



# Parenting Notes

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Parenting Notes

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Nurturing Program

## NREPP Recognition

### National Registry Notes IHR Program

SEASON'S GREETINGS from the Institute for Health and Recovery's Parenting Team. We have exciting news about the *Nurturing Program for Families in Substance Abuse Treatment and Recovery*. NREPP (National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices) recently added the *Nurturing Program* to their list of evidence-based prevention and intervention programs.

NREPP ([www.nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov)) is a searchable online registry of mental health and substance abuse interventions that have been reviewed and rated. The purpose of the registry is to assist in identifying programs and practices in the field that have been scientifically tested and can be readily implemented.

IHR is extremely pleased with this acknowledgement and invites you to view this website. The Parenting Team provides co-facilitation of the *Nurturing Program* to programs in Mass., as well as statewide and national training and consultation. Our October training proved a tremendous success: we were touched by a participant who commented, "Thank you again for sharing the work that you all so clearly pour your heart and soul into. I learned a lot and left blessed. Yes, blessed." We hope we can continue to share our experiences and passion with you.



Photo: Jessica Merz

### Focus of the Month

## Supporting Parents through the Holidays

DECEMBER HOLIDAYS are often a time for families to get together and enjoy each other's company, but holidays can sometimes be exhausting, especially for families who already have many stressors in their lives. The holidays can be difficult for families in treatment programs or for those struggling in early recovery. TV and magazines show us beautiful pictures of joyous times with loving family and friends. Of course, there is a big difference between what we see on television and most of our realities. It's important to support parents in celebrating their own lives. The fact that they have embarked on a new way of life in treatment or recovery will be much more beneficial than trying to create virtually unattainable television fantasies.

Our goal is to support families in accepting their realities and in seeking to acknowledge the positives in their lives. Parents may feel guilty if they're unable to be with their children. Others may feel scared if it is their first time clean and sober with their children during the holidays. Parents may feel inadequate because they are unable to

give their children what they would like. These are all normal feelings that need to be acknowledged. However, our task is to encourage parents to look further and see that they are on the path of recovery. They may not be the parents they strive to be, but they are also not the parents they used to be.

Looking at the holidays as a time to *build family cohesion* rather than a time to get through a to-do list can ease the stress of performance for parents. Despite all the joy the season can bring, the legacy of addiction unfortunately leaves some clients with the pain of losing their children due to adoption, loss of custody, or the death of a child. In these cases, special attention should be taken to help the client manage the sensitivity of the season and all the potential triggers.

Supporting parents so they understand that they're the gift that their children really want and need, no matter what their present circumstances, helps parents to see their unique value to their children. This shift in perspective helps build a spirit of gratitude for the gift of family.



**Included in SAMHSA's  
National Registry of  
Evidence-based  
Programs and Practices**

## Holiday Tips

# For Parents and Children

## Holiday Tips for Children

For children, the holidays can be a time of magic and wonder, traditions and history, songs and music, fun and gifts, family, and warm memories of holidays past. But the holidays may also mean an increase in children's fears and anxieties, anger and sadness, memories of past holiday hurts and disappointments, and uncertainties about the future.

### Prepare children ahead of time

Be clear about any limitations on time, location, and gift budget beforehand; preparing expectations ahead of time will make transitions smoother for all.

### Accept negative emotions with nurturing responses

And understand that children may experience ambivalence, anger, fear and a host of other feelings they may not altogether understand. Validating that you hear and understand those feelings, without trying immediately to cheer them up or change those feelings, can often be the best gift a child can receive.

### Set aside time with each child

Spend a small amount of special time with the child, no matter how short, to share a special memory, story, game, compliment, appreciative comment, joke, or gift.

### Create new traditions

Whether it is having each child light their own Menorah for Chanukah or the Kinara for Kwanzaa, each child picking a favorite Christmas song to lead, creating a picture or photo collage, or implementing a new and unique idea, having a tradition that happens yearly gives children a sense of connection and reassurance.



## Tips for Parents

### Help parents to focus on the positive things they have in their lives

1. Recovery;
2. Their children, if in their lives; and/or
3. The other supports around them.

### Encourage parents to take care of themselves during this season

1. Plan a specific time to do something relaxing, even if only briefly. Taking a brisk walk, a few minutes of meditating quietly, listening to your favorite songs, or even the joy of being creative through making cards, gifts or decorations are simple ways to make time for yourself.
2. Recognize that the best gift that your child can have is a healthy parent.
3. Taking care of yourself allows you to take care of others.

### Help parents to understand that parenting is a relationship, not just a set of skills

1. Remember that parenting is about building memories that will last beyond the season.
2. The joy of the season comes from enjoying each other.
3. You can write your own rules for the season that will create nurturing memories that children will remember for the rest of their lives.

### Help clients who have lost their children through adoption or other circumstances:

1. Encourage clients by reminding them that it is ok to be sad as they remember their loss.
2. Writing thoughts down on paper may be helpful in coping with their feelings.
3. Encourage parents to utilize extra support for themselves during this season (sponsor, therapist, friends in their network).
4. Writing a card filled with their hopes and dreams for a child that has been adopted can be a very hopeful and healing experience.
5. If clients are ready, it can be healing to create an ornament in the memory of a child who has died. This helps clients remember their child as they create a new tradition that honors their child's life.

# Suggested Resources

## Holidays and Family

**Celebrating Holidays Problems & Suggestions**  
[BetterKidCare.psu.edu](http://BetterKidCare.psu.edu)

**Holiday Traditions Around the World, and Global Giving**  
[OurBigEarth.com](http://OurBigEarth.com)

**Holidays Around the World Winter Solstice**  
[OurBigEarth.com](http://OurBigEarth.com)

**Diverse Populations Cope with the December Holidays**  
[PRWeb.com](http://PRWeb.com)

## Upcoming Trainings

**Jan. 11-12, 2011 9:30-4:00**  
 EITC: (#187) *Infant and Toddler Development.*  
 Sturbridge Host Hotel & Conference Center, JFCS.  
[cvent.com](http://cvent.com)

**Jan. 26, 2011 9:15-3:30**  
 EITC: (#071) *Supporting Children's Play.*  
 DPH Metrowest Regional Health Office, JFCS.  
[cvent.com](http://cvent.com)

## Contact Us

# We Can Support You!

IHR's Parenting Team works with health and human service programs to enhance services to families. We provide co-facilitation of parenting groups, technical assistance around parent-child issues, and staff training. Our commitment is to building healthy families and supporting their recovery. We look forward to hearing from you.

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**Visit our website for more information and a free sample of the Nurturing Program!**

