

GUIDELINES FOR APPROACHING SUBSTANCE ABUSING MOTHERS IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF ILLNESS AND RECOVERY

Mothers Who Are Still Drinking and Abusing Drugs

- Confront the alcoholism and drug abuse at every opportunity with the woman.
- Evaluate children's emotional and physical safety.
- Use the leverage of a woman's concern for her children as a motivator toward treatment.
- Work with other adult family members (spouse, lover, parent) to encourage them to get help in learning about alcoholism and drug abuse.
- Provide a mother with treatment options that include childcare and that allow her to have access to her children. Maintain a resource list of such referrals.

Mothers Who Are Newly Sober

- Do not encourage a woman to rush into fixing everything immediately or to deny any possibility of problems with the child.
- Concentrate on a mother's sobriety and accept her denial as a way of protecting an ego which is still fragile and vulnerable.
- If a child needs evaluation for special intervention, a caregiver may need to take a strong case management role.
- Meeting the immediate needs of the mother is usually the best approach at this stage if child is not in crisis.
- Newly sober women may need help to lower their expectations of how things will change in early sobriety and be prepared for a "long haul".

Mothers in Late Sobriety

- Do not shield a woman from the knowledge that her drinking and drug abuse affected her children.
- Listen to her story, as well, as to what she is not saying.
- Help a mother to express and work through her guilt and shame.
- Be able to face painful parenting issues with her and talk about incidents of abuse or neglect.
- Help a mother talk with her children about her illness, what happened and the pain it caused. Role-playing with a mother may be helpful.
- Prepare her to be able to listen to her child's hurts, pain and anger by having the mother fully explore her own.