

# Family Huddle Newsletter



## **Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services**

**Tips and resources for people who want to be more effective in supporting adults with mental health/substance use concerns.**

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### MESSAGE FROM YOUR HOST



The winter holidays are around the corner, a time when family and friends will be gathering. In the October newsletter, you were reminded to observe expectations you had of your loved ones during the Thanksgiving festivities, and to practice radical acceptance as a skill for coping.

This month's topic is how to navigate extended family members' questions about your loved one's recovery. In most situations, questions come from a place of genuine concern, and even so, they can be difficult to respond to. These questions may bring up in you feelings of shame, being judged, sadness, and frustration. They may also be difficult to answer because they make you want to protect your loved one, and when you want to protect, you can become defensive and reactive.

There are helpful skills you can use when faced with these questions. Two skills are mindfulness and benign interpretation. A third skill is noticing when there is an emotional triangle, and when appropriate, taking yourself out of the triangle to encourage other family members to foster their own one-to-one relationship.

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## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing your awareness on the present moment; you can do this by focusing on your breath, and gently bringing your attention back to breath as feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations come to your awareness. Mindfulness is helpful because it will ground you in the moment, so you can use other skills for coping.

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## Benign Interpretation

Benign Interpretation is one of the Four Basic Assumptions, in Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) family skills. Benign Interpretation is interpreting situations in the most benign way possible. You are simply seeing things just as they are, descriptively and without inference, interpretation, or judgement. You try not to "read into" what the other is saying. To use this skill effectively, you will have to be mindful of your thoughts and bodily sensations in that moment.

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## Emotional Triangles

An Emotional Triangle is a common relationship pattern used when avoiding having a one-to-one relationship with another person. An emotional triangle is any three-way relationship, where people are not saying things directly to each other. The function of an emotional triangle is to reduce emotional anxiety between two people, by inviting a third into the relationship, which can bring down the emotional anxiety between the original two. Soap operas do a great job at demonstrating emotional triangles. No one is actually dealing with their issues one to one; they are coping with the relationship stress by bringing in a third person.

Emotional triangles are common in all families, and more so in some. It is a relationship pattern that can go on for a long time, until one of the three people decides the triangle no longer works for them.

When we are thinking about family gatherings, an emotional triangle would be when an extended family member comes to you, asks you about how your loved one is, even though your loved one is at the same dinner. Your response could be "Hey, you seem really interested in knowing how John is doing, and I know he would like to tell you all about it. He's in the kitchen. Why don't you go and ask him". This is you taking yourself out of the triangle and letting your loved one and the extended family member have their own relationship, without having you to go through it. If it is a relationship your loved one is not 100% comfortable in, you could coach your loved one about what to say prior to the dinner. By coaching your loved one about how to respond, you are showing them that you believe in them, and they have the ability to manage relationships. It is a powerful skill that can build emotional resiliency in your loved one.



## How does it relate to your loved one's recovery?

By anticipating the questions ahead of time, you can prepare yourself and your loved, with ready-made responses. This may ease your anxieties about having to answer unwanted questions. It is like writing a script, that will give you the confidence of knowing exactly what you will say in response. Your loved one will then feel supported and validated, which is what you want to aim for.

### Benign Interpretation...

Is being non judgmental

Requires mindfulness

Is one of the basic assumptions in DBT for family

Is assigning no blame

Can de-escalate the situation

Is focusing just on the facts

# RESOURCES

## Basic Assumptions

<https://www.dbtfamilyskills.com/blog-head-heart--hands/the-four-basic-assumptions-fromdbt-family-skills-training>

## What is Mindfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4>

## Mindfulness Exercise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6eFFCi12v8>

## Emotional Triangles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47rDdeSPTGs>



## Reflective Box

Take time and think about emotional triangles that exist in your family, and which ones involve you. Of the triangles that involve you, choose one triangle you no longer want to be a part of. Now I want you to observe yourself in that triangle, notice what happens when you get pulled back into the triangle, in spite of your efforts to stay out of it. "Ask yourself the following: what do I gain by staying in the triangle and what will I gain by leaving?" It may surprise you to learn that we will sometimes choose what is familiar, instead of trying out new ways to be present with others.

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This month we would like to remind you that in January, we will be offering our free 9 week Education Series. If you haven't taken it, please check it out: <https://tinyurl.com/yxpt9boj>.

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**FAMILY DAY CONFERENCE  
FREE EVENT**

Family Support Services is planning a special day for all of you.

**Mark the date: March 7th, 2020**

Further details will be provided in following months.

This January, Sashbear Foundation will be offering their 12 week, free Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT) group called "Family Connections". This is an amazing skills group for families - not to be missed! Please see their webpage and read the testimonials for yourself: <https://sashbear.org/en/>.

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British Columbia Schizophrenia Society (BCSS) Kids and Teens In Control, is a support group for the younger members of the family. There will be a new group starting in January. For more information: <https://www.bcsc.org/support/bcss-programs/kidsincontrol/>



# CONTACT

Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services  
Monday-Thursday  
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
(hours may vary to include evenings)

**1 (833) 898-6200**

## Are you in a crisis?

Call the Fraser Health crisis line:

**604-951-8855** or  
**1-877-820-7411** (toll free)

Trained volunteers provide emotional crisis support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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