You’ve learned about the disease of addiction while you’re in treatment and recovery programs. This knowledge has helped you understand your behavior and the changes in your brain because of chemical use. But your children may not have learned much about addiction and sobriety. It’s important that they learn that you have a disease and that the disease is treatable. Here’s one way you could talk with them:

**Talking about addiction and recovery**

- What do your children know about the disease of addiction? Where did they learn about it? Do they have the correct information?

- What questions might your children have about addiction and treatment? Do you feel you have the knowledge you need to answer the questions? If not, where can you find the answers?

- Does talking with your kids about addiction and recovery scare you? Why or why not? If so, how will you deal with this fear?

- If you were your child, what would you want a parent to say to you now?
In our fourth step, we take our inventory and identify which shortcomings and defects of character have affected our lives the most. We also discovered strengths and assets that we can use in our recovery. Some of these same shortcomings and assets apply to our parenting.

My greatest strength as a parent is:
“*I pay attention when my child talks to me.*”

Things I am good at doing as a parent:
“*I stop what I’m doing to look at my child when he talks.*”

My greatest weakness as a parent is:
“*I don’t get along with the other parent.*”

Things I’m not so good at doing as a parent:
“*Make a commitment to not putting my child in the middle.*”
Why can’t I discipline my kids?

Sometimes recovering parents have trouble setting limits and disciplining their children. But teaching kids how to behave appropriately and interact with the world is one of the parent’s most important jobs. Here are some reasons we might give for not disciplining a child:

• “I’m afraid my child won’t love me.”

Kids will probably object when parents set limits. When you take away the fork your baby has found on the kitchen floor, she cries. When you tell your toddler he can’t have a cookie before dinner, he throws a fit. When you forbid your 5-year-old to watch a PG-13 movie, he’s likely to cry or sulk for a while. Sometimes a child may even send an insult your way: “You’re the meanest mom (or dad) in the world!”

These responses make us worry that limit setting will cause our kids to dislike us. But even though children cry, sulk or yell when you set limits, they really don’t want power over their parents. Children realize that they’re small and vulnerable, and they’re terrified when they don’t feel that an adult can keep them safe. It’s important to set reasonable limits and enforce them consistently to help your child feel loved and secure. Your child will love you more when you show you care and are there to teach them.

• “I don’t know what to do.”

All parents have times when they aren’t sure how to handle a parenting situation. It can be especially difficult if you did not have good parenting models growing up. Even experts don’t always agree on the answers. Sometimes it’s a matter of trial-and-error to see what works with your child. Learn as much as you can about parenting by taking classes, reading, talking with other parents and seeking help when you need advice. The more options you know of, the more choices you have for how to respond when your child misbehaves. Trust your instincts! If you are acting out of love, you will find a solution.

• “I feel guilty for the past.”

This is a big one for recovering parents. Overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame over past actions can make us unable to step in when a child needs direction. Working a program of recovery and finding support in our community can help with these feelings and allow us to discipline without guilt. Review your personal inventory and get support to overcome these feelings, knowing that guilt over the past can stop you from being the best parent you can be in the present moment.
First things first
Don’t lose sight of what’s important. Your focus must be on your recovery – keep yourself balanced and work your program.

If you want what we have
Get to know parents who have warm and loving relationships with their children. Learn from them and ask for their thoughts on how to handle parenting situations. Join a parent support group or take a parenting class. Ask for help from your child’s school or community group.

No more “stinkin’ thinkin’”
It’s not only a threat to recovery, but a threat to parenting as well. When we have a long list of “should” and “must” things related to our kids, we often end up angry, resentful and depressed. Remember that you can control your thinking and, in turn, control your emotions and behavior.

Live and let live
When we live and let live, we accept ourselves and others, this includes our children. When we truly accept our children for who they are, we open the door for loving relationships. “Accepting” does not mean allowing behavior that is cruel, rude or destructive – it means we understand where a child is coming from and work with him to improve behavior.

Have an attitude of gratitude
No matter where you’ve been or how long you have been away from your children, you are clean and sober today and you can be around to parent them for the rest of your life. Be grateful that you have a new chance to be a better parent and be part of your child’s life!

HALT
Hungry, angry, lonely and tired. Sometimes a minor adjustment in one of these areas can get us back on the right path. Pay attention to the basics – rest, nutrition, exercise, fun, support – in both yourself and your children.
In early recovery, your first priority is to stay clean and sober. It’s important to learn to balance your own needs and your children’s needs so that you can face the challenges of parenting without drugs or alcohol. Remember – nothing is so bad that a drink or drug won’t make it worse!

Many of the same things that are important for maintaining sobriety are also important in parenting.

Identifying three needs you have in recovery and in parenting, and write down a few ways to meet these needs.

**RECOVERY**

My needs:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**PARENTING**

Ways to meet these needs:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Preventing Relapse

Here are some things that parents who have relapsed have said:

• I used to kill the pain after visits with my children. I felt like I could manage the feelings better if I used.

• Past physical and sexual abuse issues brought a lot of painful memories to the surface once I got clean.

• I got so busy with taking care of my kids that my sobriety wasn’t the priority anymore.

• I was ashamed and felt so guilty about my kids, I just couldn’t deal with it.

• I was clean for a long time and things were so much better. Then I figured I could handle using and control it. I couldn’t.

• I never had a problem with alcohol in the past, so I started drinking. Next thing I knew I was back on heroin.

• Being clean meant so many responsibilities and I didn’t think I could do it. Everything was so hard.

• I couldn’t tell the truth to the people who could help me. I just didn’t trust anyone to help.

• Not having structure in my life was bad. I had too much time on my hands when I had an urge to use.

• Nobody in my family is healthy. I needed more support and didn’t reach out to get it.

• I figured I was too busy to go to NA meetings and decided that “everyone there is using.”

• Enabling family members made it easier for me to use.

• I just never felt worthy of good things in my life. When things were going OK it just felt so strange.

• My old friends showed up just at my lowest point, offering drugs, and it all seemed so familiar.

How can you plan the plan now to prevent relapse?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Even if you are not going to be living with your children right away, you can improve your relationship with them by making the most of the time you get with them. Visits with children can be awkward and confusing, for both parents and children. Even though children are usually happy to see their parents, they sometimes act out before, during or after visits as they react to the changes in their lives.

**TRY THESE IDEAS:**

- **Plan ahead:** Whenever possible, visits should be planned ahead of time and the date, time, location, and who will attend should be clearly understood by everyone. If there is too much tension between you and the caregiver to talk directly with them about visits, ask another relative, a friend, or a counselor to help with communication.

- **Prepare yourself:** Think about what you will talk about, any activities you have planned and any information you have to share. Line up your support system for after the visit in case things don’t go well and you need a listening ear.

- **Give advance notice for cancellations:** Make visits with your children a priority, but if you cannot make a visit, give as much advance notice as possible. It is always better to cancel than to just not show up. Some parents do not give advance notice that they cannot make it to a visit because they feel like they cannot face disappointing their child (or the caregiver) — but your child is going to be more disappointed (and perhaps worried or angry, too) if he or she expects a visit and then you don’t show up. And the caregiver has arranged the family schedule around the visit, so it’s also just more considerate to give advance notice.

- **Respect the rules:** Talk with the caregiver in advance about their rules and respect the caregiver’s rules during the visit. Remember that even though you are your child’s parent, the caregiver is the one taking care of your child day in and day out. For example, if the caregiver does not allow your child to eat a lot of sweets, don’t bring candy to the visit.

- **Know your child’s interests:** Use phone calls and letters to find out about your child’s favorite activities, what your child is learning in school, his favorite music, TV shows, and games. Ask about your child’s friends. The more you know about your child, the smoother your transition back into her life will be.