

FAMILY REUNIFICATION & ENGAGEMENT IN TREATMENT COURTS

Susan Wright, MPA
Pennsylvania Counseling Services

OUR WHY

- ▶ Nothing new; historically addiction has turned families upside down
- ▶ Substance abuse affects EVERYONE in the family
- ▶ "But if you really loved your child...you'd just stop using."

HURDLES

- ▶ Each family is different
- ▶ Reunification may look different
- ▶ Individuals who are still using or in early recovery
- ▶ Communication issues across agencies



BRAIN HAS BEEN HIJACKED

▶ Healthy Brain

- ▶ Stress response is activated, cortisol is released and spreads throughout the body
- ▶ When cortisol reaches the brain, turns off stress response



▶ Addiction Impacted Brain

- ▶ Circuits that normally turn off stress response are faulty and the stress response stays on high for longer

WHOLE FAMILY

- ▶ Engagement starts at intake / interview
- ▶ Treatment and recovery education
- ▶ Family counseling
- ▶ Participating in intake process
 - ▶ Recovery planning

EDUCATION TOPICS

- ▶ Information about the disease of addiction
 - ▶ Emotional, physical effects
- ▶ Addiction recovery process
 - ▶ Signs of relapse and how to respond
- ▶ Finding support for ALL family members
- ▶ Ways to rebuild trust
- ▶ Setting and maintaining boundaries
- ▶ Who to call

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ Conversation is crucial
 - ▶ Person first language
 - ▶ Avoid labels
- ▶ Active support in early recovery
- ▶ Triple P Parenting Program (pacounseling.com/triplep)
- ▶ Strengthening Families Program



CHILDREN



- ▶ Age appropriate interactions and discussion topics
- ▶ Events geared towards families
- ▶ Sesame Street in Communities (young children)

COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION



- ▶ No one person or agency, can do it all
- ▶ Work smarter, not harder
- ▶ Identify successes, not just problems
- ▶ Reduce or eliminate barriers when possible

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

- ▶ Nothing comes automatically
- ▶ Rebuilding trust takes time
- ▶ Individuals will remain angry
- ▶ This will be TOUGH! But not impossible



DISCHARGE & TRANSITIONS

- ▶ Identifying a community network of support
- ▶ Planning for use and access
- ▶ Graduation should not be the first time a family is incorporated into treatment court activities!

RESOURCES

- ▶ Child Welfare Information Gateway (childwelfare.org)
- ▶ Pathways to Family Reunification and Recovery
- ▶ Guidance to States (cffutures.org)
- ▶ National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (ncsacw.samhsa.gov)
- ▶ Sesame Street in Communities
- ▶ Al-Anon: <https://al-anon.org/>
- ▶ National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated
