



Parenting in Recovery

Guilt, repair, and showing up anyway · Recovery in Focus · Session Packet

Parenting in recovery means holding two true things at once. The first is heavy: addiction touched your kids. Maybe in big visible ways, maybe in absences and moods they couldn't name, and the guilt about that is some of the heaviest guilt anyone in this room carries. The second is the one the guilt tries to drown out, and it's backed by everything researchers know about children and families: **a parent in recovery is one of the most powerful protective forces a child can have.** Kids don't need a perfect history. They need a parent who's present now, predictable now, and demonstrating now that people can change. Your recovery isn't just yours. It's the single best thing happening in your kids' story too.

This session works the parenting ground honestly: the guilt, and the difference between the kind that fuels repair and the kind that just punishes; what kids actually need from a parent in early recovery (smaller and more doable than the guilt insists); repair with kids, which works differently than repair with adults; and the hazards specific to parenting in recovery, including parenting stress as a trigger, the slow work of family court, and the trap of trying to make up for lost years by buying things or skipping discipline. One boundary before we start: this group is support and skills, not a custody proceeding and not family therapy. Case specifics stay with your counselor, your lawyer, and your social worker. What lives here is the parent you're becoming, one predictable Tuesday at a time.

What is in this session?

This session has four parts, usually covered over two group meetings:

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| CLASS 1 | 1. The Two True Things | 2. What Kids Actually Need |
| CLASS 2 | 3. Repair With Kids | 4. The Hazards and the Long Game |

After this session you will be able to

- Hold the guilt and the protective-parent fact at the same time, without either erasing the other
- Name what your kids actually need from you this season, in doable terms
- Run age-honest repair: what to say, what not to put on a child, and what repair looks like in actions
- Plan for parenting stress as a trigger, and keep working the slow custody process without drowning in it

What will be asked of you?

Honesty about the parenting ground, with two protections: no case details in group (patterns, not proceedings), and no competing over whose story is heaviest. Members without custody or contact

right now: this session is still yours; distance parenting and future repair are both real lanes here.

Part 1: The Two True Things

WAIT, REALLY?

In the research on childhood adversity, a parent's addiction counts as one of the heavy adversities, and the same research found the counterweights: **one stable, present adult can change a child's entire trajectory**. You can be both facts in one lifetime. Many people in this room already are.

The guilt sorting: the Hard Emotions session's distinction does its most important work right here. Guilt says "I did things that hurt my kids," and guilt points toward repair: specific actions you can take. Shame says "I'm a bad parent, period," and shame points toward hiding: avoiding your kids because you feel unworthy of them. From a child's seat, that avoiding looks exactly like more absence. That is the cruel trick of parent shame: it causes more of the exact thing it is ashamed of. Sorting guilt from shame is not letting yourself off easy. Guilt gets a repair list. Shame gets turned back into guilt, or it keeps costing your kids a parent.

EXERCISE 1

Answer yes or no:

1. Guilt about my kids is some of the heaviest weight I carry. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Shame has ever made me avoid my kids instead of facing them. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. I can say the second true thing ("my recovery protects my kids") and halfway believe it. ☐ Yes ☐ No

EXERCISE 2: THE SORTING

Private page. Sort one piece of your parent guilt into the two columns:

A guilt item ("I did..."), and the repair it points to: _____

A shame sentence ("I am..."), converted to a guilt sentence ("I did..."):

Part 2: What Kids Actually Need

Guilt says you owe your kids the lost years back. Nobody can give years back, so guilt is setting a goal you can only fail at. What child-development research actually says kids need is smaller, and completely doable. Kids need **predictability**: the call that comes when you said it would, the pickup at the time you promised, a parent whose mood is roughly the same two visits in a row. Kids need **presence**: attention with the phone put away, even twenty minutes of it. And kids need **honesty sized to their age**: no details they cannot carry, and no lies they will unravel later. Notice what is not on the list: expensive, impressive, or constant. A reliable twenty-minute call every Sunday does more than a guilt-fueled theme-park weekend followed by a month of silence. In early recovery, small and never-missed wins.

EXERCISE 3: THE DOABLE LIST

My kids (first names or initials, ages): _____

One predictable thing I can do EVERY week without fail (size it honestly):

My phone-free presence block (when, how long): _____

The thing guilt says I owe them that I am letting go of (the spending, the spectacle, the paying-back of years): _____

Ray

Ray gets his daughter every other Saturday, and for two months he spent money the way guilt told him to: arcade, new shoes, candy, every Saturday packed so full that no quiet moment could happen, because Ray was afraid of the questions that might come up in the quiet. By week nine he was broke and exhausted, and all he could offer was grilled cheese and a puzzle at his kitchen table. Halfway through the puzzle his daughter said, "This is my favorite Saturday so far." Ray tells the group he almost cried over a five-hundred-piece lighthouse. His daughter had not been keeping score of the money. She had been waiting for a quiet afternoon with her dad.

EXERCISE 4

1. What was all the spending actually protecting Ray from?

2. What did the puzzle deliver that the spending couldn't?

3. What's your version of the puzzle, the small, quiet, repeatable thing?

End of Class 1. Talk it out:

- Which true thing is harder for you to hold, the harm or the hope?
- What's your never-missed weekly thing going to be, sized honestly?

Part 3: Repair With Kids

Repair with children follows different rules than repair with adults, and getting the rules right protects them. **With kids, actions are the apology, and words only explain it.** With adults, the amends conversation is the main event. With kids, the main event is six months of showing up every single time you said you would, and the conversation stays short. **Size the words to their age:** little ones need almost nothing ("I was sick, I'm getting better, I love you, I'll see you Sunday"); teens can handle more truth and will test it, sometimes with anger they have earned the right to feel. **Never hand a child the adult problems:** your guilt, your cravings, your court stress, and your need for their forgiveness are adult weight. A kid asked to carry their parent's recovery stops being the kid, and that repeats the old harm in a new form. **Let the child set the pace of warming back up:** trust rebuilt on the child's timeline holds; trust demanded on your timeline does not. And when a teen says "you weren't there," the right answer is not the story of why. The right answer is "you're right, and I'm here now, and I'm going to keep being here." Then keep being there.

EXERCISE 5

Answer yes or no:

1. I've wanted my kids' forgiveness faster than they could give it. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. I've over-explained adult things to a child out of my own guilt. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. There is a never-missed weekly streak I could start this week. ☐ Yes ☐ No

EXERCISE 6: THE AGE-SIZED SENTENCES

For each kid, the honest sentence sized to their age (write it exactly):

The adult problem I will NOT hand them (name it so you can catch yourself):

My answer if "you weren't there" comes: _____

Part 4: The Hazards and the Long Game

Three hazards specific to this road. **Parenting stress is a trigger:** tantrums, teen wars, co-parent conflict, and single-parent exhaustion all fire the same alarm the Stress session mapped, and a parent's relapse hides easily inside "I just needed something to cope." The counter is the same skill stack, plus one parenting-specific move: the tap-out plan, a named person or protocol for the moment you're at the edge, because stepping away from an escalation IS good parenting. **The co-parent front:** conflict with an ex, especially one who holds access, is among the hottest triggers there is; the moves are the Anger session's (exit lines, 24-hour rule on texts, say it straight) plus a hard rule: kids are never messengers, spies, or audiences for the conflict. **The slow custody process:** for members working through family court or child welfare, the system rewards the same thing probation rewards: boring, documented months. Every clean test, completed class, kept visit, and proof of stable housing is a page in the file that future-you hands a judge. The process is slow on purpose. Build the record anyway.

EXERCISE 7: THE HAZARD PLAN

My highest parenting-stress moment (name the actual scenario):

My tap-out plan for it (person, protocol, or pause move):

My co-parent rule I most need to keep (exit line, 24-hour text rule, kids-not-messengers): _____

EXERCISE 8: BUILDING THE COURT RECORD

If I am building a custody or child-welfare record: this month's pages (tests, classes, visits, proof of stability): _____

The person who helps me hold the slow pace without despair:

What I want my kid to say about this year, ten years from now:

SKILL OF THE DAY: START THE STREAK

Pick your never-missed weekly thing, sized small enough to survive your worst week, and do the first one before next group. A streak rebuilds trust. A grand gesture does not.

Take it to the group

- Which true thing does your guilt not want you to hold?
- Ray's daughter was waiting for the quiet. What's your kid waiting for, honestly?
- What adult problem have you caught yourself handing a child, and what sentence stops you now?
- For those working through family court: what page went into the record this month?

Session summary

Two things are true: addiction touched your kids, and your recovery is now one of the strongest protective forces in their lives. Guilt gets sorted into a repair list; shame gets turned back into guilt before it costs your kids more absence. Kids need a parent who is predictable, present, and honest at their age level, not a parent who pays back lost years with money. Repair with kids is a streak of never-missed visits and calls, with short honest words. In this session you sized the doable list, wrote the age-sized sentences, planned the tap-out and co-parent rules, and, for those in family court, kept building the record.

Words used in this session

- **The two true things:** the harm happened, and your recovery protects your kids now. Both stay true at the same time.
- **Age-sized honesty:** truth in portions a child can carry, with the adult problems kept off their shoulders.
- **The tap-out plan:** the named person or move for your worst parenting-stress moment. Stepping away from a blow-up IS good parenting.
- **The streak:** the small weekly thing you never miss. Streaks are what rebuild a child's trust; spending is not.

Takeaway: Your kids do not need the lost years paid back, and they do not need a perfect parent. They need quiet time with you, a streak you never miss, and a parent who is roughly the same person twice in a row. Start the streak this week. Small and never-missed is what rebuilds trust.
