

“A highly readable and encouraging guidebook”
—Dawn Nickel, co-founder of SHE RECOVERS® Foundation

PARENTS IN RECOVERY *Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle* **SARAH ALLEN BENTON**

“Recovery is more than ‘stopping drinking or using drugs’—it involves an entire lifestyle change and impacts every aspect of a parent’s life,” acknowledges **Sarah Allen Benton**, an Advanced Alcohol and Drug counselor who has been a parent in recovery from alcoholism for more than 18 years. In **PARENTS IN RECOVERY: Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle** (Rowman & Littlefield; October 15, 2024), Benton draws on both her professional expertise and deeply personal experience to support mothers and fathers as they navigate their way through parenting while embracing a sober lifestyle in a digital world filled with challenges and pressures.

Unique among “addiction and recovery” and “quit lit” guides, **PARENTS IN RECOVERY** includes helpful information for mothers and fathers who had become sober *before* having children as well as those parents just beginning their commitment to recovery. Throughout, Benton integrates research on parenting and sobriety with real-world wisdom from her interviews with men and women across the country representing various ethnicities, ages, occupations, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual identities, and stages in their parenting and recovery journeys. Along with their insights and voices, the author shares candid passages from her years of journal writings as a mother in recovery.

Covering every aspect of living sober while raising children, **PARENTS IN RECOVERY** focuses on maintaining physical, emotional, social, spiritual, behavioral, environmental, and vocational wellness while appreciating the joys that come with being a parent. While recognizing how hard both parenting and recovery are, Benton emphasizes the gifts and accomplishments of being in recovery and how they positively impact the entire family system.

Serving as a “job-aid” for readers on their parenting and recovery journeys, **PARENTS IN RECOVERY** offers strategies and suggestions on:

- Creating a healthy recovery environment in your home for yourself and your children, which includes being honest about your history of alcohol or drug use and letting go of the shame surrounding addiction.
- Adjusting to the changes in the dynamics of your relationship with a co-parent—whether living together, married, or divorced—who is also in recovery or never struggled with a substance use disorder.
- Establishing an identity for yourself beyond parenting, whether through re-establishing career goals or returning to school, and finding the strength to delegate and ask for support.
- Placing a priority on self-care—from planning “mini” retreats to implementing sleep hygiene strategies, coping with boredom, and addressing the needs of a “thrill-seeking” personality type.

(more)

- Coping with hard times, from economic setbacks to COVID surges, and managing everyday stressors, including effectively balancing the demands of work and children when working remotely.
- Setting boundaries and finding balance with social media, without “fear of missing out,” and establishing a healthy relationship with electronic communication—for yourself and your children.
- Socializing in adult circles that involve drinking without making excuses or feeling deprived, and dealing with difficult extended family members in constructive, sober ways.

With **PARENTS IN RECOVERY** in their corner, mothers and fathers will come to take pride in their recovery and become better parents in the process.

About the Author

SARAH ALLEN BENTON is a licensed Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Addiction Counselor, and Mental Health Counselor. She has been a parent in recovery from alcoholism for more than 18 years. She is co-owner of Benton Behavioral Health Consulting, LLC, (<https://www.bentonbhc.com/>) offering clinical and business support services to innovative addiction and mental health companies, as well as co-owner and Chief Clinical Officer for Waterview Behavioral Health in Wallingford, CT. She holds a Master of Science in Counseling Psychology with an emphasis in Healthy Psychology from Northeastern University, Bouvé School of Health Sciences, and has worked as a therapist and clinical consultant for various addiction treatment programs, practices, and start-ups. She also worked at McLean Hospital in their dual diagnosis transitional treatment program. She is also the author of *Understanding the High-Functioning Alcoholic: Breaking the Cycle and Finding Hope* (2009). She lives in Killingworth, Connecticut.

**PARENTS IN RECOVERY:
Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle
By Sarah Allen Benton
October 15, 2024
\$32.00 Hardcover; 240 pages; ISBN-13: 978-1538181898
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers**

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Suggested Interview Questions for
Sarah Allen Benton
author of
PARENTS IN RECOVERY: Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers
(October 15, 2024)

1. How did the idea for **PARENTS IN RECOVERY** originate? What makes your book unique?
2. What are some hallmarks of a sober family lifestyle?
3. Why do you think it is important for kids to know about their parents' past lives as addicts? Are children ever too young for an honest conversation about substance use disorder?
4. Would you tell us about your process of interviewing women and men around the country about their parenting and recovery journeys?
5. Why did you choose to include your journal writings in your book?
6. In **PARENTS IN RECOVERY**, you introduce the terms “intrinsic,” “extrinsic,” and “hybrid” parenting. Would you explain your terminology?
7. What are some of the different challenges for parents in recovery when raising toddlers compared to dealing with teens?
8. Would you offer insights and guidance for navigating the changes in a marriage—or even a post-divorce relationship—that come with one parent's commitment to sobriety?
9. Why is self-care as “not optional” for parents in recovery, and could you offer some examples of essential self-care practices?
10. You acknowledge the challenges of coping with hard times while sober. Would you share some options for relieving feelings of stress and anxiety that don't involve substance use?
11. Are there any special challenges presented by remote work and home schooling that exacerbate the demands of balancing work and family for parents in recovery?
12. Would you offer some tips for sober socializing in adults circles that involve drinking or smoking marijuana?
13. How can our dependence on cell phones and other digital devices complicate the goal of developing a sober family lifestyle?
14. Would you share a few strategies for setting boundaries and finding balance with social media?
15. What can you say to encourage struggling parents to take pride in their recovery? What would you most like all readers to take away from your book?

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Sober Socializing in a Digital Age

Tips for Maintaining a Healthy Balance with Social Media

For parents in recovery from alcoholism or drug use, social media can trigger the “FOMO” (fear of missing out) phenomenon and become another form of addiction. We’re all familiar with the practice of a weekend “digital detox,” but is that enough? A licensed counselor and mother in recovery, Sarah Allen Benton offers the following tips to help parents set boundaries with social media and establish a healthy relationship with screens—for themselves, their sobriety, and their kids.

For Self

- Start the morning with a healthy and electronic-free activity. Delay social media until later in the day to prevent an early dopamine hit.
- Limit phone notifications. Delete apps that pull your attention and have a negative impact.
- Check in with yourself before and after engaging in activities on your phone to feel the impact on your nervous system and adjust use accordingly.
- Take an electronic or “high-dopamine” activity cleanse to recalibrate balance and increase pleasure in simple activities.
- Set a timer or a precise time period for screen use instead of during spare time throughout the day.
- Add recovery or wellness-focused apps as an alternative to apps with negative content.
- Designate screen-free time daily.

For Parenting

- Talk with other parents about creating shared norms in the school or community.
- Consider what your family “feeds” their brains with electronics.
- Educate your children about the benefits and dangers of social media.
- “Friend,” follow, or otherwise connect with your children on social media to view their activity.
- Define times for use, such as after responsibilities are completed. Instill that electronics are a reward and not a privilege.
- Use the iPhone “Family Sharing” feature to monitor your children’s app usage and set time limits.
- Role model mindfulness and moderation around your electronic usage.
- Ensure that social media is not used within one hour of bedtime and does not interfere with adolescents’ minimum requirement of eight hours of sleep per night.
- Teach your children age-appropriate digital literacy (e.g., texting etiquette, understanding that digital footprints are permanent, guidelines for engaging with strangers, etc.).
- Encourage healthy online social support and phone, text, and video calls with friends.
- Designate mealtimes and other family activities as electronic-free times.
- Do not have any devices in the bedroom before or during sleep.
- Delay the onset of social media use as long as possible, ideally not until high school.
- Explore smartphone alternatives for tweens and teens (e.g., Pinwheel, flip phones, “dumbphones,” social media-free phones).
- Provide your children with alternative activities or interactions, such as playing board games as a family.

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Tips for Parents in Recovery to Navigate Social Events

In a culture that increasingly normalizes alcohol consumption and marijuana use while simultaneously increasing the expectation of entertaining adults and formerly children-only events, social events can prove to a particularly thorny experience for parents in recovery. Sarah Allen Benton offers the following tips to help parents in recovery from alcohol and drug use move through sober socializing with comfort and respect for their own needs.

- Accept invitations to events through a lens of recovery—check in with how you are feeling and remain flexible to cancel plans if you do not feel strong that day.
- Expand your social circle to include people living a sober lifestyle to increase socializing opportunities.
- Decide in advance how you will respond to questions about not drinking and practice drink refusal skills (i.e., “No thank you, I am sober,” “I stopped drinking and smoking pot because it wasn’t working for me”).
- Recognize it is okay to take a break from socializing with friends who do not support or understand your sobriety.
- Communicate clearly how long you plan to stay at an event if it would help to manage other’s expectations.
- Remember that most people are more focused on what they drink and less on what you are doing or not doing.
- Host events that are comfortable for you.
- Spend time with friends during the day or do activities that would not include alcohol or drugs.
- Be mindful of falling in to “people pleasing,” as this involves trying to keep others happy while neglecting your own needs.
- BYOD: Bring Your Own Drinks (i.e., seltzer, soda, iced tea, etc.).
- Examine your intention for attending the social event. Are you trying to live vicariously through others who are drinking? Celebrating a special milestone for a loved one?

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Advance Praise for
PARENTS IN RECOVERY: Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle
by Sarah Allen Benton

“*Parents in Recovery: Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle* by Sarah Allen Benton is a beacon of hope and guidance for parents on the challenging yet rewarding path of recovery....This book is a valuable resource that sheds light on parents' unique challenges in recovery and empowers them with the wisdom and tools needed to navigate these obstacles with resilience and grace... a must-read for anyone seeking inspiration and practical advice on the journey to sobriety and creating a fulfilling family life.”

—Teo-Carlo Straun, CEO, Straun Health and Wellness; faculty, Yale School of Medicine

“*Parents in Recovery* adds to the field by writing lessons garnered through lived experience and facts supported by research and data.... More than just a recovery book, it provides gentle guidance for parents that can benefit those in recovery...or not.”

—Diana Clark, president, O'Connor Professional Group; author, *Addiction Recovery: A Family's Journey*

“Addiction is passed down (in part) from generation to generation, but so too is recovery. In *Parents in Recovery* Sarah Benton presents a roadmap for both reflection and practice for parents in recovery as well as those who love or work with them.... Benton blends her own clinical expertise and personal recovery story with the voices of other recovering parents and experts. The result is a highly readable and encouraging guidebook that reminds us that while recovery isn't always easy, it is always worth it when families are at the center.”

—Dawn Nickel, co-founder of SHE RECOVERS® Foundation;
author, *She Recovers Every Day: Meditations for Women*

“Recovery has been the gift that has allowed me to be present in my three children's lives, but navigating parenting as a person in recovery is complex and stressful. Sarah Allen Benton's book provides a beautiful and helpful guide to this very often experienced but rarely discussed segment of parents.”

—Greg Williams, filmmaker, *The Anonymous People*, *Generation Found*, and *Tipping the Pain Scale*

“Benton has written a powerful book to help all parents in recovery enhance their journey doing 'the toughest job you'll ever love.'”

—Dan Griffin, author, *A Man's Way through the Twelve Steps*, *A Man's Way through Relationships*, and *Amazing Dads!*

“The greatest achievement of my life has been the honor and responsibility of being a sober father... Sarah's book addresses every aspect of being a parent in recovery (PIR). Regardless of your recovery or parenting stage, Sarah offers a 'first of its kind' navigation and motivational tool from the personal lens of clinician, educator and parent. This is a book that you will keep and refer to again and again.”

—Chris Herren, founder of Herren Project, Herren Talks, and Herren Wellness; author, *Basketball Junkie*