

# **Relationship in Recovery: What Families Need to Recover**

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Very commonly, newly recovering people and their family members have unrealistic or hidden expectations for the family in recovery. They all experienced the emotional upheaval that precipitated the transition into recovery. No one in the family is expecting more emotional upheaval now that the loved one is sober. They are often unprepared for the identity crises of early recovery, as everyone is trying to figure out where they stand and what they are supposed to be doing. They may be reluctant to deal with the attachment injuries that occurred in active addiction and may still be happening in early recovery. There may be some resistance to change among family members. Communication barriers may prevent resolving old resentments, regaining trust, eliminating power struggles, resolving role confusion, and restoring emotional security in the relationship.

## **Communication and Problem-solving:**

What do families need to recover? Communication. Communication. Communication. Recovering families need a lot of dialogues. Children should be encouraged to ask questions and to talk about their perceptions and feelings. They need permission to talk about how active addiction affected them and how early recovery is affecting them now. They know and understand less about the changes going on in the family and experience insecurity in the absence of information.

Spouses are trying to forge a new reality for themselves and the family. They need a lot of information and feedback to do accomplish that. Damage from the past limit willinness to take new chances. Revealing fears and insecurities in the face of past attachment injuries takes a lot of courage. New communicational skill development may lag behind the

acute need for those skills. No one really knows what to expect. Without being willing to risk by revealing what you think and feel in early recovery, the unique problems presented by the trauma of early recovery, may not be resolved. Communication is essential. New methods of communication may be necessary. If your communication methods are preventing problem-solving, seek the help you need. Counseling, coaching, and courses are available.

### **Taking Personal Responsibility:**

Both partners need to talk about active addiction, with the non-addicted spouse reviewing the damage they suffered at the hands of addiction, owning and expressing their feelings about it. At the same time, the recovering person should actively listen and take as much responsibility as insight allows. It is necessary for both partners to take responsibility for their parts in relationship issues, including dishonesty and manipulation. Both parties contributed to relationship problems. The non-addicted family member's contribution to the problem may have involved their attempts to "problem-solve" that morphed into something else.

### **Regaining Trust:**

Communication facilitates the recovery of trust. Honesty and accountability are foundational concepts in recovery. Although sponsors act as accountability partners, spouses can also serve as accountability partners for each other in recovery if they are willing to be honest, and to monitor their own motives. They have inside information that sponsors probably don't have that can be very important for recovery. Honest and accurate information about their partner's recovery allows each one to feel secure and comfortable with the other person's efforts. Anyone will fill in the blanks with theories based on past behavior when they have no information. Providing each other with information about what they are doing in recovery helps prevent the writing of catastrophic explanations and the conflicts that come from them. Both partners must work on their recovery programs while creating an emotional climate conducive to sharing their progress. Relearning how to communicate and reconnect on

an intimate level is crucial. Letting your partner in on what is going on with your thoughts, feelings, and behavior is intimate behavior.

### **The Encroachment of Realities:**

Acknowledging and navigating the honeymoon phase and its end, marked by potential challenges, is vital for sustained family recovery. Families must learn to tolerate the unfamiliar nature of early recovery, where changes are less obvious, and progress is not always continuous. When setbacks occur, both partners often feel like they are starting at ground zero. Although this is usually untrue, each setback can feel devastating and demoralizing. Owning and discussing feelings about life's challenges and setbacks is essential.

### **Learning to be a Team Again:**

Relationship and collaboration skills are necessary for thriving in early recovery. Learning to balance time for individual recovery, work, family, and each other is a task for both partners. They may face challenges in addressing past issues in various areas, including finances, household maintenance, job and career repair, and restoring other relationships. Both partners need to cultivate patience, participate in proactive problem-solving, embrace the unfamiliar, and contribute to fostering resilience in each other. They must learn to parent cooperatively to guide their children through recovery.

### **Developing a Recovery Lifestyle:**

In developing a recovering family lifestyle, partners are tasked with identifying and participating in new leisure and recreational activities that do not present common triggers for relapses. They may need to establish new family interests, let go of outdated ones, guide children in participating in the new lifestyle, and create recovery-enhancing activities and traditions.

## Navigating Broader Family Relationships:

The family in recovery is not an island. Parents and grandparents may not know about the substance use issues in the recovering family. What they do know may be lopsided, based on who is doing the telling. Extended family members may have been recruited into helping to facilitate a family member's transition into recovery. They may have been asked to not enable. Any number of challenges to the relationship can happen in active addiction. Repairing extended family relationships is a common task of early recovery. Setting boundaries, making amends, and communicating effectively with families of origin are essential for a comprehensive recovery. Many people who have substance use disorder come from families with other members who also have the illness. They may or may not be in recovery. Family events can be slippery environments when drinking is a part of those gatherings. A recovering family needs a plan for how they will deal with triggers, cues, cravings, and general discomfort that occurs with extended family.

Navigating the challenges of family recovery requires a comprehensive approach, including open communication, individual recovery programs, cooperative parenting, reconnection, and the ability to survive the ups and downs of the journey. By acknowledging the nuances of early recovery and fostering resilience, families can emerge stronger, connected, and better equipped for the continuous recovery process.

Fostering open communication and emotional connection becomes paramount for families in recovery. Transitioning from the turmoil of active addiction to the changing lifestyles of recovery requires proactive measures. **"Family Feelings Meetings: A Brief Lesson"** offers a structured approach to family meetings, prioritizing equality, respect, and emotional expression. By embracing these core principles and implementing effective communication techniques, families can cultivate an environment conducive to healing and growth. Let Family Feelings Meetings assist you on your journey of self-discovery, mutual understanding, and lasting connection.



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