



Dating in Early Recovery

The first few months of recovery from addiction are some of the most difficult, and the need to deal with emotions that were previously numbed with drugs make early recovery a period of enormous adjustment.

Learning to feel emotions again, including positive feelings of love and intimacy, can be one of the most challenging parts of recovery, but also one of the most rewarding. Early in recovery, relationships are one of the leading causes of relapse. Although the Big Book of AA doesn't offer guidelines on dating in recovery, addiction counselors strongly advise waiting until a person has achieved one year of sobriety.

It is commonly recommended in the recovery community to avoid romantic relationships for the first year, because most of us are just beginning to get to know ourselves and to define our values. We have to learn to love ourselves before we can love someone else.

The Pitfalls of Dating Too Soon

People in recovery might choose to date a very different type of person when they first quit using as compared to when they have achieved a year of sobriety. Recovering people often have learned to either shut down and hold in their emotions for fear of being hurt or to romanticize their relationships and fall in love at the first opportunity, without discriminating.

In treatment, people learn new skills that need to be practiced before they are able to make them part of their daily life without returning to old patterns. If they start dating too soon, they are likely to choose someone who is emotionally less mature, as they themselves are, than if they waited a year.

Choosing Unhealthy Partners.

People tend to choose partners who are at their same emotional maturity level. It would follow then, that recovering individuals would choose differently after working on themselves first. In early recovery, people tend to choose the same type of partner they would've chosen when they were using

drugs. This person often is abusive or codependent, as is the recovering person early on.

Replacing Drug Addiction with Love Addiction

Recovery is hard work that requires a full-time commitment. Returning to daily life without the security of being able to use drugs as a coping mechanism can be terrifying, particularly when drug cravings and triggers to use set in. When people stop using and start dating right away, they run the risk of seeking comfort in relationships instead of drugs.

Love addiction becomes a concern when infatuation replaces the high of drug use. Whether the object of the addiction is drugs or an unhealthy attachment to another person, the individual is searching for something outside themselves to fill the emotional void within.

The rush of a new relationship can be emotionally damaging and can derail even the most valiant recovery effort. In most cases, individuals who can't refrain from having a relationship in the first year of recovery are missing an opportunity to address the core issues underlying their addictions. They may have other mental health issues, compulsions and cross-addictions that need to be addressed as well, before they can truly focus on a relationship. Addicts do not enter recovery with healthy self-esteem. This affects their perception of what attributes they are bringing to the relationship bargaining table. This presents several problems. The first is that they are not looking for or getting much in the bargain for a partner. If they do not feel very good about themselves, or if their belief that they feel good about themselves is instead a defense mechanism, they will not expect much in return for what they bring.

Another problem that is in line with this is that during the first year of recovery a great deal of growth should occur. This growth raises self-esteem, and if one entered a relationship early in recovery, they will now realize that they can do better. Additionally, even if both grow, and both of the partner's self-esteem is raised, it is likely they will grow apart.

In light of these considerations on the topic of early recovery and relationships, everyone in early recovery considering entering a relationship has reason for concern. The questions is it possible this attraction is due to unconscious complexes or addictive behavior? or what contributes to my attraction to this person? needs to be asked and strongly considered. And as a final thought in regard to answering these questions, does someone in early recovery have the capacity to be entirely honest with themselves, when not that long ago they were convincing themselves they needed another fix, drink, hit, etc. to get through the day?

Reasons Relationships in Early Recovery are ill Advised

1. Relationships take the focus off of recovery.
2. Relationships take the focus off of the individual.
3. Relationships increase the potential for relapse due to emotional intensity.

4. There is too much potential for underlying issues, projections, and complexes to be creating the attraction.
5. Low self-esteem and the bargaining process of relationships make early recovery a tenuous time to enter a relationship.
6. There is a strong likelihood of outgrowing the relationship quickly.
7. In early recovery you do not really know yourself yet.
8. In early recovery you may not have a healthy understanding of what love is yet.
9. There is a strong possibility of the individual in early recovery acting on, I want what I want when I want it.
10. In light of advice to the contrary, if you decide to enter a relationship, you are working your own program. This is self-will, and this is an addictive behavior.

Be Patient. Recovery happens one day at a time. Even though it may feel like the process is agonizingly slow, there is no substitute for taking the time in the first year to focus exclusively on recovery. Recovering the mind, body and spirit requires time to clear the years of shame, guilt, denial and emotional wreckage, and the likelihood of staying sober increases with each year in recovery. By taking the time to become whole before diving into the dating scene, you give yourself a chance not only to stay sober but to have a fulfilling relationship that can be better than your best high.

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ADDICTION RECOVERY