

BEGIN AGAIN ■

As you begin the process of opening up with one another, real love can start to grow again. The process of focusing on here and now, on experiencing each other in this moment, *can* be exhilarating.

Still, it's not always enough, in and of itself, to guarantee the success of both your relationship and your program of recovery.

If you're one half of a couple in recovery, you may have already gotten used to the idea that you can't go back to the way your relationship used to be.

And you should realize that both your own and your partner's recovery may depend on the quality of love and mutual support you're able to generate in your relationship *now*.

So take time for each other. Bury the past. Welcome the present. Feel and share the joy and pleasure of being together without chemicals. Trust yourself—and your partner. See the forest—and the trees.

And remember that, in both love and recovery, practice *really does* make perfect. 🌹



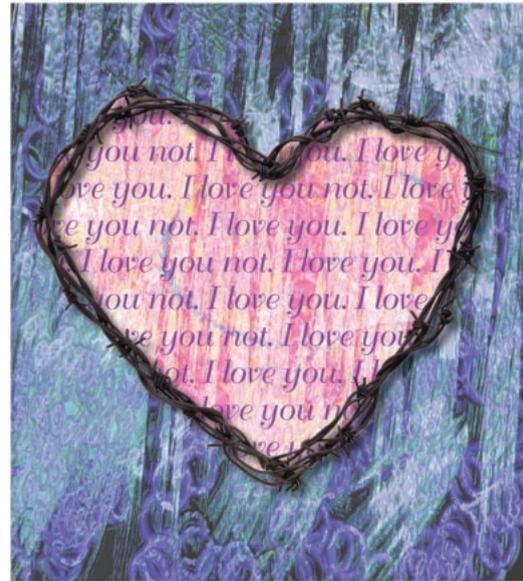
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I LOVE YOU I LOVE YOU NOT



Love, Sex & Intimacy in Recovery from Chemical Dependency

A D.I.N. Publication by Sandra Inskeep-Fox

DISAPPEARING ACT ■

For years, your relationship's been stuck, mired in muck under the shadow of alcohol or other drugs. Lately, though, you've started getting *unstuck*. Life isn't perfect, but at least your recovery has begun and things are less *messy*.

You're cautiously optimistic, and hope your relationship problems will vanish, now that you've stopped feeding them drugs and booze.

You know about the effects of chemical dependency on the family and you and your partner are both committed to a program of recovery. Now you won't have to fight, blame, accuse, or pout. All you need is love, right?

So you wait—three months, six months, nine months. And the magic *still* doesn't happen. Nothing seems to grow, in fact, but tension—and disappointment.

You rub each other the wrong way. You argue or suffer through silences that are worse than war. And often, even when you aren't angry or hurt—on your *best* days—you still don't have much to say to one another.

You begin to feel isolated, lonely. You wonder if the struggle's going to be worth it.

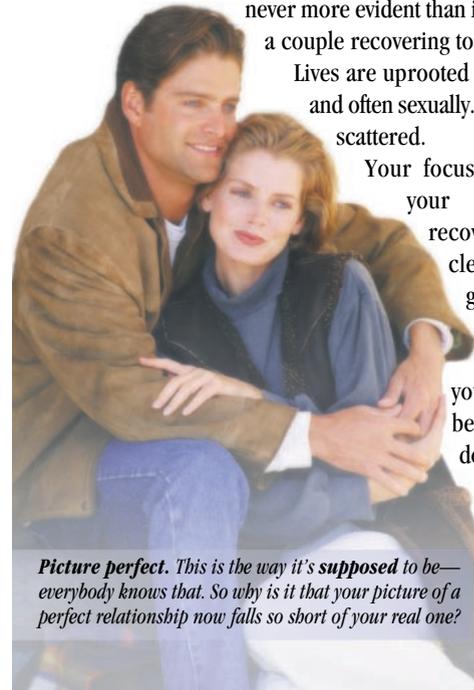
Good question—and one we want to help bring into better focus in this pamphlet.

Because recovery *can be* a slow process, which is never more evident than in the lives of a couple recovering together.

Lives are uprooted emotionally, and often sexually. Love is often scattered.

Your focus now is on your individual recovery, and on cleaning up garbage from the past.

So when, you may even begin to ask, does the “happily ever after” part start, anyway?



Picture perfect. This is the way it's supposed to be—everybody knows that. So why is it that your picture of a perfect relationship now falls so short of your real one?

So when, you may be wondering, does the ‘happily ever after’ part start, anyway?



FORESTS & TREES ■

Good question number two. Because it points out two of the main threats to both relationships and recovery: impatience and unrealistic expectations.

How do you avoid them? You don't. But you can whittle them down to manageable size by knowing how they creep up in recovery—and the rest of life.

Let's start with impatience—because for a good many recovering couples, impatience is a flame looking for something to burn.



Seasons of the heart. Recovery is a process, not a thing. And rebuilding intimate relationships doesn't happen overnight.

And like a fire, impatience can destroy everything it touches.

How do you beat it? You can start by expecting it. And end by not letting it burn you.

We all know that after

a forest fire, it takes a while for patches of green to peek through the rubble. Recovering relationships are like that, too.

That's because recovery follows a predictable path. During its initial phase, a recovering person needs to focus almost exclusively on staying straight or sober and changing basic behaviors.

These changes can make life easier for the spouse, but since at first they're only surface changes they won't heal ancient scars or fill deeper needs.

So be patient. Remember that even though Rome wasn't built in a day—it could be destroyed in one.

Another potential minefield for relationships during recovery are the expectations that partners bring to the process. Disappointment here can be just as deadly as impatience.

That's because unrealistic expectations can both cloud our vision and fuzz our thinking.

Let's try the forest fire analogy again. If I drive out to a just-burned forest, hoping to see it green and fully grown, I'm going to be disappointed. But if I'm willing to see what's *there*—to notice the birds and plants and trees that survived—I might be a little less sad.

It's the same with a relationship. If we pay attention to what's there—rather than only noticing what we *think* should be there—we're more likely to be encouraged.

Living one day at a time, without expecting our relationships to be perfect tomorrow, gives us the psychological space to appreciate growth as it happens. And it *will* happen, if we keep our thoughts out of the way.

ASHES TO ASHES ■

Still, there are some things you can do to encourage growth in your "new" relationship.

Putting the past *in the past* creates space for a new start. It may require forgiveness and it does take time, but it *is* possible when you learn to look only at today.

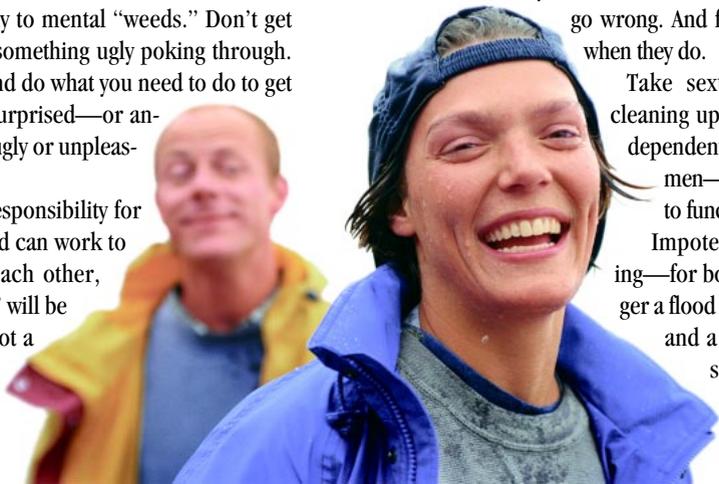
When old resentments creep in, talk them over with someone outside the relationship who understands chemical dependency. Recognize resentments for what they are—ashes from an old fire. They're only dangerous if they're still smoldering.

When old behaviors try to push their way through, treat them like you would a weed.

You don't stand back and yell at a weed, or blame it for being what it is. You get down on your hands and knees and pull it out by its roots.

The same rules apply to mental "weeds." Don't get upset when you notice something ugly poking through. Accept it for what it is and do what you need to do to get rid of it. And don't be surprised—or angry—if something else ugly or unpleasant pops up in its place.

If you both accept responsibility for change in yourselves and can work to encourage change in each other, then periodic "weeding" will be a minor fine-tuning—not a major meltdown.



QUALITY TIME ■

Want to *really* focus on your relationship? Set aside quality time to spend with each other.

I wouldn't take on the job of reseeding a national forest between trips to the grocery. You shouldn't try it with your relationship, either—if you want to be successful.

You've already taken on a big job. Your lives are busy and your schedules are full, but you need to set a time—if it's only an hour a week—as *your* time, for just *being* together.

It can be a time to share what you need to share or to work on what you need to work on. But even if you just sit quietly on the back porch, it's important that you do it together.

Keep your expectations low, enjoying the minutes, one by one. Allow silences if they come up, but don't fill up the minutes talking about *stuff*—other people, places and things.

Make it a time alone, with no distractions, no kids, and no TV.

And since it's a time to get to know each other as you're beginning to be, try to keep the focus on verbal sharing rather than sex. Too often, couples fall into bed as a way of avoiding real emotional intimacy.

SEXUAL GLUE ■

Speaking of sex, it isn't a coincidence that we left it for last. We held it back on purpose—because it can be the trickiest problem of all.

Why? Because there's so much room for things to go wrong. And feelings get so distorted when they do.

Take sexual dysfunction. After cleaning up from chemicals, many dependent persons—particularly men—find that they're unable to function sexually.

Impotence *can* be frustrating—for both partners. It can trigger a flood of self-loathing in a man and a current of tension and self-doubt in a woman.

We use sex for the same reasons we used chemicals—to feel better about ourselves, to feel accepted, to exercise power, to get even, to cover up guilt, to manipulate others.



If it happens to you, don't panic or take it personally. Impotence usually isn't a major crisis. Time, understanding, and simple communication almost always make it better.

That's because sex in any chemically-dependent relationship can become a sort of surrealistic playground for participants.

Memories, disappointments, fantasies, and frustrations from the past can all intrude on the present. And what used to be a simple pleasure can get awfully complicated.

Today, we're just beginning to understand the sex-pleasure connection in neurochemistry and the role it plays in chemical dependency.



Time out. Set aside a regular time every week just for being together.

After all, we use sex for the same reasons we used chemicals—to feel better about ourselves, to feel accepted, to exercise power, to get even, to cover up guilt, to manipulate others. And the same psychosexual dynamic that contributed to our original addiction often continues without drugs and alcohol.

What's the answer? There isn't one Big Answer. There are only a lot of little answers—and they all start with you being honest about your feelings.

Sex is so personal that it's often difficult to talk about it openly. But keeping bad feelings bottled up can keep good feelings trapped.

If sex becomes a problem for you, do what you need to do to resolve it. Talk it over with your partner. See a therapist if you think you need to.

But remember that sex can be the glue that holds relationships together.

Don't let yours fall apart for a lack of it.

BALANCING ACT

Learning to share with each other—talking *to*, rather than *at* one another—may take some practice. When you talk (and want to be heard) use sentences that begin with "I" and talk honestly—about yourself *and* your feelings. Open yourself up. Let yourself be vulnerable.

It takes courage, because risking vulnerability in a relationship that's operated on crisis and conflict is like walking into a fire to put it out. It's necessary, though, if you want to develop intimacy, because unless you know and accept each other as you really are, you can't have more than a superficial relationship.

Other difficulties may also come up. One of you may find it easier to be open when straight or sober than the other, or feel the need to force intimacy. Balancing out conflicting needs here can be tricky.

You may want to cultivate new friends who can share and provide some of your needs for emotional closeness. You may also need to focus on what your partner is able to share today and remember that honesty is sometimes relative.

Bottom line on relationships and recovery? The Beatles said it as well as it can be said, a long time ago: "And in the end, the love we take is equal to the love we make." ■