

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

NEWSLETTER



FIRST Steps Together is excited to be able to expand services to those who use stimulants as well as to provide support and services more broadly to fathers.

In the [Massachusetts Resource Guide for Fathers](#), Raymond Levy, Executive Director of the Fatherhood Project shares this:

*"I know that fathers play a key role in shaping the lives of our children. Overwhelmingly, the most current research shows that when children feel emotionally connected with their dads, they do better in school and are less likely to become engaged with the criminal justice system. They are also less likely to use drugs and alcohol and suffer from depression. In short, they are more likely to become fully functioning, healthy adults. Studies also show that men who have warm, nurturing relationships with their children are themselves physically healthier, less depressed and more successful in their marriages and careers. In other words, **an emotionally close father-child relationship not only serves as a significant protective factor against high risk behaviors, but it is also a potential source of health for the entire family. Children need their fathers and fathers need their children.**"*



Throughout this newsletter you will find thoughts, ideas and resources on how to support dads in both their parenting and recovery.

We also highlight some great things that have been happening at FIRST Steps Together locations over the summer. We have included examples of how sites are strengthening connections with other community providers despite working in a predominantly virtual environment, and other program successes. So much is being held and accomplished despite challenging circumstances in an uncertain environment!

WORKING WITH DADS

Dan Foley, Family Recovery Support Specialist (FRSS) from Bay State Community Services, shares his thoughts on working with dads.

FIRST Steps Together can support new fathers by providing them with one-on-one peer support as well as connecting them to other resources that may benefit their individual needs. I believe peer support coming from a dad who is also in recovery can be an extremely valuable resource to a new father who is trying to figure out what will work best for his own parenting and recovery journey. To be able to openly share the unique challenges, struggles, accomplishments, and victories with someone who truly understands where you are coming from is an incredibly powerful thing and a huge source of hope.

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WORKING WITH DADS

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Dan Foley

The best way that I know of to encourage dads and help them feel confident in their parenting is to share that none of us truly know what we are doing. I let them know, while also reminding myself at the same time, that parenting, much like recovery, is a constant learning process, during which we are probably learning more from our children than they are from us. By amplifying a new dad's strengths while providing tools and resources

to support them with the areas that they would like to improve, I hope to be able to help them to be confident in their parenting skills.

I try to learn about the available resources that could benefit an individual's needs based on their specific circumstances in that moment, and then, if I do not know of a specific resource that I think may help, together we will try to find something that suits their need. So, we learn together, not only about a specific resource, but also how to locate certain resources, in the hopes that the individual can develop a skill set of finding the supports that they need on their own if necessary.

The support group that FRSS Betty Doherty and I facilitate is a virtual Group Peer Support (GPS) formatted meeting. The way the GPS model is set up creates a wonderful, safe space for individuals to share in a very open way. On average we have around nine dads every week, and it has been really powerful to watch the transformation in quite a few of these individuals as we share the highs and lows of parenting, recovery, and life. I have been afforded the opportunity to watch participants that started out in the group weeks ago as quiet and reserved, come out of their shell and really show their vulnerability and pour out their emotions. It has proven to be a valuable support group for the dads that attend (and is a group that I truly look forward to every week) because it is such a powerful thing to be a part of.

Tips for staff to keep in mind when working with dads:

1. **Remember to come from a place of compassion.** A lot of times, in my experience, a new dad will try to put on the appearance of having everything together and that is not usually the case. Becoming a dad can make a young man feel as though he should be fully grown immediately, when in reality, he can be a scared little boy on the inside.

2. **Try to help build the dad's confidence.** It is overwhelming and scary to enter into fatherhood, and when fear is involved, so is the fight or flight response. When dealing with an individual with a substance use disorder, both fight and flight responses can result in using. So, if we can work to build a dad's confidence in their parenting as well as their recovery, perhaps it can reduce the risk of them moving in a not so positive direction.

3. **Dads are important, and they should know this.** A lot of much needed attention can be focused on the new mom, leaving a new dad feeling as though they are not as important. **If we can find ways to let them know that they too are extremely important, it will hopefully help them to build their motivation in their parenting and recovery. Which, in turn, will benefit both child and mom/partner, because the dad will become a positive support to both.**

SERVING DADS IN RECOVERY

While there are many best practices for working with any parent in recovery, there are some considerations specific to supporting dads, both as primary caregivers and as co-parents within the family unit. We want to be thoughtful as we expand our services to focus on fathers as caregivers, particularly as we consider family dynamics, potential relationship challenges and histories, and how these may impact a person's ongoing recovery and parenting journeys.



In talking to some dads in recovery and reviewing available support resources, a few themes continue to come up as needs and challenges specific to being a father in recovery.

Some of these challenges are specific to the message that society sends men about how they should be in the world:

There is a **societal pressure for men to “toughen up” and “figure it out”, which is the opposite of the vulnerability and willingness to seek and accept help, which is key to maintaining recovery.**

Similarly, some dads feel there is a focus on being a provider rather than a parent. There is a **general societal permission given to be less engaged and less hands on with their kids**, instead of feeling supported in focusing on and strengthening their relationship with their child.

Due to this same societal expectation that women are generally primary caregivers, and the reality that many households don't have dads at home, some dads **may not have the experience of a healthy and loving paternal relationship to model their own parent-child relationship after.**

In these ways, some dads feel they really aren't expected or adequately supported to be fully engaged with their own children. This can be further complicated by a parent's history, the perspectives of other providers, and interventions from the child welfare or family court system. Also, untreated mental illness or unprocessed trauma, as we know from working with moms in recovery, can be a huge factor in substance use as many people turn to substances to self-medicate and cope with these issues. Many people have significant shame and guilt around being a parent in recovery, particularly if their use continued into parenthood and may have caused harm to their children or their relationship with their children. Additionally, it can be especially difficult for men to acknowledge past trauma.

So while there are challenges in supporting dads in recovery, there is also a great need. We want to be aware of the societal expectations and assumptions that may impact a father's parenting journey, as well as his personal history and experience of being parented himself. And as always, we want to meet our participants where they are at and trust that in building relationships we can help them build their recovery capital and parenting skills. We want to provide non-judgmental, compassionate care, and to encourage self-reflection, help-seeking behaviors, and increase supports, for both the dads we serve, as well as their children.



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

RESOURCES TO SERVE DADS IN RECOVERY

[Stories from Fathers in Substance Use Recovery](#)

[The Fatherhood Project](#)

This article includes personal stories of fathers in recovery, as they relate to specific recovery support programs.

[Sober Parenting: 5 Ways to Rebuild the Trust of Your Children](#)

[Recovery.org](#)

This article provides tips to support parents in rebuilding their relationship with their children after having struggled with substance misuse.

[The Fatherhood Initiative](#)

[The Children's Trust](#)

The Fatherhood Initiative works to advance activities and trainings that support fathers, their families, and the professionals who work with them. Training topics include Engaging Dads and Parents as Partners.

[Parenting in Recovery, Tips for Addicts with Children](#)

[Addiction.com](#)

This article is a very thoughtful exploration of the experience of being a parent in recovery, and walks the reader through suggestions for how to be gentle with themselves as parents in recovery, while also rebuilding their connection with their children.

BRAZELTON TOUCHPOINTS CENTER: SUPPORTING FATHER INVOLVEMENT WEBINAR SERIES

[Brazelton Touchpoints Center](#)

[Supporting Father Involvement and Co-parenting Webinar Series](#)

This free webinar series will explore how early childhood programs, home visitors, health and mental health providers, and community agencies can increase their effectiveness in supporting father engagement and co-parenting. It will examine and share strategies, tools, and outcomes from the [Supporting Father Involvement \(SFI\) Program](#), an evidence-based research and intervention program designed for families that are culturally and economically diverse.



Webinar 1:

Focus on Father Involvement and Co-parenting: Why It Matters

[watch recording here](#)

Webinar 2:

Parent and Child Voices: The Importance of Fathering and Co-parenting

[watch recording here](#)

Webinar 3:

November 17, 2 PM

From "Second Shift" to "First Shift": Supporting Fathers as Central to Family Life

[Register here](#)

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH



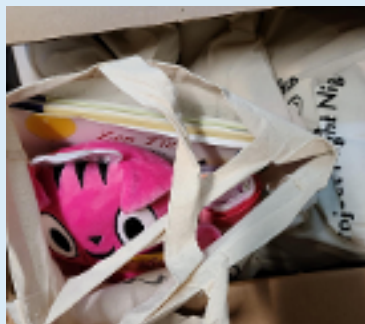
Join the Voices
for Recovery:
**Celebrating
Connections**



National Recovery Month increases awareness and understanding of substance use disorders and co-occurring disorders and encourages individuals in need of treatment and recovery services to seek help. **Recovery Month** celebrates individuals living their lives in recovery and recognizes the dedicated workers who make it possible.

Stay Healthy, Recovery Matters

The **Center for Human Development (CHD)** celebrated National Recovery Month with the slogan **Stay Healthy, Recovery Matters**. They teamed up with the locally owned and operated Berkshire Organics to deliver donated fruits and vegetables to members throughout the month of September.



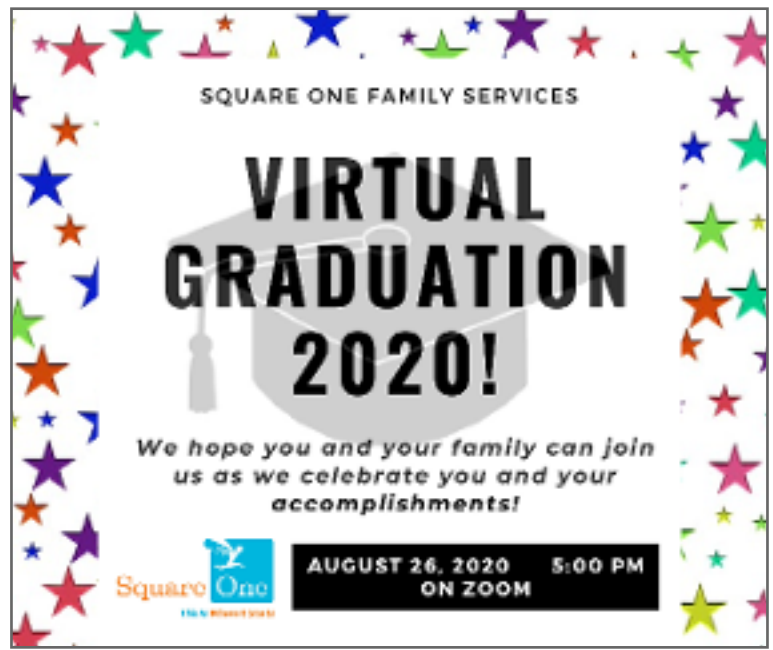
Children's Night Night and Meeting Bags

Cape Cod Children's Place (CCCP) partnered with [Project Night Night](#) to give out **Night Night Packages** which contain *"a new security blanket, an age-appropriate children's book, and a stuffed animal — all nestled inside of a new canvas tote bag. By providing objects of reliable comfort, Project Night Night reduces trauma and advances the emotional and cognitive well-being of the children we serve."*

The CCCP Team worked with parents to reuse the bags to become "meeting bags," so they have a bag with special items the children can only see occasionally when parents need to focus at meetings.

SQUARE ONE PARTICIPANT GRADUATION

Every year in May, Square One's Family Service staff starts planning their annual graduation event. In August of a typical year, prior to COVID-19 changing the landscape of how we do our work, the graduation was held in person at Springfield College's assembly hall. Family and friends gathered to watch their loved ones mark the completion of their programs. Parents wore caps and gowns and walked across the stage while their children and families cheered them on. Often program alumni speak to how Square One's services have changed their lives and program participants share their stories of how they reached their goals. This event represents a big milestone for families. It is proof of their hard work and the building up of their parental resilience.



This year's graduation looked a little different than those in the past. Family service staff worked together to deliver caps and gowns to parents, as well as t-shirts and activities for the children. On August 26, 2020 program participants from all of Square One's Family Service programs gathered on Zoom and celebrated their accomplishments with staff, children and family members. It was a huge success thanks to staff's hard work and creative thinking, and of course the continued work and accomplishments from the families themselves.

We reached out to Shalonda Mabry, Clinician at Square One, for more details about what the process looked like for FIRST Steps Together participants.

"When a participant enrolls in the FIRST Steps Together program the conversation about graduation usually begins at the first visit. At this visit the FRSS and the family will start talking about setting goals and what it will look like to receive a certificate of completion for the program. This topic is revisited at six months to check in on progress and again at nine months to start transitional plans for the family as they near completion of the program."

When asked why having a graduation event was so important, Shalonda shared: "Many of our participants have never had the opportunity to graduate from any educational institution. Participants also feel like they have accomplished something and now belong to a community of parents just like them. For me it is a rewarding experience to see participants reunify with their children or obtain housing or employment. To watch their journey from beginning to end and see their next chapter beginning is a wonderful experience."

SQUARE ONE PARTICIPANT GRADUATION

Shalonda continued, "At the graduation, participants are recognized based upon their family goal achievements, recovery management plan, or obtaining a personal SMART goal. This includes a brief description of the work the family did to complete their goal. For example, if securing housing was the goal, they would discuss how a participant worked over a period of time, communicating with their landlord to achieve and maintain their housing.

Participants, family members and even other providers such as Department of Children and Families (DCF) acknowledge the importance of this graduation. DCF workers have shared that this is an awesome experience and believe Square One's services have benefits for all families. Extended family members are excited to have their loved ones achieve something so special with the help of a phenomenal team. Participants have said they feel supported by staff and remain connected to Square One through groups and other offerings."

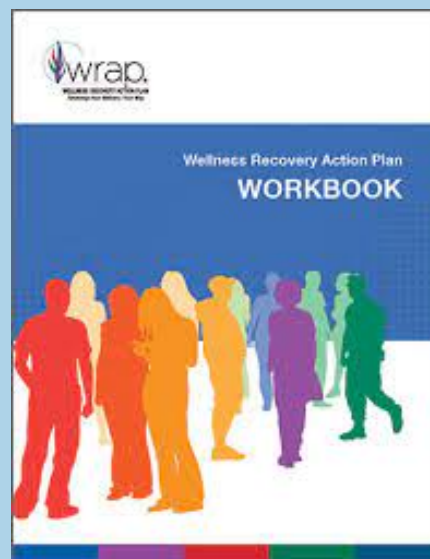
NEWS FROM THE SITES

Cape Cod Children's Place:

The Cape Cod Children's Place FIRST Steps Together team put together "Summer Survival Buckets" for each of their families to support them during the summer of COVID. Buckets included items to support parent-child engagement and to help with virtual visits. Each CCCP staff member also has the same supplies to engage virtually in visits with families. Items supported wellness, recovery, parenting, and concrete needs. For example, to promote recovery, the team printed out an updated list of 12-step meetings across the state and to help with basic needs included diapers, wipes, hand sanitizer and books. Bubbles were included as a fun activity for parents to encourage kids to be active and to support wellness in teaching breath control. Buckets also included chalk or small toys so parents had activities on hand for their children to play with during a visit.

Center for Human Development, Pittsfield

Patrick Tuohy, FRSS, facilitates a wellness group that has grown from one member per week to ten members consistently joining every week. The group happens on Tuesdays at 10:30 am via Zoom. Jenn Barnaby, Program Supervisor, feels that the biggest factor in this change is using the [Wellness Recovery Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#) workbook curriculum. Having a handheld visual along with a suggested question and activity has been a helpful structure. Patrick s



NEWS FROM THE SITES

Bay State Community Services

Bay State Community Services (BSCS) offered a six-week relapse prevention group in collaboration with the Plymouth Family Resource Center. This offering was designed for participants who needed or wanted to attend as a step-down support group after completing an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) program. FRSS Nicole Gallagher and Kristin Moore selected parts of the WRAP workbook that could be used to create a relapse prevention plan. The group used these sections to identify individual triggers and supports. During the 6-week group sessions, participants completed a full relapse prevention plan for themselves that they could also share with providers they are working with. Participants who attended at least 4 out of 6 of the classes received a certificate. BSCS is getting ready to begin round two of this group offering.

Jewish Family and Children's Services

FRSS Julia Brachanow and Sarah Fitzgerald from JF&CS are excited to begin pursuit of Recovery Coach certification. The certification process involves completing the one-week Recovery Coach Academy, and several other additional trainings and supervision with a certified Recovery Coach Supervisor. Recovery Coaching is the foundation of peer work and obtaining certification is a great way to formalize the important knowledge base and valuable experience that is essential to the work.

Useful links for those working toward becoming a Certified Addiction Recovery Coach (CARC)

[The Massachusetts Board of Substance Abuse Counselor Certification \(MBSACC\)](#)

[Careers of Substance](#)

[Recovery Coach Commission](#)

[Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery \(MOAR\)](#)

Center for Human Development, Easthampton

CHD, Easthampton is distributing informational bags to all community agencies in the area. The site wants to reintroduce FIRST Steps Together to their community and update everyone on the new eligibility criteria. Each bag includes a letter about the program updates and will be dropped off at local agencies including doctor's offices, food pantries, DCF offices, first responders, and anywhere staff have connections. The bags also contain updated rack cards, business cards, flyers about current groups, referral forms and FIRST Steps Together pens and pencils.

Making Opportunity Count (MOC)

MOC's FIRST Steps Together site has been able to **maximize participation in their groups by creating a survey** that program participants responded to about what times worked best for them and which formats they preferred. As a result, MOC is now running three active groups a week during the days and times that were best for the families they are working with.

Additionally, MOC as an organization has designated a special fund to be used for creative ideas to support families. Funding restrictions can limit what is possible, so with this in mind, ideas were solicited from case workers throughout the agency about what they would like to be able to do if they had the resources. One idea being considered that was submitted by FRSS Chelsea Peters was to arrange for photography sessions where parents can bring their children to have a family portrait taken.

LIVE WEBINARS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Children's Trust:** [Fathers and Family Network Meeting](#), Oct. 23
- **Essentials for Childhood:** [Framing Matters: How to communicate effectively about childhood adversity in the context of Racial Inequities](#), Oct. 23
- **NICHD:** Safe to Sleep Block Party: [Doctor's Tips for Breastfeeding Mamas Let's Talk About Safe Infant Sleep](#), Oct 26
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Building Resilience while Social Distancing: Parental Depression & Coping](#), Oct. 26
- **NICHD:** Safe to Sleep Block Party: [Fireside Chat with Dr. Sam—Why Is Practicing Safe Sleep So Hard, and How Dads Can Help](#), Oct. 27
- **NICHD:** Safe to Sleep Block Party: [The First 90 Days—What Every Parent Must Know About Safe Sleep](#), Oct. 28
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Fighting Immigration Policies that Tear Families Apart](#), Oct. 28
- **NICHD:** Safe to Sleep Block Party: [Caregiver Confidence— Safe Sleep in a Caregiving Setting](#), Oct. 29
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Nurturing the Nurturer: Self-care for Providers & Parents](#), Nov. 2
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Using a Hybrid Approach to Partner with Families](#), Nov. 5
- **PICCK:** [Postpartum Contraception and Lactation](#), Nov. 10
- **Children's Trust Family Support Training Center:** [Family Support Fridays: Trauma, Migración y la Crianza Temprana: Trabajando con Familias Immigrant](#), Nov. 13
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [From "Second Shift" to "First Shift": Supporting Fathers as Central to Family Life](#), Nov. 17
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Supporting Fathers Who Were Sexually Abused as Children](#), Nov. 18
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Providing Staff Support and Supervision Virtually](#), Nov. 19
- **StoryCenter:** [Storytelling in the Time of COVID-19](#), Nov. 20
- **Office of Head Start:** [National Research Conference on Early Childhood 2020](#), Nov. 30 – Dec. 3
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Understanding and Responding to Trauma in Virtual Service Delivery](#), Dec. 3
- **Children's Trust Family Support Training Center:** [Nurturing Children Who Have Experienced Traumatic Stress](#), Dec. 11
- **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Taking Care of Yourself as a Virtual Service Provider](#), Dec. 13



The [Bureau of Substance Addiction Services](#) and [AdCare](#) have multiple trainings coming up that may be of interest. Please find their calendar [here](#).

CLAS CORNER

[“The National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care”](#) (The National

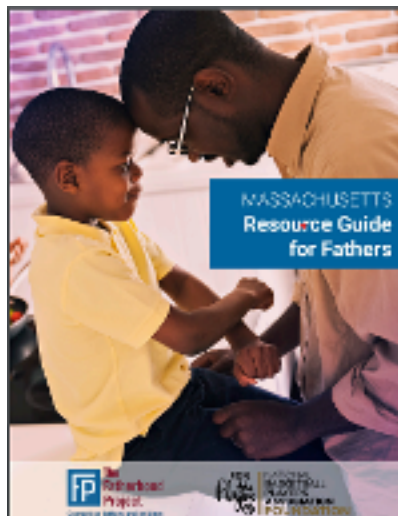
CLAS Standards) aim to improve health care quality and advance health equity by establishing a framework for organizations to serve the nation's increasingly diverse communities.” We will be talking more in coming months about how we can continue to incorporate the standards into our work in our efforts to reduce health disparities while increasing access and engagement in our services. If you missed it, or would like a refresher, check out the learning collaborative we

held last September, [Providing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\): The Enhanced National CLAS Standards](#).



MASSACHUSETTS RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FATHERS

In the [Massachusetts Resource Guide for Fathers](#), you will find national, statewide, and community-based resources that can support fathers in their role as a parent and caretaker. Whether they need help meeting their family's needs, caring for their children, or supporting their own health and well-being, there is a resource that can help.



FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

**SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER
2020**

mass.gov/first-steps-together

For more information:

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Caring for Generations
JF&CS
Jewish Family & Children's Service