As you move through your recovery journey and maintain sobriety, you may have noticed the complicated and multifaceted nature of recovery. Your addiction has likely had a negative impact on your health, job, finances, reputation, self-esteem, and mental health. You may have compromised, damaged, or destroyed friendships and family relationships along the way. Discover seven key ways to improve relational intimacy. This lesson will help you examine numerous ways that substance abuse and addiction damage relationships. You will also learn positive ways to interact with others and develop long-lasting, mutually-rewarding, and intimate relationships.
CLOSE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN RECOVERY

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KEYS TO BUILDING INTIMACY

Even under ideal conditions, it can be difficult to have satisfying and fulfilling relationships. All too often, life circumstances are difficult, and sometimes devastating. Even when difficulties arise, your relationship can endure some hardship. You can build a solid, satisfying, and fulfilling intimate relationship. Focus on the following key areas to establish closeness and connection:

1 Build trust.

A primary, or foundational, piece of any intimate relationship is the ability to trust and be trusted. Having an affair, lying to your partner, cheating, withholding information, or stealing can have devastating effects on the quality of your relationship.

How have you broken trust in your relationship? What can you do to rebuild it?

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Identify major disruptions to the intimacy in your relationship
- Evaluate your relationship and the potential damage it has suffered
- Discover places to work on and bring healing
2 Be safe at home.

The home is often considered a sanctuary and safe haven. When someone experiences domestic violence or partner abuse, the trustworthy fabric of the relationship is torn. When domestic violence occurs, fear and worry become dominant emotions and rob the victim of peace, joy, and a normal ease of living life. Violent acts cause people to be hypersensitive, constantly on guard, and resistant to re-engage in a loving, intimate relationship.

Has your home felt unsafe for you or any other member of your family? If so, how can you create an environment of safety?
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3 Make your schedule work.

An overly busy or complicated schedule may include frequent shift changes or opposite shifts, long work hours, travel, weekend work, or other time-related conflicts with your partner. These difficulties are usually not sudden or tragic in nature, but take their toll gradually, often barely noticeable at first. Schedule difficulties may increase conflict, decrease relational connection, and reduce overall satisfaction with the relationship.

How has your schedule, and daily choices on how you spend your time, affected your relationship?
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4 Find personal, relational, and family balance.

Life stressors may include financial difficulties, parenting problems, tension at work, unemployment, legal matters, housing issues, and conflicts with family members. These difficulties pile up and may take a toll over time, causing increased anxiety, depression, irritability, or anger problems. The consequences of living with chronic stress may include mounting arguments, relational separation, bitterness, resentment, increased physical problems, increased substance use and abuse, and an increase in domestic abuse problems.

Think about the stressors in your life. Which ones take a lot of time and energy? What can you do to get your responsibilities back in balance?
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Manage health concerns.

Major health issues can include cancer, chronic pain, diabetes, mental health disorders, or sleep problems for yourself or a family member. These physical problems can create difficulties with sexual intimacy and increase conflict in a relationship. Health issues may contribute to relational, life, and overall stress, due to a decrease in earnings and increase in health-care costs. It is important to recognize physical and mental health disabilities may cause an overall decrease in relational satisfaction.

How have major health issues affected your relationship with your spouse or partner?
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Work your recovery.

Substance abuse frequently contributes to relational dissatisfaction. It can cause a multitude of related problems including job loss, financial problems, legal difficulties, transportation problems, and the need for treatment. Being high, drunk, hung over, or crashing is likely not the entire problem. Generally, the devastating consequences following substance abuse create the most emotional damage, and take the most energy to repair. Getting sober and working a long-term recovery plan is a great foundation upon which to rebuild your relationships.

Explain how chemical dependence and substance abuse has been affecting you and those you love.
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Move beyond the past.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often follows a severe, traumatic event such as a natural disaster, rape, car accident, assault, and sexual or physical abuse. Symptoms include distressing memories, nightmares, and flashbacks. Emotional numbing, hyper-vigilance, irritability, angry outbursts, exaggerated startle response, and sleep disturbances are also common symptoms. The inability to experience emotions such as joy, love, and happiness, along with an increased pessimism about the future, often accompanies PTSD. This emotional disconnect can cause deep, interpersonal conflict, especially regarding intimacy. Although you cannot change the past, you can change the way you see yourself in the present. You are not damaged goods. You are making progress and are able to change your life for the better.

What traumatic events in your life still affect you? How have they affected your relationship? What are you doing to rebuild and move forward?

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SUBSTANCE ABUSE DAMAGES RELATIONSHIPS

The longer someone has abused substances, the higher the chances relational problems have occurred. While no one can read minds, you may have good insight into your partner’s concerns. The list below is designed to help you take a fierce look at relational problems associated with substance abuse. It is not designed to elicit shame, guilt, or embarrassment. Check those that currently apply or have applied to you in the past.

Consider the following relational problems. From your partner’s perspective, you have:

- Lied about your addiction
- Been unavailable to your partner
- Been irresponsible
- Wasted time and money with your addiction
- Been lazy, inactive, non-energetic, and unmotivated
- Been disrespectful
- Minimized and denied your addiction problems
- Been untrustworthy
- Been argumentative
- Used guilt, shame, and manipulation to get your way
- Been isolated from and belligerent toward your partner
- Been demanding, commanding, and entitled
- Excluded your partner from activities
- Been hostile, mean, or abusive
□ Been more self-serving than helpful
□ Avoided discussions about your addiction
□ Been fault-finding and critical
□ Been verbally abusive
□ Frightened your partner with your using behavior
□ Been absent because of your addiction (drunk, high, in prison, hospital, or treatment)
□ Been selfish and self-absorbed

Having taken an honest inventory, how have your actions harmed your relationship?
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IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Again looking from your partner’s perspective, which of the following traits or behaviors would be most important to them in creating a more positive, close, and intimate relationship?

Select the qualities most important to your partner:

□ Be honest and tell the truth
□ Be more available, present, and connected
□ Be respectful
□ Be more engaged
□ Be more nurturing and loving
□ Be generous
□ Take better care of your physical and emotional health
□ Be more family-oriented
□ Have more supportive, sober friends
□ Be more trusting, less suspicious
□ Be more achievement-focused
□ Be more independent
□ Be more dependable and faithful
□ Be helpful and constructive
□ Be able and willing to own up to your faults and shortcomings
□ Be more forgiving, accepting, and gracious
□ Be more responsible with time and money
□ Develop stable, positive plans for the future
□ Be kind, patient, understanding, compassionate, and gentle
□ Be trustworthy
□ Communicate more
□ Be more intimate and sexually connected
□ Be aware of your partner’s needs, desires, and wishes
□ Be willing to resolve conflicts
□ Include your partner in activities and contribute to life together
□ Be interested and involved in your partner’s spiritual life
□ Be more lighthearted, friendly, entertaining, and fun
As you review the list and what you checked, which would your partner say are the top five most important to them?
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

How do you hope your changes will affect those you love?

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BUILDING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Relational issues are common and do not only affect those with substance abuse or mental health issues. Obstacles affect every family and it is easy to become overwhelmed and frustrated; many consider giving up altogether. But change and healing are possible; damaged relationships can be rebuilt and restored.

Remember:

- Be patient with yourself and your family.
- Work on your own character and do not focus solely on your partner’s behavior.
- Adjustments take time and improvement comes with ups and downs.
- Get counseling and support when needed.
- Goals are important. Create a plan to help rebuild and restore damaged relationships. Keep the plan in front of you and refer to it regularly.

The support of your partner and those closest to you is one of your greatest assets and sources of encouragement in recovery. Committing to and developing a close, intimate relationship is a lot of work, but worth the effort.