

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

NEWSLETTER



PROTECTING RECOVERY DURING THE HOLIDAYS



<https://venturarecoverycenter.com/enjoying-holidays-recovery/>




The holidays can be a time of celebration and joy for some, while being a time of stress and sadness for others. Some people have fond memories of family gatherings or holiday traditions growing up, while others associate the holidays with family stress and drama, grief and loss, financial strain, or other trauma.

The holiday season poses very real concern for stressors and triggers which may put our recovery at risk. Society's focus on consumption can make the holidays a painful time, when it may be a struggle just to make ends meet. For some, being separated from their home, partner, children or other loved ones at this time of year, may make this season almost unbearable. Having to interact with either immediate or extended family, who we would otherwise avoid, often for good reason, can be extremely challenging or triggering.

As we consider how best to support our clients, our staff and each other during this holiday season, we can aim to keep in mind the wide range of experiences and associations we each have with this time of year, and to offer each other support, kindness and understanding, no matter what our individual feelings may be.

- Sophia Terry, LCSW,
Program Specialist and Parent/Child Clinician

[Why are the holidays so difficult when you're in addiction recovery?](#) from [Real Recovery](#) offers advice including:

-  **Get enough sleep:** When you're tired, you might tend to do whatever seems easiest at the time. It can be difficult to stay strong and fight cravings when your body and mind are fatigued.
-  **Always have a back-up plan:** You're all set to leave a party, and someone asks you to stick around a little longer. Make sure you have something important that needs to get done—maybe you need to run an errand before the store closes, or you need to pick up the kids from the babysitter. Don't let anyone convince you to stay at an event when you're ready to leave; you don't need to put your recovery at risk just to be polite.
-  **Nurture your spirit:** During all the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it's easy to neglect your spiritual needs. Stay balanced by making time to feed your spirit. For some people, this may involve going to church or synagogue; others may find that spending time in nature or going to a meeting does the trick.



[Money and Recovery: Christmas Edition](#) from [The Process Recovery Center](#) outlines tips for managing your money during the holiday season, "Planning ahead makes all the difference in both relapse prevention and restrained spending." Tips include: **Set a spending limit per person, have a conversation with your family, and utilize the cash envelope system."**

GRATITUDE WITH DEBRA



Gratitude is something that I have thought a lot about in my own recovery process. Sometimes it can feel like active addiction is a thief, robbing us of what we value about

ourselves, our loved ones, our relationships, and our lives. And it can be hard to feel grateful when we feel stuck without choices or when fear looms large. For me, gratitude is the antidote to all of these feelings. Here are a few exercises that I have done to cultivate gratitude, and therefore perspective, in my life:

- I texted 5 things that I was grateful for on a daily basis for a month with someone I was matched with for this purpose.
- I texted 10 things that I was grateful for every day with my daughter who lived across the country. This also gave us a little window into each other's lives.
- When I need some serenity, I make a list of things that I am grateful for in my immediate surroundings, at that moment.
- Perhaps most importantly, I take every opportunity to express my appreciation of, and gratitude for, people in my life.

Every person who is part of FIRST Steps Together is putting their heart and soul into the rewarding and difficult work of supporting the families that we work with in their recovery processes. I am profoundly grateful for everyone's commitment to keep showing up. For yourselves, for each other, and for your participants. Thank you.

- Debra Bercuvitz
Director, FIRST Steps Together
MA Department of Public Health

why gratitude? “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it **hitched** to everything else in the **Universe.**” -John Muir “With **mindfulness**, every moment of **everyday** is a precious **jewel.**” -Thich Nhat Hanh “**Joy** is what happens to us when we **allow** ourselves to **recognize** how **good** things really are.” -Marianne Williamson “The **thankful** receiver **bears** a plentiful **harvest.**” -William Blake “We can only be said to be truly **alive** in those **moments** when our **hearts** are **conscious** of our **treasures.**” -Thornton Wilder

HOW TO FOSTER EVERYDAY GRATITUDE IN CHILDREN LIVING WITH PARENTAL ADDICTION

From a recent blog post from the [National Association for Children of Addiction](#), [Gratitude: Not Just For Thanksgiving Anymore. How to foster everyday gratitude in children living with parental addiction.](#) "A grateful attitude actually changes the perspective one has on life, raising awareness of everyday things that are special. Further, children and teens go through the day more relaxed and less stressed, sleep better, and with a positive attitude that tends to make other people feel better as well."

HOLIDAY RESOURCES

JF&CS Center for Early Relationship Support compiled resources that may be helpful to share with clients:

- [View Thanksgiving resources here](#), including [Christmas in the City](#) and [Massachusetts Salvation Army](#)
- [December resources here](#), including [Globe Santa](#) and [Massachusetts Salvation Army](#)
- [Utility Assistance Programs](#), including utility discounts, shut-off protection and more

HOLIDAYS WITHOUT YOUR CHILDREN

This narrative for [Rise Magazine](#), [Missing My Children on the Holidays – Focusing on the future got me through this difficult time of year](#), Lakisha discusses her holidays with her children in foster care, "Christmas and New Year's usually make me feel like the perfect parent: cooking, gift wrapping, storytelling, bringing out smiles and long hugs. These holidays didn't feel right for me without my kids..."

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT: CHD PITTSFIELD

The FIRST Steps Together site at Center for Human Development (CHD), Pittsfield is having great success in creating a safe place by offering a variety of activities and opportunities for the families they are serving. These offerings build a sense of community and support for program participants in their recovery journey.

CHD Pittsfield currently offers a wellness group, parenting group, yoga and a "Coffee and Crafts" time each week. Program Supervisor Jenn Barnaby shared:

A mother who showed up at the office and said it was either here or the bar. She came to us instead of the bar! How amazing is that?! We are in awe and could not be more proud of the work that our staff has done to create this amazing SAFE PLACE for these women and this community.

Three women participating in the FIRST Steps Together program asked how they could start giving back to our community and teamed up to create a plan to deliver peanut and jelly sandwiches and winter clothing to individuals living down on the railroad tracks.

The office has been filled with women all week, who could be out on the streets but decided to come to us instead. These women have been using the space to talk and have coffee and even organize our donation room.

Additionally, local businesses are offering services and workshops for program participants. A hair salon is offering a free shampoo and haircut. FIRST Steps Together is also working with a local theater group to introduce our members to the world of theater and they gave us free tickets to a show this weekend. Women in this program are making plans to go to lunch together and then go see a show and some of them are even bringing their children.

A mother who is pregnant and still grieving the loss of her son who died at birth actually came in today because she said I have to get out of the hotel room and stop being depressed and learn how to be happy with this new baby coming.



UPCOMING TRAININGS AND EVENTS

FIRST Steps Together Trainings:

In Person Training in Worcester

- 1/9, All FIRST Steps Together Training

Learning Community Calls, 1 - 2 via zoom

- 12/19, Perinatal Emotional Complications
- 1/16, The State of the Project

Webinars, 1st Tuesday, 1-2:30, via zoom

- 12/3, Understanding Eligibility & Accessing Benefits
- 1/7, Removal/Kinship Placement

11/21, [Improving the Care of Mothers, Infants and Families Impacted by Perinatal Opioid Use: A Massachusetts Statewide Initiative](#), Norwood, [Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Improvement Network of Massachusetts \(PNQIN\)](#)

12/10, **Statewide Substance Use Prevention Conference: Constructing a Collective Vision for Prevention: The Connection Between Partnerships, Processes, and Results**, Norwood, [Bureau of Substance Addiction Services](#)



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

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT IS NOVEMBER 21

"For more than 40 years, the [American Cancer Society](#) has hosted the [Great American Smokeout](#) on the third Thursday of November: "The Great American Smokeout is an opportunity for people who smoke to commit to healthy, smoke-free lives – not just for a day, but year round... The Great American Smokeout event challenges people to stop smoking and helps people learn about the many tools they can use to help them quit and stay quit."

For adults, the most effective way to quit cigarettes, vaping devices, or other tobacco products is to use FDA-approved medicines and coaching support together. It takes most people multiple attempts to quit for good. In September, a statewide Standing Order was issued in Massachusetts that facilitates insurance coverage for NRT products (such as gum, lozenges and the patch).

This means that someone, over 18, can go to their local pharmacy and request nicotine replacement products at low or no cost to them! For more information and support in quitting, call the Massachusetts Smokers Hotline 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

The [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) suggests the most effective way to quit smoking is to use medicines and support together. Here are the four main steps to follow:

- Step 1: [Make a plan](#) and set a quit date
- Step 2: Put your plan in motion
- Step 3: Know why you smoke and why you are quitting
- Step 4: Become a nonsmoker

For more information:
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**YOU DON'T
HAVE TO STOP
SMOKING
IN ONE DAY.
START WITH
DAY ONE.**

Quitting smoking isn't easy. It takes time. And a plan. Let the Great American Smokeout® event on November 21 be your day to start your journey toward a smoke-free life. The American Cancer Society can help you access the resources and support you need to quit. Quitting starts here.

Learn more at cancer.org/smokeout or call 1-800-227-2345.



Attacking from every angle.®

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The MA Smokers'
Helpline offers
free support to
quit smoking.



1-800-QUIT-NOW

For more information about the
Helpline and to enroll online, visit
KeepTryingMA.org



Massachusetts Department of Public Health