

# **Finding Love in Recovery- Important Factors in Learning How to Love in Recovery**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

In early recovery, when you have weathered the storms of the recent crises, the gut-wrenching soul searching, and your emotions are starting to even out, you may experience some serenity and peace. Even though you feel better than you have felt in a long time, you might still feel like something is missing. What more do you want? You have sobriety. You are attending meetings and have a whole new set of friends that are there for you. You are more consistent and responsible than you ever thought you could be. The important people in your life notice how well you are doing, yet there still seems to be an absence of something important.

You may still experience a hunger for something that you can't grasp or name—maybe finding something will make you happy and fulfilled. Could romance be a magical solution for instant happiness? It can act as a temporary fix, filling the void left by alcohol and drugs. These substances once played significant roles in your life, and their absence creates noticeable gaps. While romance can temporarily bridge these gaps, it cannot replace the essential living skills you need to develop.

The issue is that you probably haven't yet developed the necessary relationship skills for a healthy romance. Using romantic relationships as a substitute for alcohol or drugs doesn't work well. Despite this, the allure of romance is strong, and many newly recovering addicts risk sabotaging their fragile sobriety by entering into relationships before they are ready.

## **Developing a New Identity**

One crucial early recovery task essential for successful relationship skill development and abstinence maintenance is the development of a new identity. Identities evolve. In this process, the old identity of someone who drinks a lot or uses gives way to a new identity of a drinker or drug user who is not drinking or using. Eventually, one's identity illuminates the multifaceted person defined by many things, including recovery. To be intimate with a partner, you must have a clear and comfortable sense of self. It's hard to be in a relationship with someone else when you can't feel comfortable in your own skin. Without a firm, positive sense of self, you may enter romantic relationships on a "self-finding" mission, only to discover later that you've lost ground.

Sometimes, we look to our significant other as an extension, reflection, or definition of self when we don't feel whole. It's a romantic notion, but another person won't be able to do it for you. Another potential hazard for coupling up too soon is the possibility of transferring spiritual needs to that significant other. The primary focus for the first year of recovery should be developing a solid foundation for building a new, chemical-free life. Tasks for engineering this new healthy life involve attending meetings, acquiring and using a sponsor, serving others, and practicing the skills necessary to replace the chemicals with healthy living skills.

### **Relationship Skills in Recovery**

Relationship skills are among the most essential living skills to develop. These include the ability to effectively communicate and problem-solve, consider others' perspectives, ask for what you want and need directly, trust, identify and communicate feelings, manage stress, and take responsibility for your own issues while letting go of responsibility for others' issues. Engaging in a new relationship without these skills endangers your fragile recovery.

Think about it. What do people with addiction do when they have emotional pain, conflicts, or feelings and problems they don't know how to handle? They use alcohol or other drugs to fix it or escape from it. Entering a romance can sabotage recovery because your recovery routine changes as you incorporate the new person into your life and schedule.

## **Maintaining Your Recovery Routine**

You've probably worked hard to set up a structure and daily routine that helps maintain abstinence and recovery while building self-discipline skills. Twelve-step meetings may give way to rendezvous. Romance with another recovering person is particularly precarious, especially when you experience the same challenges and pitfalls with fledgling skills. Going to the same twelve-step home group and meetings may make it more challenging to take care of your recovery needs.

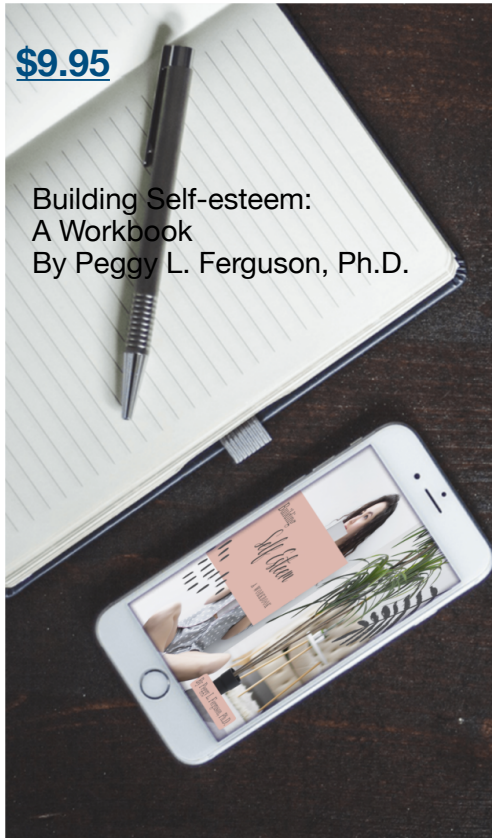
## **Resolving Past Relationship Issues**

Healthy relationships in recovery demand that you develop a solid sense of self, prioritize your healing and practice new living skills. Sponsors can be invaluable as you negotiate the challenges of early recovery, including developing intimacy skills. It's essential to have a sponsor with solid recovery in relationships.

You may not know the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships if you've never learned intimacy skills. Your sponsor can help you keep a growth perspective as you go through this process when the time is right. As you progress in your recovery, you'll find that you and the people you are drawn to are experiencing similar levels of wellness. **Note:** This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language and concepts, clarity and accuracy.

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Building Self-esteem:  
A Workbook  
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.



Evolving in your recovery journey involves the transformation of self-identity and self-esteem. Enhancing your self-worth through self-discovery with "**Building Self-Esteem: A Workbook.**" This dynamic workbook experience uses a PowerPoint-type presentation to thoughtfully prompt and insightfully question you to develop goals, solve problems, and journal thoughts and feelings while guiding you through building a stronger, more positive self-perception. This workbook offers a roadmap to significant transformation and greater self-worth. Embrace self-reflection and growth, and discover the confidence and fulfillment that come from changing how you think and feel about yourself.