RELATIONSHIPS IN RECOVERY

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. There are numerous ways to repair damaged relationships. You can learn positive ways to interact with others and develop long-lasting, mutually-rewarding, and intimate relationships. In this worksheet, discover key areas focus on in order to establish closeness and connection.

WRITING YOUR STORY

Your addiction has likely had a negative impact on your relationships. Examine times where you have compromised, damaged, or destroyed friendships and intimate relationships because of your addiction. Give specific examples of how substance use has negatively affected intimacy. Have you lost relationships because of your substance use behaviors? Have you damaged trust in the past? Has your substance use disorder made it difficult for you to have the level of intimacy that you so desire?

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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.
CLOSE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN RECOVERY - WORKSHEET 1

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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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 the 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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CLOSE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN RECOVERY - WORKSHEET 1

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 things can you do to get your responsibilities back in balance?
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5. 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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6. 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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7. 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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