

# Suggestions for Providers

## Ways to think about individual and parenting values in your work with parents

### What do we mean by Values?

Values are those principles or beliefs that guide our decisions and choices in all spheres of life. We use them to decide what is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Values inform every decision we make about our behaviours, relationships, lifestyles, careers and parenting. Our values are influenced by cultural and family traditions, life experiences, friendships, love relationships, community and church affiliations, television, movies, music, advertising, art, literature, etc.

### Values in Recovery

In early stages of treatment and recovery, individuals can be confused about their values. Early sobriety entails a comprehensive shift of identity: from being a person without a problem with alcohol or drugs, to accepting and internalizing an identity as an alcoholic or addict. Usually, successful maintenance of sobriety calls for some changes in lifestyle and personal associations, and re-establishing values for a life in recovery. As a result, in the developmental process of building recovery, individuals often go through a period of uncertainty and wavering, at the same time that they can experience a strong drive to establish a new identity.

### Parenting Values and Recovery

Just as values guide recovery, they form the foundation of our parenting choices. For individuals in recovery, it can be a process to sift through some of the values learned in childhood, and evaluate whether those values still work with their objectives as parents in recovery. Sometimes, it means releasing some of the values from families of origin that no longer feel relevant (e.g. "crying is for babies" or "what happens in the house stays in the house"). Sometimes it means emphasizing new values (e.g. "In our family, we talk about problems instead of yelling and hitting when we're upset"). And it can even mean re-imagining or reconstructing previous values in a way that is meaningful in their current lives in recovery, or even using some of their recovery values (e.g. AA or NA "12 Steps") in teaching their children how to admit wrongdoing and apologize.

Similar to how preschool-aged children (generally three to five years of age) explore their identity and self-image through imagination, pretend, experimentation and inquiry, parents in early recovery benefit from similar experimentation and imagination of scenarios in order to develop a good understanding of their values and what is important for them as parents and in recovery.

### Using the NP Curriculum to Discuss Values

Throughout the Nurturing Program curriculum there are opportunities to explore, discuss and consider values: whether it means discussing how to give a nurturing response to children (Session 4: Feelings), or the ways in which parents can reconsider their expectations of their children (Session 5: Self-Esteem). Values are



central to many people's recovery process. Session 15: Knowing Our Values is a great place to reinforce many of the questions about values that parents have been exploring throughout their recovery process. In addition to the activities listed in the book, one way to complement Session 15 is to have group members create a Family Value Tree:

### Part I

- Print out a picture of a tree, or ask group members to draw a simple tree (remind them that it is meant as a symbol and doesn't need to be perfect).
- Ask parents to list some values that are important for them to teach their children. If in a program, an alternative is to have the participants list the values that are important for them at the program. Some examples are honesty, kindness, sticking up for what you believe in, being a good listener, supporting friends, etc.
- Ask parents to go around and share what they wrote on their trees. Participants may want to add more words to their trees as others share.
- Ask participants to put their name on the back of their trees. They can use these trees as a way to talk to their families and loved ones about important family values.

### Part II

- Collect the trees from participants.
- Find the 3–5 most common values listed by participants.
- Using those values, create three examples of situations that present a dilemma, a parenting situation, or a difficult situation based on these words. For example, "hard work" might be a common value chosen by participants. The group facilitator could create a *what if* situation that asks participants what they would do if they discovered their child won a prize at school for a project that was copied and not original. This can allow participants to discuss how they teach the values listed in every day life.

## Tips for Parents: Talking About Values with your Children

Parents with older children can do this together as a family activity, but a parent or parents can also do this as a way to think about and define their core values. Start by brainstorming and asking:

- What words best describe our family?
- What is most important to our family?
- What are our strengths as a family?
- What sayings best capture our family?

Write all the suggestions on the paper, regardless of whether they apply. Then ask the children to help pick 5 or 10 words that are the best descriptions for your family. Have the children circle the words (either read by the adult or the child, depending on the age), or with younger kids, help them to make a circle. Write them out on a clean piece of paper and have the kids decorate. If you want, make the clean piece of paper in the shape of a house, a heart, etc.



## Other Ways to Incorporate Values into Everyday Life

Talk with your children about their family history. Focus on how your family may have overcome hardships, your family's resiliency, and how those same values, qualities and abilities are special to your children and family. Research has found that the more children know about their family history, "the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, and the more successfully they believed their families functioned" (Feiler, Bruce. *The Secrets of Happy Families*. New York, Harper Collins. Pg. 41). For more questions about creating a family history, download The Happy Families Toolkit from BruceFeiler.com at:

<http://brucefeiler.com/pdfs/Happy-Families-Toolkit.pdf>

For school-aged kids, try playing a game of Scruples or What If. Write difficult situations on cards, then take turns picking cards and answering different ways to react in those situation (e.g. "You find a Spiderman figure in the playground that doesn't seem like it belongs to anyone but you're not sure. What do you do?")

For more about sticky situations and values, see "How to Talk About Values to Your Kids" at Parents.com at:

<http://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/style/how-to-talk-about-values-with-kids/?page=2>