

# Substance Use in Home Visiting

PEGGY MACLEAN, PHD

CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT AND  
DISABILITY



# Foundational Elements

- What is your relationship like with the family?
  - Have you step up the relationship in a way that allows you to talk about difficult topics?
- How did you approach talking about safety concerns and risk at the start of the relationship?



# Foundational Elements

Did you slow down the conversation about safety and mandating reporting?

- *Discuss what situations would lead to a CYFD call?*
- *If I have concerns regarding you or your child's safety, how would you like me to talk to you about them?*
- *"During our work together, I may ask you questions about hard topics like substance use, domestic violence, and mental illness. I ask these questions to everyone I work with because these things impact you as a parent and impact your child. I know these topics can be hard to talk about but I hope that you will feel safe with me to talk about them so I can help you access the help you may need."*

# Foundational Elements

- Adopting a trauma lens to understanding challenging behaviors and preparing for sensitive conversations is crucial
  - Parental substance use is highly related to trauma, especially in women
  - Parents often feel judged, shamed, and criticized
- Preparing involves exploring your feeling/reactions/beliefs about substance use, prepping what you might want to say, anticipating what may occur, and regulating yourself.

# Preparing

- Exploring what personal barriers you might have to discussing substance use.
  - What makes it hard for you to talk to caregivers about this topic?
  - What emotions come up for you when working with caregivers with a known history of substance use?
  - What emotions come up for you when approaching this topic ?
  - How might your history impact your responses to certain topics?
- Reflective supervision is key to exploring what is coming up for you and how it is influencing your work with a family.

# Preparing

- We may, ourselves, have a personal connection to substance use and/or trauma, which may impact your emotional response to the discussion
- Doing this work means contending with how it impacts us personally, either in
  - Individually/Introspectively
  - Reflective supervision
  - Therapeutic support (e.g., therapy, spiritual/religious support)



# Preparing

- Exploring what might you say in supervision or with colleagues?
  - It is helpful to prepare prompts
  - Using these discussions as an opportunity to practice self-regulation.

# Finding the Words

- **Early in the relationship:** *"I have been wondering whether you would be willing for me to ask you questions about areas that are sometimes harder to talk about- like substance use, family violence, and mental health. I ask these questions to every family that I work with since it helps me understand how I might be able to support you as a parent. First, though, I was wondering whether today would be a good day for you."*
- **Later in the relationship:** *"We have talked about some of the difficulties you have faced in the past with substance use and how your family struggled with alcohol and drug use. I was wondering whether you would feel comfortable talking about relapse with me. In my time working with families, I have come to learn that relapse is often part of the recovery process but that it is often hard to talk about. Is this something you'd be comfortable talking to me about?"*



# Finding the Words

- **After noticing worrisome changes:**  
*"I've noticed that things have seemed to change in the last few weeks. I've noticed that you have cancelled visits more often and when I have seen you, you seem preoccupied. I am worried about you and I was wondering whether it would be all right if we talk about it?"*



# Preparing: Other Considerations

- Consider who is present
  - Privacy needs to be considered as part of safety. *It might not be safe for her/his partner or friends to hear this conversation.*
  - Be cautious about proceeding when other family members are present for privacy reasons and to minimize defensiveness

# Mindful Regulation

- Mindful Self-Regulation is KEY
  - To have sensitive discussions with families, you need to feel calm and self-regulated, and able to be fully present with the client.
- If you are having a bad day, are not feeling well, or the home environment doesn't feel safe, consider postponing the discussion

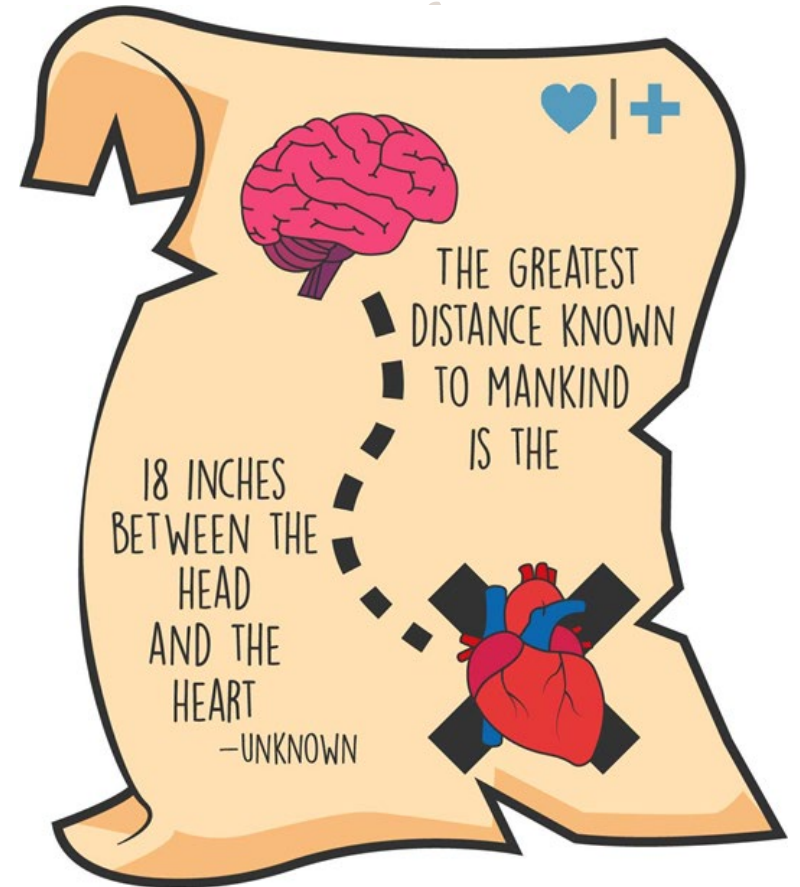


# When Feelings of Overwhelm are Present

- Remember that our work is to listen without
  - Rushing to reassure (“Remember that you are such a good mom”)
  - Give advice (“Maybe you should try ...”)
  - Correct their perceptions (“Maybe what you are feeling is more sadness than anger”)
  - Redirect their attention (“Think about how well you have been doing”)
- Normalizing their feelings, however, can be reassuring.

# When Feelings of Overwhelm are Present

- Many survivors have not experienced co-regulation with a safe adult around intense negative emotions.
- This is an opportunity for the home visitor to model a strong protective stance, which is what we want parents to do with her children.



# Strategies for Overwhelming Moments

- *"I see you're getting pretty upset. I want to support you, but first I want to help you be safe, emotionally as well as physically. This is very powerful, painful stuff. How do you usually help yourself feel calm?"*
- *"I really appreciate your courage in thinking about and sharing these difficult experiences, but I do not have the right expertise to help you walk through these details. I can help you find the right person who can help you."*



# Strategies for Overwhelming Moments

- *“Let’s take some deep breaths together. It’s so hard to think about these things. I really appreciate your courage. Are you ready to shift and think about how you would like your child’s life to be different?”*
- *“As you are telling me these things I notice my stomach is hurting. I’m guessing you are also feeling pretty bad inside.”*
- *“As I’m listening to you, I’m thinking about how huge this is. I’m so glad you told me. I imagine this is hard to share with someone. How do you want to care for yourself and your child right now?”*

# Discussing Relapse

- In our work with families, we have found it helpful to talk about relapse once families have shared their current/past struggles with substance use.
- Often, people share that it is really hard to talk about relapse with family and friends for fear of being criticized or abandoned.





# Discussing Relapse



- We often talk about:
- “Recovery looks different for each person. For some, it’s a straight shot and others, it’s bumpy. How has it been for you?” [FAN Capacity Building: Drop and Explore]
- “For some, relapse is part of *relapse is part of the process. For some people, it is not. Whatever your process may be, I hope you feel safe to share it with me.*”
- “*Recovery can be bumpy. How has it been for you?*” [FAN Capacity Building: Drop and Explore]

# Relapse Prevention/Safety Plans

- Provides questions to help guide a discussion about relapse prevention
  - Understanding one's triggers for relapse (e.g., positive and negative emotions, social pressures, interpersonal conflicts, etc.).
  - Identifying and coping with high-risk situations (situations that put a person at risk to use drugs or alcohol).
  - Learning urge-management techniques to help them cope when urges to use come up.
  - Identifying ways of keeping their child safe in case of relapse

# Relapse Prevention/Safety Plans

- Include what supports and treatments they would access should relapse occur.
  - *“What are feelings/ thoughts about treatment?”*
  - *“What is your experience of treatment?”*
  - *“Has treatment been helpful in the past?”*
  - *“What was helpful? What wasn’t?”*
  - *“What treatment options do you believe you have?”*
  - *“What are your worries about treatment?”*
  - *“What do you think a good first step might be?”*

# Resources in Your Community

- What treatment options of available in your community?
  - Inpatient versus outpatient options
  - Medically assisted treatment options
  - Nalaxone Rescue Kits
  - Fenantyl testing strips (April 1, 2022)

<https://www.nmhealth.org/about/erd/ibeb/pos/>

<https://www.nmhealth.org/about/phd/idb/hrp/>

<https://www.anotherwaynm.org/>

# Free Trainings

- <https://kessjones.com/nmopioidhub/>

