



FIRST STEPS

My Family Portfolio Provider Guide

**FIRST STEPS
TOGETHER**
FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT



FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

Thank you to the Department of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health
and Nutrition and Bureau of Substance Addiction Services and to
Jewish Family & Children's Service.



**Massachusetts Department
of Public Health**



**Substance Abuse
and Mental Health
Services Administration**



**Jewish Family &
Children's Service**



*FIRST Steps Together is funded by a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health
and is administered by the Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition.*

Thank You!

Acknowledgements

This work would not be possible without the staff at all of our FIRST Steps Together sites.

Bay State Community Services

Cape Cod Children's Place

Center for Human Development

Jewish Family & Children's Service

Making Opportunity Count

Square One Community Services

This toolkit was conceptualized, designed, written and created by the FIRST Steps Together Training and Technical Assistance Team and Project Director.

Sophia Terry

Clare Grace Jones

Adrienne Girard

Debra Bercuvitz

Erica Napolitan

We would like to thank the following people for their significant contributions to the vision and content creation of this resource.

Amy Sommer

Christina Russell

Alvina Duffy

Nicole Walden

Katie Britton

Maureen Whitman

FIRST (Families in Recovery Support) Steps Together is a program focused on empowering parents and families affected by substance use. We have seven sites across Massachusetts and deliver services in homes, communities, or virtually.

We understand that recovery from substance use is often a process with many ups and downs. We know pregnancy and parenting can be hopeful and exciting, but also stressful and overwhelming. This can be especially true for parents working on their recovery. Our home visiting services are flexible and driven by what families find most helpful.

FIRST Steps Together is a peer-centered program led by Family Recovery Support Specialists (FRSS) who are parents in recovery themselves, with specialized training that allows them to use their experience to walk with participants as they navigate their journey. Our program offers the option of a Mental Health Counselor, a space to connect with other parents in support groups, care coordination, and help with concrete needs.

Since launching FIRST Steps Together, we have accompanied many families on this journey. We feel privileged to help plant these seeds of hope and honored to have the opportunity to watch families grow.

We would like to thank the following people for generously offering their experience and expertise in the creation of this resource.

Ingrid Agis | Chasity Chaz Arigoni | Jennifer Barnaby | Annie Bentley Waddoups | Melanie Bilodeau | Mori Boudreau | Julia Brachanow | Will Burrell | Brenda Carey | Philip Cash | Tiffany Clark | Elizabeth Cleary | Carolyn Conepcion | Annette Cycon | Betty Doherty | Karin Downs | Beth Farias | Lucy Fisher | Liz Friedman | Latisha Goullaud | Meridith Hallisey | Danya Handelsman | Jen Hinton | Cindy Horgan | Kirsten Huff | Wanda Jackson | Nahia Kassas | Peggy Kaufman | Brittany Lavoie | Felice Lopez | Flore Luxama | Larisa Mendez-Penate | Chelsea Peters | Erin Pierce | Jennifer Meyerhardt | Kristin Moore | Heather Pietras-Gladu | Shalonda Nicholson-Mabry | Maria Rader | Katie Reed | Meital Sandbank | Casey Schmidt | Adam Schwamb | Jennifer Seaberg | Judy Semonoff | Billie Starks | Laura Sternberger | Julie Sweeney | Madeline Tarbox | Connstance White

My Family Portfolio Provider Guide Contents

FIRST STEPS: My Family Portfolio Provider Guide	2
--	----------

MY STEPS	5
Support List	5
Wellness Vision	5
Goals	6
Plans—Recovery Maintenance and Child Safety	7
Service and Treatment Plans	8
Group and Meeting Attendance	8
Letters of Support	9
Birth Planning Kit (<i>Resource for Expectant Parents</i>)	10
Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) (<i>Resource for Expectant Parents</i>)	11
Other Important Documents	12
Planner	12

OUR STEPS	13
Family Information and Providers	13
Supporting Child Development and Milestones	13
All About My Child	15
Family Goal Setting and Vision Boards	15
Saving Special Moments	16

STEPS TOWARDS EACH OTHER	17
Maintaining Connection	17
Ideas and Plans for Family Time	18
Family Time Notes	19
Family Action and Assessment Plan	20

SUPPORTING STEPS	21
Community Resources and Applications	21
Employment and Education Resources	21
Recovery Resources	21
Parenting Resources	22





FIRST STEPS: My Family Portfolio Provider Guide

The FIRST STEPS: My Family Portfolio was designed by parents in recovery to help other parents through their recovery and parenting journeys.

This portfolio serves as a resource for anyone working on their recovery while parenting. We recognize that pregnancy and parenting can be both exciting and joyful, but also stressful and isolating. Many participants benefit from peer and clinical support, as well as comprehensive wraparound support services. Parents can use these materials to think through how their substance use and recovery impacts their parenting, and how meeting their own needs can allow them to better meet the needs of their children. We hope this resource will strengthen program participants' recovery capital and parenting skills, to the benefit of the whole family.

Taking the First Steps Together, A Guide to Creating Collaborative Peer-Led Services for Parents Affected by Substance Use was created to provide the "Why" and the "How" for those who are working to support recovery and parenting together through peer-led services. Each of the previous chapters builds the foundation for this work. While the Family Portfolio can stand alone, we highly recommend looking through the previous chapters for a much more detailed view of how to accomplish this work. This chapter is the "Provider Guide" and can help providers walk alongside families as they complete their portfolio.

This Provider Guide explains how to help support participants as they complete each tool. We have also included *Language for Advocacy and Collaboration* which gives suggestions on how to communicate with other service providers around the family's recovery and parenting strengths, concrete needs, and progress. Please know that these are just examples, and you should feel free to use the language that feels most comfortable to you and to the specific situation.

The Family Portfolio can be completed independently by parents or with the help of any supportive person or provider. This can be any person providing support for the parent or child, including a recovery coach, healthcare professional, educator, developmental specialist,



therapist, spiritual guide, or other mentor. We encourage parents and providers to use this portfolio to guide your work, demonstrate parents' progress, advocate for their wishes, and support their child.

The portfolio includes four sections that can be individualized for each family:

MY STEPS guides parents through the process of identifying their support system, creating wellness plans and setting personal goals. It also includes information on safety and relapse/recurrence of use prevention planning, birth planning and a Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care).

OUR STEPS centers on strengthening the parent-child relationship and caring for the child, while supporting their developmental needs. This section includes space for parents to think with their child about their family's hopes and dreams for the future.

STEPS TOWARDS EACH OTHER is for families experiencing separation. This section focuses on ways for parents to maintain their connection with their children during time apart. This section also includes tools to support the parent-child relationship, as well as ideas and plans for Family Time.

SUPPORTING STEPS is a space to collect important information, applications and resources that support the parenting and recovery journeys.

At the end of each section there is a space for *Thoughts and Feelings*. We encourage parents to use this space however they would like. Taking time to reflect on their journey is an important practice for self-care and growth.

Doing this work offers participants an opportunity to consider who they have been and who they want to be as parents and as individuals. Parents can decide which of these documents may be useful or important to share with their providers. Alternatively, they may decide to keep certain pieces of the portfolio for their own personal use.

Within the healthcare, child welfare, and family court systems many participants with current or prior substance use challenges often encounter stigma and assumptions about their abilities to parent. This portfolio guides parents in thoughtful and intentional decision making, as they prioritize their children's needs while navigating parenting in recovery.

This portfolio also allows for collaboration among providers that focuses



on each family's strengths and develops a shared understanding of the supports they have in place.

We intend for providers to work with families at their own pace and to take this portfolio one piece at a time. Our goal is to empower parents to take charge of their lives, define their goals and strengthen their recovery while holding their children in mind. We hope this completed portfolio will guide other service providers in streamlining goals between services, easing parents' burdens and offering participants space to reflect and grow.



MY STEPS

This section focuses on the parent's journey as they work towards recovery. In this section, parents will have the opportunity to identify their support system, set goals, create wellness visions and safety plans and organize their important documents.

Support List

The purpose of this tool is for parents to collect and organize their contacts so they have easy access to the information they need. This tool helps participants identify their support systems and develop an up-to-date list of providers and releases of information. The completed tool powerfully supports care coordination as we use it in collaboration with their other providers.



My Support List
Go to page FP6

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"Attached is (Parent Name)'s list of their current providers, along with their contact information and signed releases. (Parent Name) has taken the initiative in compiling this information by allowing our program to collaborate with providers for both them and their children. (Parent Name)'s current providers supply services in the areas of (fill in the blank). We feel they are currently: well-supported (if applicable) or they would benefit from additional supports (if applicable) and will continue to work with them to meet their family's goals."

Wellness Vision

Creating a wellness vision offers an opportunity to work with participants to identify what wellness looks like for them. This includes the daily activities and practices that can help them stay or become healthy, determining how to recognize stressors and noting what coping or self-care strategies work best for them. This tool was designed with questions to encourage participants to reflect on the relationship between their stress and their wellness. Working through these sections may bring up big feelings and realizations

My Support List

The purpose of this tool is to have easy access to your support system's contact information. Your support system is anyone you can reach out to for support, such as family, friends, recovery supports, medical professionals, mental health providers and spiritual advisors. Your support system can consist of one or more people and work together if you choose to include signed releases of information for your service providers.

Your Name: _____ DOB: _____
 Primary Phone Number: _____ Is this your cell phone? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 Email: _____
 Current Address: _____ City/Town: _____
 State: _____ Zip: _____ Can you receive mail? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 Is this address or treatment program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 Preferred Contact Method: ☐ Email ☐ Phone Call ☐ Text

Emergency Contacts
 Who should I contact in case of an emergency?
 Name: _____
 Relationship: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____
 Name: _____
 Relationship: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____

My Wellness Vision

This plan helps you think through the daily activities and practices that can help provide wellness in your life. This can include personal exercise, daily meditation, maintaining a healthy or craft, getting enough sleep, taking your medication as prescribed or using things to manage stress, eating healthy or making your bed in the morning. Wellness can be whatever you want it to be. This is a space to practice what is important to you. Your answers are not needed, just a starting point. This is for you!

Getting to Know Me
 For my wellness looks a little like: _____
 There are the things I already do to care for myself: _____
 There are the things I can do for myself to stay healthy/well: _____
 When I am at my best, my life looks like: _____
 (How I feel, how I act, how I think, how I feel, how I act, how I think)
 There are the things I can do for myself to stay healthy/well: _____



about healthy and unhealthy practices in a participant's life. We encourage providers to take this one step at a time, use reflective listening practices and support participants through this process.

It may be helpful to review the SAMHSA's *Creating A Healthier Life: A Step-By-Step Guide To Wellness* which has ideas specific to each domain of wellness. Participants can also use the My Goals tool for setting wellness goals.



My Wellness Vision
Go to page FP9

Creating A Healthier Life: A Step-By-Step Guide To Wellness

store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma16-4958.pdf

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

Participants may complete this plan just for their own use or may choose to share it with other providers. If they would like to share their plan with others, FIRST Steps Together providers may note, "(Parent Name) has completed a wellness vision that goes beyond relapse/recurrence of use prevention and safety. (Parent Name) has used this process to become more self-aware and identify the coping skills necessary to maintain their recovery and wellness."

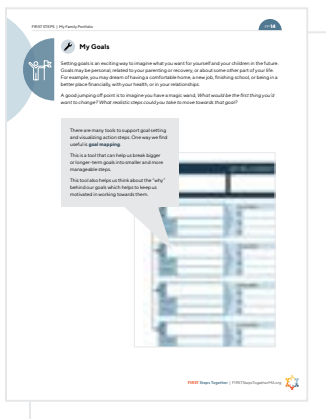
Goals

Brainstorming and identifying goals can help participants imagine the future they want for themselves and their children. We encourage parents to reflect on their parenting, recovery, and professional and personal development goals. It may be helpful to share a SMART goal format to help participants set goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound. Another approach is to begin with "the magic wand" question, asking, "If you had a magic wand, what would be the first thing you would change about your life?" This can be the beginning of a conversation about what is most important to the families we work with.

There are many tools to support goal setting and visualizing action steps. Goal mapping is one useful approach. This is a visual tool to help think about goals and break bigger or longer-term goals into smaller and more manageable steps. This tool also helps parents think about the "why" behind their goals, which can be motivating in working towards them.



My Goals
Go to page FP14



Language for advocacy and collaboration:

“(Parent Name) has identified their parenting, recovery, professional and personal development goals. We have worked together to break down larger goals and prioritize action steps needed to achieve them. (Parent Name) has been thoughtful and reflective throughout this process and has shown dedication to growth in these areas.”

Plans—Recovery Maintenance and Child Safety

This section guides parents through proactively creating a plan that can be used in the case of illness, relapse, or another unexpected crisis or emergency. This increases the likelihood that both parent and child will get the support and care that they benefit from. While we recommend families use the Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care), some parents may feel more comfortable starting with a personal and individualized safety plan.

My Recovery Maintenance Plan is a tool that encourages parents to make a clear plan for how to maintain their recovery with specific commitments from the parent as to the actions they will take to get back on track and keep themselves safe if a relapse/recurrence of use occurs.

My Child Safety Plan is a tool for participants to specify how they will keep their children safe in the event of a health emergency, relapse/recurrence of use or other family crisis.

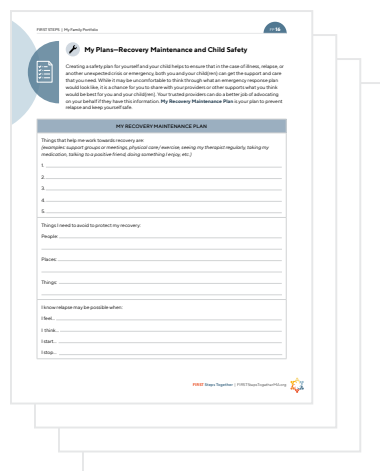
All parents can benefit from having these completed plans in place in case of emergency or crisis. We recommend walking alongside parents by taking this process slowly and approaching it without judgement or bias. This may be a good opportunity to use your lived experience, if applicable, to help parents see the value and importance of having these plans in place. It may also be useful to remind parents that their providers can do a much better job of advocating on their behalf if they have this information.



My Plans—Recovery Maintenance and Child Safety
Go to page FP16

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

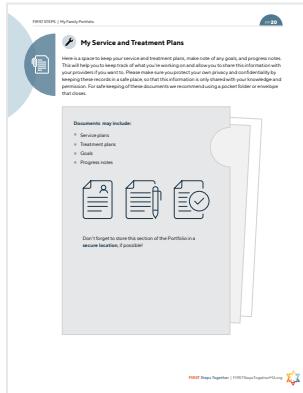
FIRST Steps Together staff members may describe this plan to collaterals, by noting that “(Parent Name) has completed a safety plan that considers not only their own health and safety but also the safety and well-being of (their child/ children). (Parent Name) has carefully thought through the supports available to them and how they will regain/sustain their health or recovery in the case of a recurrence of use or other emergency. Together, we have made a plan for the care



of (Parent Name) (child/ children) and have included the details of this plan as well as contact information for this alternate caregiver. We completed this plan collaboratively and I am happy to help answer any questions along with (Parent Name) or on behalf of (Parent Name)."

Service and Treatment Plans

This space is intended for parents to store their service and treatment plans, and make note of any goals, treatment plans and progress notes. This will help parents keep track of what they're working on and allow for sharing with other providers if they choose. We encourage both providers and parents to ensure privacy and confidentiality by keeping these records in a safe place, so that this protected information is only shared with the parent's knowledge and permission. To keep these documents safe, we recommend including a pocket folder or envelope that closes.



My Service and Treatment Plans

Go to page FP20

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"These materials include service plans, goals and progress notes from (Parent Name)'s providers (if applicable). Our aim is to ensure that (Parent Name) is well supported, but not overburdened by duplicative or overlapping services. We would be happy to schedule a collaborative meeting to review these plans and determine how our programs can best support this family."

Group and Meeting Attendance

This section is designed to hold documentation of the parent's attendance and participation in groups. Many recovery programs, Child Welfare Services action plans and court-ordered substance use treatment require these materials. Participants may also find it useful to track their own progress within their various groups.

We recognize that it can be challenging to have this form signed off on, particularly if it may breach Twelve Steps program anonymity. We encourage participants to do their best. Similarly, some meetings occur virtually, so we recommend parents request an email confirming their attendance. In some cases, participants may need you to advocate for/with them. This may involve reaching out to group leaders or other service providers, explaining the importance of obtaining the signature and thinking through alternate solutions if this requirement poses challenges.

AGENCY AND GROUP NAME	MEETING LOCATION, DATE AND TIME	ATTENDANCE SIGNATURE	TAKE-AWAY NOTES (IF APPLICABLE)



My Group and Meeting Attendance

Go to page FP21



Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"(Parent Name) has been attending groups/meetings focusing on (parenting, recovery or other). We've seen (Parent Name) grow and develop skills throughout their group participation (explain growth and new skills, if applicable). They have gathered information from the group(s) they have attended. These materials include documentation of their meeting attendance and/or a learning or take-away from each group session. Please let us know if you have any questions about the group format or (Parent Name)'s involvement."

Letters of Support

This space is intended to store letters of support that document parents' progress by their service providers or speak to their character by other important people in their life. When parents are involved with Child Welfare Services or the court system, it is beneficial to highlight their successes, personal growth, and recovery.

We advise all families who regularly participate in services to ask their providers for letters of support. It is important that these are written on agency letterhead and contain the provider's full name, position, agency, information about the service they provide, the dates of program participation and specific examples of or observations about progress. Parents may also want to collect letters from other important people in their life such as family, friends or other supports. They can also include parenting group certificates, positive work reviews, employer recommendations or anything else that highlights their strengths and growth.

We have included a sample letter participants can share. It may be helpful to brainstorm who can provide a letter, role play asking for it and help parents decide how these letters could be shared.

My Letters of Support

Parenting is recovery is not work. Whether you have many years of recovery or you are just getting started in this journey, you are the parent because you are the parent. This letter is a place for you to share your experiences in a variety of ways: as a parent, as a provider, as a participant, as a volunteer, as a group member, as a support person, as a witness, as a friend, as a family member, as a community member, as a person who is proud of you, as a person who is proud of your family, as a person who is proud of your community, as a person who is proud of your world.

If your family is involved with Child Welfare Services or the court system, it is helpful for you to be able to share your work, growth and recovery. You can ask your service providers for letters of support and support that can be used in court proceedings and other legal matters. When possible, letters should be written on agency letterhead and contain the provider's full name, position, agency, information about the service they provide, the dates of program participation and specific examples of or observations about progress. You are making a difference in your community, your family, your friends, your neighbors, your world.

Below is a sample letter for a letter of support that providers can complete on your behalf. Feel free to share this template with your providers. They are welcome to use the language to meet your specific needs.

(Agency letterhead)

Provider Name, Credentials
 Title
 Agency
 Address
 Email
 Phone

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter for (Participant name), who I have worked with since (date). (Participant name) has shown growth and progress in the areas of (list areas of growth, goals or skills). (Participant name) has participated in (list group or other program activities).

We will continue to work together to meet (Participant name)'s goals to support their family. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about our program services.

Sincerely,
 Name, Credentials (if applicable)
 Best mode of contact



My Letters of Support
 Go to page FP22

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"(Parent Name) has gathered letters of support from their current and past providers as well as other important supports in their life. Each letter includes the provider's contact information and a description of their work together. Character references speak to the parent's personal and parenting qualities and relationships. These letters illustrate (Parent Name)'s dedication to their growth as a parent and a person in recovery. I have also included a letter detailing my experience working with (Parent Name). Additionally, (Parent Name) has included progress notes from various services, along with certificates of completion of (parenting group name(s)). (If applicable)"





Birth Planning Kit (Resource for Expectant Parents)

When working with pregnant and expectant parents, we recommend *The Journey Recovery Project Birth Planning Kit Recovery and Wellness Plan*, which is available to print and download from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Clearinghouse.

The Journey Recovery Project Birth Planning Kit Recovery and Wellness Plan

<https://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/PROG-BSAS-YTH/SA3588.html>

This kit includes materials to plan prenatal and hospital visits, list birth and medication preferences and learn about the early postpartum period. It includes Information about Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS), often referred to as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), soothing, breastfeeding and safe sleep.

There are many things to consider throughout pregnancy and in birth planning, and families are often faced with unforeseen challenges along the way. Connecting with providers and asking specific questions about the birth process can lessen expectant parents' anxiety and allow them to feel empowered to create a plan, express their wishes and voice concerns. This process can also result in a more respectful and comfortable birth and postpartum hospital stay for parents and babies.



My Birth Planning Kit
Go to page FP23

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"(Parent Name) has tracked information related to their pregnancy and has also participated in prenatal care and received educational materials about the postpartum period and infant care and safety. (Parent Name)'s birth plan and preferences are outlined here. Please take the time to review these materials with (Parent Name). They have also given permission for you to reach out to our program if you have any questions."





Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) (Resource for Expectant Parents)

The Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) is a federal requirement intended to support the safety and wellbeing of children and families affected by substance use.

In Massachusetts, currently, when an infant is born affected by substances (legal or illegal), a report is typically made to Child Welfare Services. When the family is discharged from the hospital, Child Welfare Services will require a Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) to be in place.

We encourage all expectant parents to complete this plan during their pregnancy, particularly anyone who has used substances before or during the prenatal period (including treatment with MOUD) and families who have had previous involvement with Child Welfare Services.

Providers can work with participants to complete this plan and facilitate a meeting with the family, other service providers and hospital staff. The aim of this meeting is to ensure the family is prepared for the birth of their child and that their services are reasonable and appropriate. This type of collaboration can help support the family and ensure hospital staff are aware of the Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) prior to delivery. If a meeting cannot take place, we recommend the expectant parent notifies the birthing hospital social workers of the existence of the Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) upon arrival at the hospital.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has created the version below that can be downloaded from their website. The consent form is included, which gives permission for providers to discuss the participants' needs with each other and with Child Welfare Services. Providers should remind parents that it is their choice to sign this consent form, and it can help their providers work better together.

Plan of Safe Care

mass.gov/plan-of-safe-care



My Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care)

Go to page FP24

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

“(Parent Name) has gathered the information related to their Family Care Plan (Plan of Safe Care) for their family. We want to share that (Parent Name) has taken the initiative to organize these materials to ensure their children are cared for. (Parent Name) has worked with FIRST Steps Together to complete a relapse/recurrence of use prevention and safety plan, a crisis plan for each of their children, and has



listed supportive family and friends who are familiar to and available to care for their children, if (Parent Name) is for any reason unable to do so. They have been engaged in substance use treatment services (if applicable) and have listed the provider's contact information, including (if applicable) access to toxicology screens. We are committed to assisting (Parent Name) through this process and to working collaboratively with you for this family's benefit."

Other Important Documents

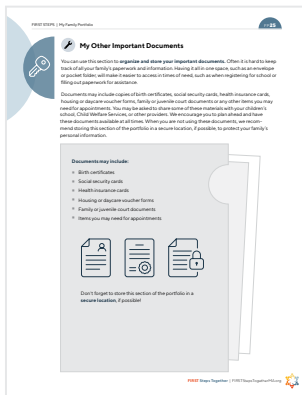
We invite participants to use this section to organize and store their important documents. Materials may include copies of birth certificates, social security cards, health insurance cards, housing or daycare voucher forms, family or juvenile court documents or any other items the parent feels are important and wants to have available for appointments and interactions with providers. Families involved with the Family Court System are often asked to provide a copy of their custody agreement or related court orders to their children's daycare, school, medical, therapeutic and other providers or to share these documents in cases of emergencies involving their child.

We encourage parents to plan ahead and always have this documentation readily available, because these requests are standard practice across providers and agencies. We do recommend that when this section of the portfolio is not being brought to an appointment, it is stored in a secure location, to protect the family's personal information.

We ask staff members to support participants in assembling their physical portfolio, by offering folders with pockets, page protectors, or tabulated dividers. Parents may find it helpful to store these materials in an accordion file that keeps important documents clean, safe, dry and readily accessible.



My Other Important Documents
Go to page FP25



Planner

Part of building skills as a parent in recovery is having the ability to organize appointments and manage time. Participants can use this calendar, or another system that works for them, to keep track of Family Time visits and Child Welfare Service meetings or reviews, court dates, groups and meetings and other responsibilities, such as medical, educational or therapy appointments.



My Planner
Go to page FP26



OUR STEPS

This section is dedicated to supporting the child's journey, regardless of where they lay their head at night. These materials can be used to support parents as they identify their child's support system, and to hold information about their developmental, educational, medical, or other needs.

Family Information and Providers

Here participants can list their children's basic information including their full names, dates of birth, best contact numbers, school or daycare providers' contact information and each child's medications, allergies and emergency contacts. There is also space to list each child's service provider's names, roles, contact information, and a release for each child, if needed.



Family Information and Providers
Go to page FP29

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"(Parent Name) has recorded a list of their children's educational and medical providers and noted any diagnosis, medications and allergies (if applicable). (Parent Name) has taken the initiative to gather this information and to allow our program to collaborate with their children's providers. Please let us know how we can best work together to support this family."

Supporting Child Development and Milestones

Some children may need additional support services, either in infancy, during the toddler or preschool years, or at school age. We want parents to know that seeking out extra support for their child is always the right thing to do if they have any questions or concerns about their child's development or needs. Many children, whether or not their parents are in recovery, benefit from developmental supports.

Children ages 0–3 may be involved with Early Intervention. Early Intervention services are provided in home, office or group formats, led by



social workers or occupational and physical therapists, who are specially trained to support children's development. School-aged children may have Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) or 504 Plans. IEP or 504 plans outline the child's right to specific services or academic accommodations provided within the school setting. Early Intervention and special education programs periodically evaluate children across developmental areas and assess the ongoing need for services or accommodations they are receiving. Additionally, all of our sites use periodic screeners designed to assess and follow a child's development. Pediatricians and helping professionals, such as school nurses may also evaluate children's progress or share information related to milestones after appointments.

Parents should be made aware of any assessments, evaluations and related meetings and when possible, actively participate in them and advocate for their child's needs. Often, there is a lot of information shared at these meetings. You can support participants by helping them prepare for these meetings. This may include making lists of questions they want to ask, noting any follow up steps that need to be taken, role playing challenging conversations, sharing resources about their rights as a parent, and connecting them to additional supports if needed.

After these meetings, families receive paperwork that serves as a record of the parent's rights, evaluation/assessment results and proposed or agreed upon services. Keeping these documents here makes it easier for participants to refer back to them when seeking additional support for their child(ren).



Supporting Child Development and Milestones
Go to page FP31

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"(Parent Name) has collected developmental screeners, appointment outcomes, aftercare instructions and educational materials related to their child's health. (Parent Name) has actively engaged in our sessions together, is focused on supporting (Child Name)'s healthy development and has followed up with their pediatrician and (Child Name)'s other providers with any questions or concerns they have about (Child Name)'s health and growth."



FIRST STEPS | My Family Portfolio

All About My Child

This section offers a space to describe your child and some of the things that make them special. Think of this as a way to speak for your child and share the details of their life that they may not be able to do for themselves. The form can be filled out on your own or together with your child. You can use this section to provide information about your child's interests, abilities, and preferences. Please take time to share this information with all who care for your child, such as your parent, caregiver, foster parent, or other caregiver or provider. Complete and save this form or send it to the agency or provider or work to share these things about their child. It's okay to leave some sections blank.

Child's Name _____ Age _____

My favorite things about my child are _____

My child's favorite activities are _____

Our favorite things to do together are _____

Things my child doesn't like are _____

My child's favorite foods are _____

FIRST Steps Together | FIRSTStepsTogetherMA.org

All About My Child

In this section, we encourage participants to think about their child and describe all the ways that they are special. You can help parents identify the unique needs of their child, including daily routines, calming practices, comfort items and favorite activities.

Participants can share this information to support smooth transitions between care providers, including a co-parent, alternate caregiver, foster parents and childcare provider. These can also be used as a tool to plan special time or Family Time with their child or to support them through a difficult moment.



All About My Child
Go to page FP32

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"(Parent Name) has taken the time to write out (Child Name)'s likes and dislikes, stressors and calming practices and coping strategies, along with preferences and routines. We feel it is useful to gather this information in one place, so that you as the (co-parent, care provider, foster parent, etc.) can be aware of what works for this child and how best to support them."

FIRST STEPS | My Family Portfolio

Family Goal Setting and Vision Boards

Setting goals allows families to share their hopes and dreams and think together about what is important. The strategy shared with your family can describe a vision board to help organize your goals. We recommend using Goal Mapping from the FTS 12345 section with older children, and to create a map to share with older children and to create vision boards. With younger children, it can be fun and helpful to create vision boards.

Goals can be big or small, simple or complicated, and have some prompts to get you started:

- What do you wish your family could do more of together? (For example: family dinners, time outside)
- What would you like to learn or work on together? (For example: how to read or ride a bike, etc.)

Vision Boards

Children (and adults) may not always be able to put their words into pictures. Vision boards become a visual reminder of a family's hopes and dreams. This can help parents and their children learn, express and motivated toward their goals together.

Materials:

- Posterboard, construction paper or old newspaper
- Magazines, newspapers, printed images or words
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Markers, crayons and/or paint

Directions:

- Look at magazines or other images that your family finds inspirational
- Cut out words, images, or anything of interest
- Use tape or glue to connect these pieces to your board
- Display your finished vision board in a space where your family can regularly see and appreciate it!

FIRST Steps Together | FIRSTStepsTogetherMA.org

Family Goal Setting and Vision Boards

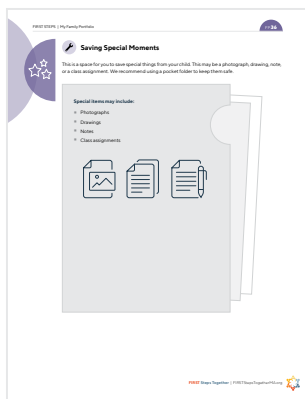
This section provides an opportunity for parents and children to share their hopes and dreams and think together about what is important to their family.

Vision boards can be a fun and tangible activity for home visitors to complete with families to help identify and illustrate their wishes and goals for the future. Depending on the age of the children they can have more or less involvement in the hands-on aspects of this activity, such as choosing, cutting, gluing or taping collage pieces. Vision boards can be completed with an individual, parent-child dyad or in collaboration with the entire family. The finished product provides a regular reminder of what is important to the family so that they can support each other in taking steps towards achieving their vision and goals. Directions for this activity are included in the parent section.



Family Goal Setting and Vision Boards
Go to page FP35





Saving Special Moments

We encourage parents to save special things from their child or children, such as photographs, drawings, notes or class assignments. Remembering these meaningful moments helps highlight the joys of parenting which is particularly important when parents on this journey are dedicating themselves to doing this work. We suggest that providers offer parents a pocket folder or envelope to keep these special items safe.



Saving Special Moments

Go to page FP36



STEPS TOWARDS EACH OTHER

This section focuses on maintaining the parent-child connection during times of separation. For both parents and children, times apart can be challenging and emotional. Supporting parents in completing this section can help ease their stress, stay organized, and make the most of the time they have together with their child. Collaboratively completing this section also allows providers to better understand and advocate for the families we serve.

Maintaining Connection

Many parents who have Child Welfare Service involvement or alternative custody arrangements have supervised Family Time, which may mean limited time with their children. It can be extremely challenging to maintain the parent-child connection; particularly if they do not have regular phone or video contact between visits. When parents are apart from their children, we encourage them to maintain their bond by “holding each other in mind,” even if it is painful to do so.

For example, a parent may keep a picture of themselves with their child, or a favorite book they read together, or a small favorite item of their child’s. Some parents process the time apart by writing letters or journal entries, in which they note all the things they would say if they could. Each parent needs to do what is best for them, and although coping with the separation looks different for every family, self-care and safety always come first. Similarly, a child may maintain attachment to their parent by holding onto a stuffed animal or article of clothing that has the parent’s scent, a photo album or something else that serves as a grounding and comforting reminder they are loved by their parent.



Maintaining Connection
Go to page FP39



Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"In our work together, we have focused on supporting the connection between (Parent Name) and (Child Name) during this period of separation. (Parent Name) has been thoughtful in considering what might be supportive to (Child Name), and they feel it would be helpful for (Child Name) to (fill in with the item or practice that the parent wants to offer the child). We hope that (alternate caregiver/Child Welfare Services) will accommodate this request as a way to prioritize (Child Name)'s comfort and connection to (Parent Name). We are happy to further discuss this matter."

Ideas and Plans for Family Time

In this area, we encourage parents to gather their ideas and make plans for their Family Time. When parents have involvement with Child Welfare Services, their parenting time and responsibilities are often limited and supervised. We refer to these supervised visits as "Family Time" to keep the focus of this time on maintaining and strengthening the parent-child relationship. This limitation and supervision of Family Time can make it difficult for parents to connect with their children. Parents may not know how to spend the time, what to bring, how to support their child, or how to process their own feelings around these visits.

Here are some ideas to help providers support parents before, during and after Family Time:

Before the Visit

Helping parents prepare for a visit helps ensure that the time together is child focused. Thinking ahead with participants about how they want to spend the time and what they should bring for age-appropriate activities can go a long way toward easing any anxiety they may feel about the visit. We also provide the opportunity for parents to identify concrete supports we can help provide for visits such as diapers, snacks, and activity items. Planning for Family Time and having open conversations before the visit also creates an opportunity for parents to share their feelings and discuss their goals for the time they will be spending with their child/children.

During the Visit

Family Time can be challenging for both participants and their children. They may be overwhelmed with emotions, unsure of how to navigate the situation, feel the pressure of having someone watch them, and may struggle with how best to handle their child's behavior. This may be particularly true for families who are managing multiple children of different ages.

First Steps Together | My Family Portfolio

Ideas and Plans for Family Time

Having a plan for your Family Time will save stress and help you get the most out of your time together. Consider things to keep in mind as:

- To plan an activity that is age-appropriate. For toddlers and toddlers, it could be exploring board books, building blocks or a soft blanket you can place on the floor. For preschoolers, it could be coloring, reading a book, or singing songs together. For older children it could be reading a chapter book or playing a board game.
- When planning for your time together, think of things your child likes. You don't have to buy new things, there are free resources available to you such as community games, books or toys from your public library or from your provider. You can also use your imagination to play "Pretend" - pretend to be a doctor, a teacher, or another game or story.
- To not get discouraged if your visit doesn't go as planned. The most important thing is showing up for your child and spending time together.
- Remember to bring snacks or food items. For babies it could be baby food or a bottle of formula, and for older kids it could be a snack, fruit, or a drink. You can also bring a juice box or a bottle of water.
- To be flexible about changing your visit on a given day. Communicate with your child's caregiver and/or the agency before that day. Be a comfort, consider all forms of support for your family's culture.

Use this form to help keep track of Family Time, plan your activities and prepare yourself for the visit. Think about what you would like to bring, think about what you would like to see brought and any follow-up that will take place during your visit. Depending on when and where you are meeting your child, you may want to bring a snack, a drink, a toy, a book or other activities, extra layers of clothing or sunscreen. You may also have paperwork to give to your case worker or informant to share with your child's alternate caregiver.

My visit is scheduled for this date, time and location:

These people will be present at the visit:

Think the activity is planned:

These are the items we will need:

For snacks, I will bring:



It may be helpful to support participants in reviewing their plan for Family Time, practicing responses to difficult questions their children might ask, and coming up with a quick breathing exercise or grounding phrase they can use to manage stress during the visit.



Ideas and Plans for Family Time

Go to page FP41

After a Visit

After a visit, parents are likely to experience a range of feelings, thoughts, and questions that came up during the time they spent with their child. Parents may feel excited, disappointed, sad, angry, vulnerable or any combination of emotions. This can also be a high-risk time for relapse/recurrence of use. We encourage providers to plan to connect with parents after these visits to offer additional support. Parents benefit from having their experiences heard and their feelings validated in a supportive and non-judgmental way. Providers can check in about participants' parenting and recovery needs and journey, while also revisiting their Wellness and Safety and Recovery Maintenance Plans.

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

“(Parent Name) has planned this week’s family time and has brought a (snack, activity materials, etc.). We have talked about how visits can bring up big feelings for them and for their child and they have practiced some ways they might handle how their child may communicate these feelings through their behavior. We know it is not uncommon to see behaviors during visits that may not be typical for a child, and they are prepared to support their child through this experience. Their goal is to make this visit a time of connection with their child and we hope that you can accommodate this plan.”

Family Time Notes

It is in the best interest of the family to keep up to date records of all Family Time visits, other contacts with their child, and interactions with Child Welfare Services. This is a useful practice for advocating in support of the parent-child relationship.

We encourage participants to use the provided form to make note of any missed or rescheduled Family Time, including any related communications that explain the nature of the cancellation, and to note whether and when the visit was rescheduled. It is recommended that parents include concerns they have for the caseworker, their observations or concerns for their child, such as a sickness, allergy, or something they shared, or any other child-related issue that arises during their parenting time or between visits.



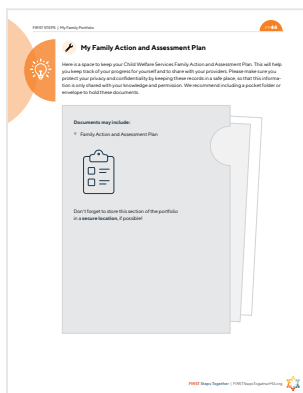
We urge parents to communicate proactively with their case worker to confirm visits, make note of any scheduling conflicts, and ask for make-up time if there is a cancellation. We encourage parents to be as involved with their children's appointments and child-related meetings as possible, and to have regular contact with the child's caregivers and service providers. Providers should work with parents to document all (or as much as possible) of this information in writing or to make note of it in a parent's personal calendar or record-keeping system. It is important for parents to have their own records which detail exactly what happened and when, in the case of a miscommunication between families and Child Welfare Services regarding scheduling, concern for the child, or initiative taken by the parent.



Family Time Notes
Go to page FP43

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"Our program has supported (Parent Name) in understanding the expectation and guidelines for Family Time. (Parent Name) has concerns related to (missed parenting time, concern for their child's well-being or other issue). We would like to schedule a collaborative meeting to discuss these concerns and determine how we can work together to resolve these issues and better support (Child Name)."



Family Action and Assessment Plan

This space is intended for parents to keep their Family Assessment and Action Plan. Providers can work with participants to access resources to meet the goals of their Action Plan and help them track their progress. We encourage both providers and parents to ensure privacy and confidentiality by keeping these records in a safe place, so that this protected information is only shared with the parent's knowledge and permission.



My Family Action and Assessment Plan
Go to page FP44

Language for advocacy and collaboration:

"We have been supporting (Parent Name) in working through the goals of their Family Action and Assessment Plan. Our aim is to ensure that (Parent Name) is well supported, but not overburdened by duplicative services. We would be happy to schedule a collaborative meeting to review these plans and determine how our programs can best support this family."



SUPPORTING STEPS

This is a space for parents to collect all of the important information, applications and resources that support their parenting and recovery journeys.

Community Resources and Applications

We know that families thrive when their basic needs are met, and they are fully supported by natural supports in their communities. It is best practice for providers to be knowledgeable about local resources, to offer information to families, and to engage in collaborative care coordination. In this section, we have created a space to share and store community resources and applications for benefits. These may include information about benefits such as TANF, SNAP, WIC, affordable housing, food, diaper banks and access to children's clothes and goods, home furnishings, transportation or other supports individualized to the family's needs.



Community Resources and Applications
Go to page FP47

Employment and Education Resources

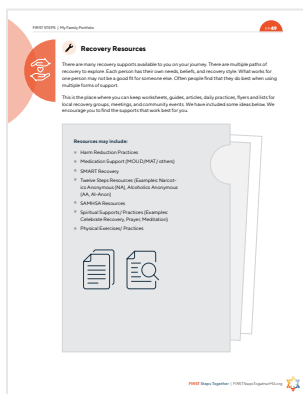
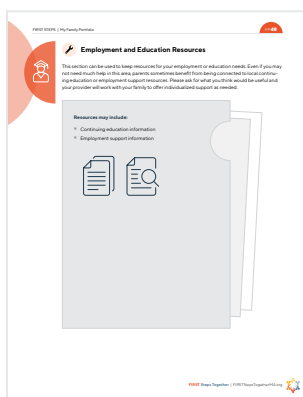
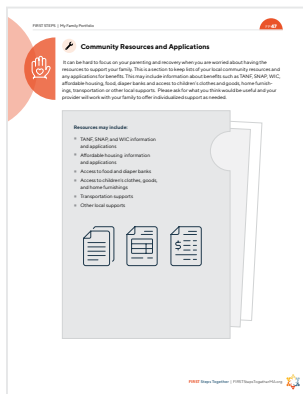
Providers can offer information tailored to parents' specific employment or education goals. Although some families may not need support in this area, others may benefit from connection to local continuing education or employment resources. We encourage staff members to work with the family to offer individualized guidance.



Employment and Education Resources
Go to page FP48

Recovery Resources

There are multiple paths of recovery to explore with participants. Each parent has their own needs, beliefs and recovery style. Providers can assist parents in exploring multiple forms of recovery supports to determine which work best for them. Some common approaches include: harm reduction practices, medication support (MOUD/ MAT), SMART Recovery, Twelve Steps resources, spiritual supports and practices and physical



exercise. We can support parents by helping them explore their options, affirming their choices, making referrals as needed, and sharing recovery resources such as group and meeting lists, worksheets, guides, articles and daily practices.



Recovery Resources

Go to page FP49

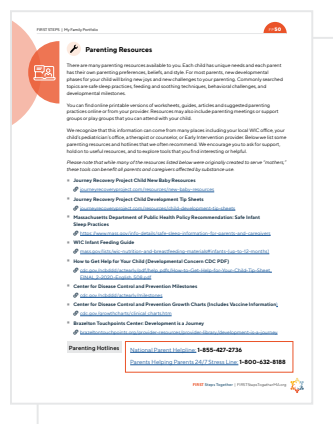
Parenting Resources

Each child has unique needs and each parent has their own parenting preferences, beliefs, and style. Many of the available online parenting resources provide printable versions of worksheets, guides, articles and parenting practices. We have included links to several parenting websites that contain information about safe sleep, feeding, soothing and milestones. One resource our program promotes and utilizes is the Journey Recovery Project, which is specifically tailored to parents in recovery and is available online at no charge to parents or providers. We encourage providers to support all families as they explore these helpful tools.



Parenting Resources

Go to page FP50



**FIRST STEPS
TOGETHER**
FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

Designed by J Sherman Studio

