

Engaging Families Affected by OUD, Reducing Stigma

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The birth and care of a baby offer
a family the possibility of new
relationships, growth, and
change.
Weatherston, 2000

*For many families we serve, this
possibility seems unattainable.*

Parallel Process

Events or situations in one relationship (current or past) can affect another relationship

When the provider helps the parent—fills up the parent's emotional fuel tank—the parent is better able to support the baby

This is one reason why helping parents helps babies and toddlers

Caregivers with OUD likely have other risks

- ▶ Mental Illness
- ▶ Trauma
- ▶ Neurodevelopmental disorders
- ▶ Social determinants of health, such as housing instability, financial challenges
- ▶ History of difficult personal relationships and relationships with authority figures (teachers, employers, court personnel)

Build relationship by transferring skill sets

Skills we teach parents

- ▶ Be interested and attentive to the baby's needs and signals for help
- ▶ Be able to read the baby's signals accurately
- ▶ Respond to signals in an appropriate, timely, and reliable way

Ways we support parents

- ▶ Show an active interest in the parent and the parent's needs
- ▶ Use active listening to really understand what a parent is telling you
- ▶ Be consistent and reliable—someone a parent can count on

Strategies for supporting parents with risk factors (and without!)

- ▶ Break down tasks
- ▶ Expect to repeat and reteach
- ▶ Maintain appropriate boundaries
- ▶ Active teaching (model, demonstrate)
- ▶ Flexible sessions related to parent's current needs
- ▶ Let the parent be the driver
- ▶ Let parents know what is going well
- ▶ Be aware of the parent's capacity under stress

Ways to connect when connecting isn't smooth

- ▶ Provide emotional support
- ▶ Get comfortable talking about difficult topics
- ▶ Have reasonable expectations
- ▶ Share information supportively; start with asking questions
- ▶ Help parents build problem-solving skills
- ▶ Accept the unexpected

Know your limits. Know yourself and your triggers. Monitor and manage your feelings.

We won't always get this right— managing missteps

- ▶ Miscommunication, hurt feelings, and disagreements are normal parts of relationships
- ▶ Many families we serve have not had good experiences repairing breaks in relationship
- ▶ Steps to Repair
 - ▶ Acknowledge the problem; “You seem upset.”
 - ▶ Describe what you think is happening: “I think I hurt your feelings.”
 - ▶ Take responsibility for your part: “I am sorry about what I said.”
 - ▶ Invite the other person to discuss: “Can we talk about this?”

Worker Preparation and Response

- ▶ A lot of this work feels like it belongs to our mental health trained friends!
- ▶ Some of us thought we'd mostly be working with babies, not adults
- ▶ We may not have had training needed to manage our own reactions

Responses to the work

What we may not be prepared for is the emotional journey, what is awakened in response to what we see, what we hear, and what we feel as we enter into helping relationships with families and/or staff on behalf of babies, very young children and parents who courageously allow us into their lives.

Debbie Weatherston (<http://preventchildabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-heART-of-Reflective-Supervision-Weatherston.pdf>)

Families we serve affect us

- ▶ Populations with risk factors, including trauma and stress
- ▶ Family stressors may challenge our ability to form relationships
- ▶ Witnessing these stress can affect workers
- ▶ Workers with similar early experiences; potential for triggers

Burnout: Who Me?



What it is

Burnout is common in high stress environments
Includes emotional exhaustion;
depersonalization; ineffective performance



Why it matters

Contributes to staff turnover
Impacts our ability to provide good care



What to do

Practice Basic Self-Care
Consider Your Work-Life Balance
Access Reflective Supervision/Consultation

Skills Developed through RS/C

Susman, et al., 2020



Emotional Skills



Reflective Skills



Relationship



Stress Management

Reflective Supervision/ Consultation

- “A collaborative partnership for professional growth that improves program quality and practice by cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities to generate growth.” (Shahmoon-Shanok, 1991)
- Or more, simply, “a relationship for learning”



In reflective practice we:

- ❖ Think differently so we can act differently
- ❖ Apply knowledge and skills
- ❖ Integrate in a meaningful way new knowledge and strategies

Gatti & Watson, 2011

Final Thought

*The families who are the
hardest to connect with
are those that need us the
most*

Thank You!

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