

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

NEWSLETTER



FIRST Steps Together is grateful for all of the connections that have been made this year as part of the work on our project. We celebrate all of the connections between home visitors and participants, between our program and other community resources, between parents and children, and between all staff working together across the state of Massachusetts to support families in recovery.



This year the 57 FIRST Steps Together staff across the state served over 3230 participants (duplicated) in groups and enrolled more than 220 new clients.

RECONNECTING WITH GRATITUDE

It's been a long day, as most days have been, since the initial COVID-19 shut down, now nine months ago. With the holidays just around the corner, gratitude is a buzzword we hear a lot and an important piece of many people's daily recovery and spirituality practices. It can be hard to feel grateful when you're juggling work, remote or hybrid schooling, parenting more or less than you'd like, and having to work much harder to maintain your physical recovery plus mental and physical health than under usual circumstances.

Everyone is in agreement...this is a lot. And it's gone on for a long time now. And it often feels like too much.

There are unreasonable expectations of all parents, even more so true for parents in recovery. So how do we reconnect with gratitude given the givens?

At dinner tonight my mom was visiting and suggested we do a gratitude alphabet with my six-year-old twins, who are just learning to read and write. They blurted out all sorts of things they were grateful for, associated with each letter, often incorrectly. It was pretty entertaining and likely mostly lost on them, but I noticed it shifted the energy just a little bit. We shifted from the exhausted, end of day home stretch to the kid's bedtime craziness, to just a moment thinking about all the good in the world, no matter how small those things may seem.



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RECONNECTING WITH GRATITUDE

As someone in long term recovery, I remember previous sponsors giving me similar assignments: a daily gratitude list, a gratitude alphabet, various ways to get back to basics, suggestions for how to just do that next right thing, practices to shift away from that “stinking thinking” and put your recovery first. Now almost a decade in, I know it works.

This has been a hard year for many people, for many reasons, and reconnecting with gratitude can feel like a challenge, and to be honest, something forced. When gratitude feels out of reach, I try to scale it way back almost into mindfulness, to just appreciate the small things.

A good cup of coffee, a surprisingly warm day in the almost winter, a moment my kids are sweet to one another, the look of my baby's face fast asleep, a good laugh at a ridiculous meme, laundry that makes its way into the wash and back onto the shelf folded and clean, or a full night of sleep. The holidays can be joyful and magical, but also triggering and even heart breaking, depending on where you are at. And this year for everyone no matter what your circumstances, holidays will be different. But these small moments endure,



Sophia Terry, LICSW,
Program Specialist
Jewish Family &
Children's Services

regardless of the pandemic or anything else outside of our control. A smile from a stranger, the first snow, a hug from someone who gets it, singing in the car, a good cry, doing work we believe in, and waking up another day in recovery. We can all remind ourselves, there is a lot to be grateful for.



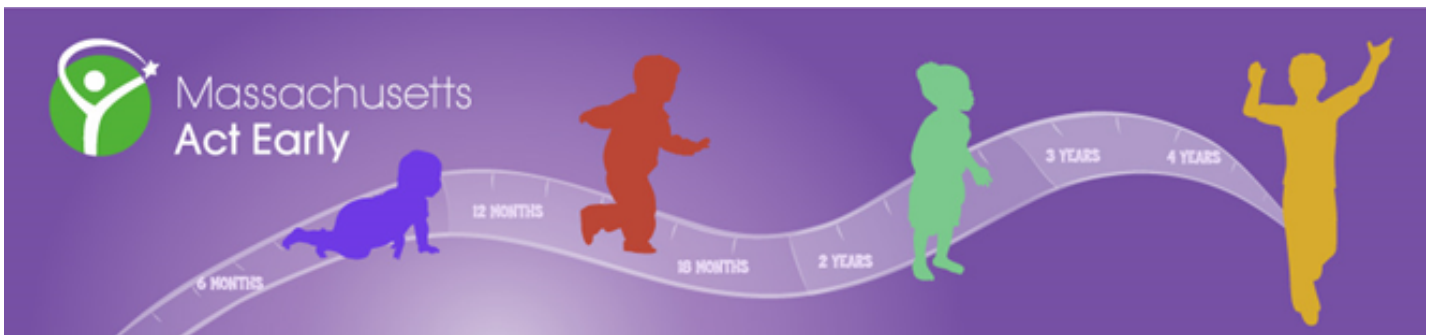
The article, [13 Acts of Gratitude for Busy Families](#), offers some additional ideas to include kids in your gratitude practice such as cultivating a Gratitude Tree or [Gratitude Garden](#), sample questions to reflect together, and [lists of books that inspire gratitude](#).



The article, [A Grateful Family is a Happy Family](#), recommends a gratitude board as a more visual way to show thanks. Simply tack the notes up as you think of things you're thankful for.



MASSACHUSETTS ACT EARLY WEBINARS



Please save the dates for a FREE webinar series. Each webinar will be offered on the last Thursday & Friday of the month. **Choose to participate either Thursday evenings at 6:30 pm or Friday mornings at 9:30 am.**

Course Description:

The course offers resources and strategies for early educators and family support professionals to effectively support parents in understanding developmental milestones and monitoring their young child's development. These tools for early identification of developmental delay, and the promotion of positive parent and child mental health through parent engagement, will be covered through an online, interactive Zoom experience.

2021 Webinar Dates & Details:

Jan. 28th & 29th "Learn the Signs. Act Early" (LTSAE)

Overview and Program Implementation of "Learn the Signs. Act Early" (LTSAE). Importance of early identification and provide current statistics. LTSAE program philosophy and implementation. Overview of Monitoring Tools and how each can be used within settings.

Feb. 25th & 26th Early Childhood Developmental Monitoring, Screening, Referral, & Milestones

Developmental monitoring? Screening? Evaluation? What is the difference between the three and who is responsible for each?

March 25th & 26th Motor and Cognitive Milestones for Children

Motor Milestones with a focus on parent engagement and play activities to support motor skill development and cognitive milestones with a focus on parent engagement and play activities to support cognitive skill development.

April 29th & 30th Social & Speech Milestones for Children

Social Skills Milestones with a focus on parent engagement and play activities to support social skill development. Speech and language milestones with a focus on parent engagement and play activities to support speech production and language skill development.

May 27th & 28th Attachment and Complex Trauma

Attachment theory and the characteristics of secure and insecure attachment. Infant cueing and parent-child interactions. Promoting secure attachment. Brain development and the neurology of trauma. Social effects of early trauma and child responses.

Registration will be on a first come first serve basis. Participants do not need to attend all trainings. Contact Kate.Barlow@aic.edu for more info. To register please [click here](#).

JOURNEY RECOVERY PROJECT

The Journey Recovery Project is an interactive web resource for pregnant and parenting women and their families who have questions or concerns about opioid and other substance use. The Journey Recovery Project focuses on the stories of women with lived experience, offering information, hope, encouragement, and resources for every step of their perinatal journey. With videos, informational slideshows, resource links, and worksheets, the Journey Recovery Project seeks to empower and inform women about opioid and other substance use and pregnancy. Resources can be shared with families, used during a visit, as part of a group, or shared with collaterals and other providers.

At <https://journeyrecoveryproject.com/> you will find:

- printable guides and tip sheets
- video stories from Journey Guide moms
- audio files
- Plan of Safe Care materials
- Resource sections by topic and region



In addition to the extensive content on the website, a number of specific tools are available to be downloaded as a PDF or ordered as a printed copy from the [Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse](#). These include:



Informational brochure for providers

This brochure provides a quick snapshot of what the Journey Recovery Project has to offer.

Prenatal Appointment Tip Sheet

A fillable worksheet with questions to ask during prenatal health appointments.

Birth Planning Kit: DCF Portfolio and Recovery and Wellness Plan

The Birth Planning Kit is a personal folder that can help you stay organized, prepare a packet of materials to share with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and support you on your journey of recovery and pregnancy. This folder is for you, but you may want to work through the materials with someone you trust. The DCF portfolio, in the Birth Planning Kit, can serve as your Plan of Safe Care.

NAS/NOWS Guide

Information on Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) and Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS) for pregnant women and new parents.



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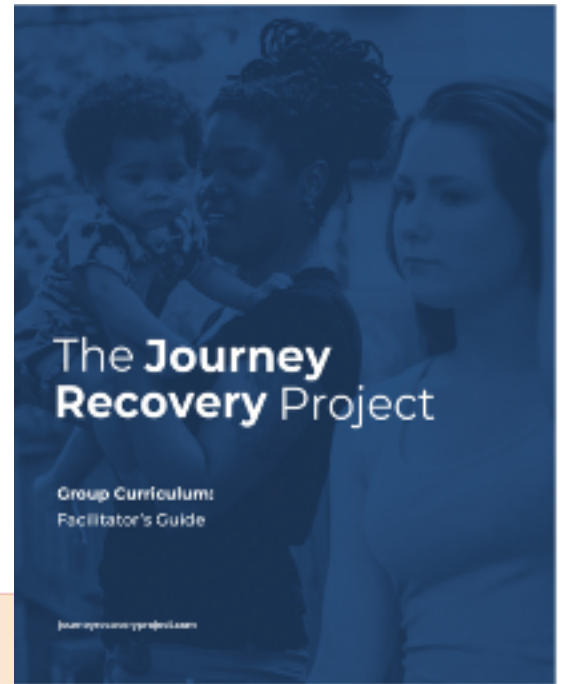
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JOURNEY RECOVERY PROJECT

Group Curriculum Facilitator's Guide

The Journey Recovery Project Facilitator's Guide is a supportive group curriculum for perinatal people in recovery or with substance use disorder. The Facilitator's Guide outlines ways for group leaders to guide participants through the Journey Recovery Project website, with discussion questions, activities, and a trauma-informed group structure. It can be used by many types of group facilitators, including clinicians, case managers, and peer recovery support personnel in a variety of settings, including treatment programs, family support groups, prenatal care clinics, recovery support centers, and more.



From Kristin Moore, Family Recovery Support Specialist
Bay State Community Services



"I have been using the Journey Recovery Project website to build pregnancy binders with the moms I am working with, in conjunction with their Plans of Safe Care, for two years now. This website is an amazing resource and guide for the families that we serve. I am looking forward to bringing these materials to life in a group format with the Journey Recovery Project Facilitator's Guide."

Birth Planning Checklist

A checklist of information and materials that a woman can bring to delivery and share with the Department of Children and Families, if they are called after she gives birth.

People to Meet During Pregnancy Checklist

A checklist of providers helpful for pregnant women with substance use disorders.

Magnets/Stickers/Posters/Business Cards



The Journey Recovery Project is a virtual road map and resource hub for women, parents and families who are starting or continuing their recovery journeys. There is truly something for everyone available here and we encourage you to explore, read, watch, listen, print, order and share this extensive resource.

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT YOUR RECOVERY OVER THE HOLIDAYS?

Melanie Bilodeau

Family Recovery Support Specialist from Center for Human Development:

In planning for the holidays, I always have made sure I knew of my surroundings and let someone know where I was going in case of needing a ride or a place to sleep. I always share with a close friend or relative where I will be spending the holidays as a safety measure for myself. It is good to know when and where your meetings are at so if you were to have triggers or desires to use or drink you have a safety back up plan to join in with others. Knowing that you are safe by attending a meeting and having that connection available when you're in doubt is helpful. Carpool if you're going to a party and assign someone as a designated driver, which I usually was, and have coffee ready in any situation, great for dessert and great for sobriety.



Brenda Carey

Family Recovery Support Specialist from Square One:



Holiday planning includes a PLAN; who you plan to spend your time with and where you plan on going. Always plan on running into unexpected people, they may be unhealthy people--even family members. HAVE AN EXIT PLAN! What will your plan be to exit quickly if you need to.....how will you keep yourself safe, away from others who are using or drinking? Bring a list of a few people you can call for support or a ride if needed. These are a few things I always plan for.

Betty Doherty

Family Recovery Support Specialist from Bay State Community Services:

Holidays, it is easy to say it's just another day, however, those of us in recovery know it's a struggle. My experience has taught me to always have Plan A and Plan B and Plan C if needed. Connection is key to avoid isolation, which a lot of us can get stuck in. We may or may not know that isolation is a set up for relapse. This year is especially difficult for those in recovery. Set up regular phone check ins with family and friends. People are so willing to help others. My first set of holidays were very difficult, I wanted to drink and use drugs so much, but didn't because I used the support of others to carry me.



Amy Brigham

Family Recovery Support Specialist from Cape Cod Children's Place:



The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation website has great personal supports. They have [Today's Gift](#) a daily inspirational meditation sent to your email. Twenty Four Hours a Day, Field Guide, and Life, are downloadable apps to help us pay attention to what our addiction is telling us.

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

Due to COVID-19, the upcoming holiday season may look very different than it has in the past. Many of us, including the families we serve, will not be able to spend time with friends and loved ones this season. In any year the holidays can be a challenging time for anyone, and especially for people in recovery. Add on not having access to your support systems and family, and it is easy to see how this year may cause extra stress. Holiday activities can help brighten our spirits and the families we work with. The magic of this season is often in the joy of children, right? Spending time with them and enjoying an activity can help get us through this difficult time and maybe start some new traditions in the process.



*Erica Napolitan
shares some ideas for
activities for kids*

One positive I've seen come from 2020 is that providers and parents are getting creative and finding ways to connect and engage with children, specifically over Zoom. The following activities are great tools for home visits, Family Time, or to simply pass on to participants. They encourage age-appropriate, parent-child interaction while creating a space for co-regulation. Some of the FIRST Steps Together sites have had success with dropping off materials for a craft activity in advance and then setting up an online time to gather and work on them together as a group.

Be mindful when choosing an activity for a family; some things may be too messy or overwhelming for parents. This is an opportunity to use a trauma-informed lens to determine what will work best for everyone. The hope is to have fun and enjoy time with your children for whatever holiday you celebrate! There are so many awesome ideas out there for holiday crafts and activities, here are a few suggestions and resources we found. Happy Holidays!

[Christmas Sensory Tub](#)



[Hanukkah Suncatchers](#)



[Colored Corn for Kwanzaa](#)



[Christmas Picture Duplos](#)



[Popsicle Stick Hanukkah Decorations](#)



[Mkeka Mat Craft](#)



WEBINAR: UNDERSTANDING AND TREATING MOTHER AND CHILD DYADS

FIRST Steps Together was very happy to welcome back Amy Sommer, LICSW, Program Director of the JF&CS First Steps Together Site, to share her expertise on ***Understanding and Treating Mother and Child Dyads***.

Amy shared with us many key components of understanding the infant in relationship with the mother, and noted how infants are born “ready to connect” taking in sights and sounds and seeking eye contact and vocalizing at an early age. And how behind the scenes within the brain an infants’ mirror neurons are responding and mimicking the emotional experience and expression the infant is receiving from their caregiver. She offered a catch phrase she first heard from Program Specialist Erica Napolitan, “neurons that fire together, wire together!”



This webinar highlighted for us the importance of caring for and truly cherishing not only the infant, but also the parent, and how important it is for us as providers to support the parent’s needs and well being as the parent plays a key role is co-regulating with the baby, reading and responding to their cues, and tempering the sensory input that may otherwise overwhelm the infant.

Amy went on to explore with us a few foundational components of understanding and treating the dyad. She described the *parallel process*, of treating parents with the same thoughtfulness, patience, space, and warmth that we hope for them to share with their children. She explained how *behavior has meaning* and should be interpreted as a mode of communication, where we ask both what is the underlying cause of behavior not only for the infant, but also for the parent, as we encourage their self-reflection.

Amy also explained the concepts of *ghosts and angels in the nursery*, “ghosts” being painful memories or experience that may impede or interfere with our parenting, whereas “angels” are positive experiences or influences that support parental understanding and protective care. Amy also touched upon the concept of *disruption and repair*, and how misattunement, or times when either provider and parent, or parent and child are misaligned or somehow misunderstanding each other, are opportunities to make sense of things, process and reconnect, stronger and with a better understanding of one another. Lastly Amy spoke about the importance of *reflection and self-reflection* as so much of our work is relational.

Please find a copy of the materials and the link to the recording:

<https://3.basecamp.com/4186995/buckets/12653224/vaults/3260886029>

WEBINAR: DEVELOPING AN ANTI-RACIST RECOVERY MOVEMENT

Lucy Fisher, Clinician at Jewish Family & Children's Service recommends this webinar

Dr. Ayana Jordan and Tracie M. Gardner's *Developing an Anti-Racist Recovery Movement: Deconstructing and Challenging Current Policies and Practices* webinar is a powerful call to action for developing and implementing an anti-racist framework in the recovery world. I think it is always important, especially in the field of recovery, to acknowledge the oppressive, systemic, structural and institutionalized racist systems which we are in and commit to taking actionable steps to bring racial equity, accountability and justice to our work.

The following is Mass General Hospital's Recovery Month description of the webinar, which I highly recommend watching:

"This discussion will critically evaluate how academic medicine, research and policy have systematically excluded Black, Indigenous and other Persons of Color (BIPOC) from the recovery movement. Researcher and addiction psychiatrist Dr. Ayana Jordan will provide examples of how to provide addiction treatment and conduct research in a culturally-affirming manner. Tracie Gardner, vice president of policy for Legal Action Center, will provide an overview of the challenges of ensuring Black voices in the current recovery "movement" and why BIPOC voices must drive the creation and implementation of good public policy."



View webinar here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pycQ2ZJwA7A&feature=youtu.be>

This just in! MTB-HV Co-Founder Dr. Arietta Slade will be offering a free 2-hour on-line training for family service professionals on January 26, 2021...

The Relational Foundations of Reflective Practice & Reflective Parenting

Based on key elements of the ***Minding the Baby® Home Visiting (MTB-HV)*** model, the relational foundations of reflection will be discussed, including components that allow reflection to flourish in parents and professionals.



[COVID-19 resources for family support professionals](#)

During these unprecedented times, the Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative has compiled this list of resources for aiding families during difficult times.

CLAS CORNER

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has just released a Racial Equity Data Roadmap. According to MDPH, "The Racial Equity Data Road Map is a tool toward eliminating structural racism. It's a collection of guiding questions, tools, and resources to assist programs in taking concrete steps to better identify, understand, and act to address racial inequities."

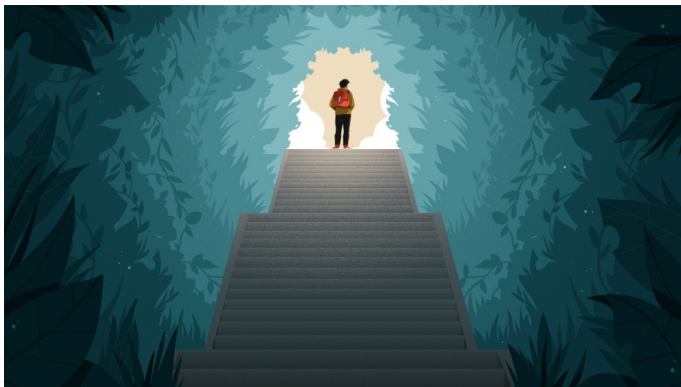
The roadmap overview includes seven steps:

1. Looking at health issues with a focus on the impact of racism
2. Determining if a program is ready to use data to address racism
3. Understanding what the data say about differences in health outcomes by race and ethnicity
4. Using other sources of data to uncover causes of the differences
5. Making plans to act on differences that are unjust or avoidable
6. Presenting data in ways that help people make sense of the numbers
7. Moving from data to action



FIRST Steps Together will be working to identify how we can incorporate the steps at the program and site level in the coming months. The detailed road map and overview are available at [Racial Equity](#)

YOUR COVID-19 'CHOOSE-YOUR-OWN-ADVENTURE' MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE.



Your COVID-19 'Choose-Your-Own-Adventure' Mental Health Guide.

From [Healthline](#), "The wondrous world of coping skills, made a little simpler.

If you're feeling maxed out or even a little cuckoo-for-Cocoa-Puffs (#notanad), you're not alone — and there are resources that can support you, no matter what you're up against.

So take a deep breath, hang tight, and let's explore your options."

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER
2020**

mass.gov/first-steps-together

For more information:

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MWhitman@JFCSBoston.org

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