

Empowering Loved Ones of People with Addiction: An Educational Group

Welcome Packet



Introduction

Welcome to our program!

Empowering Loved Ones is a FREE educational program for family members, partners, and friends of people who use substances problematically.

Our definition of “family member” includes:

- Biological family (for example, parents and siblings),
- Extended family (for example, aunts, uncles, and cousins), and
- Chosen family (for example, partners and friends who act like family).

This group offers education, not advice, and seeks to empower family members as the change-makers they are.

The group is grounded in research and compassion. We recognize that information given to families can directly and indirectly impact the course of a loved one’s substance use disorder. Just as the course of a loved one’s substance use disorder can, directly and indirectly, impact family members and their wellbeing.

The group intends to offer: a better understanding of why people use drugs and alcohol, how people change, and the road to recovery for all family members. We teach skills related to communication, problem-solving in difficult situations, dealing with crises and conflict, setting boundaries, and reducing the stress and strain family members experience.

Regardless of what has occurred in the past, all family members can learn the necessary skills to help themselves and their loved ones using substances.

Empowering Loved Ones is taught by professionals in addiction medicine personally impacted by a loved one’s substance use.

This group is not for professionals interested in learning how to work with families impacted by addiction.

Who we are...



Alicia Ventura, MPH, is the Program Director and Co-Facilitator of Empowering Loved Ones. Alicia is the Director of Special Projects and Research for Boston Medical Center (BMC), Grayken Center for Addiction Training and Technical Assistance, and BMC's Office-Based Addiction Treatment (OBAT) Program. She is researching loved ones impacted by substance use and has lectured on this topic for local, national, and international audiences. Alicia is trained in three different types of family-based interventions and is driven by her personal experience as a loved one of multiple people with substance use disorders. Alicia enjoys hiking with her puppy, Abby, in her spare time.



Lisa Schott, MSW, LICSW, is the Co-Facilitator for Empowering Loved Ones. Lisa is an experienced social worker who has worked in community mental health and community health care settings throughout her career. Lisa received her BA in psychology from the University of Michigan and her MSW in Clinical Social Work from Boston University. Lisa has been employed as Director of Behavioral Health and Primary Care Integration and Lead Therapist for an OBAT program in the Boston area. She currently has a private practice where she works with individuals and families affected by substance use. In her free time, Lisa volunteers at the Northeast Animal Shelter in Salem, MA.



Matt Heerema, MS, is the program coordinator and a facilitator of Empowering Loved Ones. Matt is a mental health counselor and research coordinator for Boston Medical Center's Grayken Center for Addiction Training and Technical Assistance Program. He is currently researching family members impacted by a loved one's substance use. In his role at BMC, Matt also facilitates a support group for people with alcohol use disorder. Matt works as a mental health counselor at Boston Alcohol and Substance Abuse Programs. Matt loves to read, run, and help at a local flower shop in his free time.

Group logistics

- Groups will take place the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month from 7:00-8:30 PM EST
- Information on session topics and registration links will only be emailed to people on the *Empowering Loved Ones* listserv
 - To be added to the group listserv, please send an email to EmpoweringFamilies@bmc.org (you only need to do this once)
- Anyone can join the program at any time (please give group information to anyone who may benefit)
- Information on the topic of the next group session will be sent at least one week in advance with registration information
 - You will need to register for each group session you plan to join *individually*
 - Registration will be open until the start of session
 - This means the Zoom link for each session will be different
- People are welcome to register for all group sessions, or just sessions covering topics of particular interest

How to register for each group

1

You will receive an email from Matthew Heerema inviting you to register for each group. This email will include a registration link specific to that individual group.

The registration link will look like this: Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/xxxxxxx>

2

The registration link will bring you to the Meeting Registration Page. Please complete the Registration Form with all required information. Once you have completed the form, click the “register” button at the bottom of the form.

3

Once you have registered, you will receive a confirmation email with all of the information you need to access the meeting via Zoom. If you experience any difficulties, please contact Matt Heerema at (matthew.heerema@bmc.org or 617-982-3510) for assistance.



You may find it helpful to download Zoom to your computer before the meeting. You can do this for free here:

https://zoom.us/download#client_4meeting.

Zoom Client for Meetings

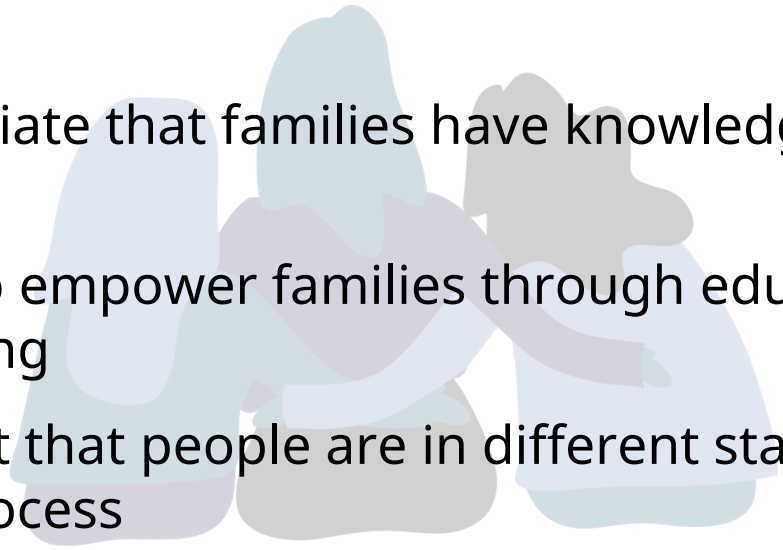
The web browser client will download automatically when you start or join your first Zoom meeting, and is also available for manual download here.

[Download](#)

Version 5.9.6 (4993)

Or, for Macs with Apple Silicon chips, click [here](#) to download

Group Core Principles

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- ✓ We recognize the importance of harm reduction (any positive change, no matter how small, is positive change)
 - ✓ We appreciate that families have knowledge and expertise
 - ✓ We seek to empower families through education and skill-building
 - ✓ We respect that people are in different stages of the change process
 - ✓ We focus on science
 - ✓ We concentrate on what is possible and changeable, rather than what is impossible and intractable
 - ✓ We believe families need support and education to make the best decisions they can, in the circumstances they are in, with the resources they have available
 - ✓ We examine old behavior in a new context
 - ✓ We believe loved ones get to decide what they want to do, can do, will not do, what limits to set, and what consequences to impose

There are no rules except the ones you make¹

¹Denning, Pat. "Harm reduction therapy with families and friends of people with drug problems." *Journal of clinical psychology* 66.2 (2010): 164-174.

Group Guidelines

- Confidential (what is shared in the group stays in the group)
- Non-judgmental / no right or wrong
- Non-religious
- Culturally sensitive
- Focus is on the family member/loved one
- No advice-giving (telling people what to do)
- Harness collective wisdom and experience of families and professionals
- No use of stigmatizing language (try your best, this is a learning curve)
- No war stories
- Mindful of the time
- Keep comments on the topic being discussed
- No cross-talk or side conversations

This group provides education and skill-building, based on science, to family members impacted by addiction. It is not a support group. While we always support one another, we do not offer one another advice based on individual experiences.

We encourage loved ones to be skeptical of anyone who suggests they know precisely what a family member should do. Issues related to substance use are often complex, not black and white, and require individual solutions.

We look forward to working with
all of you!

You can reach us at
EmpoweringFamilies@bmc.org with any
questions, concerns, or suggestions.