

WRAP and Relationship Recovery

Mending damaged relationships and developing new, healthy ones can be one of the most challenging aspects of the recovery journey. It is equally important to preserve existing relationships, especially if they are healthy and supportive. One way to approach “relationship maintenance” is through the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) model created by Mary Ellen Copeland. Below is an adaptation of the WRAP approach you may find useful.

Relationship Toolbox: This is an examination and identification of qualities or attributes that you possess that could be used to mend or create healthy relationships. These qualities may include such characteristics as humor, flexibility, hobbies, interests, family, pets, transportation availability, cooking, etc. It is important to know one’s strengths so as relationships progress, you can rely on them for growth. You may also want to consider developing new strengths.

When Things Are Going Well: Examine current or past relationships. When relationships are going well, what do they look like? How do you feel? What do you get out of a positive, healthy relationship? Are the relationships always fun or are there serious times as well? Or, are the relationships always serious without fun? They can work both ways!

Triggers: Are there things that people say or do that can affect a relationship negatively? For example, if you are spending time with a particular person and a family member says something negative about that person, would that comment cause you to think or feel differently about that person? What if the person you hope will become a close friend says or does something negative? Are there things a person can say or do that will destroy the relationship? If so, examine why such behavior is offensive to you? Is it justified? Is it worth the destruction of an otherwise healthy relationship?

Early Warning Signs: Are there signs (not only mental or emotional but also physical) that a relationship is not going well? Are you avoiding a person you once felt comfortable with? Do you dread times when the phone rings thinking it might be a person you don’t want to talk to? Do you find excuses for staying home? Do you touch the other person less or not at all? After you’ve spent time with another person, do you look back with regret? These are signs the relationship may not be going well and the relationship is starting to break down.

Taking Action (Crisis Management): Although it would be ideal to create a plan beforehand to address relationship issues before they arise but relationships often don’t give you much warning and present surprises. There is, however, one tried-and-true approach that works in most situations: COMMUNICATION!

Too often, we fail to communicate with other people about what is often most important to both parties—the relationship itself. We talk about sports, the weather, family issues,

pets, shopping and a host of other topics but failure to openly discuss the relationship—early and often—can lead to problems that doom the relationship.

An open, frank discussion about a relationship is often difficult and awkward at first. It is a topic we generally think about a great deal but talk about very little. Here are some questions you may wish to use to explore not only how the other person is thinking and feeling but how you are viewing the relationship:

- How is this relationship going for you?
- Are you getting out of this relationship what you want/need?
- Is there anything we could/should change to make the relationship more meaningful?
- Do you have expectations for our relationship? If so, what are they?
- Are there any threats to this relationship?
- What is positive about our relationship?
- What is negative about our relationship?
- Are you comfortable talking about our relationship?

Surprisingly, once the conversation is started, most people enjoy talking about relationships. It takes courage, though, to start the conversation. If the relationship is important to you and the other person, it's worth talking about!

The conversation may lead to new questions and/or ideas about how the relationship should change to be most meaningful for each person. You may also discover that the relationship may not be workable. That may be a disappointment but wouldn't it be nice to know that as early as possible?

Post-Crisis Plan: Once a relationship crisis has passed, you may want to consider how to address problems both before and after they arise in the future. You may want to ask the other person if they would mind periodically talking about the relationship now and then. Focusing heavily on the relationship instead of simply enjoying it can become a serious problem, too. It is important to find a proper balance. Many times, it is best to just enjoy the other person's company and not focus too much on whether the relationship will end and how.