



My Family is Home!! My Family....Is Home... Ambi Daniel

COVID19 and social distancing has increased family time and it's a beautiful double-edged sword. So many families are sharing that they are thankful for the family time and opportunity to connect, at the same time, when substance use disorders are involved, it can be a challenge as well.

Some of the challenges might look and sound like this:

- I am not getting a break by going to work.
- I thought it was going to be easier to avoid worry because my loved one is home. It's actually worse.
- I feel like I'm walking on egg shells, I don't know how to interact with my loved ones.
- I feel anxious all the time.
- I hate not having a routine.
- I don't know what to do with my loved one wanting to use the car, I'm not using it.
- I don't know how to handle when my loved one wants to go "out."
- I am worried that my loved one isn't practicing social distancing and could expose the rest of the house to COVID-19
- I am worried my loved one is not getting screened in treatment for drugs and not seeing their counselor.
- I am worried about how my loved one is supposed to find recovery in this time....they can't do anything, and they are angry and on edge all the time.
- I miss my al-anon meetings, I cannot do them online because my loved one is home.
- I miss my friends and the break I get from time with them.
- I need a break.
- I don't know how to work at home, take care of my loved one's addiction, and have space for me.
- I don't know how to tell if my loved one is doing ok.

None of these scenarios are easy. You can feel the anxiety and distress just thinking about the situation. We started the **CFLR Family Wellness Recovery Collective** Facebook Group to share tools and support each day. It is open to all and we welcome you to join us. I'll share some of the tools below that started our group off! <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3910803405604230/>



Social Distancing and Shelter in Place Challenges: There are 2 main ways I'm seeing challenges with families in this social distancing situation. #1 missing that break from the chaos of living with substance use, and for some, #2 having different stress because they are home to be there for it and instead of relieving worry it increases it. Both situations present significant challenges. So, I want to leave you with some questions to think about and a challenge for each one of us to take with us into the week:

1. Are we safe? What do I need to be or stay safe? Who can I call to talk through a safety plan?
2. What are the challenges I'm facing right now? Create a list so you can see it.
3. What's in MY control? Create a list.
4. What can I do to give myself a break each day?
5. How do I define Recovery for me?

Challenge: Identify one thing you can do for yourself each day, it does not have to take much time. Decide what that thing you want to do is, create a plan to do it, and check in each with how you're doing with your plan. Accountability partners help with this one!



"Today, I'm going to take a little inventory....of us."

Shared experiences: It's easy to see that in April 2020 we are focused on COVID19. Chances are few conversations start with something else! We do this because we are scared and have so many thoughts that are just uncertain. With substance use, especially as loved ones, we often do the same thing....we find it hard to talk about anything but the substance use, treatment, goals and plans with the person who struggles with use. Because we want to know....are things going to be ok?

There is a challenge with this, eventually if it's all we focus on, we stop living balance in the other stuff...you know wellness and recovery!

One of the best things and hardest things we can do, is to focus on other conversations. And when we can't find anything else to talk about, it's a great time to take pause and figure out how you can start building other things in your own life to talk about, as well as building things together to talk about.

Some good thought-provoking questions to get started:

- What are some things I can do for myself to increase my selfcare? A 20-minute yoga class? A nice socially distanced walk outside? A hot cup of tea with a book?
- When was the last time I did something with my loved one that we didn't talk about substance use or recovery? What did we do? What are fun things we like to do together?

- What are topics of conversations that are important to both of us that do not include use or recovery?
- What are some fun activities that we can do together to give us some new experiences to talk about?

Our relationships are built on shared experiences, Recovery together also strengthens in foundation and practice, with the more positive shared experiences we can include. It may be awkward at first to find a way through the conversations, at first. An activity is often a really great way to start one that you're doing something active together, even if it's a puzzle, or a nature walk.....(with in the social distancing guidelines of course!)



"Remember that time we saw a lion climb a tree?!"

Support: One of my pups is really in tune with when someone is upset and her version of "support" is to jump on you, wrap her arms around your neck and attempt to slobber on you....I am always good until that slobber part...and then I'm out. To be fair, she doesn't know better....she is giving me support the way she knows how and likely the way she might want it....sorry Lu...!m not licking you either, you'll have to settle for rubs, walks, and treats.....which now that I type this...those things would definitely define supports for me.

Support is an interesting thing, we all want it, and to a degree it's expected of us and by us! At the same time, how many times do we really define what support means to us?

Now, I can't tell my pup, you're doing it wrong, she won't get that....but I can tell my loved ones, "What support means to me, is that when I call with a problem that I don't want advice, just let me vent, maybe recognize what I'm feeling and tell me you're there. I don't want you to try to fix it." It might also sound like this, "I could really use 500 bucks to pay my car bill."

The biggest thing I realized with Example 1, is not everyone is capable of doing that, in fact, sometimes what we deal with is so heavy, and people who love us just so badly want us to be ok, they try to tell us all the things we need to do differently or shut us out because they don't know how to support us in a situation that is not in our control, except to "leave," "detach with love," "kick them out." It isn't realistic for me to expect that everyone can do this.

Example 2....!m sure some people would laugh in reading it. Guess what...same rule applies...the person the support is being asked of...they get to decide if they can provide that kind of support. And it's ok to say, !m sorry I really can't do that.

Defining Support Tool I encourage some time to put some context to what support means to you.

These tips can help:

- Make a list of what you need for you.

- Create a list of the **actions** that your loved one can do that helps with your needs.
- Write out what you might say to them, using mindful communication can help.
 - How I feel, what I want, what you can do. The format is similar to boundary setting!
 - **Example:** “I’m really anxious all the time, I think I need an hour each day that I’m not bothered, and I can spend time in the gym while knowing Jake is going to be ok. What I’m hoping you’ll do is pay attention to Jake for that hour each day and help to be sure he’s safe, so I can have a little break.”

Respect, Trust, and Love: These 3 words are of the most common requests that families and their loved ones want from each other. Much like support....out of context that we have to create....they may mean something different to each of us. How do we define Respect, Trust, and Love **in action**? What can someone **do** to show us these things, and what do we look for from someone else?

Defining these key words can help minimize fallen expectations and increase realistic measures of success! You can use the same tips above!



“Support means letting me cry on your shoulder, and playing with the kids while I cook.”

Boundary tool: Boundaries are one of the things we talk about a lot, it’s as if we are supposed to automatically be good at having them! But boundary setting is hard and when we are struggling with knowing what the right thing to do is, it makes it even harder. Here is a format for boundary setting with a specific format that may be helpful to use. In this method, setting a strong boundary has 4 key pieces.

1. **How I feel.** Use feeling words name it! How does this situation make you feel?
2. **What I want or need.** Be specific what do you want in the situation, what do you want the other person to do. But most importantly, **what are your needs, independent of the other person. This is about the behavior/situation not the person.**
3. **How you will respond to make sure your needs are met, if the other person does not play their part.** It sounds like an ultimatum; the goal is really to be sure that a.) your needs are being met and b.) that you are in charge of your needs being met. If the other person is not in a place to help with your needs, the boundary is not dependent on their actions. The other key to this is to make sure you'll follow through with the plan/action. For example, If eviction is not really option, this is not a strong boundary.
4. **Verbalize it.** The hardest part for many, including myself, is verbalizing the boundary. If they do not know what you are doing and why, the boundary wasn’t actually *set*.

Example: I get anxious when I know there’s been drinking. I want to have a sober household and need to have home be a place I can come down from the day. If the drinking at home continues, I will have to start the eviction process.

Many people hope that eviction as a threat alone will work. We know that with addiction, this is not about knowing better or logically choosing better. Often, especially when addiction is strong, we will be led to that 3rd piece. It's important to ask ourselves is the boundary realistic? If not, what's something we can do? "If there is drinking going on, I'm going to remove myself from the room. I will not be around drinking."



"Wait just a minute here....I'm following the plan."

Perfection. I should know better. I do know better. I have the tools. I want to be better. These are some of the most common things many of us think when we could have handled things better. We are expecting perfection in ourselves while we go through OUR Recovery Process, working on change.

Our emotions are so powerful some days that it seems impossible to use our tools.

Truth time: We are not going to be perfect in this, even when we know better. Our emotions WILL get the best of us sometimes, we will say things we regret, and at times we will do things we wish we could take back, whether it was "unintentionally supporting the negative behavior" aka enabling, storming out and slamming doors, or sharing an unkind word. But here's the great thing. Even when we aren't better in the moment, we can be better in moments to come.

1. Apologies really do make things better.
2. Sharing what we learned or wished we said, can change everything.
3. Changing our routine to build in that extra selfcare/me time, can give us more patience.
4. Relieving ourselves of the responsibility and shame that we are going to be perfect in how we react, lets us live in proactive change vs. regret.
5. Managing our expectations for ourselves and others can help us keep resentments at bay.
6. Most importantly, remember, our love is what drives us to keep trying, and RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE, for our loved ones, and for US.



"I could have done better...I will try again tomorrow."

Share your favorite qualities in the people you love! Sometimes it's easy to focus on the frustrations and negatives and overlook the reasons we love them. You can share this with them, you can share this with someone else you trust. I find this to be a really helpful tool!



"I love how much you make me laugh!"

Accepting Personal Responsibility: This for me is one of the hardest CRAFT tools by Dr. Robert Meyers. To share a way that I've fallen short and to let loved ones know, that I may not be always helping, but sometimes being a part of things when they are worse. It also helps to keep defenses lower and build connection through the pain. It's one of the most powerful, yet difficult CRAFT tools, to admit that you could have done something better. I see this a lot when we just don't have the energy to keep it all together. Sometimes putting it down somewhere can help make it happen. It's a powerful tool!

Examples:

1. I'm realize I spoke out of anger and was not rational.
2. I'm not perfect in this, and I'm sorry I led things to get worse.
3. I don't always feel in control in all of this and I didn't react well.
4. I don't always bring enough reserve with me after a day of work and lost my patience.



"I am on a journey, sometimes we have to find another route."

Join us in our group for more daily tools and support for you and your family. This time isn't just about surviving the virus....it's surviving with our mental health, physical health, and with our relationships too.