

Daily Reflections for Couples
By Recovering Couples Anonymous

REFLECTION NO. 1

Making Time For Intimacy

We live in a culture in which the average couple spends less than twenty-seven and a half minutes engaged in direct conversation together per week. Recovering people, however, know the price of neglected relationships. The old compulsions and obsessions drained our energy and occupied our time. In our pain and anger, we probably communicated even less than the meager national average. One of the gifts of recovery is the certain knowledge that what we wanted all along was intimacy. Our illness seduced us into taking care of our pain in unhealthy ways, as opposed to the closeness we could offer one another.

Our commitment today

Today we will work for the opportunities to connect with one another. We will attend to those moments when we are together. We will talk about whether we have enough time structured in the future. We will remember from our past experience that intimacy is an accumulation of little moments as well as large blocks of time.

My commitment today

Today I will remember that my past obsessions were a way to avoid my feelings and life choices and that what I really needed was support and nurturing.

REFLECTION NO. 2

Need For Community

Couples experience more stress now than perhaps at any other time in history. For example, this is the first time in history that humankind has expected just two people to raise children. Parents in the eighteenth century had more childcare options that we routinely have now. In earlier times, extended family and friends were available for help when it was needed. Now, we live in neighborhoods and apartments in which we largely do not know others. Further, we move on the average of every three years, which is about the time it takes to become rooted in a community. Clearly, our culture does not support those of us in recovery who came from families already isolated and incapable of asking for help.

Our commitment today

Today we will acknowledge to each other our need for others to support our life as relationship partners. We need that support and community so that we do not return to being isolated from each other and the rest of the world. We will seek one firm course of action that we can take to add to our community.

My commitment today

Today I will remember that there are my partner's friends, there are my friends, and there are our friends together. All three are indispensable for recovery.

REFLECTION NO. 3

CoupleShame

Many of us experience shame about our relationship; we think others would not want to be with us as a couple. We may be embarrassed about past behavior. We may still distrust being with others because we fear old behaviors might return. Or we may feel so shameful, we cannot believe that "good" people would enjoy us, accept our struggles, and share themselves with us. Sometimes we fear others will see realities about ourselves which we either do not perceive, or do not wish to admit to ourselves. Sometimes we fail to share these feelings with others.

Our commitment today

Today we will reflect on how we feel about being with others. Do we have shame about our relationship? What strengths do we have to offer others? What agreements or boundaries do we need to feel safe in "public?" Would it help for us to talk to other couples about our feelings?

My commitment today

Today I will work on accepting our progress as sufficient and focus on our strengths. I will comment aloud to my partner during the day about positive aspects of our being together.

REFLECTION NO. 4

Couple Self-Concept

As individuals have self-concepts, couples have an "us" concept. How a couple perceives its relationship will profoundly affect its well-being. In our individual recoveries, we learned that how we talked about ourselves or to ourselves had a direct impact on our self-worth. Self-pity, self-blame, and self-judgment always added to the burden and worsened the situation. The same principle applies to relationships. When we judge each other or the relationship harshly, or indulge in another round of "ain't it awful being together," we remain stuck in the old patterns. Our recovery demands that we extend to our friendship that essential gentleness which was fundamental to forgiving ourselves.

Our commitment today

Today we will seek to treat gently our time together. We will accept the fact that intimacy is difficult, especially for recovering people. We will be forgiving of "us," and easy with one another. We will allow our sense of humor to be our guides.

My commitment today

I will not take myself too seriously. Rather I will look for ways to be good to myself and my partner. I will remind myself that I do not have the power necessary to fix instantly the things about which I am obsessive.

REFLECTION NO. 5

Family-of-Origin

A relationship is a "blending of epics." Both partners carry within them the story of the previous generations. Recovering people coming from dysfunctional families often have bitter histories. Part of powerlessness is growing up in relationships where the only options were addiction or co-dependency. As we grow in recovery, we understand more fully the impact of our families on how we relate to others. Sadly, we also have to recognize how our distrust, terror and anger can easily be misplaced on our current partners, who do not deserve it. Part of our progress is to recognize that although we can no longer alter old family ties, we can do something about our current relationships.

Our commitment today

Today we will remind ourselves how far we have come from the old family pains. We will refuse to allow our addictive inheritances to interfere with how we are with one another now. One step we can take is to ask each other if something we are upset about represents contamination from the past.

My commitment today

Today I will be conscious of voices from my addictive past urging me toward destructive behavior with my partner in the present.

REFLECTION NO. 6

Spirituality and Vulnerability

Many people experience their spirituality as individuals in solitude. Still others experience spiritual connection in community--a church or Twelve-Step group, for example. We may find one-to-one spirituality more frightening because sharing our conscious contact is one of the most intimate things we can do. The risk to be spiritually vulnerable to a partner who knows us well is profoundly different from solitude. As with so many other risks in our recovery, the greater our vulnerability, the deeper our potential growth. Remember, we "came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to commitment and intimacy."

Our commitment today

Today we will ask each other what risks we are willing to take with one another spiritually. How do we implement the Second and Third Steps into our daily lives together? How prepared are we to turn our partnership over to a power greater than ourselves?

My commitment today

Today I will ask myself what new spiritual risk I am willing to take with my partner or in my partner's presence.

REFLECTION NO. 7

Support

One of the most difficult moments as a couple occurs when both partners are depleted and "over the edge" at the same time. Traditional wisdom has it that if you cannot get support from your partner, you should seek it from others individually. Another option exists. Part of recovery for the relationship is to develop a network of other couples who can be there for us during tough moments. Having such friendships in our lives will enhance our recovery if we develop them and call on our friends when we need them.

Our commitment today

Today we will talk about who in our network we can call when we are both overwhelmed. What kinds of excuses would we use to avoid calling them?

My commitment today

Today I will remember that building support for our relationship is another way of taking care of myself.

REFLECTION NO. 8

Partner-Blame

Blaming our partner is perhaps the most devastating dynamic available to addictive relationship partners. The dynamic becomes so familiar that we are unaware when we do it. Clues exist, however, to indicate when we are blaming. When we make absolute statements about the person such as, "you always do this" or "you are so..." or "you are such..." we are making blaming statements. If we critique the behavior ("I don't like this behavior") and not the person, we will be taking responsibility for what concerns us--and not pushing all the responsibility to our partner.

Our commitment today

Today we will contract to talk about our concerns respectfully. We will discuss how we can affirm each other and still have our issues heard.

My commitment today

Today I will remember that how I talk about something can be as important as the problem I wish to discuss.

REFLECTION NO. 9

Unresolvable Issues

Every couple has an issue that appears to unresolvable. No matter how often it has been talked about, or what solutions have been tried, the problem did not go away. Here is where the program can really help. In our addiction and codependency, we tried harder to solve a problem only to have the situation worsen. However, when we admitted our powerlessness and sought help, we were able to

make progress. Similarly, part of a First Step as a couple is to recognize powerlessness over that "unresolvable issue." By admitting the issue, a couple can gain support from others who have experienced similar patterns in their recovery. The starting point is to remember that our illness is a family illness.

Our commitment today

Today we will discuss one of our unresolvable issues and commit to seeking support. We will remind each other that we are not alone in having difficult issues which refuse to go away.

My commitment today

Today I will be patient with our partnership and remember that my powerlessness persists in my relationships as well.

REFLECTION NO. 10

Stress

Family researchers have long noted that marital satisfaction declines markedly in most couples when their children become teenagers and returns when those adolescents become adults. The lesson to be learned is that on-going stress takes a toll on the quality of relationship-life people have. Such stressors are unavoidable; we cannot change, for example, the turmoil that emerging adulthood brings to our children. What we can do is seek support from others to minimize the impact on the vitality of our life together.

Our commitment today

Today we will remember the serenity prayer: we will recognize those things over which we have no power, and change the things we can. We will pray today for the wisdom to know the difference.

My commitment today

Today I will support my partner by recognizing our limits. I will remember gentleness and simplicity.

REFLECTION NO. 11

Struggles and Understanding

A child takes her mother's shoes off and plays with them. She struggles to get them back on her mom's feet. She experiments, testing various ways to get them to fit. What started as play evolves into a challenge and a struggle. She works hard to master how shoes and feet fit together. Her parent, being wise about learning, resists the impulse to show her how they fit. She knows that it is more important for the child to develop the capability to make sense out of her world than to know about shoes. So she watches patiently with care and, at times, amusement. She reflects about whether this is how God watches our relationships--as we try to make things "fit." patient, wise, caring, and sometimes amused.

Our commitment today

Today we will remember that our struggle to make things "fit" is not only to figure out the puzzle, but also to add to our ability to understand our world. Today we will share examples of how being with each other has expanded our perceptions. We can play with the fantasy about how God looks upon our efforts to "fit."

My commitment today

Today I will ask my Higher Power for the wisdom to appreciate my relationships and all the accompanying struggles as central to my ability to see purpose in life.

REFLECTION NO. 12

Interdependency

Nature teaches about growth in many ways. We need only to walk through a forest or desert to see the interdependency among creatures, plants, and environment. We can gaze at a body of water from ocean to small pond to marvel at the complex relationships that make for thriving growth. The urge to be together for safety, comfort, reproduction, and play is one of the fundamental driving forces of the universe. We need to reflect on how being a couple is part of a total ecology and grand design. We can keep perspective on overwhelming issues when we see that our progress is shared by all of creation. Our efforts to connect as a couple draw upon those same sources of strength which routinely beat the odds.

Our commitment today

Today we will make an effort to connect with our roots as a couple by reflecting on nature. If possible we will arrange today or soon to be in an environment where we can sense together that energy which renews the world.

My commitment today

Today I will focus on my senses and how I experience nature in my life. I will report awareness of being an organism in this world to my partner.

REFLECTION NO. 13

Despair

We all can reflect on moments of despair when our lives had totally unraveled. Our pain came either from tragic circumstances beyond our control or from our own choices. Yet our commitment to continue faltered because life seemed hopeless. Our recovery teaches us that these low points actually served as gifts in our lives. We changed for the better. The losses we experienced actually gave us a new life, with new wisdom. As couples we witness for partners our capacity to transform personal discouragement into individual depth.

Our commitment today

Today we will each share a despairing moment that deepened us as persons. We will remind ourselves that extreme difficulty is part of the renewing process and that we shall have such moments again. We can prepare by strengthening our partnership and by discussing what we need from one another when facing despair.

My commitment today

Today I will share a memory of how my partner helped me when I was despairing.

REFLECTION NO. 14

Sensuality

Sensuality is fundamental to sexuality. How we notice our environment--how we see it, hear it, touch it, smell it, and taste it--is fundamental to our total experience of life. Both our sexuality and our sensuality give basic vitality to our relationship. But if we do not attend to our senses, our sexuality is diminished. As recovering persons, we know that we need to stay in the present as opposed to the tormented past or the uncertain future. Our senses are the gateway to the present. More than stopping to smell the roses, sensuality is a direct path to spirituality. Being in touch with our senses will help us to be present for one another both spiritually and sexually.

Our commitment today

Today we will talk about how sensually aware we are. We will focus on simple ways to be sensually present for one another. We can notice the food we eat, the beauty of a tree, the grace of a swallow's flight, the light of a new moon, or the color of a child's eyes.

My commitment today

Today I will seize life by heeding what my senses tell me. I will make a special effort to notice what is attractive about my partner and talk about it.

REFLECTION NO. 15

Accepting Help

Recovering people have difficulty accepting help. Our reluctance stems from early life experiences. We were disappointed and hurt when help was necessary but not given. We grieve promises of help that never materialized. We resent obligation. For whatever reason, we decided to go it alone and not rely on others. But in that commitment we became further vulnerable to addiction and codependency. We needed assistance and found relief in our obsessions. Total couple recovery requires a deep commitment to acceptance of help from each other and from other couples.

Our commitment today

Today we will ask ourselves how well we accept help from each other and how well we accept help as a couple. What specific needs do we have at this moment for which we resist asking for help?

My commitment today

Today I will remember that self-sufficiency and independence are not the same and that part of self-determination is to be free to ask for help.

REFLECTION NO. 16

Healthy Lifestyle

Recovering from addictive illnesses requires a couple's commitment to a totally healthy lifestyle. Food, exercise, and rest all become options to be explored to enhance healthy living. Sometimes the choices present significant issues for couples, as when a partner smokes or decides to be a vegetarian. Comfortable resolutions of these issues is one of the most basic elements of recovery, but sadly many of us simply let our lifestyles happen. In an increasingly health-conscious culture, we may feel guilty but only make futile attempts at change. Being of like mind on lifestyle changes means having your partner's support. From a recovery point of view, emotional well-being has a profound impact on physical well-being.

Our commitment today

Today we will ask each other how comfortable we are with our physical well-being. Do we need to set aside time to really talk through some changes? What pride can we take in how our lifestyle supports recovery?

My commitment today

Today I will think about my role as a lifestyle partner. As part of my weekly inventory, I will think about ways I do not contribute to a healthy lifestyle and what gifts of health my partner has given me.

REFLECTION NO. 17

Perspective

When a child is ten years old, the passage of a year seems like an eternity. Given that one year out of ten is a full ten percent of that young person's life, it is a long time. As an adult, the years start to rush by and seem shorter. One year at the age of forty is only two and a half percent of your life. The adult's perception shifts because the same amount of time is less by comparison. Combine the perception shift, with the pressure of adult responsibilities, and time becomes even more elusive. Couples also experience a diminished sense of time the longer they are together. Recovering people, however, need to regain the time perspective of the ten-year-old, when the world was fresh and full of wonder. They start a day at a time.

Our commitment today

Today we will talk about how we would spend the day if we were both ten years old. Then we will reflect on what that means for us in living the program today.

My commitment today

Today I will connect with the child within me so that I may reclaim the enthusiasm, earnestness, and playfulness of myself. I will pray that I remain as open to the world as a ten-year-old.

REFLECTION NO. 18

Openness and Acceptance

In every relationship, each partner comes to realizations that are difficult to admit to the other. Simply, it is that raw exposure of being fully known by the other that fills us with fear. Since we come from the shame of addiction and codependency, an additional vulnerability exists. Something admitted to a partner could someday be used against us in a relapse of the old battles of right and wrong. Another way to think about sharing an insight with a partner is to see it as an invitation to the other to a renewed life in recovery. Remember: admitting something to your partner does not have to be graceful, articulate, or fully thought-out in order to be inviting. The half-understood, the dead end, and the elusive perception can be clarified simply by sharing.

Our commitment today

Today we will reflect on how open we are to admitting to each other the difficult things about ourselves. Do we have an accepting climate in which we feel free to admit to each other our most secret fears about ourselves?

My commitment today

Today I will inventory any admissions I have withheld from my partner. If I have something I am unsure about sharing, I will check it out with others in my program.

REFLECTION NO. 19

Intimacy and Risk-Taking

Intimacy is an "inventure," meaning it is an internal adventure complete with high risk, excitement, and discovery. Many people want the excitement and the discovery without taking the risk. Recovery forces risk-taking, however, which is why the blessings of intimacy are available to recovering people. We are not talking about the Indiana Jones style of addictive life in which we took risks to stave off one disaster after another. Rather we are talking about the frontiers of oneself and of each other in which there are rewards for exploring new territory. There are the risks of new levels of honesty with each other, or of learning to play with each other, of reaching out in new ways sexually with each other, or of sharing creativity with each other. As addiction was always there as a predictable way to kill pain and emptiness, the intimacy "inventure" is always there for us to renew ourselves.

Our commitment today

Today we will have a candid discussion about new risks we can take together. To what new "inventure" are we willing to commit today?

My commitment today

Today I will reflect on the spiritual quest involved in risk-taking. How can I use risk-taking as part of a Third Step in which I trust my Higher Power?

REFLECTION NO. 20

Witnessing our Partner's Struggles

Many of us have lived tough lives. Unfortunately, recovery does not ensure that difficult times will not recur. In that sense the First Step is an introductory course to the wisdom of the serenity prayer: we must understand that there is much in our lives over which we will remain powerless. We must incorporate that understanding into our relationships. For every couple there will be moments when one partner will flounder and experience deep pain while all the other can do is witness the suffering. At that point, the Steps become vital guides to how to be respectful toward each other. First, there is a deep acknowledgment of personal powerlessness and admitting the limits of your help. Next is an act of faith that a Higher Power is at work for your partner and for you. Finally, the support of your fellowship can support you in your witnessing role.

Our commitment today

Today we will share a memory when each could only witness the other's struggle. We will re-commit to enduring those difficult transactions.

My commitment today

Today I will remember how the Steps can be guidelines in respecting my partner.

REFLECTION NO. 21

Keeping Our Reality

Relationship partners can share in delusion. When neither partner faces a harsh reality, they are vulnerable again to the old obsessions. Healthy relationship means deep dedication to reality, whatever the cost. Twelve-Step wisdom has always urged us to go to "any lengths" to keep our realities. So when we face issues like aging parents, addicted teenagers, limited finances, or unhealthy lifestyles, we need to be willing to raise possible problems, and then take the action to confirm or deny the existence of those problems. The last thing needed in recovery is shared denial.

Our commitment today

Today we will share wonders and worries about problems we may not have acknowledged. To what lengths will we go to keep our reality?

My commitment today

Fighting denial starts with listening to my inner voice that tells me something is uncomfortable or not right. I will recognize that voice by sharing my concerns with my partner.

REFLECTION NO. 22

Conflict

If you love someone and wish to be intimate with them, you have to be prepared to fight with them. Arguing is one of the most positive forms of intimacy, and anger is one of the most significant of the relationship gifts. To quarrel confidently with your partner indicates that you value and respect your partner as an adult who can handle it. To avoid conflict is to diminish your partner, leave issues unresolved, and constrict all feelings, including joy, tenderness and care. In the old days, we had battles over right and wrong. We escalated issues into crises during which our obsession would thrive. We preferred dramatic exits to being clear about our feelings. Now we avoid self-righteousness and blame, and we strive for honesty and accuracy. We work for resolution, not crisis. We do not damage each other. We leave out extraneous issues. We do not abandon each other. And through this we learned peace together.

Our commitment today

Today we will share our insecurities about fighting and how we will support each other in conflict. M

y commitment today

Today I am not going to avoid conflict. I will be real with people and set aside my fears about the reactions of others, especially my partner.

REFLECTION NO. 23

Tolerating Pain

Because of our history, we have learned to tolerate pain. Most people who experience pain make changes to reduce or eliminate it. A basic principle for self-care and self-respect demands that we take action. For those of us who have relied on addictive obsession to cope with pain, confronting our tolerance of pain becomes difficult. We are used to hurting. Physically, we ignore tiredness, full bladders, soreness and discomfort. We can sustain personal emptiness and shame. In our relationships, we bury our feelings, allowing disrespect to continue. As couples, we "adjust" to pain. Intolerable situations exist in which both partners simply try harder. Recovery means both partners working together to develop intolerance of pain.

Our commitment today

Today we will talk of ways we hurt together. We will decide on which steps to take action, and when we will take those steps.

My commitment today

Today I will tune into any pain to which I may have become accustomed. I will make an effort to report this to my partner.

REFLECTION NO. 24

Committing to Physical Health

Recovery requires a commitment to physical health. For years, we ignored our bodies and nearly destroyed one of our best bridges to emotional well-being. Solid exercise and eating well are proven contributors to psychological health. We need to be good consumers of health information. We can make changes that would improve our quality of life. The cooperation and support of our partners, however, is key. In our codependency, we had an investment in the other's illness. Now, in recovery, we invest in our partner's health and our own health. Couples can do much together as well as mutually support each other in a "training program" for recovery.

Our commitment today

Today we will talk about what we can do together to improve our physical health. Do we need more information? How can we support each other?

My commitment today

Today I will think about how I feel about my body and how I can live my commitment to physical health.

REFLECTION NO. 25

Acceptance and Healing

In many ways, an intimate relationship parallels a Fifth Step. Part of the healing of a Fifth Step is to be fully known--both strengths and liabilities--and accepted. Relationships heal when we accept each other's strengths and liabilities. Problems emerge when we control, shame, limit or abandon our partners either because we find a threatening strength or a disappointing liability. Honesty between two people does not mean that one or the other is diminished. Rather, honesty reflects a fundamental acceptance of our limitations and support for our humanness.

Our commitment today

Today we will share our acceptance of each other by admitting ways in which we each try to be perfect.

My commitment today

Today I will be gentle with myself by accepting my imperfections. I will challenge that part of myself which says nothing is good enough.

REFLECTION NO. 26

Faithfulness

Faithfulness starts with fidelity to oneself. You can rely upon those who know what they want, say what they mean, and do what they say. People who are true to themselves make trustworthy commitments. Those who make decisions on the basis of what would look

good, or what the other person wants, lose themselves in the process. We as couples need to understand that to be faithful means to be clear about who we are. No betrayal exists when nothing has been misrepresented; we are faithful to others when we are true to ourselves.

Our commitment today

Today we will share with each other an example of something we absolutely trust about the other.

My commitment today

Today I will notice when I am not being true to myself. Am I trying to please others at the expense of who I am?

REFLECTION NO. 27

Powerlessness

Most of us can remember times when we were upset and in turmoil. With the passage of time, however, we put these periods in perspective. We realize that the pain we experienced was necessary for us to grow. Or we might recognize that our self-righteousness and indignation was an exercise in blaming others for what we had brought on ourselves. Surely we recognized that we spent needless emotional energy feeling shameful. The program of recovery reminds us that much exists over which we have no power, that we need to take responsibility for ourselves, and that there is a higher power we can trust. As partners committed to a 12-Step process together, we can help each other take those lessons about our painful past and apply them to a balanced and serene present.

Our commitment today

Today we can make a pact with each other about how to support each other when we get upset.

My commitment today

Today I will keep in mind the lessons of former desperate situations. I will think of one example and reflect on what I learned from that experience.

REFLECTION NO. 28

Mutual Respect

When relationships end, both partners are likely to say, "I didn't feel respected." Two very significant questions are often overlooked. First, did I act respectably? Were my behavior and attitudes consistently straight-forward and respectable? And second, was I respectful? Did I avoid shaming, abusive, and inappropriate treatment of my partner? Was my anger constructive or destructive? When issues existed, did I work to ensure that my partner did not feel diminished by our process? Acting respectably and being respectful create an integrity that commands respect.

Our commitment today

Today we will re-commit to mutual respect.

My commitment today

Today I ask myself if I have been respectable and respectful in my relationship. If I am unsure, I will contact a close friend and ask for feedback.

REFLECTION NO. 29

Equality

Many couples start off looking for equality by searching for what they have in common. True equality, however, starts by discovering the strengths in differences. The differences between partners expand the options available, and the relationship is stronger. Equality emerges when differences become assets and sources of new options, versus irritants and sources of shame. Equality rests on respect for the strength in the other's differences.

Our commitment today

Today we share a difference that each of us respects in the other.

My commitment today

Today I will acknowledge to myself a difference in my partner that I find irritating and work to see how that difference might become a strength.

REFLECTION NO. 30

Renewal and Risk-Taking

Relationships renew through risk taking. Couples who do new things together continue to rediscover their attraction for each other. They also find new perspectives on each other. Recovery presents many opportunities to take risks: new ways of being together, new strategies for sharing, new levels of honesty, new people, and new ways to support. Among the risks, the greatest is for partners to share vulnerability with each other. Risk always feels new and unsettling, so we feel dependent and inexperienced. As recovering people, we know we have problems with dependency. By sharing with each other the vulnerability we feel about our risk-taking, our opportunities for intimacy and support become exponential.

Our commitment today

Today we will assess our current level of risk-taking. Are we doing enough to keep the process of renewal alive?

My commitment today

Today I will share, with my partner, my vulnerability around risks I am now taking.