

Your Relationships



Part A - Discovery: What Have You Become?

INTRODUCTION

Relationships, good or bad, are central, fundamental and vital parts of your lives. They were prior to your addiction taking hold. They remained so during your addiction. They are now. They will be in recovery. You, like other people, live through your relationships, including your relationship with yourself. A few quotations from the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) texts make this clear, here is an example:

The primary fact that we fail to recognise is our total inability to form a true partnership with another human being. Our egomania digs two disastrous pitfalls. Either we insist upon dominating the people we know, or we depend upon them far too much... Always we tried to struggle to the top of the heap, or to hide underneath it. This self-centred behaviour blocked a partnership relation with any of those about us. Of true brotherhood we had small comprehension.

Relationships may be with people, places and things outside of you. This may be obvious enough. Or the relationships may be within you. This may be less obvious. One of the main issues that we cover in this module is the extent to which your relationships with people, places and things outside of you are affected by the relationships within you.

In this module we also look at your relationships with people, places and things outside of you. These include your *present* relationships with members of your family-of-origin, as well as *present* relationships with friends, lovers and partners, and others. Many of these *present* relationships have been affected by your past experiences in your journey to here-and-now.

Relationships Within You

Apart from your relationship with God there are three sets of internal relationships we need to consider. These are, firstly, your relationship with self; secondly, your relationship with drugs, alcohol and gambling; thirdly your fantasy or imaginary relationships.

Relationships Within You: (1) Relationship With Self

In other modules we explore four different aspects of your nature as whole people: your intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional natures. All of these natures need to be in *balance* for you to be *whole* people. One of the greatest blocks to you having real and rewarding relationship with yourself is when these four natures are not in balance.

If you are too intellectual you try to develop a relationship with your intellect or brain, because you have confused your whole self with your brain. As strange as it may seem, *you* try to 'become' your brain because you like your brain and only feel comfortable when you live through your head. You are proud of your intelligence. Yet there is more to you than your brain.

If *you* see yourself in purely physical terms you will try to develop your bodily appearance in order to develop a relationship with your body, because you have confused your whole self with your body. As strange as it may seem, you try to 'become' your body because you like your body and only feel comfortable when you live through your body. Again, you may be proud of your body, perhaps rightly so. Yet there is more to you than your body.

If you carry spirituality to unhealthy extremes you may lose touch with your other natures and become detached from both yourself and reality, because you look to God to do your living, growing and recovering for you. As strange as it may seem, you try to 'become' your spirit because you like your spirituality and only feel comfortable when you live through your spirit. Again, you may be proud of your spiritual nature, perhaps rightly so. Yet there is more to you than your spirit.

Finally, if you see yourself in purely emotional terms you will confuse wholesome living with having extreme emotional experiences. For you these extreme emotions are often anger and sometimes depression, self-pity and self-righteousness. As strange as it may seem, you try to 'become' particular feelings (e.g. anger and self-pity) because you like that feeling and only feel comfortable when you live through that feeling. You may be proud of being connected to, and in touch with, your feelings (or with particular feelings), and perhaps rightly so. Yet there is more to you than your feelings.

All of these examples involve people becoming caricatures of themselves. 'Caricature' means a distortion of a person by over-development of a particular characteristic, or taking it to extreme, or getting it out of balance. You confuse character with caricature. That is, you are aware of the parts that you take to extremes, but you think these parts make up the whole of your character or personality.

Now the problem with trying to have relationships with *parts* of yourself is that it simply doesn't work. You might like the parts of yourself that you over-develop, or you might dislike those parts. Either way you are in comfort zones when you focus on those parts. You may feel comfortable, safe and familiar in those zones. Yet you have no full relationships with the whole of yourself. You do not necessarily hate yourself, or even have low self-esteem. True self-hate (which is relatively rare, even among *addicts*) is, at least, a relationship *by* the whole self *with* the whole self. No, you experience emptiness, loneliness, a void, a vacuum, a nothingness.

(A) Do you now see yourself in any of these caricatures?



Now the problem is that you have tried to fill the emptiness with anything that makes it 'go away'. The solution common to all *addicts* is, of course, the compulsive use of substances or activities that seemed to work effectively, if only temporarily, in making the emptiness disappear. Only then did you feel fully alive. These activities may also include finding partners who make you feel whole, and who make you believe that you have 'got it together' and are worthwhile. Since you have not really 'got it together', this reality eventually hits you. Then you escape from it again and continue the insanity of repeating the same behaviour but expecting different results.

Perhaps some of you will recognise a variation of the theme described above. You may not over-develop any of the four human natures described above. Instead you may develop a particular way of behaving that enables you to be, at least, noticed by others who are important to you.

This is also where the 'family roles' model fits in. Some of you became the hero, clown, rebel, caretaker, enabler, and martyr, any role that enabled you to be noticed and to receive attention in your family-of-origin. In 'becoming' these roles, you lost touch with your whole self and prevented yourself from having any sort of meaningful relationship with the whole of yourself. The lost-child role-players went to the other extreme of avoiding all relationships with others. Instead they over-developed exclusive and unhealthy relationships with *only* themselves.

(B) In what way have you lost yourself behind a mask or within a role or by over-developing one of your human natures?

We need to make a very important point here. There is nothing wrong with these roles or masks or performances in themselves. All people need to play any of these roles from time to time, swap masks and demonstrate particular skills. That is part of living in the real world.

The problem for you is when you lose the capacity to choose. It is *then* that you lose yourself in the roles and behind the masks. It is *then* that you lose contact with reality and with your real and whole self. It is *then* that you lose the capacity to have relationships with your whole self.

(C) Is it possible that your problem may not be that you have been wearing a mask, but that you lost touch with the whole of yourself because you forgot that you were wearing the mask (or playing a role)?

Relationships Within You: (2) Relationship With Alcohol, Drugs, Gambling

You are *addicts* because you came to relate compulsively to alcohol, drugs or gambling. As you first abstain these relationships stay *within* you until you grow beyond this in lengthy recovery. Non-addicts get some of their emotional and intimacy needs met through relationships with others. They reach out to life. You reached inward and withdrew *from* life. You eventually lost your ability to meaningfully relate to others. Instead you began to treat others as one-dimensional objects to be manipulated and controlled.

The 'advantage' to you in forming relationships *within* yourself to alcohol, drugs or gambling is that their effects on you were predictable and consistent. Therefore the drugs become seductive and, in time, addictive. In contrast, the people around you were insufficiently predictable or consistent for you to get your needs met. Also, you didn't have to meet the needs of other people when you used. The alcohol, drugs or gambling had no needs. Therefore you used as a way of 'fulfilling' yourself *without* other people.

Of course this fulfilment was an illusion. The mood change was temporary. So the cycle was repeated. Once *you* formed addictive relationships *within* yourselves to alcohol, drugs or gambling, your view of other people changed, you looked to more of them to find your 'false' fulfilment. Even though people were around you, your fulfilment was not through them. Either you used them to enable you to continue your addictive activity, or they got in the way of that activity. Which is why some of you may have lost yourselves in alcohol, drugs or gambling even though you 'loved' your families, who suffered as they observed your decline. You may have 'loved' your families, but your needful relationship *within* yourselves to use was more dominant.

We emphasise that this relationship to alcohol, drugs or gambling is *within* you as an *addict*, because it is one-sided. You relate to them but they do not relate to you. You get something from the drug but you don't have to give anything to the drug in return. Good relationships between people are two-sided. Each relates to the other with give-and-take. Addiction is a 'taking' relationship. As you get used to this sort of relationship to your drug you treat people around you the same way. You take. This is why *addicts* are seen as so self-centred and selfish. This is also why addiction ends up becoming so emotionally and spiritually isolating.

This 'taking' nature of the addictive relationship within *addicts* is one reason why you tend to fall so easily into resentments. You notice when other people don't give you what you want or need. You react accordingly by developing resentments. You also tend not to notice your responsibility to meet the wants or needs of others. This is where the self-centeredness comes in.

As your addiction developed you began to notice what you were doing to yourselves and others close to you. Intellectual awareness came in. Perhaps you took the first step. Yet you couldn't stop. You had not yet reached the acceptance of your addiction that is so necessary for recovery. This produced excessive shame, so that your addictive relationship *within* you to alcohol, drugs and gambling became shame-filled. The tragic effect of this excessive shame is that, if it continues too long, you can become resigned to the belief that you are unworthy of recovery, and that you are nothing more than an addict. This can lead to a failure identity and a fatal attraction to the addictive lifestyle. The only workable solution to this is the spiritual awakening involved in the 12 steps.

(D) Do you recognise the relationship *within* you that you developed with your drugs, alcohol or gambling? Can you describe the stages you went through?

Relationships Within You: (3) The Fantasy Relationships

Another set of relationships that you have *within* yourself is, strangely enough, the fantasised relationships you have with others. They are fantasised because they only exist in your imagination. These relationships may be with people that live 'rent free' in your heads, that is the people you resent. You may have no present relationship, or your present external relationship with such people may be distinct from the internal relationship *within* you. You don't communicate the resentment and instead hold it preciously *within* you. Another example of a fantasy relationship that is 'opposite' from resentments is a 'love' infatuation with someone who does not know of your existence or feelings.

Another serious fantasy relationship *within* yourselves is the fantasy you have about categories of people, e.g. authority figures. If you have a fantasy relationship *within* you to authority figures, this has a substantial effect on the way you relate to particular real-life authority figures, regardless of their particular personality.

Finally, another fantasy relationship *within* yourselves is your relationship with your own past experience, your history. One example is what we call 'victim-hood'. Rightly or wrongly (it could be either) some of you see yourselves as having been victims of someone else's abuse in the past. You carry that victim status into the present, where it contaminates and spoils real relationships in present time, and your experience of life here-and-now. You have left unfinished some business from your past. You now need to finish that business. Once and for all.

(E) What are your fantasy relationships?

Relationships With Others

There is a special reason why we have looked first at relationships *within* you before reaching this section on relationships *with* others. That reason is this; it is the relationships within you that affect your relationships with others.

It is fundamental to Bridge Program philosophy that you cannot change other people as an alternative to changing yourselves. This is the same in the 12 Step Fellowships. “The [NA] program convinced us that we needed to change ourselves, instead of trying to change the people and situations around us.” As a result of changes *within* you however, your relationships with others *will* change, and the other parties *may* change themselves in response to your changes.

All people in the world relate in some ways to other people in their world. The issue, therefore, is not whether you relate but *how* you relate. The answer to this “how” question, depends on the different types of people involved. You have to consider parents, step-parents, siblings, extended families, friends, life-partners, children, authority figures, subordinates, workmates, team mates, fellow *addicts* - the list could go on and on. This is, potentially, a very big topic. We will concentrate on only a few aspects of the topic here.

Family Of Origin

Some of you, who have long since lost substantial contact with your parents, continue to have 'American Express' relationships with them. In other words, you have 'never left home without them' and continue to have a dependent childish relationship to them *within* you. This is an example of you having relationships with your past that spoils your capacity to live in the present. In particular, it can spoil your present family relationships.

(F) Are any of your present (or potential) family relationships being spoilt by your 'American Express' relationships with your parents?

Friends

Friends are those people with whom you share secrets, jokes, common attitudes, or common experiences. Sometimes friendships last beyond the situation in which they were formed. Sometimes they stop when those situations stop. You may use the second circumstance to avoid making any friendships in the first place. You thus avoid living here-and-now. Your capacity to form friendships is spoilt by trust issues and self-absorption.

"Many of us come to NA (or AA) never having had a long-term friendship because of conflicts within ourselves. Those conflicts were the real grounds for the arguments we started with our friends and our ensuing refusal to work through the disagreements and continue the friendship. Some of us felt that we would end up getting hurt in any close friendship, so before that happened we arranged the end of the friendship ourselves. We may have feared intimacy to such a degree that we never revealed anything about ourselves to our friends. We may have induced guilt in our friends to ensure their loyalty or indulged in other forms of emotional blackmail...Our behaviour ranged from taking our friends hostage to taking them for granted."

(G) Do any of the situations described in the above quotation refer to you?

Fellow Addicts

In addiction, fellow *addicts* can be dangerous. Their self-centred and compulsive needs can clash with yours. Or they can be your dealers. You can use them and be used by them. You tend to develop with them the same one-dimensional relationships that you have *within* yourselves to your drugs. You can have very intense experiences with them that you may confuse with intimacy. Adrenalin rushes substitute for the genuine and sustained excitements of life. In recovery these same *addicts* (if they are in recovery too) can become your allies. Your common past experience can enable you to trust and relate in rewarding ways. They enable you to better see yourselves and to grow accordingly.

(H) Did you ‘use’ fellow addicts when in addiction, or get ‘used’ by them? Are you now ‘using’ appropriately the fellowship of fellow addicts in recovery?

Case Workers – Sponsors

In recovery, Case Workers are the ones with whom you develop therapeutic relationships, not friendships. They may be friendly but they are not friends. You don’t have to *protect* the future of the relationship with a Case Worker by withholding shameful secrets (as you might do with a friend), and you should not do so. With friends it may matter what they think of you. With Case Workers it does not, since you don’t intend to continue the relationship indefinitely. Indeed you need to avoid developing dependence on particular Case Workers. You can therefore share your shameful secrets.

(I) What for you is the distinction between a Case Worker and a friend? What might happen if you want your Case Worker’s friendship?

Life-Partners

God intended humans to enter into life-partnerships (marriages) with others. Sometimes these partnerships may not last a lifetime. For some of you these relationships are unhealthy in that they involve extreme dependence. One party cannot live without the other. Relationships formed during active addiction or in early recovery tend to have doubtful futures since they are often used to *replace* rather than *reinforce* self-love.

(J) In your life have you sought life-partnership/relationships so that you will feel good about yourself?

Your Relationships

Part B - Recovery: What Are You Going To Do About It?

INTRODUCTION

First, let's look at what not to do: Don't try to change other people as a means of trying to change yourself. It never works!

Now, let's look at what to do:

(1) Accept each of your four human natures (emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual) and get them into balance.

(2) Remove any and all masks so that they no longer frustrate your connection and relationship with your whole self, or your relationship with others.

(3) Get in touch with your intellectual nature and take a hard and critical look at the fantasy relationships that may be contaminating some of your real relationships.

(4) Critically examine the effect your relationship to alcohol, drugs or gambling was having on your real relationships.

(5) Develop a workable understanding of the mechanics and dynamics within relationships of dependence, independence and interdependence

Co-Dependence - Dependence - Independence - Inter-Dependence

‘Co-dependence’ used to be such a simple and straightforward concept. It started out as a term to describe the wives (life-partners) of males alcoholics. The alcoholic was dependent on alcohol and moulded his life and lifestyle accordingly. (We talk about male alcoholics here, because that’s where the concept started.) The wife was said to become co-dependent on the alcohol through her husband’s dependency, when she moulded her life and lifestyle to accommodate his alcoholism. The wife began to derive her sense of worth, her role in life, as helping both her husband and their family survive his dependency.

Two problems flowed from this. *Firstly*, the wife *enabled* her husband to stay in alcohol-dependency. Secondly, she had no role to play in the family *unless* her husband stayed in alcohol-dependency. This was all very clear and simple.

Then the term ‘co-dependent’ came to be used to describe the children of such a family, especially as they became Adult-Children-of-Alcoholics. Then the term ‘co-dependent’ came to be applied to the alcoholic himself, because of his dependence on his wife’s enabling activities. The whole definition became circular: the husband was co-dependent on the wife because of the wife’s co-dependence on the husband’s dependence on alcohol. Then the term ‘co-dependent’ came to be used to describe anyone who depended on *anyone*. Then it was used to describe anyone who depended on *anything*!

When babies are born they are totally dependent on their parents for all their needs. During their early childhood, as they acquire their separate and individual identity, children cast off aspects of their dependency on their parents one by one. By the time they reach their adolescent years children have left dependence behind them and get totally into independence from the significant others in their lives. As adolescents grow into young adulthood, they bounce back from independence, but not all the way back to dependence. Instead they settle on a balanced, middle, way that we call inter-dependence with significant others in their lives.



What we were describing in the previous paragraph was ideal or 'normal' growth. We started out by describing babies' and children's dependence 'on their parents'. Then, as we turned to adolescents and young adults, we spoke of their independence from - or interdependence with - 'significant others in their lives'. This is because, again in ideal circumstances, the 'significant others' changes away from parents. Many of you did not grow up ideally.

Now if children do not perceive themselves as getting their developmental needs met from their parents, they may grow up into adolescents and adults who are looking for 'significant others' who will provide to them what their parents did not. That is, they will be dependent on significant other people in their lives to meet their unmet needs as children. That is the key to 'dependency on people', which is a close cousin to drug, alcohol and gambling dependency. And that is where relationships can take a dangerous turn.

What you need to do here is avoid turning relationships into dependency. One of the NA texts explains the situation well (talking about Step 10):

Although all of us need the love and attention of others, that doesn't mean we must depend on people to provide what we can only find within ourselves. We can stop making unreasonable demands on others and begin to give of ourselves in relationships. Our romantic relationships, our friendships, and our interactions with family members, co-workers, and casual acquaintances are undergoing an astounding change. We are free to enjoy another's companionship because we are no longer so obsessed with ourselves. We finally see that all the devices we use to keep other people away are unnecessary at best and, more often than not, are the underlying cause of the pain we suffer in our relationships.