



Social Relationships – Setting Priorities

Background:

Friendships and other close relationships can be a touchy subject. In general, most people want to believe that their friendships and close associations are genuine, heartfelt and based on sincere loyalty. Hopefully, in the majority of cases friendships are real and lasting. Unfortunately, however when substance abuse is involved, friendships and other relationships can often be a challenging issue. One of the most difficult situations that can arise is what to do when you stop getting high but your friends still use.

For years substance abuse counselors and treatment programs simply told people in treatment to just change their friends and get away from everyone else who uses substances. Although that may be the most straightforward way to deal with the friend issue, for many people it simply is just not easy.

Being as honest as possible, which of the following closest describes your friend situation:

- A. I realize that the only way to get better is to completely cut ties with other people who get high, wherever possible in my life right now
- B. I am going to stop associating with my friends who use “harder” drugs (like heroin, crystal meth and cocaine) but I will still keep my friendships with people who just smoke weed or drink.
- C. I am going to do this on a case by case basis and I will keep the friends that I feel are close friends, even if they use around me
- D. My plan is to keep most or all of my friends and just ask them not to use directly in front of me.
- E. I am not going to change anything about my friend situation at all even if they use in front of me I will just use willpower to stay out of trouble

Discuss –

Which situation best described your viewpoint (A-E)? If none of the above, then how would you describe your plan to deal with this issue? Explain your plan to confront the “friend issue”:



Activity – Reaction Fraction

Case Example: *Pat* - Pat got into trouble and now is facing serious jail time and now must go a full year without getting high or risk getting locked up.

Be Honest - Pat's friends who also get high/use can react several different ways. On a scale of **0% to 100%** for each question, make your *best guess* with regard to the likelihood of each situation below: (If doing this as a group, stop and discuss each item as you go through, explaining the reasons for thinking the way you do about each area)

1. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends will decide to be super-loyal and successfully stop getting high for the whole year themselves in order to support Pat?
2. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends who try #1 at first will give up after a few weeks or months and go back to using?
3. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends will try to teach Pat ways to beat the drug test or just help Pat cautiously schedule getting high around the tests without getting caught so they can still get high and have fun with Pat?
4. ___ What is the chance that Pat goes the whole year with this plan in #3 without getting caught?
5. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends will still be around as close friends after a year if Pat stays strong and goes the whole year without getting high at all?
6. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends will be out of the picture in six months or less for one reason or another Pat stays clean?
7. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends will decide to stay friends with Pat but just try to get high only when Pat is not around?
8. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends who choose #7 will eventually stop asking Pat to hang out as much because they would rather get high themselves than hang with Pat and not use?
9. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends will take the attitude "Pat, you are on your own" and they won't do anything different and just let Pat worry about it?
10. ___ What percentage of Pat's friends from # 9 will find themselves in their own trouble before the year is up?

What kinds of issues and challenges have come up as a result of this exercise?



Trusting in the Right Priorities – Friendship and relationship issues can be quite a challenge. If you are not ready to change your relationships on our own, then you can at least get started by learning to trust that relationships will work themselves out for the best if you are able to first do what is right for yourself.

Discuss the following:

1. If you decided to change your life for the better and stick with it, how might that eventually change some of your current relationships, particularly with your friends and associates who use?
 - Be Honest: Are you ever afraid, concerned or worried about what you would do to have friends if you were to stop using for a significant time period?
 - If you changed your habits and ended up losing a few friends in the process, would that always be a bad thing? Can you think of any situations where that may be for the best? (For example do you have any friendships/associations that you know deep down are not good for you?)
2. Challenging Question: When it comes to your social life: What would it take for you to be able to really start making some positive changes? Discuss
 - Friends can be hard to come by, especially friends who don't get high in today's world. Brainstorm where are some places you may be able to meet some people who don't get high but are still interesting enough to hang around with?
 - In your opinion, if someone goes a long enough time without using, do you think that person eventually won't even want to hang around with other people who use any more?
 - If so, how long does it take to lose the desire to hang around with others who use/get high and be OK with that?
 - Do you know anyone who has gone through that situation successfully? If so what can you learn from them?
3. Getting your priorities in order: Friendship and having fun is important in life, but there are other things that should take priority, especially as a person gains more maturity and responsibility in life. Circle some different priorities you can increase your focus on in order to stay on a positive path during your this time in your life:

Family

Career

Beliefs

Education

Health

Travel

Pay Debts

Children

Hobby

Creativity

Other: _____

4. Action: In conclusion, what is one goal about your priorities and your social life that you can set based on all that has been discussed?