

**BEST PRACTICES**

*In-Home Parent Coaching for Struggling  
Adolescents and Young Adults*

Tim and Roxanne Thayne for Homeward Bound™

Target 3.5:

Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

**Three major factors for long-term success**

Homeward Bound is a private, for-profit organization founded in a bold attempt to curb – if not eliminate – the failures of young people following out-of-home placement in treatment. Soon the best practices being used in transition were also applied to early intervention cases, prior to out-of-home treatment. The Journal of Child and Family Studies (December 2005, Volume 14, Issue 4) published the results of a study on “Outcomes for Children and Adolescents After Residential Treatment: A Review of Research from 1993 to 2003.” This study presented three key factors in predicting success levels long-term:

1. The extent to which the **residents’ families are involved** in the treatment process before discharge;
2. The **stability and structure of the place** where the children or adolescents live after discharge;
3. The **utilization of after-care support** for the children or youth and their families.

All three of the factors cited from the research have to do with the family and identify parents as being in a most influential position. Thus in-home parent coaching became the vehicle for helping these young people.

**Three best practices for substance prevention and treatment success**

Homeward Bound’s in-home coaching work implements three vital behaviors (principles or tools) available to any family, regardless of race, religion, socio-economic status or location – that are unparalleled in availability, simplicity and low cost. They are:

1. Parental unity and leadership.
2. Use of family councils.
3. Fostering of multiple natural mentors (home teams).

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When used in combination, the results are families with a profoundly better chance at keeping their children and teens from experimentation and use of drugs and alcohol, or reengaging in their use.

### Parental unity and leadership

Parents-working in concert with one another – create a strong, protective culture that serves as a shield to drug and alcohol use, as well as other behavioral and mental health issues. Although not all families consist of an ideal (mother and father), there is usually a grandparent or another trusted individual who can be enlisted to help in some of the parenting discussions and decisions. Divorce can be more difficult, but the methods work to increase cooperation between co-parents as they teach values and address challenges individuals in the family encounter. Homeward Bound coaches four keys to strengthen parental unity:

1. Discuss openly with the co-parent the mutual vision for the young person and the co-parenting relationship.
2. Teach basic parenting principles that have applicability across a broad range of issues parents encounter with their youth.
3. Identify mutual expectations for the young person as a basis for co-parenting discussions.
4. Teach parents Solution Talk, an effective method of communication and joint problem solving.

Some examples of topics for discussion between co-parents are:

1. Setting clear behavioral expectations for the children.
2. Parental monitoring and supervision for drug use prevention.
3. Prioritizing the relationship between themselves and their children.
4. Moderate, consistent discipline that enforces defined family rules.

### Use of family councils

Homeward Bound's process includes conducting council after council in a family's home. With some education, parents can effectively lead their families by facilitating councils. Parents might meet regularly together in council to address concerns and to plan and support one another directly (facilitating the first key to success, unity between parents). In addition, other configurations include councils between a parent and a child, or with all members of the family present.

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Trained coaches facilitate and moderate one council type after another, until parents have observed, practiced and communicated their vision for their family, coming to a unified plan for how to move toward that vision.

Children, teens and young adults are involved to gather their thoughts and feelings on the topic, and then decisions and principles are implemented, based on the input received. Ef-

fective family councils contain four crucial yet simple elements not always found in day-to-day conversation:

1. Inclusion of, and listening to, all parties who are part of the council.
2. Maintenance of an atmosphere of caring and mutual respect.
3. Arrival at an actionable consensus before moving forward.
4. Follow-up on the results of actions taken.

As children listen, learn, and process in a variety of ways, a parent may choose to council as they walk together, travel to school or work alongside one another in daily household chores. The more informal the better for most topics, but in a time of real concern – for example around treatment for an addiction where a specific decision needs to be made – a formal gathering may be most appropriate. Councils can and should be used in times of calm (i.e. a large purchase or vacation), as well as in times of concern or distress (i.e. drug use or failing in school).

When family councils are facilitated regularly in the manner described above, the consistent results have been that family relationships flourish, children feel valued and are more respectful, and members of the family become a greater resource to one another.

### **Fostering of multiple natural mentors (home teams)**

Because young people naturally reach a point in their development where they turn to people outside the immediate family for ideas and companionship, Homeward Bound encourages families to build and utilize a community of support. Having multiple people in a child's life who genuinely care for, are available to and are willing to reach out to help when they are forming their identity and their opinions related to drug and alcohol use, is highly impactful. This identified group is called the "Home Team."



*Photo by Slickmint Creative 2016*

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Homeward Bound coaches facilitate the creation of Home Teams by having parents reach out and share their concerns regarding their young people with others they trust who can play an influential role. These may include obvious options of a doctor, teacher or therapist, but should be expanded to include other significant individuals, such as: athletic coaches, religious leaders, coworkers, extended family, parents of other teens, positive peers, neighbors, bosses, family friends or those who share an interest or hobby.

The power of cultivating a Home Team is that it can be identified and nurtured long before there is any trouble with drug or alcohol use. These individuals are in place to intervene early, with what can be termed “micro-interventions.” Team members encourage small and continual course corrections in a youth’s behavior or attitudes, building their identity and schooling them in the positive tenants of their cultural heritage, rather than waiting until there is a crisis requiring an abrupt, intensive or costly intervention. If there has already been involvement in drugs and alcohol, these team members are educated and positioned in every environment and at times of day that no professional or even a parent can cover, such as: on the soccer field, at the party, in the halls at school, etc. Their presence and permission to help creates a large safety net of support for the family.

Home Team members are efficient and cost effective because they are voluntary, and can be maintained even through a family’s relocation. They are often available over the years spanning adolescence into adulthood, rather than an average of mere months when assigned by an agency or program.

### Conclusion

Homeward Bound finds that parents who engage in these three best practices experience hope, a growing confidence in their ability, find a calm anchor and adopt realistic expectations by having a concrete plan for their family. After three to four months of implementing parental unity, family councils and home teams by using curriculum, coaching and technology, parents report an impressive increase in their confidence in their leadership, skills and influence at home. Educated parents ultimately create a healthier and more satisfying family life for their children.

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**Tim Thayne, Ph.D., LMFT**, is a marriage and family therapist whose entrepreneurial ventures have led him to start both wilderness and residential treatment programs for struggling teens. Recognizing a dangerous gap following out of home treatment, he set out to eliminate recidivism. His pioneering work is detailed in his book *Not by Chance*.

**Roxanne Thayne** helped her husband launch Homeward Bound in 2005, and serves as director of marketing. A high school teacher by training – and an enthusiast for anything that strengthens the health and happiness of family – she teaches and presents regularly. Her book *Cheership: A Salute to the Spark and Sway of Everyday Leaders* is available in 2017.