

Module # 7

The Four Key Relationships

By

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Introduction

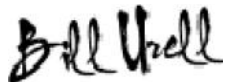
This week will be looking at four key relationships in addiction recovery. A number of these may have suffered through our actions and behaviors while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

I have yet to meet someone who is able to honestly say that all their relationships are in the best shape they've ever been when they first enter recovery.

The four relationships will be discussing this week are these:

1. Our relationship to ourselves.
2. Our relationships to our family.
3. Our relationships to our higher power.
4. Our relationships in society.

Onward,



The Four Key Relationships:

I believe that addiction is a disease of isolation. The deeper and deeper we slide into our addictive actions and behaviors, the more and more distant we become from relationships that are important to us. I have identified four key relationships that undoubtedly suffer when we're active in our addiction, and those are:

1. Our relationship to ourselves.
2. Our relationships to our family.
3. Our relationships to our higher power.
4. Our relationships in society.

1. How We Relate To Ourselves:

When honestly looking at our past behavior while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, I think it is real difficult to feel good about yourself. And perhaps that is the easiest and most simple definition of self-esteem. Common feelings turned inward, experienced by people in active use, are anger, loneliness, shame, guilt, and inadequacy, among many others.

It is common to have very low self worth, and not feel very important or very likable. It is extremely difficult to attract and give love when you don't feel lovable. How do we change this? How do we start moving forward in a positive direction? I hate to state the obvious. but the first really positive action we can take is to become abstinent. Stop using drugs or alcohol and stay stopped.

As we enter into addiction recovery and move down the path toward sobriety, it is natural to feel a bit better about oneself. After all, you're finally taking pro-active and positive steps to improve your life.

We will have to come up with a richer definition of self-esteem, then simply how we feel about ourselves. Perhaps a broader concept would be to look at the value we place on ourselves emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Where does self-esteem come from?

For some reason, I picture a little newborn baby in the hospital being held up behind the glass by the nurse. New parents are gazing fondly at their new child. Then I ask myself, does that child have low self-esteem? Where did this concept of not putting a value on ourselves come from? What's that all about?

Somewhere along the line, I believe we learned how to feel about ourselves. One thing I know, is that one of the strongest forms of teaching and learning is modeling.

We tend to emulate what we are shown. If we are raised in a healthy family, a Leave It to Beaver situation, where our needs are met, love and reassurance freely given, I don't think there will be low self-esteem issues.

Unfortunately, many people who suffered through addiction come from less than ideal and emotionally functional families. Now I'm not all about blaming our parents, I really believe they did the best job that they could, but the fact is some of us were raised in less than ideal family situations. Think about that. We learn from what is modeled around us.

Leaving the past behind us, just think how our value and perception of ourselves plummeted as we became active in our addiction. I really think that at some deep level we know that drinking and drugging is not a positive influence in our life. Yet we continue to do it. That push and pull of wanting to stop, then having to use, can play havoc with how we feel about ourselves.

Enough. How About If We Move Into Some Solutions?

One of the great things about being in addiction recovery is that our self-esteem can take a major boost. Sometimes though, the old feelings and thinking can re-occur. That is when self esteem tips can be a useful recovery tool.

When people talk about improving self-esteem, they usually mean self-confidence. While the two are related, they are not exactly the same. Self-esteem is all about self-worth and self-value. It's how we see ourselves in relation to other people and our environment. It has nothing to do with vanity or conceit.

The lack of self-esteem is a major problem and has a leveling quality. Rich and poor, all strata of society alike, are afflicted by it, and people decide between happiness and unhappiness because of it. If self-esteem is an area in your life where you need improvement, here are some tips you can use to build your self-value and improve the way you see yourself:

Self-esteem Tips

1. Know what you want. You can't assess where you are in your journey if you have no idea what you want to have in life. You also will not be able to judge whether you've been doing a good job or just so-so.

Set goals that are clear and doable. Make sure that these are things you want to do and attain, and not things your parents, family, friends and colleagues insist you 'should' have. Is it just the latest trends that dictate your aspirations? If so, you will never catch up and be satisfied. You can only claim your goals as your own if you recognize them as things you truly, genuinely want in your life.

2. Assess your good points. List the things that you do well and the things that make you a good person. It could be anything: intelligence, a good sense of humor, good analytical ability, compassion, creativity, ability to spot trends, or people skills. These are things that you have and can recognize as an integral part of your personality and talents. No matter how low you feel in your life, these are qualities that you never lose.

3. Recognize your liabilities. Improving your self-esteem does not mean ignoring the things that make you human. To be human is to make mistakes, just do not let them keep you stuck. List your negative traits and label them as areas in your life you need to work on, areas for improvement. Treating them as downright liabilities will make them seem an unalterable feature of your life, and create a feeling that you are helpless against them.

4. Build slowly but surely. Take little steps to improve your self-esteem. Big successes build upon small successes. You can't decide to change your outlook drastically today and expect extreme results in the morning. By taking it slowly and performing well during each turn, you gradually build a solid base of achievements that will boost your self-esteem more effectively.

5. Make it a point to improve yourself daily. Whatever you do, say or think should be geared towards improving your self-esteem. Improve the way you dress, walk or talk. Take further studies to hone your knowledge and skills, learn a new language, take up cooking classes, start a new hobby. Being able to immerse yourself in worthwhile activity creates a feeling of capability and opens new opportunities for growth.

6. Keep away from people who shoot you down with snide remarks and unfair criticisms. Associate with positive people. There will always be grouches and negativists who will think nothing about giving careless opinions that make other people think unworthy of praise or recognition. If you find people who make it their life mission to belittle other people's achievements, keep your distance. They will not contribute anything good to your life.

7. Be yourself. You'll never improve your self-esteem if you try to live life and find acceptance as a projected mask of yourself. Pretending to be someone you're not will fail to affirm your uniqueness and potential and will only make you sadder about your circumstance. You can't make everyone love you, so don't try.

8. Make other people feel good about themselves. People tend to like you more if you're honest and pleasant. Polish your

listening skills and body language to make people feel comfortable. Respond to them visibly and with interest.

You might think that this is the opposite of what you want to do to improve your self-esteem but by actually focusing your attention on other people, you create an aura of likeability that they gravitate towards, making them choose you over others. And when you are singled out as a good person who's terrific to be with, your self-esteem grows.

9. You have the right to make mistakes. Nobody's perfect, regardless of what you've heard or what popular media wants you to believe. By accepting that you will make mistakes and that it's all right, you learn to recognize that it is a necessary process you need to go through in order for you to improve yourself.

10. Recognize that you are a unique individual with a different set of talents and that you have something to contribute. You may not be a big celebrity like Justin Timberlake, as rich as Bill Gates or as powerful as Oprah Winfrey, but your individuality makes you as important as they are, with as much right to exist and make something of yourself.

Coming Up In A Future Module

We will be devoting a future module to improving self-esteem and-self image. A major benefit of growing in recovery is feeling good about yourself.

2. How We Relate To Our Families:

I was asked to give a lecture on addiction and relationships to about 50 patients in an inpatient treatment facility. I asked the group to shout out emotional states or consequences of their active addiction while I wrote their responses on the board. We developed a list; take a look at it very carefully because I am going to ask you a question after:

isolation	financial consequences
guilt	legal issues
shame	abandonment
anger and rage	loss of morality
cheating	poor health
job loss	dishonesty
Losing interest in life	divorce

Here Is the question:

With all that going on, why would you NOT think your relationships are in trouble?

Look at what you were bringing to the relationship. Look at your emotional contribution. The silence is deafening.

A person who is active in their addiction has one the self-centered goal in mind, and that is to continue using drugs and alcohol. If someone close to them points out the fact that they are hurting themselves and others around them, the natural thing to do is to put up walls insulating themselves from the message. The addict will continue to use and twist the relationship as long as it promotes his ability to continue alcohol or drug use.

I can't tell you the number of times I have heard:

I just want my old _____ (husband, wife, mate, friend) back.

The obvious implication here is that things have changed, and if you go back to the list we mentioned before, it is not for the better. I have NEVER heard anyone say "the more I drank or drugged the better my relationships got." Oops! Sorry for stating the obvious.

The Million Dollar Family Dilemma:

I could make a million dollars if I could solve this early recovery dilemma. There are two points of view on healing relationships as we move into sobriety, the recovering persons, and families. Unfortunately, they are almost always diametrically opposed. Here the two positions that are talking about:

The recovering person...

with good reason, wants to let go of past, live in the present, and move on to the future. They are very sincere in their conviction that they have finally got it right and that drugs and alcohol will no longer be a problem. And for everyone's sake we hope it is true. They want to reestablish family relationships as if nothing has happened, and not dwell on the wreckage of the past or least tone it way down.

The family member(s),...

sincerely hope that there is no return to drug or alcohol use. However, the past cannot just be ignored, the pain was very real to them each and every day while the user just 'checked out', leaving the family members holding the bag for a whole host of problems. They truly want to believe that is all over, but have very real concerns about it. The track record has not been good

Conclusion:

The recovering person sincerely believes and wants this to be the last time, and wants everybody around him to believe in support him. That's great, however here is the flaw. This may hurt, but I'll let you have it right between the eyes,

Your track record stinks. Why should anybody believe you this time?

Don't get me wrong, your family wants to believe you, but what they are really looking for **is a guarantee**. I had one family member describe it to me as like being on a roller coaster, they would see progress get their hopes up high only to see them slide downhill into oblivion.

How about this for a different explanation: the family finally has your attention your head is out of the drug and alcohol induced cloud, you just might be capable of hearing them. They want you to listen to them. They are not being mean and vindictive they are simply trying to get the point across did they have been through hell too. You certainly were not able to listen what you are under the influence. Maybe they are thinking that if you know how bad it was, you would not possibly go back.

Coming Up In A Future Module

We will be devoting a future module to improving poor relationships, identifying dysfunction and improving communications

3. How We Relate To Our Higher Power (spirituality):

One way or another our spirituality is definitely affected if by actively using drugs or alcohol. I am going to stick to that point within this Module. You might guess we will be dealing with spirituality in depth in a future session, and you would be right.

Perhaps one of the most simple, yet elegant exchanges I ever heard of when discussing how people become disconnected from their spirituality when using is this:

Recovering person "I felt I was more and more distant and disconnected from God, and my spiritual well-being."

Person listening: Who moved?"

I used to be envious of people who had a strong connection to God or religion. I always wanted that, but something always held me back, I just couldn't get there. The one thing I could not appreciate is that while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, it was very difficult to have faith in much of anything.

For those who do believe in something greater than themselves, I can't recall ever having heard that their faith became greater and they became closer to their higher power while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

I will just state that in order to grow in recovery, move closer to that peace and serenity that I think most of us want to achieve, I believe it is necessary to address spiritual issues. I'll leave the definitions of them up to you for now.

4. Our Relationships In Society Or Community:

OK, we have covered relationships with ourselves, our family, and spirituality. Now it is time to tackle pretty much all else that is left, and by that I mean our relationships in society and with our community.

Almost by definition, our relationships in the society and community around us suffer and deteriorate. Two of the criteria from the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders which mental health professionals use to diagnose substance dependence are:

1. A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain substance, use the substance, or recover from its defects.
2. Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of substance use.

I return once again to our idea about alcohol and drug addiction as being a disease of isolation. What may have started out in the beginning as casual use escalated over time. Our drug or alcohol use became so prominent that it became the thing around which we organized everything in our lives. Not only does that include destroying relationships, but actually giving up fun things that we used to do.

One of the real benefits of 12 step programs, is they provide a way back into community, and learning how to reestablish those people skills we may of lost along the way. Aside from that, all the people in those programs are trying to head in the same general direction, that is, lead a life that is drug or alcohol free.

What better place to become socially reconnected, or to use the program terminology, to partake of fellowship?

When asking people who have relapsed what they believe the causes are, there are two answers that come up over and over again. Boredom and isolation. Sometimes we become so lonely and withdrawn from society we actually forget or do not know how to reconnect again.

There are some standard answers, such as get a job, do volunteer work, etc. Now, when people complain that their bored or lonely I look them right in the eyes and say what are you going to do about that? Who said it was easy?

Sometimes life in recovery involves pushing the envelope and making a little bit of effort. If you need to work on shyness, or being uncomfortable with people, then so be it, let's start working on it. I know you can do it because you are here reading these words, trying to improve yourself.

As they say in the 12 step programs, recovery is all about action. You can think, and study all you want, but nothing happens until you take action.

And in a larger philosophical sense, I believe that's what makes us human. Making decisions, sometimes being right, sometimes being wrong, but doing something darn it.

In Closing:

Well there you have it, a look at the four key relationships in recovery. I want to touch bases on all for those areas, to put a more global view on the concept of relationships.

Some of these relationships such as self-esteem, dysfunctional relationships, and spirituality we will be visiting in more depth in the future.

A final thought or word of caution I might relate when it comes to relationships is

this if: be very careful about superimposing your desired time frame on reality. In a lot of cases it took a long time for relationships deteriorate and crumble. It would be a very unrealistic to believe that they can be repaired in short order for instantly.

In some cases people associated with us have had enough of the talk, they want to see more of the walk. A sure-fire method to reestablish positive relationships is to the next right thing, act responsibly, consistently into overtime. If we are taking right action and making good decisions over time, the people love us will certainly come back into our lives.

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