



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Supporting Families Affected by Substance Use Disorder

Findings from a Pilot Evaluation of the Be A Loving Mirror (BALM) Program

Substance use disorder (SUD) affects not only the individual experiencing addiction but also their family members. Parents, spouses, siblings, and other loved ones often experience stress, stigma, isolation, relationship strain, and uncertainty about how best to help. While many treatment services focus on the individual with SUD, far fewer programs are designed specifically to support family members.

Be A Loving Mirror (BALM) is a national virtual family support program that provides education, coaching, community support, and practical tools to help family members improve their own well-being while strengthening relationships with loved ones affected by SUD. Although BALM has served thousands of families nationwide, it had not previously been independently evaluated.

This pilot study explored participants' experiences with BALM and examined whether greater engagement in the program was associated with improvements in key outcomes.

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Study Overview

Researchers conducted a mixed-methods pilot evaluation of the Be A Loving Mirror (BALM) program to better understand participants' experiences and identify potential outcomes for future study. The evaluation combined qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey, allowing researchers to explore participants' perspectives in depth and examine whether program engagement was associated with key outcomes.

Phase 1: Participant Interviews

Researchers conducted one-hour virtual interviews with eight current or former BALM participants between Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. Participants were recruited through BALM and represented family members of loved ones with substance use disorders, including parents, spouses, siblings, and grandparents.

Interview questions focused on:

- Reasons for joining BALM
- Experiences participating in the program
- Perceived benefits and challenges
- Suggestions for program improvement

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a systematic qualitative approach to identify common themes and experiences across participants.

Phase 2: Participant Survey

Findings from the interviews were used to develop an online survey that was distributed to current BALM participants in late 2023. A total of 46 participants completed the survey.

The survey collected information on:

- Demographic characteristics
- Participation in BALM activities
- Satisfaction with the program
- Sense of inner peace and emotional well-being
- Communication with loved ones affected by substance use
- Knowledge and understanding of substance use disorders

Researchers also collected information about participants' engagement in BALM, including the length of time they had been involved in the program and the amount of time spent participating in BALM activities such as coaching, educational sessions, support groups, and self-directed learning.

Data Analysis

Researchers examined whether greater engagement in BALM was associated with improved outcomes. Statistical analyses assessed relationships between program participation and measures of inner peace, communication, addiction-related knowledge, and overall satisfaction. Findings from the survey were then compared with themes identified in the interviews to determine whether the two sets of results supported similar conclusions.

Study Limitations

As a pilot study, findings should be interpreted cautiously. Participants volunteered to participate, and the sample was relatively small and demographically homogeneous. Because data were collected at a single point in time, the study cannot determine whether BALM directly caused observed outcomes. However, the findings provide important preliminary evidence and help inform future, more rigorous evaluations of the program.



What Participants Told Us

Across interviews, participants consistently described six major benefits of BALM.

1. Improved Relationships

Participants valued BALM's focus on maintaining and strengthening relationships with loved ones rather than distancing themselves from them. Many described feeling more connected, compassionate, and hopeful in their relationships.

2. Better Communication and Boundary Setting

Participants reported learning practical strategies for discussing substance use, addressing difficult situations, and setting healthy boundaries without anger, judgment, or conflict.

3. Greater Inner Peace

Many participants described feeling calmer, less reactive, and better able to cope with the challenges associated with a loved one's substance use. Mindfulness practices, coaching, and self-care strategies were frequently cited as helpful.

4. Increased Understanding of Addiction

Participants reported gaining a deeper understanding of addiction as a health condition rather than a moral failing. This knowledge often reduced feelings of blame, shame, frustration, and guilt.

5. Community and Support

Participants appreciated connecting with others facing similar experiences. Many described the BALM community as a source of encouragement, practical advice, understanding, and hope.

6. Increased Confidence Supporting Recovery

Participants felt better equipped to support their loved one's recovery while also maintaining their own well-being. Several described feeling more confident navigating difficult situations and helping loved ones access treatment and recovery resources.

Key Survey Findings

Survey findings generally supported the themes identified in the interviews.

1. Program Satisfaction

Participant satisfaction with BALM was exceptionally high.

- 100% reported being at least somewhat satisfied with the program
- More than three-quarters (77%) reported being "very satisfied"

2. Longer Participation Was Associated with Greater Inner Peace

Participants who had been involved in BALM for longer periods reported significantly higher levels of inner peace and emotional well-being.

3. Greater Engagement Was Associated with Higher Addiction Knowledge

Participants who spent more time engaging in BALM activities reported greater understanding of addiction and recovery.

4. Coaching Was Associated with Better Communication

Participants who worked with BALM coaches reported greater confidence communicating with loved ones about substance use and recovery-related issues.



Why These Findings Matter

Family members often play a critical role in supporting recovery, yet they frequently receive little support themselves. Findings from this pilot evaluation suggest that BALM may help address this gap by providing education, practical skills, emotional support, and a sense of community. Participants reported benefits that extend beyond simply coping with a loved one's substance use. Many described improvements in their own well-being, communication skills, relationships, and confidence in supporting recovery.

Importantly, participants commonly used BALM alongside other supports, such as therapy, faith communities, and peer support groups, suggesting that BALM may complement existing services rather than replace them.

Looking Ahead

This study represents an important first step in understanding the potential impact of BALM. Because the study relied on a relatively small convenience sample, additional research is needed.

Future studies should:

- Include larger and more diverse participant populations
- Examine long-term outcomes
- Compare BALM with other family support approaches
- Evaluate whether BALM influences recovery-related outcomes for loved ones with SUD

Overall, the findings suggest that BALM is a promising family support program that may improve family members' well-being while strengthening their capacity to support recovery.

Key Takeaway

Families are deeply affected by substance use disorders and often receive limited support. This pilot evaluation suggests that BALM may help family members feel calmer, more knowledgeable, better connected, and more confident in supporting loved ones affected by addiction. Further research is warranted to determine the program's effectiveness and potential role within the broader continuum of addiction recovery services.

