

Characteristics of Healthy Partners

Taking the Initiative - Expressing care

To be intimate, one has to risk being first. Calling, reaching out, expressing interest or care, inviting others to share activities or problems, revealing needs and wants — all characterise initiative. Initiative never stops. Without it, mutuality cannot exist. Its opposite is the passive, isolated stance of an anorexic terrified of abandonment, or the seductive person who has to rely on others to maintain their emotional connections. Recovery requires connection with others.

Remaining Engaged/ Staying Present.

To say someone is emotionally present means that their feelings are available, that the whole person is totally engaged. People who are present listen and pay attention. They notice what happens and express their reactions. They are willing to spend time with no other goal than to be present. They seek and accept the presence of the other. The opposite of this is the shame-based person who deflects the attempts of others to connect, since any affirmation is felt to be undeserved. Recovery works to reduce shame through affirmation of the group, so that presence becomes safer.

Working for Resolution

Trust builds when people finish things, including interpersonal transactions. A person who acknowledges care and outreach lets others know they have been heard so the message does not have to be sent again and again. Working for closure on problems, responding to others needs and wants, and expressing appreciation for others' completed efforts all create a sense of safety and reliability.

Addicts try to leave things unfinished to keep their options open; co-addicts set low levels of accountability because they are afraid of abandonment. Needs and wants here remain unheard. Recovery comes through the 8th and 9th steps as the interpersonal bridge is rebuilt.

Vulnerability When people are vulnerable, they share their thoughts and feelings. They talk to others about their dilemmas and involve them in their decisions. People who are vulnerable allow feedback. They reveal parts of themselves, including fears and inadequacies. Anorexics, however, keep everything secret and private, often from fear or shame. By hiding their internal dialogues, they often strive to appear fearless and invulnerable, not knowing that owning up to powerlessness and need is normal and human.

Nurturing involves caring for other people. People who are nurturing express care for others, empathize with their pain, and affirm their value. They support, encourage, and offer suggestions. They do things to help others, taking care not to diminish them in any way. They touch and allow themselves to be touched.

Recovery comes from compassion and honesty engendered by the group experience. Nurturing of others can become the norm, as fear is replaced by feelings of safety.

Honesty When people are honest, they can claim both positive and negative feelings. They are clear about their priorities and values. Honest people are specific about disagreements, provide feedback when asked, and admit flaws and mistakes. Those with whom they are intimate know them fully.

Manipulation, passive-aggressive behaviour, and avoidance can take the place of honesty, because we fear conflict or have been unable to identify what we feel and think. The program's focus on rigorous honesty and on meditation help to heal the gulf created by silence.