

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

*vii*

CHAPTER ONE: A Quick Overview

*1*

CHAPTER TWO: Rebuilding Trust

*17*

CHAPTER THREE: Living with Integrity

*29*

CHAPTER FOUR: Navigating New Firsts

*41*

CHAPTER FIVE: Avoiding Becoming Overwhelmed

*55*

CHAPTER SIX: Managing Family Dynamics

*65*

CHAPTER SEVEN: Handling the Holidays

*85*

CHAPTER EIGHT: Connecting to Your Passion

*99*

CHAPTER NINE: Medical Care and the Importance of  
Healthy Thinking

*113*

CHAPTER TEN: Aftercare Options

*127*

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Frequently Asked Questions

*131*

RESOURCES

*139*

## Rebuilding Trust

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One of the many challenges people face in long-term sobriety is understanding whom and how to trust. Typically, individuals in recovery *want* to trust others but struggle with the confidence to do so because of past broken trust and promises. What we hope to accomplish in this chapter is to help you find the right kind of trust.

To acquaint ourselves with the word itself, let's start with one of Merriam-Webster's definitions of trust, which is "one in which confidence is placed."

When you think about active addiction, in whom did you place confidence? Many times, it probably was people who weren't doing the right thing. You might have trusted the drug dealer to get the drugs you needed, or maybe it was the friend who could "hook you up with the good stuff." Why do you think you did this? What made you trust them?

It probably had something to do with past experience or knowledge of those people. They might have given you drugs before, or perhaps other people had told you they were good for whatever you were looking for.

Take some time to examine the roots of your trust issues. Was there a lack of trust in your family when you

were growing up? Have people you trusted in the past let you down consistently? Or have you spent time in prisons or jails, where no one can be trusted? As you navigate this chapter, explore what is at the core of your trust problem, and identify what material here applies to your personal situation.

One goal of this book is to enable you to begin to trust your family, peers, and anyone else who is doing the next right thing.

### **TRUSTING OTHERS**

So, where do you go from here? Let's start with thinking of people you want to trust. Who are the people who have been there for you from day one? This could be family members, friends from school, friends from your recovery network, or members of a religious/spiritual group. At the end of this chapter, we'll make a list in writing.

What makes you want to trust them? Is it that they are non-judgmental? Do they see the world from the same viewpoint as you? Are they caring individuals? Do they maintain sobriety?

The "why" really matters here. Many times, in sobriety circles, you will hear that the "why" isn't important, but with trust, understanding the "why" helps identify and clarify your basic issues with trust in general.

Why do you want to share something personal with someone? Is it because you need to share something important for your own sobriety, or is it to help the other person?

Is there something eating at you that could lead to relapse? Do you just need moral support?

Recognizing why you want to share things with a particular individual will help you recognize the bigger purpose of trust. Take Alcoholics Anonymous, for example. It has become such a key piece of sobriety for many people because attendees trust that nothing will be repeated outside the support group. They believe that other members of the group can relate to their problems and will keep their stories confidential, without judgment.

There is no doubt that various anonymous groups work for many people. That said, sobriety doesn't require that level of all-or-nothing thinking when it comes to trust. In sobriety—as with life in general—it's not necessary to give everyone complete trust about every detail of your life. Some issues might be best confided in a friend. Others might be suited for a family member. Still other topics might lend themselves to being shared with a professional.

For example, let's say you are an intravenous drug user and have contracted HIV from sharing a needle that was infected. Naturally, such a discovery feels overwhelming. Not only do you have to figure out what you are going to do medically, but you have to face your fear of dying from the disease, look at the decisions you made that led you to this place, and learn to cope with certain stigmas surrounding HIV. Figuring out whom to trust requires questioning and discernment:

- Do you want to share this information with someone bound by confidentiality laws, such as a medical professional or counselor?
- Do you know someone personally who has dealt with this diagnosis or who is close to another individual with the disease?
- If so, is that person someone who tends to share things openly on social media 24/7?
- Will that individual judge you when he or she finds out you have HIV?

This process of questioning and evaluating is essential when figuring out whom to trust with sensitive information. The most important thing to remember in this process is that what you are sharing is for *your* purpose. This is about helping yourself, not fulfilling the wishes or expectations of others. So, if something needs to remain confidential, save it for someone who won't break that confidentiality. Again, examine your "why." Why do you want to share this information with someone, and why are you considering Person X, Person Y, etc.

It's important to trust your instincts. At Adams Recovery Center, we read each day from the "12 Steps to Self-Care," and one of the most important steps is trusting yourself. So, when you're considering sharing something with someone, ask yourself, *Does this person seem trustworthy?* Your instincts will take over, and that gut feeling will say, *No, this is something I don't feel comfortable sharing with them,* or,

*Yes, my instincts tell me this person isn't going to be judging me or sharing this with anyone else.*

Sometimes it can be hard to trust yourself in recovery, so let the behavior of others show you the way. Is someone saying things to you about other people or sharing other people's secrets? If so, then they'll probably do the same thing to you.

Of course, people are human, and sometimes they break your trust unintentionally. But most people genuinely mean well, and your instincts will guide you in making good decisions.

### **TRUSTING YOURSELF**

Many times, people will come into our facility, and when we talk about trusting our instincts, they will say something like, "Well, I ended up here, so this is where my instincts took me."

We counter that with, "You are absolutely right, and you still ended up here because you knew you wanted to start a new, healthy life." Remember this: You have the power to trust yourself and to know that you, as an individual working toward long-term sobriety, can make solid decisions that can lead to lifelong healthy living.

You have more power than you think in every situation, and you deserve to trust yourself even if you've broken the trust of others in the past and even when others have broken your trust. Just because someone violated your trust doesn't mean there is no hope for you or your judgment. It goes

back to that all-or-nothing thinking we discussed earlier. Often, individuals will see someone they highly respected break their trust, and they'll think, *Well, if they can't be trusted, then no one can—including me.* That's why you have to know in your bones that you are on the right path. If you're trusting the process, then you can trust yourself to make empowering decisions.

One technique to try is using self-talk reminders, such as “I can be trusted,” “I am trustworthy,” or “I have made mistakes in the past, but today I am honest and trustworthy.” These reminders seem simple but can be very challenging because there are going to be people who remind you frequently that you have broken their trust in the past. The fact is, not everyone is going to forgive you for your past indiscretions.

You have to know in your own heart and mind that you are becoming a new, trustworthy person—regardless of what anyone else thinks.

### **REBUILDING THE TRUST OF OTHERS**

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that you have violated the trust of others. In doing so, you might be asking, *How do I regain my loved ones' trust? Will I ever gain their trust back? Will there ever be healing from my past mistakes?*

The reality of the situation is that when trust is violated, some people will hold onto resentment, anger, and hostility. The good news is that you can work on regaining their trust in a variety of ways.



First and foremost, start with your actions. When it comes to trust, most people will agree that words have little power; your actions do all the talking.

So, start by being honest with the individual whose trust you have broken. It could be through a letter, phone call, or a face-to-face encounter. Be straightforward with the individual about what occurred and what you did. If you stole someone's jewelry and pawned it to support your addiction, tell her. Acknowledge what you did and let her know where you are today with regard to your addiction and making amends.

Honesty and candor go a long way in rebuilding trust. Be frank with your loved ones about where you are in your fight for sobriety and in your life in general. That will help them trust that you are on the right track and making progress. If you are struggling, be honest about that, too. Chances are, the people closest to you already know that, and you'll create more trust with honesty than by trying to hide your issues or pretending everything is okay.

Honesty doesn't mean you can't set boundaries with people. In fact, setting boundaries can be a great way to be honest! For example, you might choose to let your loved ones know up front what you're comfortable sharing at this point in your sobriety and what needs to remain private. If you let your mother know that you don't feel comfortable talking about your cravings, but you inform her that you want to go to a sober-support meeting or visit with a

counselor, then you are being honest and trustworthy while protecting your privacy.

Now, here is the tough news: Mom might not believe what you say is going on. And that's where even more honesty comes in. To earn her trust, you might invite your mom to ride with you to the meeting, advise her that she can call your sober support or your counselor, or volunteer to take a drug screen upon your return. These kinds of things will let her know you are working a program. Patience goes hand in hand with honesty. Remember, your mom is looking out for your best interests, and because you didn't lose her trust overnight, you aren't going to regain it overnight either.

Another place to set boundaries is with people who are using or selling drugs. Simply put: Cut them out of your life. People in active addiction will not respect your boundaries or your priorities in maintaining health and sobriety. Furthermore, your family and friends won't take your recovery seriously if they feel you're not fully committed to moving beyond your unhealthy relationships.

Rebuilding trust—in yourself and with others—will take time. Be patient with yourself and your loved ones, and trust that the process is working.

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**MELINDA'S STORY**

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Melinda completed residential treatment in August 2016 and recognized that she had many problems related to her relationship with her mother. Melinda didn't want to move back in with her mother, but she also didn't want to go to sober living and have to start over again with a new group of women. Melinda's mother told her that if she relapsed, she would be kicked out of their home immediately. Melinda agreed that she must remain sober in the house.

A few weeks after the move, Melinda's mother told Melinda that she'd gone through her belongings because she was suspicious that her daughter was using heroin again. Melinda informed her mother that she was not using heroin and that she felt disrespected that her mom would go through her things. Melinda's mother said she would never be able to fully trust Melinda, and Melinda moved out in a rage. She said to her mother, "Since you think I'm high, I'm going to show you high."

Melinda relapsed and hasn't been heard from since. Though her story is very sad, it reflects the importance of respecting the time it takes to rebuild trust with friends and family members. It also serves as a reminder of the actions people in recovery might need to take to enable others to trust them again. We can only wonder where Melinda might be had she gone to sober living after treatment.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- Identify some individuals you feel you can trust. Why do you trust them? What qualities about them make them seem trustworthy?

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- Name some people whose trust you would like to earn back. What are some things you can do to begin building bridges to them?

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- When you think about honesty, how do you feel? Does the idea of honesty scare you? Challenge you? Make you feel free or at ease? What emotions are tied to the idea of being honest?

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- Have you been clear in setting boundaries with your friends and family? What is working for you, and where do you need to be more honest about your limits and expectations?

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- Recall a time when you trusted your gut and made a great decision, and then remind yourself of this example the next time you're tempted to doubt yourself.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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*Can't I or my loved one just stop using? What's the big deal?*

Unfortunately, that's not how it works. By the time an addiction becomes an addiction, there is a reliance upon the substance. To put it simply, the person's brain has been "rewired" by the substance, and work needs to be done to set it straight. Obviously, this is much more complicated than this brief answer, and we encourage you to read through this book to get a better grasp on addiction and its components. In the meantime, though, start eradicating that belief that the solution is telling someone, "Just stop it!" Although there are some people out there who have been able to "just stop it," that is not the reality for most.

*Okay, so I need help. What type of treatment do I need? Do I really need to go to "rehab"?*

Yay! Recognizing the need for help is a wonderful first step! The type of treatment you need is dependent upon a lot of factors, though. The best way to determine which type of treatment might be appropriate for you is to seek out a clinician or a social services agency and have an assessment done. They then can recommend options to you and

connect you to resources. And yes, you might need to go to “rehab” (we prefer “residential treatment”), and that’s okay. A huge mistake many people make is not pursuing the best treatment option(s) for them because it’s a big change and it’s scary. Don’t hold yourself back. Take the leap!

*Why do I have to follow some type of program? Isn’t my addiction unique to me?*

Sort of. The reasons you use, specific issues that contributed to or resulted from your use, and the way you process things are unique to you, yes. But addiction itself is pretty cut and dried: a reliance upon a substance or substances. There are various ways to approach treating addiction, but again, even those are pretty similar: promote abstinence from substances, address issues related to use, and then make positive changes to support sobriety. If you find yourself thinking your addiction is so different and unique that there isn’t a treatment option out there for you, then honestly, you might be using that as an excuse to continue using.

*Will my brain ever go back to “normal”?*

Yes and no. Here’s the obvious part: Drugs and alcohol have a major impact on the brain and its functions. The unknown parts are exactly how and to what extent drugs and alcohol have affected *your* brain. That depends in part on the types or combinations of substances you used. Research provides a promising outlook, though, and overall it suggests that those who maintain long-term abstinence from substances



see improvement (and usually a complete return) of their brain functions.

***Will the cravings and urges ever go away?***

Maybe. Again, it all depends on the person. Cravings and urges are a totally normal thing, and it's also totally normal to have them on occasion even after weeks, months, or years of sobriety. As we said, the brain is changed by addiction. After years of dependence on a substance, the brain isn't going to let go that easily. It will take time for cravings to go away, but they will eventually. As you take steps away from using and learn new coping skills, the urges and cravings will lessen. When they do occur, try to see it as an opportunity to learn how to cope with them in a healthy way. Rather than see it as a weakness or a sign that you aren't "getting better," see it as your brain healing and as part of pursuing a better life.

***I keep hearing about "ninety meetings in ninety days." Do I have to do that?***

A lot of clients ask us this question, and we usually don't give a direct reply because we want people to explore their own options. We bring in several types of support groups at our treatment centers so people can explore which ones, if any, might be helpful for them post-treatment. If you want to pursue a ninety-in-ninety because you believe it will be beneficial to your sobriety, then great! Try it out! Here's the thing, though: You also need to be realistic. Do you have the

ability to accomplish this goal? If life happens one day and prevents you from making it to a meeting, will that cause you major distress? The issue that sometimes occurs with ninety-in-ninety is that all-or-nothing thinking creeps in. People will miss a meeting and feel ashamed or like they failed rather than recognizing the reality of the situation: Life happens, mistakes happen, and ninety-in-ninety is a choice, not a requirement, for sobriety.

*Is it okay to be in a relationship early in recovery?*

This is a two-part answer. The first part is for those who are already in a relationship. If you are in a relationship while in active addiction, a lot of work probably will need to be done when entering into sobriety. Whether both of you were in addiction or not, addiction brings toxicity into relationships that will need to be addressed. This might mean improving communication, ceasing enabling, addressing a lack of trust, and so on. Really look at the relationship and your feelings toward it. Also, don't fall into the trap of staying together just to stay together. If it's not working, forcing it will just make things more toxic.

For those of you who are single and looking to mingle, here's our take on it: We are not going to throw out a timeline of when you can be in a relationship. What we can say, though, is that you might want to ask yourself some questions. What are your intentions for entering into a relationship? Are you currently supporting yourself both emotionally and financially? Are you able to deal with conflict in

healthy ways? Do you have goals? Will entering into a relationship jeopardize any of those goals? What we tend to see in early recovery is that people enter into relationships quickly because it allows them to focus on someone besides themselves. It also satisfies the codependency that often comes with addiction. So be honest with yourself. And if you can't do that, maybe a relationship isn't the best choice right now.

*Can I still hang around my old friends?*

We get this question a lot, and it baffles us. We know it's difficult to accept, but hanging around old friends with whom you used to use is probably one of the worst decisions you can make. Hanging out with people who are still in active addiction will only keep you in that lifestyle. Even if you don't directly use, you're surrounding yourself with what you are trying to get away from.

Okay, so what if they got sober as well? That might be okay, but we've seen many people have issues with this, especially if the thought patterns and behaviors associated with using are still present. Many times, people forget about the reality of the past and focus on "the good ol' days" when hanging out with old using friends, and it can lead to some dangerous thoughts and/or actions. Be selective about the people with whom you surround yourself. Don't hang out with old "friends" just because it's comfortable and easy. Unfortunately, pursuing a sober life is not always comfortable and easy, but it is worth it. The relationships you form in

sobriety will be much more meaningful and supportive than any based on substance use.

***My loved one is in early recovery. How can I best support him?***

First things first: Listen to the person. *Really* listen, without any preconceived notions or beliefs. Let your loved one communicate with you about his thoughts and feelings without judgment. Utilize empathy and understanding to bridge connections. This might be hard, because you might not entirely understand where he is coming from. You might even have difficulty grasping the concept of addiction, and that's okay. Seeking to better understand is a great step in supporting someone. Maybe even ask how you can support your loved one, how you can help when he is struggling. The truth is, your loved one will struggle, and having a solid and nonjudgmental support system is a wonderful asset in sobriety.

Now, we want to make it clear that we don't associate "support" with "money." We are talking about emotional support here. Your monetary support is entirely up to you, and we encourage you to set boundaries with it.

That leads us to this advice: Take care of yourself! Addiction is not a single-person issue; it extends outward. Your loved one living with addiction probably had a huge effect on you. Looking at your own issues and the stresses that arose during that time will be very helpful for you. Seeking out counseling and support groups for families