



Healthy Life – Healthy Relationships

- Counselor Video Intro (1 minute) – <https://youtu.be/uovMHEPtfPo>
- Client Video Which Corresponds to this Worksheet (27 Min.) - <https://youtu.be/rdd8Su74Zh0>

Intro – Relationships tend to be parallel with one’s lifestyle. For example, when a person is active in misusing substances, relationships tend to go downhill. The same is true when things may not be going well with mental health for an extended period: relationships may also be strained as well. To the contrary, when changing for the better, part of the change process involves working on improving relationships. This may include:

Ending negative relationships – For example, someone working on substance use issues may work on cutting off associations with others still in the substance using lifestyle. For anyone making life changes, there may be people we need to distance ourselves from in order to make positive changes in ourselves.

Repairing existing relationships – Substance use and mental health issues can lead to conflicts, isolation, neglect, and many other relationship issues. With family, friends, and loved ones there may need to be some “repairs” made as part of the long-term recovery or positive change process.

Seek and establish new relationships – Support is needed for sustained recovery, positive change, and progress related to substance use and mental health issues. This may require finding new people to talk to who can also provide encouragement, a listening ear, and a healthy outlet for socialization.

Part 1 – Ending Negative Relationships

Social media is filled with memes that say something to the degree of “if someone is not good for you, cut them off” - These messages can be popular, but life is often not that easy. It is an oversimplification to just cut people off because there are some interpersonal problems. For example, it’s often not so easy to just ignore some close family members just because relationships are strained, especially when we live with them or interact with them often. The same is true with romantic relationships especially marriage or other commitments, particularly when children are involved. There may be a time to leave but it is not a decision to make impulsively or hastily. When considering mental health and substance use recovery, it can be necessary to distance oneself or cut off some relationships that are highly “toxic” or extremely unhealthy. Talk to a counselor for help with these challenging choices. While thinking about some of your more challenging relationships consider some of these toxic relationship traits:

Aspects of “Toxic” Relationships

Violence or Abuse – There simply is no place for violence or abuse of any kind (Physical or Sexual) in any relationship. Emotional abuse may be harder to identify and define but it can be just as damaging or worse.

Deception and Lying – If someone is acting the way they should be acting in a relationship, there should be nothing to lie about. When a person hides who they really are, is that prevents the trust needed to be truly close. When you never know what the truth is in a relationship, this can impact your own stability.

Control and Jealousy – When a person attempts to “micromanage” or worse: manipulate your life, that stems from another’s deep insecurities which makes for difficult times in a relationship. This destroys trust.



Criticism and Put Downs – Your partner should be someone who builds you up, supports, and encourages you to be the best person you can be. When someone does the opposite and puts you down, insults you and actively works toward breaking your spirit this can be very problematic and hurtful.

Disrespect and Lack of Empathy – Healthy relationships are built on mutual understanding and respect. When someone consistently fails to respect you and does not make an effort to try to understand your views, beliefs, and values then the relationship is not going to grow.

Disloyalty and Mistrust – Your partners should be someone you can trust. There should not be any form of “double life” where there is part of a person you see, and part that you don’t really know about. Also, if someone chronically won’t trust you and is constantly questioning your motives and actions or spying on you then that is another sign of toxic insecurity which is very damaging in relationships.

One Way Relationships – It is not a good sign if a relationship is drastically unbalanced and there is one “giver” and one “taker” – A relationship does not need to be exactly 50/50 across the board as one partner may do more in one area and the other partner may excel in other ways. When one partner is extremely selfish and self-centered and the other is taken advantage of causing an imbalance, it’s a problem. (When one partner is sick or disabled in a relationship, then that is a different situation as one person may accept a caretaker role)

Dependency and Rescuing – When one person in a relationship is losing control of their life and the other person falls into the role of constant rescuer, this can be a very unhealthy and destructive relationship pattern that can get worse and worse with time. Resentment may follow.

Part 2 – Repairing Existing Relationships

Relationships can be improved by adding or repairing the following “building blocks” of healthy relationships shown in the wall diagram. These healthy building blocks are also important for the next section: Finding new relationships.


Even when are problems, many relationships are worth working on. This is especially true with deeper relationships and commitments where is worth putting in some time and effort to attempt to make repairs, if possible (provided it is a safe environment – when there is violence or other immediate safety concerns, then safety of self and children should be considered first) Should you decide to work on a relationship, often it can be improved by working on the following “building blocks” of healthy relationships. We cannot change other people, so when it comes to relationships that are worth working on, we can start with working on ourselves and our own reactions to situations. At the same time, we can enhance our skills for effectively communicating our needs with our relationship partners.

All of these building blocks are important and helpful, but consider which ones particularly stand out to you as qualities that you need to focus on when it comes to improving your current relationships:

- **Again, it is worth repeating: You can’t change other people but you can change yourself – So, starting with yourself first, which areas from the “Building Blocks” do you need to work on?**
- **Next, which areas can you develop a plan to discuss with your current relationship partner?**
- **Finally, who and what can help you and your relationship partner to build these qualities? Be creative and remember this process takes time.**



Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships

Honesty	Trust	Mutual Respect	Communication	Affection	
LOVE 	Loyalty	Time Commitment	Shared interests	Shared values	Joy
Boundaries	Safety/Security	Anger control	Compromise	Problem Solving	
Fun	Cooperation	Encouragement	Emotional Support	Understanding	Peace
Forgiveness	Openness	Caring	Kindness	Shared Responsibilities	

Part 3 - Finding new relationships.

Consider the following “new” things to add to life to increase the likelihood of finding new relationships:

New values bring new priorities – When making positive lifestyle changes our priorities change. For example, changing substance use habits should change our values. When looking for new healthy relationships and friendships, it is important to allow our new positive values and priorities to guide our search.

New places to look: Granted there are people with problems everywhere, there are still some places that have a higher likelihood for finding a more mentally and emotionally healthy friend or partner than others. For example, which is better a bar or a bookstore? A party or a park? A club or a community meeting? With this in mind, what are some more positive new places you may try to go to try to meet new people?

New things to try: There may be hobbies and interests that you might like if you give them a chance. These hobbies can open the door to meeting new people with similar interests. What comes to mind.



New ways to get involved: Getting off the sidelines and being active can open the doorway to meeting people. If you are part of a group or meeting, can you speak up more or attempt to increase participation? Also, volunteer work, joining interest groups and clubs and actively participating, for example, can create more social opportunities.

New perspectives on what you already have – Do you know someone who seems like they may be a potential friend (like a coworker or someone else you see around who seems interesting and stable?) Consider asking that person to get a cup of coffee or do something together, which can be a way of making new social contacts. Also, if you have existing friends who go places and know people whom you have not gotten to know, can you work with your existing social group to meet some friends of your friends? What can you try?

New skills to work on – In order to build the confidence needed to make friends and find new relationships, it may require establishing and practicing social skills. There is an “art” to starting and maintain conversations. Learning to overcome fear and social anxiety may also be needed for relationship building as well as assertiveness skills and understanding healthy social boundaries. Therapy is a great place to work on these skills.

Closing Discussion: Making Practical Application

This exercise covered a lot of information. What are some specific and practical things from the exercise and group discussion that you are going to work on to enhance relationships? (Try to come up with 3 or 4)

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“Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher.” – Oprah Winfrey