their answers. This is where participants really share their own plans, fears, and hopes. Let this discussion extend, and ask little follow-up questions, like, "Can you tell us more about that?" (10-15 minutes)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Recovery Journal - Getting Through It**

**GOAL:** Sylvia set short-term goals, like staying clean for 14 days. What is a short-term goal that you want to reach?

**REFLECTION:** What did you do to reach your short-term goal during this week? How did it go?

What's something you did during your week that you are proud of accomplishing?

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- Ask parents to fill out the worksheet marked "My Reflections." Once most people seem to be finished, give a 2-minute warning. Then ask everyone to put his/her pens down and listen to one another. (10 minutes)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**MY REFLECTIONS: Getting Through It to Sylvia's Story**

1. How did you feel when you first came to treatment?

2. What is motivating you to stay clean?

3. What's helping you handle the parts of treatment that make you feel uncomfortable?

4. Who has helped you stay focused on your recovery? How?

Rise www.risemagazine.org 20 OVER → BREAKING A PAINFUL PATTERN

- Ask parents to turn to the worksheet marked "My Recovery Journal." Ask everyone to write down one goal, or a few simple goals, for his/her week. Participants should read their goals out loud. (10-15 minutes)

- Parents should complete the "reflections" questions on the "My Recovery Journal" worksheet at home, after their next visit. If participants consistently arrive without the reflections questions filled in, give everyone 10 minutes to prepare at the beginning of each group.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Recovery Journal - Getting Through It**

**GOAL:** Sylvia set short-term goals, like staying clean for 14 days. What is a short-term goal that you want to reach?

**REFLECTION:** What did you do to reach your short-term goal during this week? How did it go?

What's something you did during your week that you are proud of accomplishing?

Rise www.risemagazine.org 20 BREAKING A PAINFUL PATTERN



*Certificate of Achievement*

**Congratulations!**

This certifies that

\_\_\_\_\_

Successfully completed a Recovery Parenting Group at

\_\_\_\_\_

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

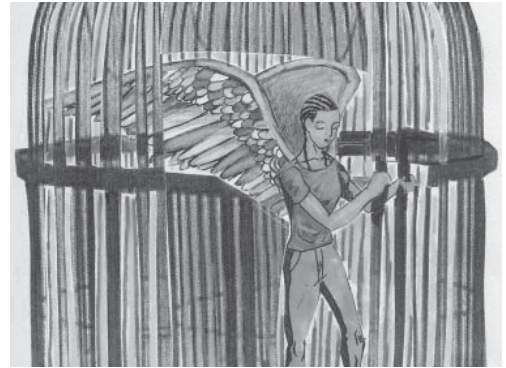
Group facilitator \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**Are you in recovery?**  
**Do you want help**  
**reconnecting with your**  
**children?**  
**Join a Recovery**  
**Parenting Group.**



Every week we'll read a true story by a parent who overcame addiction and succeeded in reunifying with children in foster care.

- Share your experiences and learn from other parents.
- Get support dealing with the child welfare system.
- Learn what you can do to reconnect with your children.
- Earn a certificate that you can show to your recovery counselor, child welfare caseworker, lawyer and judge.

Come to the first meeting of the Recovery Parenting Group.

When:

Where:

To learn more, speak to:

Phone number:

Email:

**Rise**

Parent stories are from Rise, a magazine by and for parents affected by the child welfare system. [www.risemagazine.org](http://www.risemagazine.org)





[www.risemagazine.org](http://www.risemagazine.org)

## LEADER'S GUIDE: First Day

### GROUP WELCOME

Thank you everyone for coming to this group. This is a group about being a parent in recovery. We hope it will help you handle the stresses of recovery and of starting again with your children as a sober parent. Whether your children are with you, with relatives, or in foster care, your children are part of your experience of recovery. Our children motivate us to get sober and stay sober. At the same time, the stresses of parenting and dealing with the child welfare system can threaten our sobriety.

Every week, we are going to read a story by a parent about recovering from addiction and reconnecting with children. The stories were written by real parents. They were written for Rise, a magazine by and for parents affected by the child welfare system. The stories show how parents like were able to deal with challenges and strengthen their families.

### PRIVACY

I am not going to talk with anyone involved in your case about the struggles you may share in this group, unless you say something that shows that you're at risk of harming someone else or yourself. Everyone in the group should keep our discussions private. This is a private place to talk and reflect on your experiences, to try new things, and to grow as a parent.

Do you have any questions about sharing with the group?

## SELF-INTRODUCTIONS

Before we begin, let's go around and introduce ourselves. Can everyone say a little bit about why you are here today? You can just say your name and:

- a little bit about your children
- their names and ages
- what led you to join this group

Who wants to start?

Thank you for sharing a little bit about yourselves.

## RULES + EXPECTATIONS

Before we begin reading our first story, I want to let you know some basic information about the group:

First, we're going to meet from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)  
every \_\_\_\_\_ (day of the week).

During the group, there are some rules that everyone will have to follow so that we can learn from each other. *[Hand out a sheet explaining basic rules or ask the group to define group standards.]*

You can earn a certificate for completing the group if you come regularly and on time, and you participate. *[Hand out a sheet explaining the attendance rules or ask the group to define the standards for a certificate.]*

Do any of you have questions about the rules or about the group itself?

---

## READING AND DISCUSSING STORIES

In our group, we're going to read all of the stories out loud. If you feel comfortable reading out loud, please read a section or two. If you don't feel comfortable, that's OK. Remember, everyone makes mistakes when they read out loud. Let's not worry too much about mistakes.

Does anyone have questions about reading out loud? Great, let's begin.

# Making My Son Proud

*I had to prove I could be trusted.*

By Rosita Pagan

My son Louie has been a good kid ever since he was small. He rarely complained about anything. He was one of those toddlers who clings to the mother. Wherever I went he was there. Summers when I was outside playing spades, Louie kept pestering me until I taught him how to play. When we were short a player, my son would fill in.

As he got older, Louie loved basketball. He filled his room with posters of Michael Jordan. His dream was to become a great basketball player.

## ***Keeping His Distance***

Then, when Louie was 12, some terrible things happened in our family. We found out his younger sister was being sexually abused by her father during weekend visits. Louie became angry and blamed me. As he put it, I allowed the courts to give her father visitation rights.

Even therapy did not seem to help my daughter. I became stressed out and began to drink when I saw my daughter suffer without knowing how to help her.

When I began drinking, Louie shut me out. Most

days, he would ignore me and go outside to play basketball with his friends. Louie was ashamed of me and the way I was wasting my life away. He would never invite his friends over because he didn't want them to see me drunk. He wouldn't return to the apartment unless he knew that I was passed out. He rarely spoke to me when I was awake. In my stupor, I felt angry at him, not sad.

When my children were removed and placed in foster care, Louie would only come see me when I was sober. Then he would ask me, "When are you going to get your life together?" or, "When am I coming home?" I would respond with, "One of these days." I didn't believe I had a problem. I felt I was having fun and he wanted it to stop.

## ***'I'm Really Sorry'***

Finally I went to rehab and got my act together. When Louie saw that I was staying sober, he began to allow me back into his life. The day I came back from rehab, I saw Louie outside hanging out. As soon as he saw me, he ran to me, hugged me and introduced me to his friends.

Soon after that I decided to express my regrets to Louie and his sister Rosemarie, my two older children. I sat with them and said, “You know I love you all. I was not myself while under the influence. I know I must have embarrassed you while I was drinking and you probably hate me for that. I can’t make up for the lost times but I would like a chance to make it up to you guys. I’m really sorry for what I’ve put you through and I promise I will work hard not to let alcohol come between us again.”

Rosemarie said, “Mom, I understand why you went there and I feel your pain. Let’s try to start anew.”

Louie only said, “Don’t let it happen again.”

Later on, Louie came to me and expressed the anger he’d been feeling all those years. He said things like, “Don’t go messing up like before. Don’t lose this apartment or the girls again.”

### ***Meeting His Girl***

As time passed, my son began to trust me and let me learn about his life. He invited me to his basketball games and introduced me to his girlfriend. He had a girlfriend who he’d been dating since junior high school. I didn’t even know about her. The first time I met Anita was at a street fair. I was talking to some friends when my son asked if I could take a walk with him.

We went down the block and I noticed a very pretty young lady just standing there. Louie said to me, “Mom, this is the love of my life, Anita. Anita, this is my wonderful mom.” She hugged me and gave me a kiss.

I felt weird because my son was in a serious relationship and I’d missed it. He’d already been dating Anita for two years! But when he intro-

duced us, I knew my son was proud of me for turning my life around.

Then my son’s high school graduation came up. All of us attended the graduation—my two girls, my grandson, Louie’s father and me. During the ceremony they gave out trophies. An award for best spectator went to the person who attended all the basketball games—that was Anita. The MVP and best player award went to Louie!

### ***Making Him Proud***

My son’s determination inspired me. Last year I decided that I wanted to do something to better myself. Louie keeps a steady job, and I wanted to work, too. I joined an organization that helps parents advocate for themselves in the child welfare system. Then I applied for a parent advocate position at a foster care agency. When I was hired, I felt numb, but I was calm enough to tell my son about it.

“I’m so proud of you,” Louie said and handed me a \$50 bill!

I’m happy that I can make my son proud of me, because I’m so proud of him.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- Why did Rosita's son stay away from her while she was drinking?
- How did Rosita respond while she was addicted?
- How did her understanding change during recovery?
- How did Rosita prove to her son that she was trustworthy?
- What did her son do to let Rosita back into his life?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What were some of your goals?
- Please share an especially proud moment.

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: Making My Son Proud** by Rosita Pagan

1. What's going well in your recovery?

2. What's positive about your relationships with your children?

3. What is stressful to you about being a parent in recovery?

4. What do you want to learn about in this group?

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Making My Son Proud

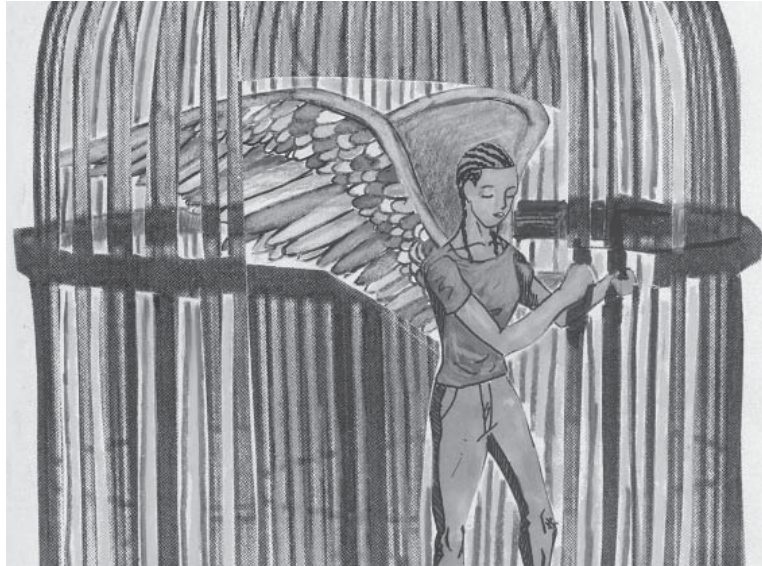
**GOAL:** Take time this week to reflect on your recovery and your relationship with your children. Pay attention to your feelings during treatment and during family time, if you are able to see your children this week. Complete the questions below.

**REFLECTION:** What's something you did this week that you feel proud of as a parent?

What challenges are you facing as a parent in recovery?

What help do you feel you need to get through tough moments?

# RECOVERY









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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Getting Through It** by Sylvia Perez  
I didn't like drug treatment but it worked.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

#### Choosing to change your life

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#### INTRODUCTION

Recovering from an addiction can be a painful process. Full recovery often depends on:

- exploring the feelings, experiences and situations that contribute to your addiction;
- separating yourself from the people and places that trigger using;
- taking responsibility for the impact of your addiction on yourself and your loved ones;
- establishing new routines and coping mechanisms to get you through difficult moments.

It may take time for you to commit to your sobriety and enjoy it. Much of what you are asked to do in treatment may feel strange or uncomfortable at first. If you are separated from your child, you may feel especially sad or ashamed. Dealing with the child welfare system can be overwhelming. You may feel angry and powerless that someone else is making decisions about your life. But you will feel more positive about your sober life as you come to value yourself, develop new skills and supportive friends, and recognize the joys of spending time with your child without using. Let's read Sylvia's story about changing her life.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

# Getting Through It

*I didn't like drug treatment but it worked.*

By Sylvia Perez

My first day in recovery was Aug. 15, 2001. I will never forget it. Our daughter, who we call Little Mama, was already in foster care. That morning, getting dressed, I tried to look normal. Then my husband and I got on the #6 train to 3rd Avenue. We didn't even talk. I guess we were both nervous. I couldn't believe we were finally going for treatment.

For so long I had never thought about recovery or had it in my mind to quit using drugs. All my life—ever since I was 12 years old—I had been on drugs. My life was just drugs. That's all I knew. So my confidence was low. I was scared I wouldn't make it and would use again or drop out.

## ***Don't Mess With Me***

When we got there, my husband's name was called first. Then I was by myself until a lady called me and we went to her office. I remember passing all these addicts. Women holding plastic cups to go to the bathroom. Women talking about relapsing—how much they used and how much time they lost toward getting their kids

back. The worst was the women who had their babies or children with them at the program, while my baby was in foster care. That's the biggest reason why I didn't like Lincoln in the beginning—because I didn't have my daughter with me and other people did.

And I hated all the positive faces. I mean, everyone wanted to hug you, shake your hand, try to make you have a sponsor and get you to speak in the meetings. I didn't want anybody to mess with me.

My counselor's name was Ms. Wint. She was African-American, wore dreadlocks and no makeup and was very straightforward. My first impression was that we weren't going to get along. But soon I discovered she really was nice and 'til this day I call her to let her know I am doing fine and to tell her how Little Mama is growing.

## ***Telling My Story***

That first day she asked me a lot of questions, like, "What drugs do you use? When

was the last time you used? How long did you use drugs?” I was ashamed to say I was a crack addict and the last time I used was four days before. I said, “I’ve been using alcohol, crack and marijuana since I was 12 years old. That’s about 21 years of substance abuse.”

I blamed myself for becoming addicted, but I had a lot of reasons to use drugs. My parents abandoned my siblings and me when I was 5, and my sister and I were adopted by a family that physically and sexually abused us. When I started running away to search for my birth mother, I got raped and ended up living in group homes and shelters. Drugs helped me escape from the reality of my life.

When I told Ms. Wint about my long history of drug abuse, it was like she’d already heard of stories of life like mine. But for me it was a relief, like weights lifted off my chest. It felt good accepting that I did really need help to stay clean.

Ms. Wint asked me why I was at Lincoln Recovery. I showed her a letter from ACS about Little Mama.

“OK,” she said, “We can help you as long as you do the program.”

I got my schedule for getting acupuncture, urine tests, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, meeting my counselor, going to parenting classes, relapse group and vocational training.

Then I could finally leave. I was so relieved to get out of there.

### **Annoying Experiences...**

As much as recovery has helped me get a new life I’m proud of, I never did get used to treatment and I never did enjoy going there.

Acupuncture was an upsetting experience. We had to have five needles placed in our ears and sit in pink chairs for 45 minutes. That was just unbearable. It was supposed to be relaxing, but people in the acupuncture room would always be talking loudly.

NA—I never enjoyed that, either. Even when I had 1 1/2 years clean, I just never did feel right in the NA meetings. All of the hugging, oh my God. To me that was annoying. It was phony. And then I heard people talking about other people in the NA meetings, passing judgment behind their backs even though it’s supposed to be supportive and confidential.

Parenting classes weren’t that bad, mostly because I went with my husband. I learned helpful things about raising my daughter, but I did have a conflict of opinion about the advice the teacher gave. The teachers told me not to spoil my daughter, and said that giving her a real allowance—like \$3 to \$5—would give her bad habits. To them, 25 cents was a good allowance. I always disputed it, and to this day I give her a full allowance for the chores she does around the house.

The main positive thing I got out of parenting class was that the teacher gave us information about an organization called Golden Opportunity Inc. They help mothers with ACS cases who need housing. I ran to them with the information and did all of the steps necessary to get a section 8 voucher. I was ready to find an apartment big enough for Little Mama to come home to.

### **...But it Helped**

As much as Lincoln annoyed and overwhelmed me, it helped me break my addiction to drugs. My first breakthrough came about two weeks after I started going to NA. It came time for

people to receive their key chains celebrating their new sobriety. I had been to four meetings so far and I went up to receive my first white key chain. The leader asked me how many days I had clean. I said, "Fourteen days." I felt so good that I was able to admit that I was a recovering addict.

When I stayed after the meeting to get a key chain for my husband, the NA chairman told me that we might want to tape a quarter to a phone number so if we have to desire to use, we can call somebody, especially another recovering addict with at least one year clean, to help us get through it.

### **Getting Over Crack Dreams**

Those first few months were hard. I had "crack dreams" in the first two months of my recovery. Once I had a dream that I saw myself buying crack and hoped I wouldn't get caught by my husband. In my dream I was putting the crack in the pipe. I felt my finger lighting the lighter and putting the glass pipe to my lips and pulling the white cloud in.

When I caught myself inhaling, I woke up—still sober, with my husband lying asleep next to me. I was grateful not to be in the dream. I was also glad that other recovering addicts told me that dreams like that do happen. That was to be expected.

When I had bad dreams or cravings, my counselor told me a lot of positive things, like that she was proud of me for sticking to the program. Ms. Wint was very motivating. I hated when we had to do random urine tests with our counselor or standing in the bathroom with us. Ms. Wint made it easier.

### **A Sad Celebration**

People around me would relapse and I always felt I was missing out on the excitement of getting high. But I never had a desire to relapse. My focus was on recovery, housing, school, and getting my daughter back. I knew I couldn't use drugs because the system had my daughter. I needed to prove to myself I do this.

My husband and I made our first year sober in August, 2002. That's when I really cried. It was hurtful to remember where I was and all of the terrible things I did for drugs: selling myself, lying, losing all seven of my children, including Little Mama, who was the last one. I had a chance to fight for her and needed my recovery to work. Not just me, but for my husband as well. We could fight together.

I was tired of my abusive life. I wanted my sobriety and my daughter returned home.

### **Positive Attitudes and Activities**

To stay focused I kept my days full with positive activities: NA meeting, talking to my counselor if something was bothering me, working toward my GED in school and attending a peer education training. My life changed. I had positive friends in the program.

In my two years at Lincoln, I struggled to deal with the attitudes of new women and men being fresh and disrespectful to women. It stressed me out that I had to keep giving urine when they knew I was clean. When people asked if I used, I always told them, "I work hard every day to keep myself off drugs."

I completed two years of treatment and took parenting classes twice. Now I have had four years in recovery. I never want to use any drugs

again. My life is not easy, but I love my life and I love my husband and daughter. I never want to go back to the life of drugs. I suffered so long and all of my children suffered because I was being selfish and not wanting to be a mother.

### ***I'm a Strong Person***

I know now I am a strong person, and that I'm responsible. I have positive friends in my life who don't use drugs. I have been able to keep in contact with my two sons who were adopted by the foster mother who also had my daughter for three years. Now my daughter is home and her foster mother and husband are my godparents.

I really don't focus anymore on my past. I just live my life free from alcohol and drugs and negative people. I got my GED and I'm in college now. It's hard work, and it's not easy balancing what my daughter, my husband and I all need. But it's better than living how I was before.

I love being with my daughter. I love her so much. I believe I will never fall back. I will just keep striving for new positive things.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What experiences contributed to Sylvia's addiction?
- At the beginning, how did Sylvia feel about getting clean?
- Why do you think she found drug treatment so stressful?
- What motivated her to stay in treatment?
- What did she achieve by sticking with recovery?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What were some of your goals?
- Please share an especially proud moment.

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: Getting Through It** by Sylvia Perez

1. How did you feel when you first came to treatment?

2. What is motivating you to stay clean?

3. What's helping you handle the parts of treatment that make you feel uncomfortable?

4. Who has helped you stay focused on your recovery? How?



**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Getting Through It

**GOAL:** Sylvia set short-term goals, like staying clean for 14 days. What is a short-term goal that you want to reach?

**REFLECTION:** What did you do to reach your short-term goal during this week? How did it go?

What's something you did during your week that you are proud of accomplishing?

## One Step at a Time

*How you can recover from your addiction.*

By Rosita Pagan

In November 1999, I went to Women Connect, an outpatient substance abuse treatment program affiliated with Lincoln Hospital, to deal with my drinking problem. It turned out to be the beginning of a new life for me.

I was blessed with meeting Ms. Angela Torres, my substance abuse counselor. Now I've been clean for five years. To find out how other parents get help with their addictions and get their kids home, I went back to Women Connect and spoke with Ms. Torres. She explained the steps of recovery to me.

### ***1. Face Your Addiction***

Ms. Torres said that addiction is a habit that takes over your life. Even though you're aware that a certain behavior—like drinking, using drugs or even staying in an abusive relationship—has negative consequences, you repeat the behavior anyway. You're always doing the same behavior and expecting different results.

The first step toward ending an addiction is breaking denial, Ms. Torres said. Denial is what

allows the problem to take over your life. You don't keep using drugs if you're aware that it's hurting you and your family. "Once denial is broken, there are possibilities," Ms. Torres said.

Ms. Torres said it's usually easiest to break parents out of denial when their kids are in a foster home. "When the children are given to a relative, the parents say, 'I haven't lost them really,'" she said. "It's much harder for the parents if they have to say, 'I don't know where my children are.'"

When I first went to Women Connect, two of my daughters were in foster care and my son was living with my sister. Even so, I was totally in denial about my alcoholism. "In the beginning, you were not compliant at all," Ms. Torres remembered. "Many times you came in under the influence."

Ms. Torres gave me tough love. After three months, Ms. Torres told me, "Go home and

*Continued on next page*

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pack your underwear. You've hit rock bottom and it's time for you to get up."

She sent me to inpatient detox and rehab upstate for 35 days. When I went back to Women Connect to continue outpatient treatment, facing Ms. Torres without my mask of anger was overwhelming. But she was happy for me. She said, "I knew there was a good person under all that drinking."

## **2. Face Your Pain**

One thing I didn't like about recovery was that I had to talk about my childhood. I asked Ms. Torres why treatment often brings up the past. "Because childhood issues are often the reasons why people turn to drugs," she said.

How people treated you in your household, and how they treated each other can set you up for feeling bad about yourself. "If you don't value yourself, then you don't care what happens to you," she said.

Addiction is about using something outside of ourselves to feel complete, whether it's alcohol, a drug, a person, money, or something else, she told me. You shouldn't have to rely on something outside of yourself to feel good.

## **3. Discover Hope**

Once denial is broken, counselors try to help you see that your life can be better. "We give people some sense of hope that they can achieve things for themselves and their children," Ms. Torres said.

It helps that, once you get sober, your thinking gets clearer, your behavior gets better, and the counselors can begin to see all the strengths and skills you have. Once I'd been sober for a month or so, I started feeling better about myself. I told myself, "I have to get my family back. I'm not worthless. I can accomplish things if I make an effort."

Ms. Torres told me about another client of hers who was resistant like me. We'll call her Brenda. Brenda was using marijuana and her mother was taking care of her.

When Brenda came to Women Connect, she was not compliant and ended up getting discharged. Then she made a complete turnaround. Ms. Torres thinks that happened because Brenda's mom got fed up. She told Brenda, "Here's your children. I'm not taking care of them."

At first, Brenda started using even more because she was stressed out. Then ACS got involved and Brenda returned to rehab. "We did an intervention kind of thing, like, 'If you have no problem, then why do your kids need to be with your mother? Why is ACS involved?'" Ms. Torres told me.

Once Brenda faced her addiction, she changed. "She was a real hard worker, a real go-getter," Ms. Torres said. Brenda stuck with rehab, got her GED, got her kids back, got her driver's license, started driving school buses and is now hoping to go to college.

#### **4. Face Your Children's Pain**

Many times parents don't believe their addiction hurt their children. "They say, 'I feed my children. I don't leave them home alone,'" Ms. Torres said. "But I don't think feeding your children is really enough."

Ms. Torres says she confronts parents first with the less severe kinds of neglect, saying things like, "If your kids are giving you so much trouble, what role are you playing in making that happen? Something's missing in your child's life when they act out. Remember how you felt as a child when you acted like that? That's how they feel."

One painful thing is that, once parents get clean, their kids (especially their teenagers), "can get really nasty," Ms. Torres said. The kids want their parents back, but they also have so much anger.

Ms. Torres told me about one client who brought her daughter to the program once a week. "Her daughter spoke to her like she was a piece of nothing," Ms. Torres told me. "We had to say to her, 'Look, we know what your mother did. But you have to treat your mother like a parent while you're here.'"

#### **5. Change Your Future**

To start having good relationships with their children, families and partners, Ms. Torres said parents need to learn to set boundaries. Boundaries are rules that protect you and others, that make you and other people in your life feel safe.

When a parent is addicted, she doesn't set any boundaries, like curfews or chores for her children. If your kid was coming in and out of the house at any time while you were drinking, you need to start setting boundaries by saying, "I wasn't aware of that when I was drinking, but now you need to be home by 9 p.m. or you'll be facing consequences." And you don't set a boundary unless you stick to it. You'll lose face.

Parents can also connect with their children by talking frankly about the past and giving their children hope for a better future. "Saying, 'Look what I did. I don't want that for you.' Or, 'Now I know how to be different, and I'm trying to be here for you more than my parents were for me,' can show your kids that things can be different and better," she explained.

Ms. Torres told me that she believes everyone can get to recovery if they work hard. "We give people the opportunity, and they have to run with it. And it works. We do reunite a lot of families," she said.



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Building a Foundation** by Pamela Hughes  
I'm giving my kids the love I never had.

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### TODAY WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT:

#### Recognizing your triggers

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#### INTRODUCTION

"Triggers" are feelings, experiences, people and places that make us feel like we want to get high. Common triggers are feelings of loneliness, rejection, anxiety, or boredom. Recovering addicts can relapse because of experiences like losing a job, witnessing violence, or having a fight with a family member, or just being around people or places where they used to use.

We can avoid some triggers, but it's impossible to avoid stress. The stresses of poverty, living in unsafe neighborhoods, or even dealing with the child welfare system can make you feel powerless and alone. To cope with stress so that it does not trigger you to relapse, you can learn new ways of soothing yourself and build stronger support networks. You also can set up services to support you. Counseling, medication, family therapy, in-home supports to help you handle your children, or respite care to give yourself a break can all make it easier to handle your triggers and avoid relapse.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

## Building a Foundation

*I'm giving my kids the love I never had.*

By Pamela Hughes

When I was a little girl, my siblings and I went from group homes to foster homes, from one grandmother's house to the other grandmother's house, due to our parents' drug use.

Some people might think that, growing up in the foster care system for half my life, I wouldn't let my children go through the same experiences. Not so. I have five children and—I'm not proud to say this—all five children eventually wound up in foster care too.

Having five children in the system is very depressing for me. But I'm in a treatment program and I feel confident that I will reunify with my two youngest children very soon. I am determined to succeed.

I want to break the cycle. I will not die from drugs like my mother did. I will build the foundation that was missing in my childhood and help my children grow up feeling cared about and loved.

### **On My Own**

Moving from home to home as a child, I felt that no one cared about me, especially my mother and father.

I felt unwanted, and this made me feel like no one could like me. I remember being in gym class in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Every day, I sat in that same corner. The other girls would go to the locker room and get dressed but not me. I wouldn't play. The gym teacher did nothing to break me out of that corner. As I am writing this story, remembering those times, I am feeling a little lonely.

As a teenager, I started staying out until 2 a.m., smoking marijuana and sleeping with boys. Sleeping around made me feel wanted. My grandmother called me a ho. She would always say, "You're going to be just like your mother." One day my grandmother hit me with a two-by-four and I hit her back with my hand. That is when she called the agency to take me once again to a group home.

My grandmother rode with me up to a group home where I stayed for four years. As we rode down the highway, my grandmother told me, "I'm sending you upstate for your own good." I felt so alone and unwanted.

### ***Looking for a Connection***

In the group home, I started drinking and smoking weed more often. When I was high my loneliness and depression went away for a moment.

Looking for love also wound me up in violent situations with men, and the violence sent me further into my drug addiction.

At 16, I left the group home to live with an older man who I wound up marrying. At first I was holding down a 9 to 5 and also going to the clubs and getting drunk on the weekends. But as time went on, our drinking led us to lose our jobs. My husband started stealing, got caught, and the judge slapped him with a long sentence.

I thought I would die. I was so scared. All I knew was this man. Soon I started hanging out with a negative crowd and, when I was 19, I was introduced to crack. I didn't know the impact it would have on me.

### ***Repeating the Pattern***

I got pregnant with my first son when I was 23, after I met a big drug dealer who supplied me with crack. I had my son because I was lonely. But he was born positive tox and was taken from me from me right from the hospital. Eventually he got lost in the system. To this day all I know is that he is 21 years old.

Five years later I had a son and a daughter who were also taken at birth and were adopted by their aunt. They are now 17 and 13. At that time, their father used to beat me for breakfast, lunch

and dinner. He took my money, my dignity and respect. I just kept on drugging.

### ***One Program to the Next***

Drug use completely took over my life. I almost died from drugs and yet continued to use. Using landed me in prison for three years. There I kept asking myself, "What is wrong with me that I can't stop using drugs? Why am I in these abusive relationships, thinking about a man before myself or my children?" I also thought about how my family didn't care for me. Those thoughts put me into a deeper and deeper depression.

After I left prison, I went from one program to the next. I kept trying to get clean because I'm a very determined person. But the negative people had too big a grip on me, and I kept them in my life.

### ***Clean and Proud***

Finally when I was 37, I went into a shelter when I was pregnant and I got clean. I had my youngest son, and two years later, I gave birth to my youngest daughter. My last two children I took home with me from the hospital. I was proud of myself.

I relapsed once, when my son was four months old, and I found out his father was cheating on me. But I straightened out, and after that, I worked hard to be a good mother and to stay clean.

I went to an outpatient program, I got a two-bedroom apartment, and I went to an employment program and landed a job with the Board of Education. After four months, I was promoted to a private secretary. I was climbing the ladder fast. I even started to go to school to get my GED.

I also decided that trying to find the right man was too much drama. I felt good being a single mother to my children. Every Saturday we went to Jamaica Avenue and shopped. I treated the kids to McDonald's and I ate pizza. At home, they liked to jump on my bed and bother each other.

After school, they loved to watch Madagascar. I still love to watch Madagascar because it reminds me of being home with my children. I'd cook dinner while they watched, then I'd iron their clothes and go to bed. It was just us three having fun.

### **Losing Hope**

But after four years of being a good mom, I returned to using drugs.

I was working far from where I lived, and my school was far away in the other direction. I began feeling depressed and stressed out being a single parent of a 2 and 3 year old. That last straw was that the program that was helping me pay my bills ended, so I had to pay \$1200 a month for rent on my own. Soon I was backed up on my rent.

I started hanging out with old friends and drinking every weekend. Then I lost my home, and I started drinking even more. Then I turned back to drugs. Eventually, I lost my children.

### **Out on the Streets**

For a while after I lost them, I gave up on life. I was out on the streets. Finally, though, I went to a women's shelter and told the social worker there that I wanted to get clean but couldn't. They sent me to an out patient rehab program, but I still couldn't stay clean. I set myself back so many times.

Finally, I came to a residential program, VIP Women's Services, on Sept. 2, 2007. I relapsed for one month on New Year's Eve after I went to see my son and daughter and grew depressed. But I returned to the program, and since February 25, 2008, I have been clean.

### **Getting Help**

This is the best program I have ever attended. In therapy I realized that since I had no solid emotional foundation in my life, and no secure feeling of being loved or of belonging, whenever things became hard, I became depressed and turned to drugs.

I also started to see a psychiatrist. I had always said, "I don't need pills." But I knew I was falling into depression again and would relapse. So he put me on an anti-depressant medication. Soon I could feel a difference. Now, when I get stressed about my children, I am better able to stay focused on getting my life back together and child welfare out of our lives.

I am also taking anger management and parenting skills classes, and doing an internship at a nursing home as an administrative assistant. Plus I am studying for my GED. Every time I take it I fail the math but I've been studying math for seven months now and feel like I am ready to pass the test this time.

I know I made bad mistakes but I am a good person. I will not forget about keeping the faith with God, who continued to carry me the whole time.

I don't think just about myself anymore. Now I think about my children, my family, the people that suffer when I relapse. I know I cannot wallow in self-pity anymore. I am too old for that. I



am confident that I will make it.

### ***I Want to Break the Cycle***

I feel sad that all my children are separated. They do not even know one another.

But I am searching for my 21 year old, and I will speak to my middle children soon. I hope to explain to them the trials and tribulations that I and their grandparents have been through. I do not want them to turn out like me and my parents: addicts. I want them to grow up to love themselves and their children.

### ***Determined to Succeed***

I am close to reunifying with my youngest children. I face a lot of challenges as a parent. The biggest challenge I face is with myself. Still, I go to visit my youngest children every week, and I have overnights with my son. They are so happy to see me.

On overnights, my son and I, go to movies and out to eat. We play videogames and I take him to the park. We stay at my aunt's house or spend time with my brother. We talk. My son talks like he's 20 years old.

I ask him, "How do you feel about coming home?" He tells me, "Mommy, I want to live with you, because I don't want nobody to hurt you, man or woman. I'm going to be your body-guard."

Once he told me, "You're the best Mommy in the world because you give me hugs, kisses and gifts." That's what keeps me motivated—knowing my kids love me and depend on me.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What triggered Pamela to use drugs?
- After Pamela was clean for four years, what led her to relapse?
- How did Pamela come to understand her own cycle of depression and drug use? What new steps did she take to strengthen her recovery?
- What do you think makes Pamela more likely to be able to maintain her sobriety when she faces hard times in the future?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's turn to the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What were some of your goals?
- Reflect on some of your past goals. Why do you think that you were successful in meeting some goals, but not others?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: Building a Foundation** by Pamela Hughes

1. What feelings do you think trigger your drug use?

2. What people or places are triggers for you?

3. Do you have any other ways of handling painful moments or feelings? Describe using specific examples.

4. What supports might help you when you are faced with triggers in the future?

OVER —————>

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Building a Foundation

**GOAL:** Write down one trigger that you're worried about and then write down the name of one person you can speak to this week about this trigger. What are you going to say to this person?

**REFLECTION:** Did you follow through on your goal of talking to one person this week about how to handle your trigger? If so, how did it go? If not, what kept you from sharing your feelings?

Describe one positive development about yourself that happened this week.



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**The Little Girl Inside** by Milagros Sanchez

Long into adulthood, I needed my mother's help to heal so I could grow.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

#### Opening up

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#### INTRODUCTION

Many times, addiction is rooted in childhood traumas like experiencing abuse at home, being separated from your family, or witnessing violence. Traumatic experiences can feel too painful to remember, so people try to push away their memories. But painful memories can be triggered by everyday situations or can haunt us in dreams. Drugs can seem to make the pain go away—but only as long as you keep using.

Recovering from an addiction involves recognizing the painful experiences that have contributed to your addiction and finding new ways to respond to pain from the past. It is possible to get to the point where your memories don't overwhelm you, and you won't need to use drugs to escape them.

It can feel scary to open up. With a counselor or in a group, you can open up safely. Take your time and share only as much as you feel safe sharing. Let people in your program know if you're feeling flooded with feelings you don't know how to handle. They can support you as you set yourself free of the past. Let's read Milagros's story and see how she began to open up.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

# The Little Girl Inside

*Long into adulthood, I needed my mother's help to heal so I could grow.*

By Milagros Sanchez

My mother and I had a bad relationship when I was a child. I was very angry with her because she was not there for me emotionally or spiritually, and she resorted to violence whenever she was upset with me.

When I came to my mother at 9 years old and shared that the babysitter's husband was molesting me, she chose to ignore me and kept leaving me at the babysitter's house for two years. I was devastated that she didn't believe me. As the years went by, I felt that I hated my mother and was determined to make her life miserable.

Eventually, when I was 12, she sent me to a group home where I was molested once again by a male counselor. My mother never once came to visit me. I felt very alone, angry and abandoned. I grew up, but the depression I'd felt since my childhood did not leave me.

## **The Little Girl Inside**

When I was 21 years old, the pain of my childhood came back to haunt me. At the time, I was married with an 8-month-old baby. I was finding

motherhood rough and stressful. Then I found out that I was pregnant, and that my husband was using heroin.

His behavior had me worried. At times he would not come home for two or three days. I could not eat or sleep. I started missing my pre-natal appointments. When I was six months pregnant, I gave birth. The baby was too premature. His weight was one pound, half an ounce. Fifteen days later the baby died.

I told my husband he had to leave. Then I got depressed. I felt that it was my fault the baby died. I felt guilty that I hadn't wanted the baby when I first found out was pregnant. I also believed that, somehow, God was punishing me because of my behavior as a teenager, for making my mother suffer so much.

I started going to therapy and revealed a lot of deep, dark secrets. Talking about the molestation, and my mother's reaction, was overwhelming. With my past coming up so strong, the thoughts in my head were not about being a

parent to my child. Instead, I felt just like that little girl inside me who never healed.

### ***A False Sense of Safety***

Even though I was in therapy, I could not handle the pain I was feeling. About a year after my baby died, I took refuge in drugs. My sister-in-law introduced me to crack cocaine. When I saw her using crack, I was curious and tried it.

Crack gave me a sense of security, a sense of time freezing so I didn't have to think, cry and feel all alone. It made my pain go away. I started using crack in 1988 and slowly but surely lost everything: first my children, then my job and my apartment. I sold my jewelry, TV, radio and even my body. After that I lost my self-respect and self-esteem.

My son JonPaul was about 2 when I started using drugs. Two years later, I had a second son, Gile-ric. Trying to parent my children while I was using was off the wall insanity. I often found myself screaming at them. At times I would put them to bed very early or just put them in their room to play just so I didn't have to deal with them and they'd keep quiet, since I was paranoid much of the time. I was very cold toward them. I was not a loving person. I could not protect my kids.

### ***Drowning in Darkness***

One day, after I'd been using for about a year, I woke up and felt sick of living like that. So I dressed my boys and took them to my mom's house to ask her to help me. I hoped she'd keep the boys while I went into treatment. But things didn't turn out the way I hoped.

I remember it vividly: I knocked on the door. When my mom opened the door, my tears were rolling down. I said, "Mami, I need help. I have a drug problem and I need you to stay with the

boys while I get myself together."

Her response was to snatch my boys, telling me, "You've always been a problem child. You will never change and you're no good. And never will be." Then she slammed the door in my face.

Once again, I was devastated. That little girl resurfaced and I just lost myself and drowned in the darkness of the city. It swallowed me up.

### ***Taught to Love Myself***

For years, I stayed away from my boys and my mother. At first I did not care because crack had a tremendous hold on me, but once I started thinking about them I felt the pain of losing them. By then, my mother, sister and everyone I knew was telling me to get help.

I put myself into five different treatment facilities and would always leave after three months, because I was too scared. Finally, though, I stuck with it.

In treatment they taught me how to love myself. They told me it was not my fault what those men did to me. They helped me to express myself without getting angry and wanting to hurt someone physically. I learned that I could be in healthy relationships. Religion became a comfort for me, too. Having faith that God would help me relieved some of the pain I was feeling. I didn't feel I had the whole burden anymore.

### ***Expressing my Feelings***

As a child, I was always told, "What happens at home stays at home." Since what happened to me was taboo to talk about, I buried my pain inside but acted it out by being very rebellious, using alcohol at a very young age and, eventually, taking drugs. But in rehab, I found that it was all right to express myself. Slowly but surely

I started talking about my feelings, even to my mother.

My mom was very closed at the beginning. There was a lot of shouting and screaming, but one day she said to me, “I know I have not been the best person or mother to you. But I’m sorry for not being there for you. I’ll try my best to be there for your boys. I love you.” I know that was very difficult for her because my mom never told any one of us that she loved us.

Slowly, our relationship had improved. We talked more about the mistakes she made raising me, and we made it a point to forgive one another. I found out by talking to her about her childhood that my mom never was taught how to converse with her children, but only to get physical when things went wrong.

### ***Changing the Pattern***

When I learned about my mother’s upbringing, I understood better why things went wrong between us. This pattern of not speaking, and physically abusing your children, was passed down from my great-grandmother to my grandmother and then from my grandmother to my mother and to my sisters and myself.

When I understood the pattern, I told myself, “I will make it my business to change that pattern when I get my life together.”

My mom tried to change that pattern with my sons. She gave them the love I didn’t get when I was a child. They were her heart. I didn’t have any ill feelings about my mother’s love and devotion to my boys. I knew she had changed and my boys were safe with her.

My mother died not long after we had that con-

versation, and I relapsed, spending years more out there on the streets. But in June of 1997 I graduated from rehab and I’ve stayed clean since then.

When I took over parenting my sons, I felt a lot of insecurity, but I overcame those emotions and focused on maintaining my recovery and bonding with my sons. Today we have a good relationship.

I’m so thankful that my mother and I were able to talk through what happened between us, and in our family. I needed her to understand what happened to me and to help me heal, and I needed to understand myself so I could be a better parent to my sons.



## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- How did Milagros feel when she first opened up about her past?
- What helped Milagros better handle her memories when she went into treatment many years later?
- What was Milagros risking when she decided to open up again, this time by talking with her mother while in treatment?
- What did she and her mother gain by opening up to each other?
- How did opening up help Milagros in her recovery?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Take a moment and write down a goal you were not able to meet this week. Why do you feel that this goal didn't work as well as you wished? If you feel comfortable, share with the group. Perhaps some of your classmates can offer some gentle suggestions to help you better meet your goal next time.

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: The Little Girl Inside** by Milagros Sanchez

1. What connection do you see between your addiction and painful experiences you've gone through?

2. If you've tried to open up about these experiences in the past, what was that like for you?

3. How do you feel about opening up now, in recovery? What fears do you have?

4. What might you gain by opening up?

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – The Little Girl Inside

**GOAL:** Write down one thing that you feel you can take the risk of sharing in a recovery group or conversation with a counselor. You don't need to tell your whole story; you can share a little bit to start.

**REFLECTION:** Were you able to open up in a safe way this week?

Think and reflect on a success this week—whether it was small or large.



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Powerless and Alone** by Chrystal Reddick

How could I stay sober when I felt like my child would never come home?

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### TODAY WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT:

**Handling obstacles without relapse**

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#### INTRODUCTION

Relapse is a normal part of recovery. At the beginning of treatment, many parents say to themselves, "My kids need me. I'm going to work really hard to get sober." But after you've been clean for some time, that driven feeling of "I have to work really hard" stops feeling so powerful. Then you can start to think, "I'm almost there. I can afford to have a drink or get high. I can reward myself." That turns into relapse.

Another pattern is that, after people have been sober for a while, all of life's challenges begin to feel too hard to handle. You may have dreamt of a fresh start, but then all the old problems of family conflicts, paying bills, and handling your kids begin to feel overwhelming. That's when addiction's "stinking thinking" can kick in. You may tell yourself that the only way to feel better is to use and that no one understands you but the drugs.

Understanding the thought process that could lead you to relapse can help you maintain your sobriety. Let's read Chrystal's story about relapsing and returning to recovery.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

## Powerless and Alone

*How could I stay sober when I felt like my child would never come home?*

By Chrystal Reddick

One day last fall I went to an anger management class. It was in a neighborhood where I used to get high. It didn't even go through my mind that this could be a trigger for me. I believed I was strong but I was not.

At the time, I was consumed by feeling powerless and alone. My son, Brandan, had been in foster care for about a year. ACS took him when I was jailed for credit card fraud. Months before that, ACS had investigated me for neglect but had closed the case. When I was released from jail after four months, I was told that I needed to prove myself capable of raising Brandan.

### ***I Expected Recognition***

Once I completed my service plan and secured housing in a program designed to support me in reunifying with Brandan, I started to feel that the efforts I put forth had gone unnoticed. I expected recognition. But when my accomplishments were presented in court, it seemed like the foster care agency just kept bringing up my long history of addiction and incarceration instead of focusing on the five years I'd been clean

before I had Brandan and the progress I was making.

After court, my attorney would make lame statements like, "I'm very sorry, Ms. Reddick. If it was up to me I would give him back now." I'd think to myself, "If, if, if! That word is empty to my son and me."

### ***Feeling Abused Again***

The worst was hearing about my history over and over again in court. I had to endure fancy people not caring about my story, people misjudging me and categorizing me and making decisions for me. I had to answer to people who seemed to loathe me. That was hard. I struggled to smile in the enemy's face.

As time passed, all of my experiences of being powerless—being abused and gang raped and going to prison—came together in my mind. I was reminded of being told when to eat and sleep, of not getting to make a phone call for days, of having someone scream in my face and not be able to knock their teeth out. Being told

when I could and couldn't see my child and what I should and shouldn't do during visits came to feel like another kind of abuse.

The pain in my chest got tighter as the days passed me by. I felt completely alone.

### ***Pain, Time and a Few Dollars***

Pain, time and a few dollars don't mix. As I stepped off the train to catch the bus to my anger management class, my stinking thinking told me, "It's f-ed up how ACS and the agency are treating you. You should have your son right now. You deserve to feel good for a day or night. You have a few dollars in your pocket. Who will know if I get one bag of dope? F- it!"

Vulnerable and alone, I convinced myself that escaping just one time wouldn't hurt. So I bought heroin and then jumped in a cab, not wanting to be late to my class.

Heroin gave me the feeling that I could handle anything that came at me.

I didn't have any intention to continue to use. But two or three days later, once again alone, that craving came up again and then again.

Drugs have a way of clouding what's inevitable. Once I had used more than four or five days in a row, I became convinced my secret was safe with me. "They'll never know," I told myself. "I deserve not to hurt." Before I knew it I was addicted again.

### ***On the Sneak Tip***

At first, I manipulated the system so that I wouldn't get caught. I knew who was testing me and when. I still attended all meetings, visits and classes. I stayed sober briefly to do these things.

I kept planning to stop, looking for ways out. Could I not use as much? I even tried "cold turkey." That was a joke. As soon as I opened my eyes and realized that my life was where it was, I flipped out and went and got high.

During the three months that I was using, I spent quite a bit of my family's money under false pretenses. I told them I had rent where I lived when I did not. That's where drugs had taken me. I lived to use and used to live daily. I did some really irresponsible things that were unsafe for me.

Somehow, I had reality turned around in my mind. I thought that by using, I was hurting the people who had taken my baby from me. Boy, was I wrong.

### ***Under Pressure***

The first tox that came out dirty was at my residence. I convinced them not to divulge that info to the agency right away, but they said I had to go to an outpatient drug treatment to regain my clean time.

But I didn't attend the treatment, so my program disclosed the dirty tox to the agency. Probation also found out that I was getting high. Soon I was under pressure from all sides. My lawyer was the last to find out and she was furious. She threatened to drop my case if I ever withheld vital information from her. I felt threatened and even more alone.

Everyone on my case kept asking me, "Do you want to go to jail? Do you want to screw up your service plan altogether so that ACS will terminate your rights? Or do you want to get sober and fight for Brandan?"

### ***Afraid to Surrender***

I knew that if I didn't get it together, I would never get Brandan back, my greatest fear. I might even go to prison, my next biggest fear. Still, I was not thinking rationally. I just felt controlled, backed up against a wall. I knew that I needed to fight for Brandan, but I didn't want to stop getting high. I kept looking for a way out.

I always said, "Just one more time." Finally, I realized that I had no more chances. I felt trapped and scared. But at last I surrendered to the disease of addiction. I found an inpatient program and I stuck with it.

I have been clean for a year now. I think my recovery is going well. The urge to use when I get upset has subsided. I'm not in as vulnerable a place anymore. I have obtained gainful employment and have lived in my own apartment for four months. I pray nightly and take life one day at a time.

### ***Fighting Termination***

But my months of drug use took their toll on my case. While I was in treatment, the agency filed to terminate my parental rights. The trial has not yet started, but I am scared that I will lose my son. I am angry and overwhelmed every day.

The hardest part is controlling my anger. Everyone says, "Be nice, don't show your frustration." That's very stressful.

Trying to fight back in a positive way, I spend hours overloading my brain with information about the system. I make phone calls and send letters. I am searching for someone powerful to care about my case and intervene. I never stop planning in my head, thinking, "What else can I do? Who can help me?"

### ***One More Chance?***

What scares me most is to imagine Brandan, who is now 7, growing up without me. I want to nurture, love and educate him. I feel that he's already forgetting who I am. He has been in care three years now. We only have visits every two weeks. Our relationship is so rocky. He calls his foster mother, "Mommy." That really bothers me.

During visits, I get to kiss all over him. Brandan clings to me at times. He also gets defiant. I truly understand why. I do all I can to show patience to my little boy.

I am angry at myself for putting our relationship in jeopardy. When I look back at the past 19 months, I think, "If I had just stayed clean a little longer, Brandan would be with me."

Still, I'm angry that the agency is pushing to terminate my rights when I'm clean again and working to reunify with my son. I know I made this bed I'm lying in. But should I have to sleep in it forever? I just keep begging the agency, "Give me one more chance to prove myself. Have faith in who I've become."



## **NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:**

- How did dealing with the child welfare system remind Chrystal of being abused in her past?
- Why did Chrystal convince herself it was OK to use again?
- After Chrystal got clean, again what difficulties threatened to overwhelm her?
- What positive parts of her life helped her stay strong?
- What positive actions did she take to help her handle her pain, anger, and fear?

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## **JOURNAL TIME**

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

---

## **ENDING THE GROUP**

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## **STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Since we've been setting goals for ourselves for a while now, let's reflect on actions that help us achieve our goals. What thoughts, words and actions pave the way to success?

Thank you for sharing.

**DATE:**

I. What current obstacles in your life hurt you the most or make you the angriest?

3. What positive thoughts help you to counter the “stinking thinking” when you feel hurt, angry or scared, or when you think that using just one time won’t matter?

4. What positive actions can you take when life's challenges feel like too much to handle? Who can you turn to for support?

OVER  $\longrightarrow$

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Powerless and Alone

**GOAL:** What is one positive action you can take this week when obstacles in your life frustrate or overwhelm you? Who can support you if you have “stinking thinking” this week?

**REFLECTION:** Did you try to reach your goal this week? How did it go?

Think about a time in your past when you felt especially proud of yourself. Reflect on this positive accomplishment.



www.risemagazine.org

## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**A Long Road Home** by Louis Angel

My visits proved I was worth my son's trust.

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### TODAY WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT:

#### Building a support network

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#### INTRODUCTION

It can be hard to trust others, especially if you've been abused or abandoned by people you've loved. But strong relationships are important. Research has shown that people who feel cut off from other people are more vulnerable to addiction, while people who manage to build a strong support network are more likely to succeed in recovery. And the more support parents have, the more likely they are to develop strong bonds with their children.

A support network can include friends, family, a romantic partner, a teacher or coach, a therapist, or a support group. To figure out who is trustworthy, you can ask yourself: Do I feel like I can be honest and open with this person about my situation? Can I turn to this person in moments when I need support? Does he help me become a better person and a stronger parent? Does she help me stay sober? Does he encourage me and let me know when I've done a good job? Does she help me without judgment when I am struggling? Let's read Louis' story about finding support.

---

### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

# A Long Road Home

*Getting clean was only the first step in becoming a better father.*

By Louis Angel

Long before my kids went into foster care, I knew they were going to get taken away. Their mother and I were addicted to meth. Our life was out of control.

During this time, she and I were not really taking care of our three kids. We'd put them in front of the TV with their bottles and some food and lock ourselves in our bedroom all day to get high.

I worked long shifts and I knew their mother was not taking care of the girls while I was gone. I'd come home to find the girls still wearing the same diapers I'd put on them before I left.

## **Scared for My Children**

The neighbors started to tell me that my kids were running around the neighborhood by themselves at only 3 years old. One afternoon I came home early from work. Cruising up my street on my bike, I saw my oldest daughter, Jasmine, across the street from our house, playing in just her underwear and a t-shirt. I was shocked and scared for my children.

I yelled, "Jasmine," and she bolted back home. When I got inside, I saw their mother staring blankly at the television, totally unaware.

At that point, I was determined to stop using. I stopped giving their mother money. But she began to sell things like our table, the brand new couches and our TV. I was too weak to stop getting high on my own.

## **A Knock on the Door**

I look back on this dark time with sadness and regret. I see how different I was when I was getting high. My addiction made me only want to make money and buy drugs.

When I was a child, my parents did the same things to me. They were heavy into drugs. I can remember being in the second grade and not even coming home until nighttime. I always told myself that I wouldn't do that to my kids, but I was no better than my parents.

Eventually my life was a complete mess. I lost my job, my car was repossessed, I was arrested

for welfare fraud, I faced a tax audit because I couldn't pay my income taxes, and I had creditors on my back. My addiction had a grab on me and destroyed my life.

Then came that knock on the door. I knew that once the cops stepped in to our home, our kids were going away for a while. I remember my little ones getting into a police car and slowly driving away.

### **Two Empty Weeks**

After the commotion cleared, I had an empty feeling inside of me. "How am I going to get them back?" I asked myself. Two of the most empty weeks in my life passed by.

While I waited to find out what I could do next, I separated from my children's mother and made a commitment to myself that I would change my life. I was determined to become the dad my girls needed and deserved. I also promised myself that I would begin a real career so I could provide for my children financially.

I knew that if I was going to reach my goals, I had a long road ahead of me.

### **Woken Up**

At first, I thought that Child Protective Services (CPS) would place me in a treatment program with my kids. I also thought the system could help me get welfare and Section 8 so that, once I was clean, we could get back on our feet.

But I found out that's not how CPS works. You can't just get the help you want, you also have to do what the system thinks is right for you. I also learned that there are no rehab programs where a father can live with his children in Fresno, CA.

CPS told me that I needed to enter drug treat-

ment, take anger management and parenting classes, and go to counseling. I felt that there was a huge possibility that I might not get my children back at all.

### **The Right Path**

In treatment, I learned that I needed to be quiet for a change and accept help. During one of my one-on-one talks with a program leader, he explained that it was good that I tried to do right for myself, but that my judgment was off. Trying to fix my life my way got me into this mess. Now I needed to allow people to guide me in making the right decisions.

His words helped me open up to my mentors, and in a few months, I was on the right path.

Within nine months, I finished treatment, found a new job and moved to a one-bedroom apartment close to downtown. It was a nice, quiet little place with stucco walls and roses out front.

### **'I'm Sorry, My Babies'**

I felt so good when I was able to bring my girls to our new home for visits. My daughters were happy to explore their new surroundings and draw pictures on the sidewalk—pink and white flowers, and purple and blue rainbows.

I soon learned that it was hard to show my girls all the attention they needed during visits. It was new to me to take care of my girls when I was sober. I had my hands full!

Once my daughters asked me, "When are we going home, Daddy?" Part of me wanted to hold them tight and tell them, "I'm sorry for this, my babies. I love you and you will be coming home soon."

But I was unsure myself if I would ever get them

back. So after a long pause, I just said, “Let’s not talk about that right now.”

### ***My Case Was Stuck***

I thought that once I got an apartment, I would get my kids back. To my mind, I had gotten what I needed from the system. But my case seemed to go nowhere. I felt stuck.

Partly, I blame having three different caseworkers. But I also had to realize that CPS saw me as a father who could easily get overwhelmed by trying to work full time and care for three little girls with no one to step in if things got hectic. I didn’t know much about taking care of my children and didn’t have any family or support team to help me.

### ***Someone Who Supports Me***

Luckily, at this time, I met a wonderful woman named Elizabeth who made a huge difference in my life.

I met her one day at work. My cash register broke down while I had a long line. Elizabeth and her mother waited patiently. Then I decided to take them to pay at the front of the store. I started a little conversation and asked for her number. “Are you serious?” she said. Amazingly, she agreed to go on a date with me.

On our first date, I just came out and told Elizabeth what I was going through. She seemed shocked and didn’t say anything but “OK.” She needed time to think. But for the last three years, we have been together.

### ***Embarrassed to Cry***

Elizabeth has listened to my hurt and encouraged me. Many days I had tears in my eyes as I wondered whether I would get my kids back.

One day I told her, “Maybe my girls are better off in foster care. I can’t provide what they need. I can’t even afford their clothes or toys.” I turned away so she wouldn’t see me crying.

I told myself, “Men shouldn’t cry,” but Elizabeth wiped the tears off my face and put her arms around me, saying, “It’s OK. You don’t have to be embarrassed. Your girls don’t want material things. All they want is to be with you.” I felt good knowing that she was on my side.

### ***Meeting My Girls***

At first, my social worker was concerned that my relationship might have a negative effect on my children. But I introduced Elizabeth to my kids in a gradual way that was acceptable to my worker.

Elizabeth joined us on visits and earned my girls’ trust by doing their hair and playing games with them. Elizabeth also began going with me to all of my meetings with CPS and even to court. Soon my case started to move forward. My social worker, Eva Torres, offered me more services to help me reunify with my girls.

### ***The Help I Needed***

Although I felt that my parenting skills were OK, the courts believed otherwise, so I started attending a class called Incredible Years. The class taught me how to deal on a daily basis with the emotions of being a parent, especially how to handle all the weapons of mass destruction that little ones know how open up and unleash with no regret. The class helped me a lot.

Ms. Torres also gave me practical help. She got me dressers for my daughters and applied for a voucher so I could get a better car. “It’s a long shot, but it’s worth a try,” she told me. A few



weeks later, she gave me the voucher for a down payment on a new car. That was unbelievable!

Finally, in November 2007, my kids started to come home for extended visits. Then I felt confident that I would be a father again.

### ***A Father Again***

Now it's been almost two years since my children came home. At 29, I am a proud father with a wonderful girlfriend and three beautiful daughters.

Jasmine, the oldest, enjoys writing stories and reading to her sisters. Casira is the middle child. She dreams of being a ballerina one day. She dances and spins in circles while quietly singing to herself. Then there is Hanah, the youngest and toughest. She tries to push her 35 pounds around like she's the boss.

All of the girls had trouble adjusting when they came home. Suddenly I was a father who set rules that they had to follow, and it was frustrating for everyone. But we try to be patient and our family life feels positive to me now.

It was also an adjustment for Elizabeth to become a full-time mother, but she loves my girls like her own. She stays home with them while I am at work and the girls even call her "Mom."

### ***Proud of Myself***

I am proud of the steps that I've taken to become a better father. Now I am working full time and have gone back to school. I earned a GED and an emergency medical technician certification, and am enrolled at Fresno City College, working on an undergraduate degree.

I am also involved in a new program at CPS called Parent Partners. The program trains

parents like me to help families whose children have entered foster care. The hope is that parents who have successfully reunited with their children will be able to break down barriers between social workers and parents.

I especially hope that I'll be able to help parents get help before their lives spiral out of control like mine did, so we can prevent parents from losing the most important thing to them, their children.

At times I did not believe I would reach my goals. Now I believe that with faith, determination, sacrifice and help, all things are possible. I'm also grateful to the people who acted like stepping stones for me, helping me along my way.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- Who are some of the people Louis comes to trust during his journey?
- What do you think about Louis' decision to be so open on his first date with Elizabeth?
- What are all the ways that Elizabeth shows her support for Louis?
- Why does Louis' worker want him to introduce Elizabeth to his girls in a gradual way?
- How does Elizabeth show that she will be a good person in the girls' lives?

---

## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

---

## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions on your own at the end of the week before our next group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

---

## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- What is one goal you really want to achieve this week? Choose one of the following descriptions and discuss why you chose it. I felt that I achieve my goal: (1) Not at all (2) somewhat (3) About half (4) Very well (5) totally. Please share

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

---

## **My Reflections: A Long Road Home** by Louis Angel

Using the chart on the next page, make a list of the important people in your life. For each person, check off whether this person supports you. Not everyone on your list has to support you in every way. Circle the people on your list whom you feel are truly supportive.

How does your support network list look? How could you strengthen your circle of support?

Below, write down the names of anyone you would like to add to your support network. Or write about developing your network, such as finding out about support groups, joining a church or activity, or reaching out to positive people from your past.



**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – A Long Road Home

**GOAL:** Think about a previous relationship that has drifted apart. What is one step that you can take this week to strengthen that relationship?

**REFLECTION:** What's something you did this week to strengthen your support network and bring positive people into your life?

What's something you did this week that you feel proud of accomplishing?

# RECONNECTION AND REPAIR





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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Closer Than Ever** by Sandra Evans

I'm learning how to handle my children without getting high.

---

### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

**Understanding your children's needs**

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#### INTRODUCTION

While you were in your addiction, your children's needs may not have been in focus and your behavior may have been unpredictable and confusing to your children. Sometimes you may have acted warm, playful and loving. Other times, you may have disappeared from home, seemed out of it, made false promises, or acted angry and scary. Now that you're in recovery, you can be there for your children.

If you've let your children down in the past, or if your children are not living with you now, you may find it painful to face their disappointment. You may not feel sure that you are strong enough to cope with their demands, especially if you're parenting sober for the first time.

The first step is to think about what your children need from you. All children need their parents to show up when they say they will, to listen, hug, talk and play with them, and to say goodbye at the end of visits in a nice way. These little steps will strengthen your children's trust in you in a big way.

---

### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?



## Closer Than Ever

*I'm learning how to handle my children without getting high.*

By Sandra Evans

When I was 12, drugs became my way to numb out all the ugly feelings I had inside from being molested and being ignored by my mother, who always put men ahead of her children. Eventually I tried meth and became addicted. Those painful childhood memories, the ones that no one talks about, disappeared with meth.

My addiction escalated when I was about 25 and caring for my four children under age 5. My husband, Francisco, and I lived in a neighborhood where at every fourth house they either used meth or sold it. Soon getting high became my escape from the smallest things—my baby crying, or a fight with Francisco.

### **Totally Numb**

I'm not sure what triggered me to start using so much. Thinking back, I see it may have been a number of things. Francisco was going to school, which left me home alone all day. I found caring for all of our children overwhelming and was jealous that Francisco was bettering his life. My role as a mother seemed insignificant.

I feared that I did not know how to be a mom. I did some things well. I always made sure my children were fed and bathed. We would read together and go to the park by our house. But I was really stressed out because I was afraid of making all the mistakes that my mother had made with me.

My addiction made my parenting worse. I was always frustrated with my children and Francisco. I would yell at my oldest, who was only 5, "Make Emiliano a bottle" or, "Take care of your brothers." Other times I did what I had to do but with no emotion. I had become totally numb.

When I got pregnant again, I knew I needed to quit and I wanted to. I would tell myself, "This hit will be the last," but I kept using.

### **No More Hiding**

Francisco knew I had used meth socially, but I hid my addiction from him. Then we went to the hospital because I felt like I was going into labor. I hadn't gotten prenatal care and didn't know how far along I was, so the doctor did all sorts

of tests. He told us that I had tested positive for meth.

I told Francisco, "There is no way. I haven't touched the stuff."

He just gave me a look of disappointment and said, "Babe, tell me, have you been smoking your stuff?"

I lied again.

"If you are, then you really don't care about me or the kids. And what about the baby you're carrying? If you test positive when you have her, we can lose all of our kids."

### ***Ashamed and Desperate***

The next night, I had bad contractions. I kept telling myself that I could make them stop. I was hoping for more time. But I gave birth that night.

At the hospital, child protective services (CPS) showed up and told us we couldn't take the baby home. I felt ashamed and desperate. I had failed my family and myself. I feared that I would lose my children forever.

That day, I went to the nursery to hold my daughter, who was no longer allowed in my room. I just looked at her, feeling like I was the worst mother in the world. I had jeopardized my whole family, and for what?

### ***Feeling Betrayed***

That day, we went to a meeting at the CPS office. The workers helped Francisco understand how meth affects people and they suggested that I go to an outpatient treatment program so I could be with my family while I got help. But Francisco insisted I go to in-patient outside of our neighborhood, where he knew I would have

an easier time breaking my habit.

I felt betrayed. I felt that he hated me. It really pissed me off that we were in a room full of people passing judgment on me, and I felt like I was a terrible mom, and my husband wasn't backing me up. I felt it was Francisco's job to protect me, even if that meant lying. I now realize that he was looking out for the welfare of our children and for me.

### ***A Little Bit of Hope***

Soon I was admitted to Westlake, where I stayed with my newborn daughter for six months.

The day I was admitted, I felt angry at myself, scared and guilty. I thought, "How did I let it get this far?" But I was still not ready to face reality. In my addiction, I had started to make a lot of empty promises, and even on the day I went to my program, I told my oldest son that I would be home in time to pick him up from school. I could picture the look on my little boys' faces when Daddy went home that night and Mommy wasn't with him. I had let them down again.

Still, I felt hopeful. Maybe, just maybe, if I gave this place a try, they could help me deal with all the raw emotions I carried inside. Then I could go home to my children a better mom.

### ***I Found Support***

In treatment, I met a lot of women that I could relate to. We connected because we'd been through similar experiences.

My counselor, Sharon, also helped me so much. Sharon was a tough woman who didn't listen to any excuses. From the instant she looked at me, I felt that she got me. The loneliness that I had felt for so long began to lift in her presence.

Many times I went to Sharon's office a mess, crying. She'd look at me and tell me, "It's OK, we can fix it. Nothing is engraved in stone." I learned to take one day at a time.

### ***Rebuilding My Family***

Through treatment, I got to connect with my family in a much different way than I had when I was high. Francisco and our children came to visit on Saturdays. I looked forward to our visits. I wanted to hear about everything they had been doing.

I would play with our kids, read to them, color and really enjoy our time. These were things I hadn't done with my children before.

Being in the program with my daughter was a wonderful experience, too. I was able to enjoy taking care of her. We had a special class called Therapeutic Childcare that gave us time and support to bond with our babies.

### ***Attention and Consistency***

The teacher, Ms. V., taught us little things that can set the foundation to connect with your children. For instance, I used to make a bottle, put my baby in the bed, prop up the bottle with a blanket, and that was that. She told me that propping the bottle can make a baby choke, get ear infections, and have trouble learning to stop eating when she is full. Most important, feeding the baby in your arms is a way you show the baby you love and care about her.

I learned that children thrive when they have a daily schedule and when you're consistent with them. Ms. V. told me that it's important to get up early with my children, get them dressed and eat breakfast together. She also reminded me to hold my children, tell them I love them, praise them when they do something good, and stick

with a punishment once I have set it.

The most valuable thing I learned was that I needed to set aside time to spend with my children to give them the attention they craved. I didn't realize that children need attention in order to thrive.

Ms. V. gave me confidence that, despite my childhood, I could raise my children without neglecting them. I tried what she suggested and found that her guidance helped me build a stronger connection with all of my children.

### ***Closer Than Ever***

Francisco and I reconnected during Family Group, where we could vent in a productive manner. One-on-one sessions with Sharon helped us to understand the roles we had played in each other's lives and work out our differences without blame.

One Saturday near the end of my treatment, Francisco picked me up to take our children to the zoo. I was thrilled. I had always wanted to do that. I'll never forget the expressions on our children's faces while they looked at the animals. It felt incredible to me that we could experience such joy as a family.

Francisco grabbed my hand and looked at me and said, "I love you, babe." On that day, I knew we were going to be OK. Even though I could not undo the past, we still had a future.

### ***'Can I Do It?'***

The day I returned home, I was overfilled with joy but also terrified. So many thoughts went through my head, like, "What if I can't do it? What if my kids hate me? Am I going to be able to handle the stress without getting high?"

I had spent six months with only my daughter and in the safe, structured environment of the program. I feared that I wasn't ready for the real world.

A big moment for me came about a month after I returned home. My caseworker, Geneva Thomas, came by for our weekly visit and my 4 year old started acting up. First he threw a ball at her. Immediately, I got on him and told him to stand in the corner. He told me no and continued to throw things.

I knew he was just trying to get attention, so I decided to ignore him. But Geneva saw that I was getting frustrated. "You need to deal with him," she said.

### **A Sober Mom**

I picked my son up and told him to stand in the corner. He started to shout. Then I was so embarrassed. I wanted to yell at him, "What the hell is wrong with you? Why are you acting like this?"

But that was the old me. I told myself, "That isn't the kind of parent you want to be." So I sat down with him in the corner. I told him we were going to sit there until we calmed down.

It felt like a good solution to me, but Geneva explained that I was punishing myself by sitting there with him. I felt so frustrated and confused. How was I supposed to handle him? Even though it took a lot of work, I finally got my son to stand in time-out by himself.

In the past, moments like this would have overwhelmed me and I would've gotten high. Not this time, though. I'm learning to be a sober mom.

### **Handling My Children**

Now it's been 18 months since I came home from treatment. I feel good. I know how to build a foundation for my children. I am learning to handle their outbursts in a positive way and am reaching out to Francisco for support.

I'm so glad my social worker didn't just throw me out into the world when I was done with treatment. She stood by me while I got adjusted. She also helped my family move into a new apartment and gave us referrals for furniture, clothing and food. Even after my case was closed, she was there if I had a problem or question.

Now, through a program called Exceptional Parents Unlimited, a child development expert comes and works with my children and me once a week. She brings games for the kids to play or comes up with projects for us to do together, like baking or making our own Christmas ornaments. It helps to strengthen the bond between my children and me.

Francisco and I are also closer than ever. We are able to communicate without fighting. I feel that we can make it through everything and our love will not fade.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What did Sandra's children need from her that she was not able to give them while she was using? What could she do for them?
- What did her older children need from her during visits?
- What did Sandra's newborn need from her?
- What helped Sandra recognize and respond to her children's needs?
- Sandra was especially surprised to learn that children need attention in order to thrive. Did you learn anything new or surprising from her journey?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's turn to the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

---

## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals

---

## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

---

**My Reflections: Closer Than Ever** by Sandra Evans

1. While you were using drugs or drinking, what needs were you able to meet and not meet for your children?

2. Children of different ages and stages of development need different things. What ages are your children now and what are the developmental tasks that they're learning right now? (For instance, learning to talk, learning to recognize letters, etc. You can look at the Ages + Stages chart on page XX)

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Needs:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Needs:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Needs:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Closer Than Ever

**GOAL:** Write down a few of your children's emotional or developmental needs that you want to focus on in the coming weeks. If you are able to spend time with your children this week, take some time to notice what they seem to need and want from you.

**REFLECTION:** If you were able to spend time with your children this week, what did you notice that your children needed from you?

What's something you did to respond to your children's needs that you feel proud of?

OVER —————→

# Ages and Stages

*Developmental milestones help you know how your child is doing.*

## 3 Months

**At three months of age, most babies:**

- turn their heads toward bright colors and lights
- move both eyes in the same direction together
- recognize bottle or breast
- respond to their mother's voice
- make cooing sounds
- bring their hands together
- wiggle and kick with arms and legs
- lift head when on stomach
- become quiet in response to sound, especially speech
- smile

## 6 Months

**At six months of age, most babies:**

- follow moving objects with their eyes
- turn toward the source of normal sound
- reach for objects and pick them up
- switch toys from one hand to the other
- play with their toes
- help hold the bottle during feeding
- recognize familiar faces
- imitate speech sounds
- respond to soft sounds, especially talking
- roll over

## 12 Months

**At 12 months of age, most babies:**

- get to a sitting position
- pull to a standing position
- stand briefly without support
- crawl
- imitate adults using a cup or telephone
- play peek-a-boo and patty cake
- wave bye-bye
- put objects in a container
- say at least one word
- make “ma-ma” or “da-da” sounds

## 1½ Years

**At 1½ years of age, most children:**

- like to push and pull objects
- say at least 6 words
- follow simple directions (“Bring the ball”)
- pull off shoes, socks and mittens
- can point to a picture that you name in a book
- feed themselves
- make marks on a paper with crayons
- walk without help
- walk backwards
- point, make sounds or try to use words to ask for things
- say “no,” shake their head or push away things they don't want

## 2 Years

**At two years of age, most children:**

- use two-to-three word sentences
- say about 50 words
- recognize familiar pictures
- kick a ball forward
- feed themselves with a spoon
- demand a lot of your attention
- turn 2-3 pages at a time
- like to imitate their parent
- identify hair, eyes, ears and nose by pointing
- build a tower of four blocks
- show affection

## 3 Years

**At three years of age, most children:**

- throw a ball overhand
- ride a tricycle
- put on their shoes
- open the door
- turn one page at a time
- play with other children for a few minutes
- repeat common rhymes
- use three-to-five-word sentences
- name at least one color correctly



## It's Normal to Be Nervous

*How to handle the stress of drug-free parenting.*

*Kim Sumner-Mayer, a project manager at the Coalition on Addiction in the Family, has helped treatment providers, courts and individual parents handle reunification and relapse. Here she explains how you can prepare to get your children home:*

Parents often relapse right before kids come home or right after because they fear they'll fail as parents. It's a devastating experience. But it can be prevented by looking at the ambivalence—or mixed feelings—that parents feel about becoming parents again, and by preparing parents better to take that step.

### ***It's Normal to Be Nervous***

All parents worry about whether they can do a good job, and many are not always sure they want to parent. If you're a parent who's messed up in the past, you might feel happy, ambitious, and excited about your kids coming home, but also worried, resentful of some of the demands of parenting, and unsure if you can handle everything while staying sober. Some parents who got pregnant while using

may also question whether they really wanted to be a parent.

Close to 100 percent of families who are reunifying after drug treatment have these feelings. From research and work with families, we know that mixed feelings usually come from three sources. Parents often think:

- 1) "I'm not sure I have a strong enough bond with my children. We've been separated, and I wasn't taking full care of them while I was addicted."
- 2) "I'm not sure I have the skills to parent my children."
- 3) "I'm afraid that the stress of parenting full-time will lead me to relapse."

### ***Practice and Gain Confidence***

Usually, there's very little opportunity for parents to surface those feelings, acknowledge them and work through them. That's because parents feel a lot of shame about those feelings, and they fear that a caseworker will take mixed feelings as a sign that a parent's rights

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page*

should be terminated. But just because you have mixed feelings doesn't mean you're not motivated. (Besides, staying in your children's lives doesn't always mean having them home 24/7.)

Talk with a treatment counselor or caseworker about your fears and make a plan for facing them before reunifying with your children. For instance, if you feel you don't have a strong bond, you should get help using your visits to establish and strengthen your bond. You can learn ways to get closer to each other.

If it's a skills issue—maybe you're not sure you can cook dinner for three kids, help them all with homework and get them all in bed at night. In that case, visits should be designed to allow you to practice skills like cooking and helping kids with schoolwork. Then you'll gain confidence.

If you're fearing relapse, you might want to join aftercare groups or support groups for parents in recovery who are reunifying. There are solutions. There are ways of getting at what's behind your fears and overcoming them.



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Eat, Play, Love** by Sylvia Perez

Visits helped me become a good mother.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

#### Connecting through play

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#### INTRODUCTION

Parents can rebuild strong connections with young children through play. Playing is how children learn and grow. Playing helps children learn how to get along with others and negotiate. It improves their ability to use words (instead of negative behavior) to express themselves. Playing together, you and your child can create a special shared world.

Your bond will grow as you and your child have a lot of positive back-and-forth. Games like peek-a-boo or patty cake might engage a baby. Children enjoy songs, simple games like “Mother May I?” or “Red-Light, Green Light,” playing pretend, or playing with blocks, cars, puppets, balls, jump ropes, or balloons. Children also might enjoy puzzles or board games, singing and dancing, or talking with you about friends and school.

Following a basic routine during visits or family time will help your children feel safe and secure. You might begin every visit with a snack, or end by reading or singing songs. You might say goodbye by talking about what you'll do together next time.

---

#### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

# Eat, Play, Love

*Visits helped me become a good mother.*

By Sylvia Perez

When my daughter, Lydia, was a year and a half, she was removed from home because my husband and I were using drugs. At our first visit, Hector and I were very anxious. I was scared that Little Mama would forget me, or would feel that I did not want her anymore.

Waiting in the hallway for our baby, we saw a Spanish man holding a little girl. The girl looked like my baby but she had bangs. Could that be her? My husband, Hector, said, "It is her" and he grabbed her from the guy's arms, saying, "Mama." She grabbed him back and put her little head on his shoulders.

When I saw my daughter's haircut, I was so upset. She did not look like my daughter. I confronted the worker and she told me that the foster parents could not see her eyes. I told her, "They should have put her hair up!"

"I'm sorry," the worker said. "It will grow back."

## ***Sad and Confused***

During the visit, Little Mama would not let

go of us and was quiet. Her eyes gave a blank stare, moving ever so slowly. We tried to play toys with her but she just wanted comfort. She wrapped her body around me and rested her head on my shoulder. Her father and I rubbed her back and told her that we loved her very much and would fight to get her home.

At the end of the visit, it was hard to say goodbye. Little Mama was crying so much. Her face was full of agony. She screamed, "Mommy! Daddy!" I can still remember her arms stretching out to us.

When I looked into her eyes, I felt despair and guilt. I cried and hugged and kissed Little Mama and told her we would see her again.

## ***A Mom, But Not a Good One***

Before my daughter was removed, I had a very bad addiction for almost 20 years. At times, I barely slept or ate. I wandered the streets looking for my next hit. I had six children before Lydia and didn't raise any of them. Two of my sons ended up in foster care and were adopted

by their foster mom, Tamera, who I asked to take Lydia when she went into foster care.

When I got pregnant with Lydia, I was determined to raise her. I stayed clean for six months. But I relapsed, even though I loved my daughter with all my heart.

While I was using, I tried to take care of Lydia. I put her to sleep by laying her on my stomach and rubbing her back until she fell asleep. I held her and comforted her when she cried. Little Mama liked to be tickled on her tummy and she liked rolling a ball back and forth. When she was old enough, I would take her to the park and push her on the swing and help her climb the jungle gym.

The best thing I remember during that time was Lydia's first birthday. I planned and saved money. I made tuna salad, baked macaroni and cheese, *pernil*, chicken and green salad. We had a big cake with Baby Minnie. I had *capias* made for each guest. We taped the trees with streamers and I even had her father hang a piñata stuffed with candy. All of my friends came and Tamera and her husband came with my two sons. That was the best thing—spending the day with my two sons and my baby.

Lydia was laughing and playing. I don't think she understood what was going on, but she was very curious about her toys and ate a lot of cake. She even took her first steps that day.

Sometimes I was a good mom to Lydia but not always. Other times I would sell her milk and food stamps for money, and I would leave her in her crib while I got high. I hated when my high came down and I had to face that I'd messed up as a mother. That was the worst. I would lay on the floor with my daughter watching TV and I

would cry. My guilt was tremendous. I always prayed to God to forgive me.

### **Getting Ready**

After Lydia went into foster care, we had visits at an agency in the Bronx for two years. The visit room had a small red couch and some little chairs. There was a toy room but the lady in charge was rarely there. So basically, it looked like an office: no toys and very gloomy green paint on the walls.

A few days before each visit, I would pack a bag of toys and coloring books and reading books. I tried to be ready for any activity. Hector and I would go shopping to buy Little Mama a new outfit and things for her hair.

Little Mama would come wearing clothes that were too small, and her hair was never really done properly. So when Mama first came in to visits, I would hug her and then take her to the bathroom to change her clothes and do her hair.

### **Eating and Playing**

It made me feel better that I was still able to take care of my daughter. Even when I was using crack, I would get Lydia clothes from the church and wash them by hand so she would look like a clean little girl. With her hair done, she looked like my little angel again. I also loved to be in the bathroom with my daughter, away from everybody else. It was my time to comfort Lydia and let her know that I loved her.

Then Little Mama would usually eat a Happy Meal that Hector would bring for her, and for the rest of the visit, she and her father and I would play. Her favorite thing to do was color. She also liked us to bring kitchen things, like plates and spoons and forks. We would pretend we were cooking. Every visit, I brought a camera

and took pictures to look at during my week.

When it was time to say goodbye, I tried not to cry because I did not want Lydia to see me hysterical. I would tell her, “I love you and I’ll see you next week.” Hector would ask, “What do you want us to bring to the next visit?” As she got older, she could tell us if she wanted any candy or a toy. Then we would say goodbye with a hug and a kiss.

### ***Smothering Her With Love***

When the judge gave my family unsupervised visits, it was such a weight off to leave the agency. I was able to really hold my daughter and smother her with all of my love. She would call out, “Mommy!” and give me hugs and kisses. The more time I had with Lydia, the more connection I felt to her.

We would pick her up at 10 a.m. and bring her back by 4 p.m. We always made sure we were there early to pick her up and on time to drop her off. We would take her out to lunch, to the pool, the park and the playground, and to see all of our friends.

I loved taking her to the swimming pool. I bought her a little sky blue one-piece bathing suit. I would take her in the baby pool and watch her try to swim in the water. Now that I was sober, I was able to laugh and play in the water with her without any shame. My daughter’s father would meet us at the pool and we would go for lunch. These were moments that I did not want to let go of.

### ***A Good Mother***

Being out with Lydia sober was so much better. My thoughts were clear and I was able to take time to enjoy her laughter and her ideas.

I had never been sure that I could be a good mom. I was not raised by my mother; I was raised by the system. Not having a mom or dad for guidance when I became a mother was very hard. During moments when I felt I needed advice, I felt empty. Feeling empty and alone had fed my addiction.

In parenting classes I learned that I could become a real parent to my daughter and have family activities with her and my husband. I learned about unconditional love and how to show Little Mama my love.

During visits, I was able to do motherly things with Lydia, like saying “I love you” and playing with her. I learned that I could be a good mother. I also found out that I am a responsible person. I was proud that I was able to plan outings with Lydia and make sure that I had packed what she needed, like milk, juice, diapers and a change of clothes.

### ***The Little Things***

The best parts of our visits were the little things: being able to hear her say “Mommy” and feeling her hand in mine. Away from the agency, I felt safe with her, like no one could take Lydia from me.

Simple things felt good to me, like eating at a Chinese restaurant together, or asking Lydia about her brothers and Tamera and how things were in her foster home. The best was taking Lydia to church with me. I was able to put her in a nice dress and shoes and finally introduce her to people there. That was something I had wanted for a long time.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What did Sylvia think her daughter needed from her during visits?
- What did Sylvia and Hector do to plan positive visits?
- What routine did Sylvia, Hector and Lydia follow during visits?
- How do you think their activities helped them bond?
- How did Sylvia end visits and why did she say goodbye that way?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**My Reflections: Eat, Play, Love** by Sylvia Perez

1. What activities do you and your children enjoy doing together? What might you enjoy?

2. What can you do to connect more with your children in the time you have together?

3. What is a basic routine that you could follow?

4. How do you—or how could you—say goodbye in a positive way?



**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Eat, Play, Love

**GOAL:** Look over your children's needs that you identified last week. What activities can you do this week to help you connect with your children? What's a routine that could make family times more positive?

**REFLECTION:** What planning did you do before you spent time with your children?

Did you follow the routine and do the activities you planned? How did it go?



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Baby Steps** by Sylvia Perez

I had to get to know my daughter again when she came home.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

**Using positive discipline**

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#### INTRODUCTION

As a sober parent, you can enjoy all the little moments with your children—brushing their hair, reading their favorite stories, kissing them good-night. Your children will feel so happy to share their lives with you. But all children misbehave, and if you've been separated from your children, they might act out because they are angry at you or test to see whether you will be able to stay sober.

When children act out, it's easy to get scared that you aren't up to the challenge or get angry that your kids are making your life so hard. Under stress, it's easy to slip back to yelling, screaming, or hitting. Or, out of guilt or fear of losing what's good between you and your children, you might not set limits at all, letting your children run wild.

Your children need you to show them that they can rely on you to keep them safe, physically and emotionally. Positive discipline is about finding calm and caring ways to set limits for your children. Let's read Sylvia's story about setting limits with her daughter.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

## Baby Steps

*I had to get to know my daughter again when she came home.*

By Sylvia Perez

When my daughter, Lydia, 5, came home after two and a half years in foster care, it was so different from having her home only on the weekends. The best part was that we didn't have to rush spending time together, or deal with having to say goodbye on Sundays. She always used to say, "Mom, I don't want to go the other house. When am I going to come home forever?" It felt good not to have to tell her, "When the judge says it's time."

But for the first couple weeks she was giving me a really hard time. She didn't want to brush her teeth or wash her hair. She totally refused to pick up her toys. I had to yell at her to do these little things, or tell her, "Go to your room." This little angel had a bad side I'd never seen.

### **'Does She Hate Me?'**

One day she got mad at me because I was yelling at her to do her chores. She started throwing toys at me. I didn't want to spank her, so I told my husband, Hector, to come and get her. His voice is so harsh and deep that he scared her into her room.

Then she started slamming her bedroom door. I was so pissed off that this little girl would challenge me that way. All I wanted to do was grab her by the arm and start spanking her. But I fear that if I discipline Little Mama by spanking her I will truly hurt her, and I really don't want to hurt her and make her scared of me. Even when I yell at her angrily she starts crying.

To keep myself from hurting her, I sat on the couch in my living room and just cried. I really cried hard, thinking, "All I wanted her to do was pick up her toys," and, "Does she really hate me so much to throw her toys at me? I worked so hard for her."

My husband went to her room and told her, "You see, Lydia. You made your mom cry. You have to respect your mom."

I took a deep breath and waited for her response. Our house was silent for that moment. Then I heard her little feet coming into the living room. She came in silently, like she was scared of me, and I felt afraid of myself, that I had fright-

ened her so much just with my words.

### ***‘Mommy? Mommy?’***

Little Mama has long black hair and big, dark eyes. She looked up at me and said, in her tiny, squeaky little voice, “Mommy? Mommy?”

Her shoulders were down and her tummy was sunk as she approached, disguised as a little angel. I asked her, “Lydia, do you not understand why I’m upset?”

Then she started crying and hugging me. “Mommy, I need help picking up my toys,” she said. At that moment, I stopped feeling so angry and just wanted to understand her and find out why she got out of control like that.

I told her, “You need to stop slamming the door, and never, ever throw things at me again.”

### ***The Chore Chart***

She’s never thrown anything since then. But our arguments scared me. I love her so much. I don’t want these little things to turn into a fight.

We’ve been going to family therapy every week since she came home. So I discussed it with the therapist. He told us to make it little steps with her, and that all of us—me, Hector and Little Mama—are going through changes. He said it will take time for Lydia to adjust to our home and our different rules and schedules.

After that, I remembered something I learned in parenting class. The teacher said to make a chart of household chores. I decided to make one together with Lydia, and to give her a small allowance for each chore.

### ***Counting to 10***

We got some papers and markers to start. I put on one paper how much she could earn for each thing, like she gets 5 cents for feeding our pets, 10 cents to brush her teeth, 7 cents to wash her hair, and 10 cents to go to bed at 8:30 p.m. She put on the chart to dress herself for school and in her pajamas.

The chart is actually working. Getting her to do her chores is a lot easier now and she puts the money in her piggy bank.

But at times, her attitude with me still really makes me angry. If I tell her, for example, “Stop sitting on the arm of the couch!” she looks at me and rolls her eyes and says, “Mom, I’m just sitting.”

It gets tiring repeating myself. So now I’ve learned to take a deep breath and start counting to 10. I only end up at number 5 or 6. I honestly don’t know how I would handle it if I got to 10.

### ***Enjoying the Little Things***

The nicest part of our day is when I get Little Mama ready for school every day, especially doing her hair: putting the gel in, pulling it into ponytails and then braiding them.

It feels good to do her hair, because when I was on crack, I honestly didn’t care about her hygiene or how she looked. I wasn’t loving her like a real mother should. I never took her out—not to the park, or shopping. I spent my time worrying about who was going to watch her while I went outside to get money for crack.

Being a sober mom is 100 percent better. I make sure she eats well and that I have food in the house, and that she takes baths and washes her hair. I take her to the park. We play together—

hide and seek and follow the leader, and then we get an icee and sit in the grass watching soccer or baseball games.

I waited four years to be able to be a full-time mom, to love her and take care of her every day. Spending time with her, I feel proud of myself for going through drug treatment, therapy and parenting classes so I could bring her back home.

### ***Not an Angel, But a Good Kid***

My parenting has gotten a lot better in the months since Lydia first came home. We eat dinner every night now, sitting together at the table to discuss our plans for the next day. We bake cakes together, make arts and crafts projects and talk about little things she's thinking about.

I love her personality. She's very giving and caring. When she acted up, I had to realize that she's not a perfect angel, but she is a good kid.

We still have difficult moments, but I'm getting better at staying calm. I'm grateful to have my husband. Even though I take care of Lydia most of the time, he and I discuss how to handle situations with her.

Lydia's bedtime is the best time of the day for me. At about 8:30 p.m., she and I go to her room and read three fairy tales: Little Red Riding Hood, The Ugly Duckling and Cinderella. We hug and kiss and she says her prayers.

After she lies down, she always calls to her daddy for a cold cup of water. We are all together as a family when we put her to bed. When she sleeps she looks like an angel, protected by God.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- When Lydia acts up, how does Sylvia feel?
- What stops her from responding with hitting and yelling?
- What does Sylvia come to understand about her daughter's behavior?
- What parenting techniques work for Sylvia and Lydia?
- What challenges does Sylvia continue to face with her daughter?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: Baby Steps** by Sylvia Perez

1. What expectations do you have for your children's behavior? What rules have you set with your children when they are with you?

2. How can you help your children understand the rules?

3. What strategies can you use to enforce the rules without resorting to hitting and yelling?

4. How do you give your children positive feedback?

OVER 

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Baby Steps

**GOAL:** What is a discipline challenge that you find confusing or overwhelming? What is one step you could take this week to help you find positive ways of handling this challenge?

**REFLECTION:** What is something new that you learned this week that could help you set limits with your children in the future? If you tried your new idea with your children, how did it go?

What's something you did this week that you feel proud of achieving?





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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Breaking a Painful Pattern** by Milagros Sanchez  
My children won't grow up silenced and afraid.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT: Changing family communication

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#### INTRODUCTION

One key to a strong family is positive communication. If people in the family are screaming at each other, and children don't feel like they're being heard, they can become depressed or act out. Children do best when parents and children listen to one another. Parents often underestimate what children can understand and what children need to know to feel safe and in control of their lives. Explaining basic things—like why you are in treatment and when your child can expect to see you—will help even very young children feel comfortable and behave well.

When you spend time with your children, make sure they understand the rules you have for their behavior and the consequences of breaking your rules. You may need help setting rules and consequences that will work for your children. You also may need help staying calm in tough moments. If you were raised with yelling and physical abuse, it can be very difficult to communicate with your own children in a respectful way. But with hard work and determination, you can break negative family patterns. Let's read Milagros' story about raising her children in a new way.

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#### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

# Breaking a Painful Pattern

*My children won't grow up silenced and afraid.*

By Milagros Sanchez

On Aug. 4, 1997 I got my sons back after they'd been in foster care and I'd been out on the streets for many years. I felt that God had given me a second chance in life to be the best mom I could be.

I was determined to be different toward my sons than my mother had been toward me. My mother and I had a bad relationship when I was a child. She resorted to violence whenever she was upset with me, and she didn't believe me when I came to her and told her I was being sexually abused. When I was a teenager, she put me in a group home, where I was sexually abused again.

For years she raised my sons when I turned to drugs to escape my pain. Then, after she died, they went into care. Finally, I went to rehab and they came home. Luckily, my mother and I were able to talk before she died, when I was in rehab. We shared more about our lives, and we made it a point to forgive one another.

When I learned about my mother's upbringing,

I realized that my family had a pattern of not speaking about your feelings and of physically abusing your children. I told myself, "I will make it my business to change that pattern when I get my life together." It wasn't easy, but I did.

## **Honest Answers**

In the months before they returned home I built a bond with my boys. We spent every other weekend together and I always had something planned for us to do as a family. We went out to the movies, the beach, or the pool, and to museums and the library. Sometimes we would just stay home and play family games. I would also make them their favorite foods.

Every Friday we had a family conference. That was a chance for them to let out their feelings about what they went through. They were allowed to ask me any questions they wanted about my addiction and the time when I was not with them. Answering their questions, I would get very emotional, but it helped us get closer. It was a step toward breaking the silence and anger that had dominated my family's relation-

ships for too long.

My son JonPaul asked me why I left him with grandma for such a long time. He said, “Didn’t you love us? Was it something we did?” It was very hard for me to answer those questions. I prayed that they would forgive me for my honest answers.

I told my sons, “I had a drug problem, which took over my life and my mind. Even though I thought about you and loved you, the drugs were more important to me at the time. That was what the drugs were telling me. I left you with Grandma because I didn’t want to drag you into my world of drugs and insanity, too. But you were always in my heart and in my thoughts.”

I continued, “I was dealing with my own demons from my childhood. You did not have anything to do with that. And in no way did you do anything wrong. I was the one that messed up. But what’s important is that I’m here now and I love you guys to infinity and beyond.”

### ***A Terrifying Moment***

It wasn’t always easy to be a good mom. One afternoon I came home from work feeling very tired and found a message on my answering machine from JonPaul’s teacher. She said JonPaul, who was 12, was not showing up to school. Plus, he had never turned in the \$75 I gave him for his cap and gown.

I asked JonPaul, “What was that all about?” He was giving me all kinds of excuses, but when he said, “I don’t care and I can do what I want,” I just I totally lost it and started hitting on him. Almost without realizing what I was doing, I even grabbed him by his throat and started choking him.

He said, with tears in his eyes, “Mami, you’re choking me.” At that moment I saw myself in JonPaul and my mother in me. When I realized I was acting out the role of my mother, that scared the hell out of me. I panicked, let go and ran to the hallway where I sat on the steps and called my sister, sobbing.

When I calmed down, I hugged him and apologized and promised him that it would never happen again. After that, I recommitted myself to breaking my family’s pattern. I made a conscious decision that I would talk to my boys no matter what they do that upsets me, instead of treating them how my mother treated me.

### ***Listening to My Son***

Since then, I haven’t reacted so crazily to my children. I’ve realized that my son is still learning how to be a son and I am learning how to be a mother. Things got better one day at a time.

Another time I was very upset with him was when the teacher informed me that JonPaul had not turned in any homework for a whole week and disrespected her in front of the other students.

I felt the heat rising in my head. But by the time JonPaul got home, I had calmed down and thought out a strategy of how to approach him in a positive way. We talked and I really listened to what he had to say.

### ***Today I’m Blessed***

Today I have a good relationship with my boys. I communicate with them, something my mother and father never did with me. We share our thoughts and feelings, whether good or bad. We go out together and, every other weekend, we have family game night. We all sit around the table and play games like Parcheesi, Sorry, Cha-

rades and Operation.

At times, things get hectic, but we pull through. Like every teen and mom, we struggle together to understand one another. Together, we made a choice to break our family's pattern of violence and silence.

When I look back on what I've been through and what I put my kids through, I often start crying. Then I look at where I am today and realize I'm blessed. Not everyone gets a second chance.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- How did parents in Milagros' family usually communicate with their children?
- How did that pattern affect Milagros and her sons?
- What helped Milagros understand the problems with that family pattern?
- What steps does Milagros take to change the pattern and open up communication with her sons?
- At times, Milagros' first reaction is still to explode at her children. What helps her communicate calmly instead?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: Breaking a Painful Pattern** by Milagros Sanchez

1. Write down two things that are positive about the way you parent. Write down one thing you would like to change.

2. How are your parenting practices similar to how you were raised? How are they different?

3. What support might help you make the change you wrote down in question one?

4. What do you think will be hardest for you about changing as a parent?

OVER —————→

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Breaking a Painful Pattern

**GOAL:** Who is one person you might talk to this week about a change you would like to make in how you treat your children? What help do you think they might give you?

**REFLECTION:** Who did you reach out to this week? How did it go?

What's something you did during your week that you feel proud of?



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**Bonded for Life** by Robin Wiley

My son and I didn't develop a bond until years after he came home.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

#### Building a bond

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#### INTRODUCTION

Many of us consider the parent-child bond to be natural and unbreakable, but when parents have been physically apart from their children for long periods, or have been emotionally disconnected from their children because of their addiction, that bond may not develop or may become shaky. This is scary and sad for parents and children.

When a bond isn't strong, parents and children may crave a connection but also fear rejection. They can develop invisible patterns of behavior keep them from feeling close to one another. Children who, deep down, feel afraid of losing a parent again may push the parent away by acting naughty, defiant, uncommunicative, or hostile. Parents who feel guilty or rejected by their child may be quicker to punish the child or separate themselves from their child. Tensions can escalate quickly.

It's not easy for parents and children to understand how their behavior affects each other and begin to change patterns of distance and distrust. But with help, parents and children can build a strong bond. Let's read Robin's story about how communication and honesty helped her connect with her son.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?



# Bonded for Life

*My son and I didn't develop a bond until years after he came home.*

By Robin Wiley

Twelve years ago, when my son Caiseem was 5, he came home from foster care, where he had been since birth. Caiseem is the youngest of my four children. I've always felt a strong connection with each one of my children, but with Caiseem, something was missing.

## ***Pieces Missing***

While he was in care, I would visit Caiseem at the agency, and during those visits I could feel that something wasn't right. I felt that there was a wall between my baby and me. But I would put that feeling to the side and just try to be happy to see my baby.

Caiseem was a big old bundle of joy, especially when his father would pick him up. Then he would smile from ear to ear. But from the beginning, I didn't feel like I got a positive response from him when I would pick him up. Instead, I felt like he was looking around for his father.

## ***Separated at Birth***

I wondered if Caiseem understood somehow that, when I was pregnant with him, I didn't want

him. During my pregnancy, I hoped God would take him away because I didn't want to bring him into this world while I was using crack and homeless.

I asked God to forgive me for my negative thoughts, but I feared that Caiseem always felt unloved and unwanted, no matter how I tried to love him.

Looking back, I think I felt rejected by my son because I felt so guilty, and that there was a wall between us because he went into foster care right from the hospital, before we had time to connect.

## ***How Can We Bond?***

In the years after he came home, it always felt like Caiseem and I were not connecting. I constantly wondered what I could do to create a bond with my son. I knew I needed to reach him, because he was going through many issues at school and at home.

Caiseem would not talk much. He would stay

out past curfew. He would steal. When questioned, he would lie. He would even steal from his brother and lie about it, or steal in school. I would make him give his allowance to pay for what he stole, but discipline didn't solve the problem.

Finally, when Caiseem was 12, I thought, "He needs counseling." Then I corrected myself: "No, we need counseling." We needed someone to help us understand what the problem was.

I had been to counseling myself, not long after my children came home, because I was really stressed about taking care of my children and needed someone to talk to. My counselor helped me a lot. With her, I realized that counseling is mostly about listening to yourself and having someone whose responses can help you think from a new perspective. That counselor helped me hear myself.

### **'We Need Counseling'**

This time I went with Caiseem. We were introduced to a really smart and understanding therapist at the Northside Center for Child Development in New York City. At first I wasn't sure she could help us because she was younger than me and didn't have children, but she really helped to bring us together.

Caiseem and I were very nervous at our first session. But after Ms. Gamble introduced herself, we started to relax. She had such a soft and comforting voice—you know, the kind that makes you feel like she cares.

Ms. Gamble told us that we would talk to her together. Other times, we would take turns talking with her separately, and then we would talk together about some of what we'd discussed.

### **Homework and Games**

Ms. Gamble gave us homework and games to help us open up and try new ways of relating.

During one of our sessions, Caiseem seemed embarrassed when I mentioned his lying and stealing. I felt the same way when he said, "Mom's always yelling about stuff." I knew I yelled but I didn't understand the way it sounded to him.

Ms. Gamble gave us an assignment to do at home. Caiseem was to ask for what he wanted instead of stealing, and I was to congratulate Caiseem on his good work.

As for me, I was to talk instead of yelling, and when I did yell, Caiseem was to say, "Mom, do you know you're yelling?" Then I should stop and count slowly from 10 backwards to one.

Sometimes I would apologize. Other times I found myself saying, "Yeah, I know I'm yelling, and that's because I have to keep repeating myself." We discussed this in the next session.

### **Hearing Ourselves**

Other times we played a game where I would be Caiseem and he would be me.

Playing Caiseem, I would say things like, "Ma, can I go outside?"

"Go outside for what?" he'd say loudly. I began to think, "Every time I ask for something, he's yelling." I really started feeling sad.

Other times, Caiseem, acting as me, would ask me if I took something. Caiseem has this puppy dog look he gives where he looks real cute. I'd give him that sad look and I wouldn't say anything.

“Mommy, why you not answering me?” he’d ask, getting frustrated.

“Cause I’m being you, and that’s what you do!” I said.

Caiseem was always afraid to ask for what he wanted, because I might say no. But a little while after that, he did stop stealing.

### ***‘Ma! Ma!’***

Those experiences really helped Caiseem and me understand each other’s perspectives and change our behaviors. But most of all, going to therapy together brought us closer.

I’ve noticed a big change in my son. Before he wouldn’t talk to me, but now he is eager to share and connect.

Some days after school, Caiseem will rush into my bedroom all excited and say, “Ma, you know what happened today? At school?”

### ***Happy and Connected***

I remember one time when I did not feel like talking with him. I was thinking, “Oh, no, Caiseem, I’m tired.”

I said to him, “Not now, I’m watching my show.”

Then he grabbed the remote and pressed pause, laid on the bed with his head on my shoulder, and told me about his incident at school, like a little boy.

I noticed that his hair was really fresh smelling, like the apple shampoo he uses, and as I listened and talked with him, I felt so happy and connected to my son. I can actually say we have bonded.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- How does Robin's guilt contribute to her feeling that her son is rejecting toward her?
- What does Robin learn by stepping into her son's shoes?
- What does she learn when her son plays the role of mom?
- What small steps do they each take in order to change the pattern of distance and distrust between them?
- How does this help them build trust?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.



**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – Bonded for Life

**GOAL:** What is one small change you could make in your behavior or in how you think about your child that might help you and your children feel closer?

**REFLECTION:** What small change in your behavior or thinking did you make this week?

Changing even a small part of your behavior is difficult. Reflect on a positive change that happened this week.



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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**'What Can I Do?'** by Latonya Baskerville

My children needed new parenting techniques.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

#### Understanding teens' needs

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#### INTRODUCTION

For parents in recovery, parenting teens can be especially challenging. Your child may have gotten used to a lot of freedom while you were using and may resent the limits you want to set now that you are sober. Your teen may act recklessly or experiment with drinking or drugs. This can fill you with fear. And you may be angry and disappointed that your teen wants independence just when you are feeling ready to be Mommy or Daddy again.

You may find yourself asking, "How can I show my child that I am the parent without screaming or hitting? How can I keep my child from making all of the mistakes I made?" There are no magic solutions, and each child is different. But all teens need your patience, open-mindedness, empathy, nurturing, respect, kindness and discipline. By listening to your children, coming to understand their perspectives, helping them understand their needs, and supporting them in making decisions, you can develop more open, trusting relationships. Let's read Latonya's story about listening to her teens.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

## ‘What Can I Do?’

*My children needed me to try new ways to parent.*

By Latonya Baskerville

When my children first came home from foster care, life was different for all of us. I was clean and sober, thrown into a new apartment with three little strangers. My children were 10 years, 5 years and 2 weeks old when they were removed and 12, 7 and 18 months when they were returned.

Boy did my children let me know they were mad that they had been in foster care. My son was like, “F-you” about everything. They’d say to me, “You a crackhead.” I had to stay calm. My attitude was: “Ok, I sold your video game and smoked crack with the money. We established that. It’s done. What else you got?”

When my children saw that the guilt trips they tried to run on me were not working, and that I was going to continue on with my sobriety life, they came back to me and got on board. But for real, they were going crazy for two or three years. Yes, my kids and I went through it. I just kept telling them, “I’m not giving up on you.”

### **Old-School Techniques**

I was very confused about how to parent my children at first. The fact is, during my children’s

early years I used the parenting style I learned from family members. You know the model: beat your children if they disobey you, beat them if they talk back, beat them if they get in trouble, steal, have sex at a young age, act disrespectful. Beat them!

Don’t get me wrong, some of the old school techniques are good and important. For example: have manners, be polite, respect your elders—that’s a must. My children and grandchildren abide by these rules. But techniques like, “Children should be seen and not heard” and beating or controlling your children had to go.

I wonder where this method originated. My theory is that, for my community, it began with slavery. Parents probably figured that if they beat their own children, their masters wouldn’t, and this would save the children’s lives. The method was meant to protect children.

But beating your child doesn’t really work. It creates silent and enraged children. These children grow up to be abusive adults, rigid and insensitive to their own children’s feelings and needs.



### ***I Needed to Change***

Once I took parenting classes, I realized that the model I mimicked was not legal. If I wanted to keep my children out of foster care, I needed to change my style.

But when my teenage son started running wild, I didn't know how to respond. My son was having many problems at school, at home and in our neighborhood. He started getting high and gang banging. I thought I was going to bury my son before he was 18 years old.

I was so afraid of disciplining him the old way, but all I knew how to do was yell at him. We were arguing and cursing all the time. Our relationship was crazy.

### ***'What Can I Do?'***

Then came a knock on the door: A detective from the local precinct came at 2 a.m., holding a manila folder as thick as a cinder block. The detective had evidence that my son had been committing robberies dating back two years. My son and I sat at the kitchen table with this detective. That was the first time I saw my son smoke a cigarette. He was tight.

I looked in his face and asked him, "Did you do these robberies?"

He said, "Yes, Mommy."

"Well, then you must take ownership," I told him. We wrote a full confession and the judge sentenced him to 15 months in a group home. I started thinking, "Really, what can I do to parent this kid?" I thought back on the parenting and anger management classes I took when my kids were in care. I decided to create a parenting style for my son that I called, "Firm as a father, soft like a mother."

### ***Keeping My Distance***

When he got locked up, I let him do his time. I didn't run up to every visit or send packages and money. I didn't write letters or accept phone calls all the time. I was not in court for every court date. I didn't scream and beg and cry. I let him do hard time for 15 months, firm like a father.

I felt that running to his aid would enable him—it would give him extra attention for doing negative things—and I believed that would only encourage him to commit crimes again. If he got locked up, I'd come running.

When my son came home, he hugged me and kissed me. He said he had learned his lesson. I was glad I didn't cater to his nonsense and reckless choices. But once he was home, I began listening to him more, soft like a mother. I encouraged my son and held him to the standards he set for himself.

Soon my son dropped his gang activities, went back to school and got his GED. At 20, he is now a responsible father and is exploring starting his own business.

### ***Trying Straight Talk***

I faced similar challenges when my daughter was around 14 years old. My daughter was suddenly a whole new child. She began hanging with sexually experienced girls and started asking a lot of questions about boys.

I did my best to detour her from sex, but my best was not good enough. Soon I found out that my daughter was having sex with a 17-year-old boy. I was shocked, but I knew that if I overreacted, she would not open up to me, so I tried to play it cool.

We sat down in the living room and I asked her, “Why are you dealing with older boys and having sex right now? It seems like you’re too young.” I explained that I was not trying to take away the wonderful experience of sex, but that it is a sacred act for two people who love each other, and that I worried that the sex she was having could come with painful experiences, like unwanted pregnancy and STDs.

We didn’t flip out on each other, but straight talk did not help my daughter.

### ***Learning to Listen***

She started cutting school and running away from home. It was so serious that I went to the child welfare system for help before they came to me, charging me for educational neglect because she was truant. The caseworker told me to put her in therapy and I reconnected her to our former foster care agency for therapy. But she went to three sessions and refused to go back.

Once again, I had to dig into my bag of parenting skills and find a way to reach her. I realized that my daughter didn’t need tough love, she needed nurturing, compassion, connection.

I started having girl talk with my daughter. I didn’t do much talking; I just listened openly. We even invited her runaway partners over to our house to have real heart-to-hearts. The other parents thanked me and tried the same thing.

My daughter is doing much better now. She stayed with my grandmother for two years and recently moved home again. She went back to school and her GPA went from a 40 to an 87. She applied to a college program in her high school and was accepted. She also got a job and is now working at our local supermarket. My

daughter is doing well for herself.

### ***No Child Is Alike***

As teenagers, my children needed two different parenting styles. My son needed me to let him experience the consequences of his own mistakes. My daughter needed me to come closer. Both needed me to listen. My youngest child is 10 years old. I can’t wait to see what style will help him thrive as he grows older. I’ve realized that no child is alike and no parenting model is right for all children.

I try to use patience, open-mindedness, understanding, empathy, nurturing, respect, kindness, honesty, courage, security and discipline. To be honest, these skills came from the many classes I completed while my children were in foster care. I’m thankful that I learned these skills. It needed more tools to deal with my children.

### ***All Children Need Kindness***

I believe parents should surrender the punitive parenting styles that they suffered as children. Adults who are good providers associate brutal beatings with their success. They tell their children, “It worked for me, it will work for you.”

But we have learned that it doesn’t really work. Children need to feel safe. They need your support to get ready to be responsible.

I understand that parents need to feel respected in their homes, and that learning new parenting skills takes diligence and practice. But I like the new model and use it. My children are doing better than they were. They’re not perfect, but show me a child who is.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What are the biggest things Latonya felt her teens needed from her?
- How did Latonya feel when her son started running wild?
- How hard do you think it was for Latonya to let her son “do his time”? What do you think of her decision?
- What do you think of Latonya’s decision not to punish her daughter but to just listen to her more?
- Latonya says two of the qualities she uses in parenting her children are open-mindedness and courage. What do you think she means?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let’s look at the worksheet called “My Reflections.” Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we’ll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the “Recovery Journal” worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the “reflection” questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We’ll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

---

## STARTING NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Let’s talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: ‘What Can I Do?’** by Latonya Baskerville

1. What hard times did you go through with your children? How did they improve? What did you realize that your children needed from you?

2. How did you use open-mindedness to help you through that time? How did you listen to other people’s perspectives or try out new ideas? Also describe whether you felt that you were not as open as you could’ve been.

3. How did you use courage to help you through that time?

4. What did you learn from that experience that might help you face parenting challenges in the future?

OVER —————→

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – ‘What Can I Do?’

**GOAL:** Think about what your teens might need from you and what support you can offer them. Write your thoughts it down in a letter to your teen on the next page. (photocopy the page if you want to write separate notes to more than one child.) Share your letter with your children if you can. Make sure to write down what makes you feel proud of your children.

**REFLECTION:** How did writing this letter make you feel about your children? About yourself as a parent?

How did your children respond?

How did it feel to tell your child that you are proud of him or her? Why?

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**My Recovery Journal – ‘What Can I Do?’**

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_,



www.risemagazine.org

## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**A Way Out of No Way** by Carmen Caban

My daughter and I keep trying to connect despite termination.

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### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

**Repairing a relationship with a teenager.**

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#### INTRODUCTION

Children whose parents have long struggled with addiction often become fearful of trusting anyone. As children move from home to home, witness relapses, deal with false promises, or go through painful experiences without their mommy or daddy to lean on, they can begin to feel like they can't count on anyone. Most times, children blame themselves. Children do not understand that a parent's addiction is about the parent. Children convince themselves that they must be unlovable or unworthy of love. Even children who rage and tell you, "Everything is your fault" usually blame themselves deep down.

When you are ready to reconnect, your children may not be. Out of anger, fear, and shame, your children may shut you out or go down destructive paths that may look all too familiar. The two-steps-forward, one-step-backward dance of reestablishing trust with a hurt teenager can be infuriating and devastating. You and your child will struggle with painful feeling of rejection and abandonment. But repair is possible if a parent's remains committed to rebuilding a relationship. Let's read Carmen's story about trying to reconnect with her daughter.

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### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?

# A Way Out of No Way

*My daughter and I keep trying to connect despite termination.*

By Carmen Caban

Fifteen years ago, when my youngest daughter, Destiny, was 3 and her sister Desiree was 7, my parental rights to them were terminated.

I just could not understand why. I had been addicted to drugs for many years but completed drug treatment, parenting classes and anger management classes. I also had two older children in foster care, and my rights to these children were not terminated. In fact, a year later, my teenage son was returned to me.

## **God Would Make a Way**

In family court, my nerves always became reckless. I would look up at that huge sign behind judge, "In God We Trust," and repeat the words.

Then the final court date came. The judge decided to terminate. In shock, I looked up at those words above the judge for some sign. I had believed with all my heart that God was going to make a way.

The judge asked if I had any last words. "Yes,

Your Honor," I replied. I looked straight at him, a confrontational look. "Your Honor, as long as I live, I will have parental rights. They will end the day I die."

The judge asked me to be removed from his presence. Outside, I crumbled, breaking down in tears of pain. How could a God I trusted allow this to happen to me? How would I tell my children that Mommy was not able to visit them anymore?

## **'I Will Always Be Mommy'**

I only had three weeks more to visit my little girls. I told them, "I will always be your Mommy. No one can take my place." Desiree and Destiny were sad and later became very angry.

But I remained in contact with my girls. The foster mother let me come around the house. During visits I told them, "No matter what comes between us, we will always remain a family." It turned out that they were attentive to my teaching.



Now, 15 years later, all of my children have come home to me from foster care except Destiny. My oldest signed herself out 10 years ago, at 18. My son was discharged to me at 15. Desiree signed herself out of care last year and came home.

But the hardest relationship to repair has been with Destiny, who at 18 is still in foster care.

### ***A Painful Mirror***

Destiny has become a teenager who reminds me too much of myself. My daughter is filled with hatred, anger, envy. She is very rebellious. Destiny gets involved with people twice her age. She's reckless. Her attitude really stinks.

Many times I have asked myself: Why has Destiny turned out to be who she is today? Bottom line is that she has gone through a lot with me and experienced terrible things in care. She feels devastated and rejected.

As a teenager, I felt the same. My father was an alcoholic. My mother, caught up in her frustration, was not very attentive to my siblings and me. I turned to the streets for comfort. I had it set in my mind that no one could help me. I can remember times when help was offered but my scars were too deep. I felt alone and scared and trusted no one. My addiction and recklessness almost took me to my death.

I've tried to tell Destiny that running the streets won't help her. She throws the past in my face. Her response is, "Well, you did it too."

### ***Wishing I Could Save Her***

When Destiny flips, I just want to hurt her physically. But I do not want to repeat my mother's discipline. So I walk away or run away and stay angry, or I cry in the fetal position.

I wonder what will become of Destiny. I fear that she will get hurt and go through the same painful experiences as I did. It makes me cringe that I cannot find the right bandages. I feel weak because I cannot save Destiny from herself.

I want to give to Destiny what my mother could not give to me. But seeing my daughter do what I used to do rekindles the hurt little girl inside of me who I thought I'd laid to rest. In the last few years, our visits have become overwhelming to me.

### ***Moments of Connection***

I have tried to help Destiny. I have taken her to church because I believe she needs to find God. We also tried therapy, but she got very angry when I told the therapist about her behavior.

I would still like to try intensive family therapy with Destiny. I believe it could help. But Destiny is very resistant to the idea. She says, "It won't work." I get angry because I feel like she's not trying.

### ***'I'll Help You, Mom'***

But one day recently, I saw that Destiny does reach out. She arrived at my apartment unexpectedly. Her two sisters whispered, "Ask her." Destiny humbly bowed her head and asked, "Mom, can I stay for a while?"

"Yes, you may stay for the weekend," I said. I wanted our relationship to develop and for us to feel like family.

I was putting up some Christmas lights, so I asked for help untangling them. Destiny jumped off the couch saying, "I'll help you, Mom." As Destiny and my granddaughters helped with the lights, I observed her good qualities. She can be helpful and nice.

I realized for the first time that my Destiny desires a bond with her mother. Despite her disrespectful ways, Destiny wants and seeks Mommy's love and attention.

I also realized that I have to see Destiny as my daughter, not a young me. She is more than a mirror of my past. Destiny is who she is and I am who I am.

### **'Don't Make Me Cry'**

Soon after, on Destiny's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, I felt that I should apologize to Destiny because I was not there through her growing years. I took her to my church and asked her to come to the front.

With my fellow church members as my witnesses, I said, "My child, I have something that I'd like to tell you." With tears in her eyes, Destiny said, "Mom, don't make me cry."

"Destiny, I know that I have not been there for you," I said. "And we share a strange relationship, loving and then disliking one another. I would love for us to start anew. Forgive me for not being there when you needed me."

We embraced and cried. Then she said, "Of course, Ma, I will forgive you." It felt like a load came off my shoulders.

### **'What Next?'**

A few days later, we spent the day together, just the two of us. We picked up samples from Sephora, shopped and ate Mexican food. Destiny was so sweet, walking with me and holding on to me like we were best friends. It was a hopeful moment for both of us.

But at dinner, there was a moment where I held silence. She asked me, "What's wrong?" I had to change the subject. I really did not want her

to know what was on my mind: "When will she strike again?"

After that day, my daughter didn't call me for weeks. When I did reach her, it felt like she had slipped back to her old self again.

### **Excuses and Attitude**

A few months later, someone rang my bell at 2:30 a.m. I ignored it. But the person rang, rang and rang steady for 20 minutes. I got kind of edgy. I turned out my lights and looked out my window. I saw only a shadow of waving arms.

Finally, I was able to make out that it was Destiny. I was shocked and angry. I yelled out, "Destiny!"

With attitude and anger, she yelled, "Ma, open the door!"

I told myself, "Girl, brace yourself."

When I let her in, Destiny had dark circles under her eyes and looked like she was under the influence. Her clothes and hair were not intact.

Once again, I felt I was looking in the mirror and became very angry. I asked, "Where are you coming from?"

In an annoyed tone of voice she responded, "From a friend's house."

"What are you doing at my house at this time of the morning?"

"I got locked out, Mom," she said. "I need your help. I am being harassed and threatened at that foster home."

### ***'This Is Why I Hate You!'***

Because of her many previous lies and betrayals, my suspicions were on high alert. I needed time to think, so I went into my office space.

A few minutes later, she came in with an attitude, asking, "Well, are you going to help me?"

"Yes, I will," I said. "Let's go to the precinct so you can report this."

Destiny put a dumbfounded look on her face. "That's not necessary," she said.

"But there is an allegation," I responded, and we exchanged words. Becoming angry and frustrated, Destiny stormed out.

About 15 minutes went by before Destiny returned. This time, her anger was more explosive. When I opened the door, she was standing with her hand on her hip. I just kept asking for her new foster mother's number, which she claimed to have forgotten.

Soon she stormed out of the house once again, yelling out as she hurried down the stairs, "This is why I hate you, b-tch! I hope a car runs over you in the street!"

I yelled back, "I love you, too."

### ***She Was Gone***

Destiny soon returned, trying another avenue. "All right, Mom, I remembered the foster mother's number," she said, adding, "Mom, I just want to stay here until tomorrow."

By now it was 4 a.m. I called the foster home and spoke to the foster sister, asking, "Why is Destiny in my home at this wee hour?"

"Ms. Carmen, no one has done anything to your daughter," the foster sister said. "My mother gave her \$200 and she has been missing for two days since then. And your daughter has a nasty attitude. We are tired of her."

I got off the phone feeling furious. I looked straight at Destiny and said, "Oh, so you were hanging out with your so-called friends, they spent your money and then they turned their back on you."

Destiny was silent. "You have played yourself," I told her. "Give up on your games."

I went to put my clothes on, saying, "I will do you a big favor. I will put you on the train." But when I reached downstairs, I did not see Destiny. I called out for her and she was gone.

### ***I'll Keep Trying***

After Destiny left for good, I was upset. I tried to calm myself by saying, "She did me a huge favor. She had to go. I needed her to leave."

But I felt devastated. Will my daughter and I ever be able to trust each other? I love Destiny but right now I don't like her.

I do not like to hold on to my anger. I want us to feel like family. With the holidays approaching, I will call and invite her to spend time with her siblings and with me. I will never give up hope and faith. Faith is what has kept my family together.

Destiny and I are struggling because we were blessed not to be cut off from one another. God made a way out of no way. I believe that if Destiny and I keep trying, we will find a way out of our anger and separation.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What feelings and behaviors does Carmen see in Destiny that remind her of her own painful past?
- How does Carmen feel when Destiny's pain and anger lead her to act in self-destructive ways?
- How does Carmen communicate her own pain, anger, and distrust to her daughter? What negative impact might this have on Destiny?
- What is positive about the limits Carmen sets with Destiny?
- What ways does Carmen continue to reach out?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group meets again.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:**

**MY REFLECTIONS: A Way Out of No Way** by Carmen Caban

1. How do your teens communicate their hurt and anger about the past to you?
2. What is healthy about the ways they express their emotions? What seems self-destructive?
3. How do your children frighten or overwhelm you? How do you protect yourself?
4. How do you let your children know that you understand their feelings? How do you keep trying to connect?

OVER  $\longrightarrow$

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – A Way Out of No Way

**GOAL:** Take time to journal this week about the ways your older children express their pain and anger about the past. Write your feelings on a separate piece of paper.

What's one way that you can show your love and commitment to your teen?

Share your journal with someone if you feel comfortable.

**REFLECTION:** Reconnecting with a hurt teen will be an up-and-down process. What will give you the strength to keep trying? Who can support you in continuing to try to reconnect?

What's something you did this week that you feel proud of achieving?

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

---

**My Recovery Journal – A Way Out of No Way**

**Dear Journal,**



www.risemagazine.org

## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**No More Secrets** by Anonymous

Only the truth can heal my children and me.

---

### TODAY WE'LL TALK ABOUT:

#### Acknowledging the impact of addiction

---

#### INTRODUCTION

For parents, one of the hardest parts of recovering from addiction is facing the truth that your actions while you were addicted hurt your children. When you were high or chasing a high, nothing else may have mattered. Parents deep in their addiction may spend the family's food money, leave young children home alone or with unsafe people, let their children witness scary behavior, or even allow other people to physically or sexually abuse their children. Denial may feel safer than facing the guilt of knowing that you have hurt your children. But breaking through that denial and learning to bear the pain you have caused can help you and your children heal.

As you understand what drove your addiction and your actions, you can begin to forgive yourself. Then you can begin to find a way to open up to your children, ask them for forgiveness, be willing to hear their feelings, and answer their questions. At first, your children might not be ready to forgive you. But if you can be honest, you and your children can start down the long road of healing. Let's read this week's story.

---

#### READ AND DISCUSS STORY

Let's take turns reading the story out loud. Who wants to start?



# No More Secrets

*Only the truth can heal my children and me.*

By Anonymous

*Story is anonymous to protect the privacy of the writer's daughters.*

A fellow inmate and I are thinking about starting a support group at Bedford Hills Correctional Center for women with convictions related to harming children. I have a child-related conviction. I was a crack addict and I prostituted myself. Ultimately, I prostituted my teenage daughters. I feel so ashamed, guilty and disgusted with myself.

I cry at night when I think about what I did. I remember the first time I allowed my daughter to do this disgusting thing to get me high. I was in the living room of some guy's apartment and my child was in the room with him. She was only 13 years old. All I did was cry. I felt trapped. I knew that what I was allowing was wrong, but I was so caught up in my addiction that I didn't stop it. The drugs had a very strong hold over me. My addiction took me places that I thought I would never go.

Once I took my daughter home, I was nervous

and felt guilty. I just knew that she was going to tell someone. In all honesty, I was hoping that she would tell. I couldn't stop this madness on my own. But in fact, my daughter stayed silent and I kept prostituting my daughter for two years. I even got my older daughter involved.

## No More Secrets

My daughter kept the secret for two years. She once told me that she thought she was helping me. She hated to see me withdrawing from the drug. So she did what she did so I didn't have to crave it.

At times, I thought of turning myself in. However I couldn't picture myself without the drugs. Finally, when my daughter was 16, she said to herself, "Enough. I have to tell someone about the mess that my mom has gotten us into." She went to family court and I was arrested.

Looking back, my own actions seem unbelievable to me. How could I allow my child to sleep with a grown man for a few hundred dollars? Each time, I would just get high to forget everything.

## **Double Life**

My drug addiction started when I was very young. Now I realize what I was running from. Yes, I came from a two-parent home, went to Catholic school and never wanted for material things. However, my mom lived a double life. While my dad worked all day, my mom gambled and I was the mother to my younger siblings, missing a lot of school. When I messed up in school, my dad beat me.

I was also molested. Being touched by male family members was considered normal in my family. It first started when I was about 8 or 10 and my maternal grandfather started touching me inappropriately. Then other male family members did the same. As I became a teenager, I started to exchange sex for money. I told myself, "As long as you don't give it up for free, it's fine."

To deal with my life, I started smoking weed at age 9. I also became very sexually active at an early age. I was attracted to older men. I think this is because I was molested. At 12, I got pregnant by a 29-year-old man, my best friend's uncle. My mom and aunt helped me get an abortion. I felt scared and lonely. I couldn't tell anyone who the father was because he was married and my dad would have murdered him and me. So that became another secret I kept until I was grown.

## **A Mother and an Addict**

Eventually, I rebelled. I started to run away a lot and stopped going to school for a while. I used heavier and heavier drugs. At 15, I started smoking crack. When I got high, I really couldn't feel anything. I was numb to all the pain and anguish I went through as a child.

At 15, I also gave birth to my oldest daughter. I moved out of my mother's house and moved in

with my baby's father. He was much older than me and he was abusive. He gave me plenty of money, though, and I used it to get high. My love for money and drugs kept me with him throughout years of abuse. I was afraid of who and what I had become but I felt like I had nowhere to turn.

Over the next seven years, I had two more daughters and a son. Like my mother, I led a double life. I got high all day and tried to be a wife and mother at night. During the day, I would allow my children to do whatever they wanted. I was too busy smoking crack to be a good mom. Even though I love my children dearly, my love of the drug overpowered that love.

Eventually, my kids' father and I split up but I continued to get high. My children also got taken away while I was living in North Carolina. However I came back to New York and went to an inpatient drug program for 27 months and got them back. Then I relapsed. In total, I was addicted for 18 years.

## **Enough Is Enough**

My daughter warned me when she told our secret. I knew I was going to prison. I smoked crack the whole night before I was arrested. I wanted to die, or disappear. When they came to get me, I was so high that I felt nothing.

In prison, I went through the typical procedure. I thought about taking my life but I just couldn't do it. I stayed medicated a lot in the beginning to help with the detox and depression.

Once I stopped getting high, I had to face reality. At first, I somewhat thought that everything was a dream and that I would wake up. I couldn't believe I was in prison with years to serve. There

are still times when I can't believe that I am here. I really don't know how I've gotten through so many days without medicating myself.

### ***Facing the Past***

I didn't speak openly about my case for the first year but keeping it bottled up was killing me. All I wanted to do was eat excessively and sleep. I was truly depressed.

Then I started to read self-help books and motivational books. The book that helped me most was "The Art of War." It states that you should face your opponent head on. I decided that my opponent was my past and that, to recover from my depression and shame, I needed to face my past head on and accept what I'd done.

So that's what I've tried to do. I started a process of facing the facts of my addiction, my childhood abuse, and most of all my crime and my time. I've had to accept that I've done a horrible deed and that I am living the consequences. Facing my past has made it possible for me to face my daughters.

### ***Facing My Daughters***

I can honestly say that I thank my daughter for having the courage to speak up and put an end to our pain. She saved my life and her siblings'.

Now, my oldest daughter is living with her boyfriend, my two younger daughters are together in foster care, and my son is at Children's Village. I'm happy to say that I am now in contact with my daughters.

After I'd been at Bedford a year, my oldest daughter came to see me for the first time. I was truly surprised to see her. I didn't expect her to ever want to see me again. I cried the whole time. I kept apologizing to her through the entire

visit. My mother also came with her. Their visit was a blessing.

Recently, my middle daughter asked the court for permission to see me. My daughters are in therapy and their doctors said that it was all right to visit me. I was relieved to hear that my children are in therapy. I am so happy that they are getting the help that I should've gotten as a kid. I hope that they will continue to heal and overcome any fears they have due to my actions.

### ***Growing Up Inside***

I know my kids weren't proud of me in their childhood. I want to become someone they could be proud of as they grow into adulthood. I've started college. It is stressful. However, I like it. I also have completed three different parenting groups. I have learned that my children's feelings matter, and what it means to be a mother.

Now I want to start this support group to give women like me a safe place to open up, take responsibility for our actions, forgive ourselves, make a full recovery and become productive people.

### ***Lots of Judgments***

When I first tried to start facing my actions, one of the hardest parts was finding someone to talk to. It's scary to open up when you've committed a child-related crime. People, even other inmates, don't want to hear about it and they stigmatize you.

Once I approached an inmate who I thought I could open up to. I said, "I need to speak to someone because I'm feeling really bad."

"All right," she said.

"I did some really bad things to my daughters," I

began. Then I explained what I had done.

“What? How could you do that?” she said. She seemed horrified.

I felt even more ashamed.

### ***Making a Safe Place***

But as I continued reading, thinking about my life and coming to grips with my crime, I began to talk about my past in support groups and with a few women who have committed similar crimes. Talking about my past has helped me. Most people give me words of encouragement like, “Only God can judge you,” or, “You have to forgive yourself,” or, “It was the drugs calling you.”

I hope that I can get a group started so that other women who are in pain and ashamed can have somewhere to express themselves. It might not be easy. But I have 11 years to get it started.

I hope that by telling my story, I can help other people break the cycle. Keeping secrets hurt my children and me. I believe that if I am open, I will heal.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STORY:

- What makes it hard for the writer to face her past?
- What makes it important?
- What gives you compassion for the writer?
- What do you think is hardest for the writer's daughters about seeing their mother?
- How do you think seeing each other helps both the writer and her daughters heal?

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## JOURNAL TIME

Let's look at the worksheet called "My Reflections." Take 5 or 10 minutes to write down your answers on the worksheet and then we'll share. (*Wait until most people are finished.*)

- Who wants to share some responses?

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## ENDING THE GROUP

Now turn to the "Recovery Journal" worksheet. Take a few minutes to write down your goal for this week. You can answer the "reflection" questions at the end of the week, before our group.

We'll begin our next group by talking about your goals. I look forward to hearing from everyone about how you tried to meet your goals!

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## STARTING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Let's talk about your goals for the week:

- Who tried to meet their goal?
- How did it go?
- Will someone share a moment they are proud of?

Thank you for sharing.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

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**MY REFLECTIONS: No More Secrets** by Anonymous

1. The writer of this story was brutally honest with herself. Even though the past was difficult to think about, she made herself face it. Her goal is to move forward by acknowledging the past. How can your past history, keep you from achieving goals? What can you do to get over these roadblocks?

2. What helps you to forgive yourself?

3. What do you think is important for your children to understand about the past?

4. How do you think this might help them heal? How would it help you heal?

OVER —————→

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

## My Recovery Journal – No More Secrets

**GOAL:** Write a short, basic script of something you think is important to tell your child. Imagine your children listening to it. What questions might they have? How do you think they'll feel? How can you answer these questions in a simple way? If you see your child this week, and the moment feels right, share what you want to say.

**REFLECTION:** Were you able to share what you wanted to say? If so, how did it go? If not, do you think you can in the future?

What's something you did this week that let you let go of the chains of the past?

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

**My Recovery Journal – No More Secrets**





**DATE:**

Take some time to look back on your reflections and recovery journals. Think about the steps you have taken to move forward in your recovery and reunifying with your children. Think about the steps you still want to take.

1. What goals did you set for yourself during the group?

## 2. What progress have you made in reaching your goals?

### 3. What is your proudest moment?

4. What did you learn from the group?

5. What did you share that helped others?

6. What story was most important to you and why?

**MY GOALS:** Take a few minutes to write down goals that you are still working on reaching. What steps will you need to take to reach each goal?

**MY SUPPORT TEAM:**

I can call on these group members, friends and family when I need support:

Name	Phone Number	Email

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