



Transcript: The Importance of Aftercare & Finding Your Tribe

Ginny Mills: Hi, there and welcome back. I'm Ginny Mills. And in this discussion, we're going to address the transition from primary treatment setting and into aftercare. And so in our last video, we talked about the importance of doing that from a bed to bed transition, fighting the temptation to take a detour through the beach or a detour back to your son or daughter's childhood home and rather go directly from one place to the other. And so in this video I'd like to talk a little bit more about the differences between primary residential treatment and aftercare programs.

So, part of my life experience and professional experience is that I have been a provider and an integral part of all three of those levels. I have been the director of a primary residential program that included detox all the way through a 30- to 60-day program. I've also owned and operated a sober living program, and I currently own and operate an outpatient program that is focused on providing aftercare for people in long-term recovery. And so I have some first-hand experience about all three of those levels of care, and I want to help parents understand the differences between those three so that you can have reasonable expectations and understanding about how they're different and what to expect in each context.

So in a primary treatment setting, you've got the benefit of multiple people who are not only available and monitoring a patient population, and that sounds like they're prisoners and I don't really mean it that way. But what I mean is that you've got anywhere from 30 to a hundred patients in a primary treatment setting. In some operations, you might have smaller setting groups such as the ranch out in Nunnelly, Tennessee has houses with 12 to 16 residents. But even still, in those environments you've got 24/7 wraparound care where there are multiple people not only available to provide support but also available to provide monitoring and oversight. They're checking for safety. They are very much like a hospital setting, except it's just a lower level of acuity.

And so primary treatment settings have 24/7 observation, interaction, and support. And so that is the ultimate in wraparound care. And the presumption is that for a period of time, you really need that level of care in order to be safe, not only from yourself but from the world. And so some of you may have heard me share in another video about my husband's experience of falling four stories and landing on his feet and breaking both his legs and his back. That happened before I met him, thank heavens. But he was in the hospital for a period of time and then he came out with lots and lots of support in the form of wheelchair, and cast, and crutches, and braces around his middle, and he needed a lot of extra support. And so the parallel is that that's what the aftercare setting is like. He no longer needed to have 24/7 nursing care, but he certainly was not

ready to run out of the hospital. And so in the same way, your son or daughter is transitioning from that 24/7 level of nursing care and into a lower level of care that is intended to provide extra support, but it is not the same as primary treatment.

So now we're talking about the aftercare residential portion, so the sober living or recovery residence, what we used to call a halfway house. This level of care is lower than primary treatment but it still has a lot of wraparound support. So the level of staff engagement is going to vary depending on the kind of sober living operation it is, but regardless there is the opportunity for your son or daughter to have wraparound support and 24/7 availability regardless of whether there's a staff member that sleeps on the premises or not. Please be aware that not all sober livings have a staff member who sleeps on premises. There maybe a recovery coach or a staff member who is available 24/7, and I think that's a reasonable expectation for everything except for the self-governing sober living homes. All the other homes, the monitored homes, the supervised homes, the extended-care providers will have 24/7 availability for your son or daughter if they find themselves in distress, if they're lonely, if they're thinking about using, if they're thinking about leaving, if they're really upset about something that's going on and they need somebody to talk to. So you've got staff who are available 24/7, but you've also got fellow residents who are at varying degrees of recovery who are also available.

And remember that one of the most important parts of recovery is that when one helps another, they both get better. So it's true that even now, even if your son or daughter only has 30, 60, 90 days of sobriety, they still have something to offer the person who's earlier in the game, and sometimes even the person who is further along in their recovery. By being available to each other, people in recovery not only get help but give help. And the closer the access is to that help, the more likely it is that your son or daughter will do well in this next step of their recovery.

And so it's important to recognize that sober living operators have the availability for 24/7 staff access, they have the availability to stop by unannounced, they have the availability to be able to do drug testing and to inspect the premises to make sure that the environment is safe on an ongoing basis. Now, this is not the same thing as primary treatment and that's the purpose of this video, is to help you recognize that with the transition comes more independence, not just for your son or daughter but every other person in that residence. And so, one of the things that you will hear from your son or daughter is their feedback, their observation of the level of engagement of staff and the thoughts and feelings they have about the behavior and attitudes of the people that they live with.

So I want to remind you that your son or daughter is in early recovery, which means that they have a pretty low threshold for tolerating distress. They are living life un-anesthetized for the first time in a really long time, and now they're out in the world. They are riding in cars, they're going to apply for jobs independently, they are going to meetings by themselves, they are walking around in the world independently which they did not do when they were in primary treatment. But now in aftercare, they have that degree of independence, which means that they're going to get hit with more of the challenges of everyday life, they're going to be interacting with people whose threshold for frustration and who's ability to tolerate distress is also pretty low. And so the likelihood of there being conflicts within the household is pretty high. And the likelihood of your son or daughter having some negative feedback or some criticism about the

sober living staff is also pretty high. And part of that is because they just don't have very much ability to tolerate the distress and they are still living in that symptom of self-centeredness that is a symptom of addiction.

Now, hopefully your son or daughter by the time they've gotten to sober living, they've gotten some continuous days of abstinence under their belt so the symptom of active use is in remission, but the other symptoms aren't necessarily all in remission. And so that self-centeredness, that sense that the world revolves around me and everybody should be doing things that make me feel better, that symptom is just not better. And so you need to be prepared for the likelihood that they're going to have some complaints, they're going to have some frustrations with fellow residents and with staff. And I think it's really important that you do two things, that you both demonstrate compassion and support and understanding for how frustrating it is, and I also want you to fight the temptation to swoop in and rescue or to say, "You know, maybe we just need to get you out of there." If you hear concerns from your son or daughter, I do think it's really important that you reach out to the sober living operators. They don't want to be taking a hundred calls a day, but they do want to know if you have concerns based on some feedback that you've gotten from your son or daughter.

They would much rather hear those concerns and have an opportunity to address them than for you to just take matters into your own hands and pull your son or daughter out of the sober living environment and move them on rather than giving them a chance to either give you some additional information about what's going on, help you understand that there maybe some dishonesty going on. Imagine that. That symptom may not be better either. But at the same time they may really need that information, they may need that information in order to intervene and be more attentive to what may be going on with another resident, because part of their job is to do their very best to maintain a safe environment and it's much harder than it was in primary treatment.

Primary treatment, literally, there's somebody watching the door. There's a perimeter to a property that is monitored and protected. And so sober living operators don't have that luxury. They've got a lot of moving parts and a lot of moving people. You could have 12 or 15 residents living in the same home and everybody's on a slightly different schedule and everybody's coming in and out, and it is hard to keep track of everybody and to know where everybody is and to make sure that everybody's doing what they're supposed to be doing. And so, have a little patience with the sober living operator, but give 'em a call, let them know if you're concerned about something and engage them to be your partner in knowing how to solve the problem if there even is one.

One of the truths is that just like the urgency that you might have heard about wanting to get out of primary treatment, you may get some of that same urgency from your son or daughter as they decide that they would really rather go back home, go back to their college, go back to their home community wherever they were living before, instead of staying in the sober living community. And I think our job as parents is to be able to lovingly and compassionately hold that line, to be able to balance boundaries with compassion and hold our ground, but be compassionate for how hard it is to tolerate distress and to tolerate frustrations from other residents who have a different agenda, whether it's somebody who snores, or somebody who

smells, or someone who... We had issues with a member of one of our homes who liked to cook seafood everyday, and it stunk up the house. And so that became an issue for them to work out as a home community, to be able to talk about, "Dude, this is stinking up the whole house." Or, "You never take out the garbage when it's your turn." These are some of the kinds of lessons, life lessons, that your son or daughter is living as a function of being in that sober living home. And so even though it's hard, there is therapeutic value in just the facilitated and supported effort by staff to be able to help that young person, or not-so-young person, be able to live life on life's terms.

So again, there may or not be a recovery coach or a staff member on premises 24/7, but they're always available and the director always needs to hear from you if there's a problem. Oftentimes, sober living operators are partnering with or may even have their own therapeutic or clinical portion. And so this not so much the living, but this is the ongoing therapy, this is the ongoing treatment for the disease of addiction to help the recovery journey continue. And outpatient programs can really vary from a few hours a week of relapse prevention group and individual therapy, to intensive outpatient treatment, which is at a minimum, nine hours a week. Or maybe even a partial hospitalization program that is six to seven hours a day, five days a week. Now partial hospitalization would be the most level of engagement on an outpatient basis that your son or daughter could be recommended for. And one of the things that's important to verify, following the step down from primary treatment is, did this residential program use up some of the days of eligibility of partial hospitalization? Also called PHP or intensive outpatient. Sometimes one of the ways that primary treatment programs help your insurance continue to help your son or daughter be able to stay in treatment is they will pass on the room and board part of residential treatment to you as a parent or to the family, and they will bill insurance for a lower level of care for a PHP or an IOP.

And so if they've used up those days of eligibility in the residential part, then those days of eligibility are fewer once the person is actually in an outpatient setting. That's an unfortunate reality but it probably helped make your primary treatment stay a little bit more affordable. One of the things that's really surprising to me is that sometimes the cost of an outpatient PHP day might actually be more expensive than your primary treatment day in residential treatment. That just blows my mind. I don't even understand how that happens. However, it's an important reminder that you need to ask questions and not make assumptions, that the outpatient fee, particularly if it is from an out of network provider, you need to not make assumptions that that fee is very manageable. You should ask questions about the daily rate for private pay for the PHP or IOP level of care, and if it does not include individual therapy, drug-testing, or psychiatric care, that's going to be on top of that.

And so, one of the things that I think is really important, but doesn't always happen, is for there to be a continuity of care in the outpatient setting and the aftercare setting between all those partners. So, who are those partners? And this is actually part of what we're going to cover in the video about the recovery team. But the sober living operator and staff, the primary counselor in an outpatient level of care and the psychiatrist, really all need to be working together to help make sure that everybody's on the same page and everybody knows what each other's doing to try to help your son or daughter progress on their own journey of recovery. And so, all of those players could be a part of what's happening in that aftercare level of care following the

residential treatment part.

One of things that's true is that when your son or daughter is in primary treatment they probably don't get to choose their recovery meetings. The community goes together to the same meetings every week. And they might have the choice of whether they go to AA or NA or celebrate recovery or smart recovery, but they go with the group of people from that treatment center to those meetings outside, or they may never have even left the facility. All of their meetings may have even been within the residential treatment environment itself. But when your son or daughter starts moving in to sober living or aftercare, then they are engaging in choosing their own meetings and choosing their sponsor. And so one of the truths is that all meetings are not created equal. I want you to think about 12-Step or mutual support meetings as being very similar to churches, or colleges, or rotary clubs. They may all study some of the same material but they're very different based on where they're located and who the leadership is. And there is a group of leaders in every mutual support community.

So if your son or daughter is attending a meeting and says, "Oh, I hate that meeting. I hate all these meetings. I don't ever want to go to these meetings. They always make me think about using or they always make me feel worse than when I came in. And so I don't need to do that. I just need to get a job." So, your job as parent is to be able to say, "Okay, I get that. It's good for you to get a job but if you're not happy with the meetings that you've been attending, you need to find some different meetings." Because one of the truths is that as more independent people in recovery, they are making more of their own choices and so they will engage with the recovery community, but there is not necessarily engagement between those professional providers and the self-help community.

And that really is a boundary that is appropriate to respect even though it would be really tempting to say, "Well, if the sober living program doesn't talk with the sponsor and find out and see their step work, how do they know that they're really doing it?" Well, depending on the policies of the aftercare provider, that may be considered terribly inappropriate. And so, if you are concerned about that, ask about what the position of the sober living or the aftercare program is as it relates to that interaction with the self-help community. In general though, the professional community players should be working together but that may not necessarily include the sponsor or the other people in the meetings that are there to help themselves and really not affiliated with those professional providers.

So one of the reasons I'm bringing up those mutual support groups and how important it is to keep looking until your son or daughter finds a group of people or a meeting that they really like is because part of the reason that they are in aftercare is so that there is some accountability and some push to help them keep working at it until they find their tribe. So what is a tribe? A tribe is a group of people who share a common interest and most importantly, share enough connection around that common interest that they really do support each other. How do relationships really get built between people who don't know each other? Well, the easiest way is that they end up in the same place, at the same time, with a common interest and they talk about it, and that creates the opportunity for relationships to get to be built.

So I can go sit in a park and watch the birds and watch the dogs play, and look at the beautiful

flowers, but you on the other side of the park are looking at different birds and different dogs and different flowers and we aren't talking to each other at all. We are barely in the same place. I can't talk and you hear me across the way? So, even though we are in the same place at the same time, there's not really an opportunity for engagement and we really are looking at different things. And so if we go to a movie, I can sit beside you in a movie theater and we are in the same place at the same time, paying attention to the exact same thing, but if we don't talk to each other no relationship gets formed. And so, if your son or daughter is going to a mutual support meeting and he's going at the same time, sitting in the same circle of chairs or row of chairs, listening to the same 12-Step speaker or listening to the discussion but they're not engaging anybody, even if they're engaging each other, if your son or daughter is not engaging and making relationships and having conversations, there's no relationship being formed.

It's when all four of those elements are present: Same place, same time, interested in the same thing, and talking about that, that it's formed that springboard for us to also be able to talk about other things. Well, when do we talk about other things if we're in a mutual support network? Well, I come early to the meeting and I get my coffee and I introduce myself to people and I get to know their story. And after the meeting's over, we hang around after the meeting and we talk and we visit, and somebody says, "Hey, we're going out to Carrabba's for dinner, you want to go?" Well, Carrabba's kind of pricey and your son or daughter may have a curfew to get back to. And so that's one of those real challenges about how do you live in a sober living community and still engage with the recovery community to be able to begin to build their tribe.

And so, part of your encouragement to your son or daughter is, when they complain and say, "Well, I had to get back for curfew, I couldn't hang out with anybody so I'm not making any friends. Everybody goes out after the meeting but I can't go." It'd be really tempting to appreciate that double bind but it really does create the opportunity for your son or daughter to get some phone numbers and call some folks and to be able to say, "Hey, let's get together and go to a noon meeting and then maybe go get some lunch. That way we can get to know each other a little bit better and I don't have to worry about getting back in time for curfew." So building those relationships is creating the opportunity for your son or daughter to feel a part of a tribe. A tribe of people that know each other, care about each other and have each other's back.

And just like your son or daughter needs their tribe, you need a tribe too. Some of you may have had the opportunity to actively participate in Al-Anon, or Nar-Anon, or Families Anonymous, or a program like that before your son or daughter went to treatment. If you didn't, my guess is that your experience of being in the room with the family program was probably the first time that you ever had the opportunity to really engage with a room full of other parents who are on that journey. I think that that is a distinctly better resource than it is to engage in a broader family program where there's more focus on spouses than there is on the relationship between sons and daughters and their parents. That's a particularly different relationship.

We don't divorce our children like we can divorce our spouse. And we feel very strongly as parents that it is part of our job to stay engaged in their lives and in their recovery. And so in thinking about your tribe, you've really got at the very least four different choices. You've got 12-Step resources that are for family members and the way to think about that is that it is Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, Families Anonymous, and Al-A-Fam would be the labels that go on those 12-Step

family groups. You may have a local provider that has a family support group or a parent support group, I know FAVOR down in Greenville, South Carolina has a strong emphasis on parent support groups. We in North Carolina, at Full Life, have a strong emphasis on that. Ask around in your community to see if there is a similar group that meets live and in person that's really directed towards helping parents connect and find a parent tribe.

The third place is a little bit of a different spin, which is Celebrate Recovery. Celebrate Recovery is a decidedly Christian program that incorporates 12-Step but also biblical principles and it's really targeted towards people who have hurts, hang-ups, and habits. And so, as parents of a child in recovery, no matter how old they are, I know that you've had some hurt, and you've had some hang-ups, and you've probably developed some not-so-great habits in your effort to rescue your son or daughter, or to protect them from their disease and from themselves. So Celebrate Recovery is also a reasonable resource. Celebrate Recovery's a little bit different because it only meets once a week in terms of the big meeting but that big meeting could last three or four hours. It can include a meal, a worship service, and some small group discussions, and those small group discussions may happen informally between that once a week meeting. So Celebrate Recovery is a resource for family members.

And last but not the least are the online family program resources that are available through Parenting Through Addiction. On Monday night, we have a discovery group that is focused for parents who aren't really sure whether their son or daughter's use has progressed to addiction. My guess is that group is probably not really appropriate for you. You're probably a more appropriate candidate for our Endurance Group. It meets on Wednesday at 7:30 now. By the time you see this video, that may have changed but that's the current schedule. And so that Parenting Through Addiction Endurance Group is a combination of parent education so that you can continue to learn, and family support or parent support. So there's both of those things that happen. That creates the opportunity for some of the things that you may hear about in this course to be discussed among other parents and to have the opportunity to ask questions of me or another facilitator.

It's important to recognize that all four of these kinds of resources whether they are 12-Step resources for families, independent parent support groups, the Celebrate Recovery resource, or Parenting Through Addiction's Endurance Group, all of those are support and/or education, they're not intended to be therapy groups. Just like the self-help resources that your son or daughter is engaging in for their recovery, therapy is separate from that. Those ongoing relationships, you're probably not going to have an ongoing 10, 20, 30, 40-year relationship with your therapist. On the other hand, your son or daughter may develop a sponsor/sponsee relationship that could last for decades. And so, in the same way, we want you to develop relationships with other people who are on this journey with their son or daughter just like you are.

Now, I understand this is not necessarily a club you want to be a member of, but by default your son or daughter's circumstances of addiction and need for recovery mean that you need your own tribe, you need to find your club, your opportunity to continue to learn and grow and be supported and most importantly not feel so alone. I am very confident that there have been parts of this journey where you felt like you were the only person who really knew what you felt and

that nobody could understand how uncomfortable you were, how scared you were, how angry you were, how confused you were, how bewildered about the system and the journey of recovery, and whether your son or daughter was even going to have a chance to find out. And so, as you journey with other parents, there is an opportunity for you to continue to grow and feel better, and I cannot underemphasize how important that is for you.

So, to wrap up, we've talked today about what you expected from primary treatment in terms of that 24/7 constant supervision and availability, to this next step where there's some independence but there's still accountability. There's the resources of both the sober living community, the fellow residents who work there, the leadership and the staff of that sober living, as well as the aftercare outpatient providers. And the recovery community itself, their tribe is a third component that your son or daughter is engaging with now that they have moved out of primary treatment and into aftercare.

So I really want to thank you for joining me for this particular segment as part of this course and this parent guide about understanding aftercare options, and having realistic expectations, and finding your tribe and why it's so important. And before we wrap up today, I want to give you an action item. I want you to make a point of doing one of three things before the week is over. I want you to call a local provider of addiction services whether it is a local intensive outpatient program, a local addiction specialist, somebody in your home community who knows about the recovery resources in your town. And I want you to ask is there a number two, is there a parent specific support group in town, where is it, verify whether it's free or not and how you get plugged into that. I also want you to go online and see if you can find a list of the Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, Families Anonymous, Al-A-Fam schedule in your community, and I also want you to plug in to the Endurance Group on Wednesday night at 7:30 Eastern Time. That gives you an opportunity to plug in immediately to an online tribe. I honestly don't think that an online tribe is a substitute for a person to person tribe, but I want you to start plugging in immediately. I don't want you to wait.

So I want you to join us for Endurance Group, but I want you to start exploring in your local community. If you are person of great Christian faith and you feel like connecting through a supportive environment of other Christian believers, explore about the resources for Celebrate Recovery in your community and see if you can find somebody who can tell you more about that. They are always sponsored by churches. Unlike AA or Al-Anon meetings that are based in churches, there's not necessarily a relationship between AA and Al-Anon and that church. But Celebrate Recovery will always have a relationship between the program itself and the church staff. And so, if you can find out where Celebrate Recovery meets in your community, then call the staff at that church and find out more about how you can become involved in Celebrate Recovery.

So your charge is really to begin. Begin engaging to find your tribe, and make a point of joining us for Endurance Group on Wednesday, and start looking locally for a group of people that you can engage with in person so that when you feel like you've got that community, maybe you want to continue in Endurance Group, maybe you don't but you have people that are available for you to continue to build those relationships with just like your son or daughter needs to do. So that you're going out to dinner after the meeting, you're meeting for coffee to talk about how it's

going. You've got that live and in-person support that's separate and better than the online group, but until you get there, I'll see you in Endurance Group on Wednesday night. I'm Ginny Mills. This is Parenting Through Addiction. I'll see you next time. See you next time.