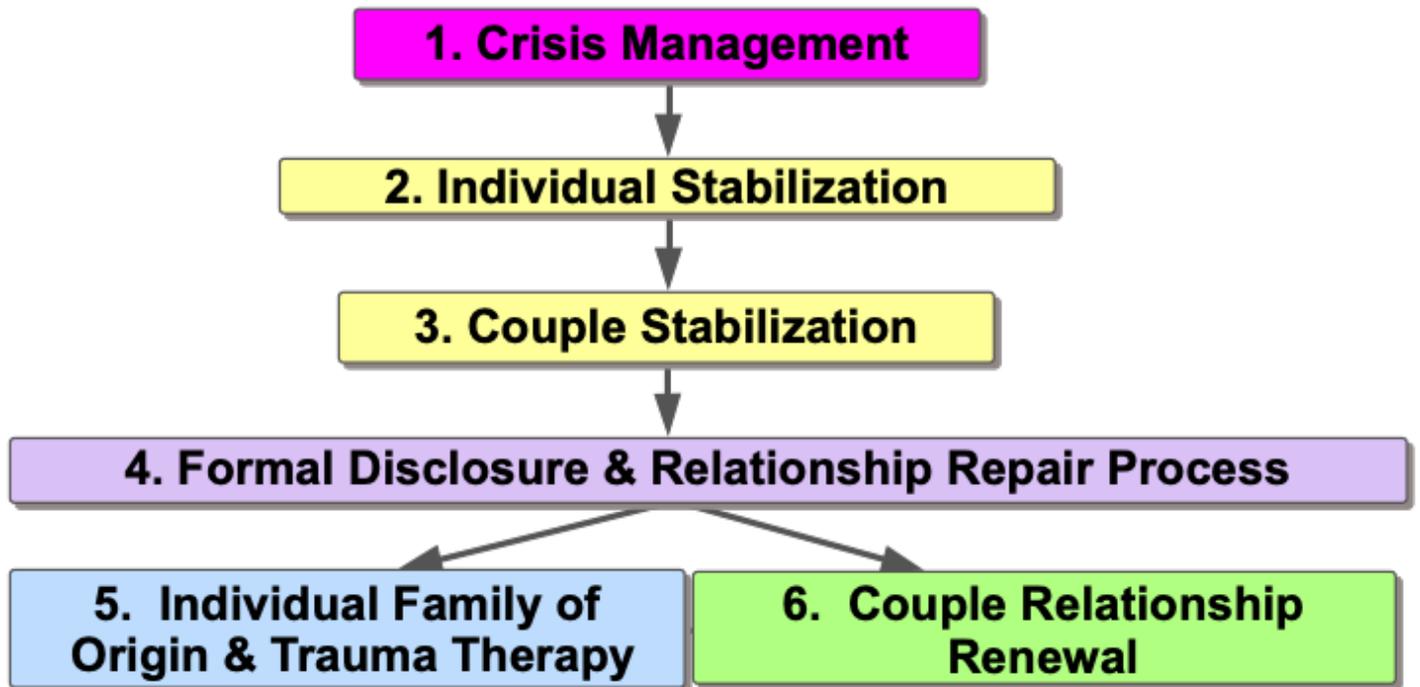


Couple's Roadmap to Recovery

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Stage 1 - Crisis Management

In the first stage of the recovery and healing process, the focus is on stabilization from what is often a myriad of crises, including stressors with regard to the:

- marital relationship
- living arrangements
- responding to children
- Finances
- medical problems
- legal issues
- work
- extended family
- emotional distress
- Self-care - sleep, diet, exercise, etc.

At this stage, the focus needs to be on making immediate decisions regarding day-to-day functioning, developing resources for self-care, and making agreements regarding boundaries, accountability and trust building.

The immediate priority is to cope with daily life in the present. Becoming overly focused on the past can exacerbate distress and trauma and result in not coping with more urgent, immediate issues. For example, if your sleep is disturbed, the immediate focus needs to be on developing resources for insuring that you get sufficient sleep. Without sufficient sleep, everything is negatively impacted. Focus on healing wounds from the past occurs in Stage III.

During this stage, the focus is on past behaviors only insofar as that is necessary to stabilize daily life in the present. For example, the partner may need basic information about the addict's behaviors so as to make immediate decisions about his/her needs for safety, accountability, and trust building.

Similarly, it is not possible at this stage to focus on long-term issues regarding the future that cannot be resolved in the present moment. Can the relationship be repaired, or should it end? How will long-term financial problems be resolved? Will the addict have a relapse? Will the partner be able to heal from the trauma? At this stage, it is not possible to answer these questions. Focus on these questions that cannot be answered are distractions from facing the immediate challenges. The answers to these questions will become clear over time based upon the work that the couple does in the first stages of healing.

Stage 2 – Individual Foundations for Recovery & Healing

In this stage, the focus for the addict and the partner needs to be on each developing constructive and healthy independent resources for self-care: physically, emotionally, interpersonally, and spiritually.

Addict - Working with the safety of a confidential therapeutic relationship, the addict commits to becoming honest about his behaviors, developing a comprehensive plan for abstinence and recovery, including plans for controls and accountability as needed to maintain abstinence. The addict also needs to work to develop awareness, understanding, and empathy for the impact of his behaviors on his partner, and become willing to do whatever is possible to do to provide accountability to his partner.

Partner - The partner needs to gain understanding of the impact of the trauma she has experienced as a basis for creating and implementing a plan for her own healing as well as define her needs and boundaries with respect to her intimate relationship, including expectations concerning abstinence from destructive behaviors and the consequences for violating those expectations. She also needs to clarify needs and wants regarding ways to establish controls and accountability, the foundation for rebuilding trust.

Partner and addict each need support from others, including therapists trained and experienced in working with issues of sex addiction with addicts and partners, and with developing supportive relationships, in 12-step programs and with others who are safe, empathic, and non-judgmental. Each also needs to develop strategies for coping with other crises resulting from the discovery of the acting-out behaviors – legally, medically, professionally, financially, socially, etc.

Partner and addict each need to independently:

- clarify needs in the relationship with regard to time spent together, and time spent separately, what issues are discussed on their own, and what is discussed only with the support and guidance of a therapist, physical boundaries, and emotional boundaries.
- develop healthy, constructive, and effective methods for regaining emotional balance when becoming emotionally distressed.

The individual work provides a foundation for the next stage in which the couple works together to define and implement a plan for their recovery as a couple.

Stage 3 – Couple Foundations for Recovery & Healing

Trust building & accountability agreements - Based on your individual work, you then discuss issues as a couple and make specific, clear agreements that create the foundation for a healthy relationship and work to implement those agreements. There are a variety of agreements that you may make regarding accountability such as providing access to email, financial accounts, internet usage, and telephone records. Although the partner cannot be certain that the addict is not acting-out, the willingness of the addict to be open and transparent often does help to rebuild trust. The partner must also agree not to abuse the access by interfering with the addict's normal, appropriate life activities.

The wounding resulting from the acting out behaviors is not only the impact of the violation of marital vows; often what is even more problematic is the loss of trust due to the lies and deceit. In keeping agreements and being rigorously honest, the partner can slowly, over time, begin to rebuild trust.

Boundaries & consequences - The partner discusses and refines her boundaries with regard to the addict's behavior, what she will do if the addict relapses, lies or fails to keep agreements. The addict also discusses and refines what he will do to recover if he has a serious violation.

Developing relationship skills - Continuing to build a foundation for healing, you work as a couple to develop relationship skills, the capacities to:

- communicate clearly and constructively,
- listen and understand what has been communicated,
- feel and express empathy,
- be responsive,
- set boundaries,
- give and receive support,
- lead and to follow, and
- engage in collaborative win-win conflict resolution.

There are a variety of structured communication processes that are used to facilitate this process.

Stage 4 – Formal Disclosure & Relationship Repair Process

Healing the wounds of the past & Building a foundation for the future

Engaging in a formal process of formal disclosure & relationship repair with regard to the past can be healing. This process can only begin after both addict and partner have:

- stabilized your day-to-day lives and are able to cope with the crises resulting from the acting-out behaviors,
- developed and implemented agreements for self-care, for trust building, and for accountability,
- learned and can utilize the range of core relationship skills

The addict's part of the process includes:

- full disclosure of acting out behaviors,
- accountability statement describing the consequences of these behaviors,
- recovery plan for maintaining abstinence, and
- emotional restitution focusing specifically on the impact upon the partner.

The partner's part of the process includes:

- impact statement describing the damage caused by the acting-out behaviors and a
- boundaries/trust building statement specifying what she/he needs to continue the relationship and to heal.

After completing your preparation (with support and guidance from each partner's individual therapist), the documents are then shared in a series of highly-structured sessions.

The goal is, as much as possible, to heal the wounds of the past. The partner has a right, if she wants, to know the extent and frequency of acting out behaviors. If the partner decides to continue the relationship, it is done with full knowledge of what the addict has done. The addict has strengthened his capacity for honesty and can move forward knowing that there are no more secrets.

The purpose of the formal disclosure is to provide the partner with information she needs to move forward; however, not all partners find it necessary or helpful to request a formal disclosure. For these partners, it may be sufficient to know general information about the types, frequency, and extent of violations. Knowing more details may only create more distress. For other partners, although it is distressing to hear details, not having a formal disclosure may be even more problematic, resulting in ongoing suspicion and rumination about the addict's behaviors. The decision to request disclosure is made by the partner after thorough discussion and consultation with his/her therapist. The addict must then make a decision as to whether he is willing and open to respond to that request.

In being accountable and making emotional restitution, the addict:

- breaks through denial, minimization, rationalization, and justification,
- expands greatly his awareness of the depth of damage resulting from his acting-out
- deepens his empathy for the pain inflicted upon his partner.

The partner's experience is recognized, acknowledged, affirmed and validated, helping to heal some of the damage caused by the addict's previous lies and attempts to convince the addict that her suspicions are unfounded. The partner has the opportunity to share – in detail - her experience of the impact of the addiction, and the addict to her the partner's pain and hurt. Sharing of the addict's recovery program and of the partner's boundaries and requests for rebuilding trust provide a clear, specific, and verifiable plan for moving forward in the healing.

The formal process also helps both of you develop and strengthen your capacity to talk constructively about very difficult topics. It also provides a framework for you to contain those discussions and make a transition back to day-to-day life.

The formal process of disclosure and reconciliation not only serves to heal the wounds of the past and reduce the need to continue to talk about the past. It also helps both of you to strengthen and deepen your skills so that you can communicate more constructively going forward. The addict has increased ability to be honest, accountable and empathic; the partner is able to ask questions, to constructively share her experience, thoughts and feelings, to define her wants, needs, and boundaries. Both of you have more capacity to maintain self-care, to engage constructively, and to disengage when emotionally dysregulated.

Goal setting & commitment to next steps: making the decision to work to repair the relationship or to end. After completing the disclosure and relationship repair process, you will each clarify if you are open to continuing to work to repair the relationship or if you need to end the relationship. If you agree to work to continue the relationship, you will proceed to the next stages in the healing process. If the intimate relationship needs to end, you will focus on working to have a healthy ending, to resolve practical issues regarding finances, parenting, etc and to make an emotional closure.

Stage 5 – Individual Family of Origin and Trauma Therapy

Resolving underlying issues with regard to impact on couple/family relationships

After having worked to stabilize as a couple, rebuild trust, heal wounds of the past, you now focus on understanding underlying issues that impair your ability to create a healthy relationship. Each of you learned particular ways of relating based on childhood experiences in your families, some of which may be healthy and constructive, and others of which may be dysfunctional. In addition, there are likely to be ways in which your unique experiences in early life create conflicts and stresses in your current lives. After gaining understanding of these underlying issues, you will make commitments to build on strengths, to interrupt and inhibit unhealthy relationship habits, and develop new abilities and skills.

Stage 6 – Couple Relationship Renewal

Working through chronic, unresolved couple issues: decision-making, finances, life-style, parenting, relationships with extended family, etc. After understanding and working to change dysfunctional habits, you now work to identify and resolve long-term conflicts. Each of you has the capacity to speak constructively and clearly about your own experience, thoughts, feelings, and needs; you each have the capacity to listen and respect your partner. Based on this foundation of mutual understanding and respect, you work together to explore options for resolving differences that respect and integrate your needs with your partner's needs.

Renewing physical and sexual intimacy - The trauma of the addiction creates a difficult challenge for the couple in your efforts to heal. As you explore how to renew your physical and sexual intimacy, the trauma of the past may be evoked.

For the partner, touch, physical closeness, and sexual contact may bring memories of past wounds into the present moment with intense feelings of distress, anger, hurt, pain, grief, shame, etc.

For the addict, there may also be difficulties resulting from addictive urges, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors emerging in the context of healthy touch and sexual activity; or, you may experience intense feelings of shame, fear, or other distress that lead to withdrawal from healthy physical and sexual interaction. Moreover, for some addicts, addictive behaviors have resulted on a focus in their sexual activities that are inconsistent with healthy sexual interaction with their partners.

You each work individually to develop your capacity to be aware of triggers and traumatic reactions, to have resources for self-care and regaining balance. You also work to be attuned and responsive to the needs of your spouse.

As a couple, you learn to communicate honestly and respectfully, and to listen to one another empathically. You may make agreements to have intimate time, clearly defining guidelines and limits for healthy touch and sexual interaction, with agreements to stop sexual activity if either becomes triggered into a trauma reaction, and to work together to regain emotional balance.

You also learn to explore healthy sexuality, communicating openly, honestly, and respectfully about your experience, feelings and thoughts, wants and needs, and limits and boundaries. You work together to create a vibrant and mutually satisfying sexual life.

Recommitment to the relationship - After healing the wounds of the past and building the foundation for a healthy, satisfying life together, many couples decide to solidify the new relationship with a recommitment ceremony, including new vows.

The renewed commitment is based upon the realistic understanding that there will always be challenges. Neither person will be perfect. The addict continues to work to make progress in his/her recovery. Hopefully, there will be no relapses, but sometimes relapses do occur. Even if the addict maintains sobriety, there is continued work on underlying issues and there may be moments when there are difficulties and regression to dysfunctional reactions. The partner may have moments when she has trauma reactions. The partner also continues to work to solidify and strengthen new capacities for self-care and for relationship. There will be inevitable challenges with issues related to health, children, finances, work, societal problems, etc. However, as individuals and as a couple, you now have the resources within yourselves and support from others, as well as the knowledge that you have the courage, persistence, and wisdom that has enabled you to face and overcome what seemed to be impossible to solve problems. You can heal!