

Family Wellness Weekly

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What to expect:

Purpose:

- To provide ongoing support for families of loved ones with physical, emotional, behavioral, or addictive illnesses.
- To provide education about family systems and recovery.
- To introduce and practice skills that contribute to healthy relationships.

Online protocol:

- Keep your microphone muted.
- You are invited to use the “React” function at the top of your screen during this presentation.
- If you have a question or a comment, please use the chat function.
- Do not use the name of your loved one in treatment in questions or comments.
- To maintain confidentiality, keep your camera off and make sure your name is not visible in your square.

Our Focus:

- Our focus is on you, the family member or friend, and your experience and skills, rather than on your loved one.
- We take a biopsychosocial approach to behavioral health challenges.
- We make assumptions about human behavior that favor a nonjudgmental stance.

Weekly Topics:

- Family Dynamics:
Functions of family, Human Needs, Patterns of Connection, Family Safety
- Boundaries:
Wants versus Needs, What Boundaries are and are not, Boundary Clarity.
- Accurate Communication:
One thing in the moment, Radical Acceptance, Validation of Self, Identifying Emotions and Thoughts.

- Accurate Listening
Listening with a Goal, Relationship Effectiveness, Tolerating Fear and Anger.
- Family Problem Solving
Wise Mind and Difficult Situations; What to do When Your Current Strategies Are Not Working.

Indicators of Successful Family Recovery

- Family is connected and differentiated.
- Emotional intensity is regulated
- Attachment is realistic

Session 3: Accurate Communication

What makes communication with a loved one so difficult?

When we are living with a loved one with mental health or addiction issues we often have so many competing thoughts and feelings that we deliver more messages than we may intend. We try very hard to be as effective as possible, for example, being firm and not too firm, understanding and not too understanding. Since we “cannot not communicate” our first challenge is to clarify in our minds what we need to communicate.

How can we be sure we are saying what we mean, meaning what we say, and not saying it mean?

Start with the mindfulness practice of focusing on just one thing in the moment. This will help you to use the skills you need to be effective at staying focused on just one thing at a time. As Jon Kabat-Zinn has said, “You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn how to surf.”

What if my worry thoughts all happen at one time?

It is normal to have a lot of thoughts all at one time. Sometimes we practice by writing our message down and focusing on just one message that is true, relevant, and kind. Ask yourself, “What is prompting my need to communicate at this moment? What am I looking for as a result of our discussion?” When your thoughts wander, gently bring them back to the need you have in the moment.

How do I decide what I want?

Typical goals of a speaker are to achieve an objective (e.g., “To have a safe home.”), to take care of themselves (e.g., “For my well being I accept that I am only in charge of my recovery.”), or to affect their relationship (e.g., “I want to be able to enjoy each other even when we have different ideas.”). Think about prioritizing your goals. While they are all important, you may need to focus on the most important goal even when you might be uncomfortable, and your relationship might be stressed (e.g., “I love you, and for my well being I cannot live with you right now.”).

What if I cannot accept this situation my loved one is in?

Radical acceptance is a practice that allows you to let go of the pain and not the person. Before we can change any situation we must first accept the situation as it is. If you radically accepted that you cannot force your ideas or your will on another person, what would you do differently? In the case of your loved one, if worry and control were effective tools for creating change, your loved one would already be healed.

How do I get my loved one to listen to me?

Making sure you take responsibility for your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors will help your listener listen. While it is tempting to blame others or hold them responsible for the challenges we are facing, the ability to listen requires that the listener does not have to use part of themselves to defend themselves. If we blame or accuse the listener’s brain goes into a defense

mode physiologically that may include fight, flight, or freeze. Using effective skills in which you specify the action and situation, and your own feelings helps you to use “I” messages and will help your listener stay present.