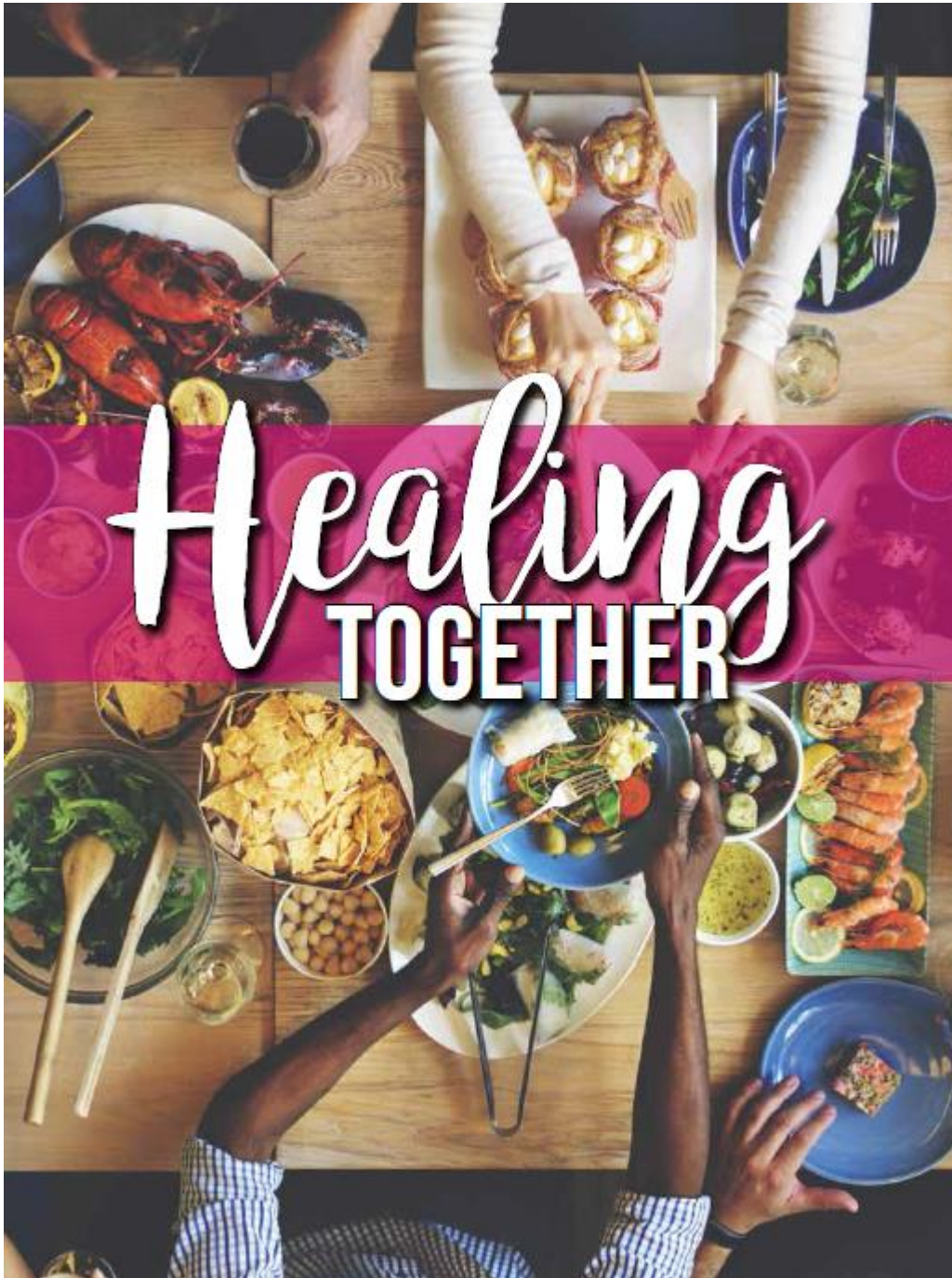
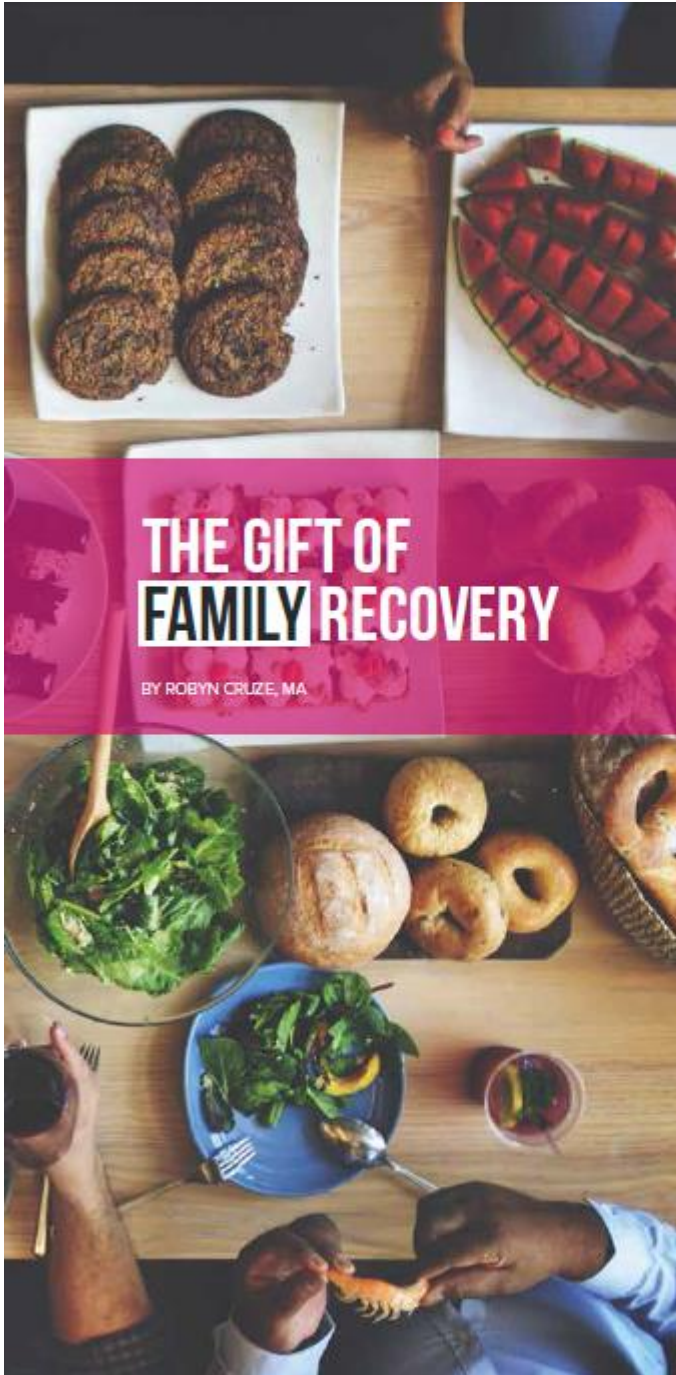


## The Gift of Family Recovery



## The Gift of Family Recovery



The holidays are coming, and stores will soon smell of cinnamon, spice, and everything nice. Advertisements will portray happy families eating fun food, and lots of it. At this time each year I pause and think about individuals and families affected by an eating disorder.

Let's picture for a moment a family around a table set for 10, but with enough food for 50. Everyone is talking, eating, and laughing, while intermittently glancing from the corner of their eye toward the one person they're concerned about. There is an underlying fear, sadness, and yes, even anger that lingers.

It is not uncommon for many of us to feel a lot of pressure during the holiday season, but it can be especially felt by someone in early recovery from an eating disorder. That feeling of all eyes on you can be unintentionally oppressive. The unspoken fear that evaluates every move of the loved one in recovery makes the surrounding energy quite palpable.



# The Gift of Family Recovery

Holidays that include a family member in early recovery can be challenging. However, it is possible for them to be joyous as well. It's going to take thoughtful and considerate planning and communication from everyone in the family, not just the one in recovery.

Instead of ignoring the eating disorder as it roams the house looking for a safe place to hide, let's talk about it as a family. Let's create a holiday that has us celebrating our commitment to recover as a family.

#### THERE IS A FAMILY SOLUTION.

The Academy for Eating Disorders (AED) states that the "potential value of including families in the treatment of children and adolescents, and in identifying resources within the family, can hasten recovery." The leading eating disorder treatment facility, Eating Recovery Center (ERC), promotes family involvement is such a critical part of the treatment plan that it provides free education and support to family members long after the treatment process is over. The ERC has even created an online family community—open to all families, whether their loved ones have attended the ERC or not. To support this, even the Joint Commission changed recently to support the family approach to treatment that the ERC had already implemented.

*Let's give the best gift this holiday season—the gift of real family recovery—using these five tips.*

#### 1 CREATE A MENU TOGETHER.

If you or your loved one is on a food plan, have the entire family do their best to follow it with flexibility. Have a discussion before an event planned around food, and agree on foods that are both fun and safe. When selecting the menu, remind each other that you are allowed to enjoy the food. Being flexible is a part of recovery—the holidays give us a chance to practice that as a family.



Invite someone on your support team who is outside of your family to the event.

#### 2 IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

Suggest that your loved one invite someone on their support team who is outside of your family to the event. If that is not possible, they can carry a list of "safe friends" to call for a little outside perspective. Although family members have a great deal to contribute to recovery, they shouldn't shoulder the entire responsibility themselves. Studies show the need to have support beyond family networks such as significant others, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and people from religious groups. It's okay to need others outside your family to support you in recovery. Do what you need for yourself and encourage other family members to do the same.

#### 3 PLAN A NEW FAMILY HOLIDAY TRADITION.

There is often an inordinate amount of time spent sitting at the table surrounded by food. The holiday season encourages the entire family

to remove themselves from the dining table within an hour of sitting down. Plan an activity around promoting recovery, such as creating a family recovery mission statement or discussing all the strengths you have seen each family member express throughout the year. Reaffirming your love for each other and your commitment to family recovery is a powerful tool worth celebrating.

#### 4 INCLUDE GRATITUDE.

It is important not to hide from the challenges of the recovery process and hold our heads high wherever we are on the journey. As a family, take a moment to recognize and be proud of how far your loved one has come. If you have struggled recently, appreciate that too. Share the gratitude and solutions to your struggles openly; it is a gift to our hearts and removes any shame anyone is feeling.

#### 5 PUT YOURSELF ON THE GIFT LIST.

Do something for yourself: practice self-care, connect with the greatness of recovery, and make space for your loved ones to do the same. **en**

*ROBYN CRUZE, MA, is a well-known author, public speaker, and the Eating Recovery Center's national recovery advocate. She is an avid writer on topics such as nutrition, body image healing, and eating disorder recovery.*

*// robynruze.com*

*// eatingrecoverycenter.com*

