Relationships in Early Recovery

Facilitator Guide | 60–75 minutes | Substance-use recovery

Purpose: Explore relationships, emotional dependence, social pressures, and recovery. Participants identify healthy connection, personal boundaries, and supportive choices.

Objectives: Examine the one-year dating suggestion; identify supports and warning signs; reflect on overinvolvement; create a relationship-readiness plan.

Safety and group agreements

Use fictional examples and voluntary sharing. Allow participants to pass, write, or observe. Do not require trauma or relationship disclosures. When coercion, threats, stalking, or violence are present, follow safeguarding procedures rather than encouraging direct confrontation.

Suggested agenda

• 0–10 min: Welcome and opening question about supportive relationships.

• 10–25 min: Discuss the one-year dating suggestion and early recovery.

• 25–40 min: Explore healthy connection, conflict, and emotional dependence.

• 40–55 min: Private eight-item reflection inventory.

• 55–75 min: Readiness plan, discussion questions, and closing.

Teaching notes

One-year dating suggestion: Common in some recovery communities, but not a universal evidence-based rule. Explore its intention: making space for stability, coping routines, and social supports. Avoid judging participants already in relationships.

Recovery and relationships: Relationships may provide support or stress. Avoid claiming that arguments inevitably cause relapse or that partners in recovery are necessarily unsafe. Discuss situations involving substance exposure, disclosure, consent, and support networks.

Codependency and cross-addiction: Codependency is not a formal diagnosis. Ordinary affection and dopamine responses do not establish a behavioral addiction. Focus on self-neglect, excessive reliance, reciprocity, autonomy, and boundaries.

Statistics: The source lesson’s 75% first-year relapse claim and historical mortality figures are not repeated as universal estimates. They do not establish that dating causes relapse.

Facilitated activity

Use the eight statements in the participant workbook as a private self-reflection inventory. Do not score, diagnose, or label participants. Ask what patterns feel supportive and what patterns leave them depleted.

Discussion questions

1. How can you tell if a relationship is healthy? What qualities do you look for?

2. How will you know if or when you are ready for a relationship?

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3. If you are not currently with a partner but want to date now, why do you want to be in a relationship?

4. If you currently have a partner, do you believe the relationship benefits your recovery? Why or why not?

5. If you think the suggestion to wait a year to date is just dumb, tell us why!

Closing plan

Each participant can name one relationship boundary, one support outside a romantic partner, one coping response to conflict or loneliness, and one situation in which professional help might be useful.

Reference points and editorial note

SAMHSA Recovery and Recovery Support: https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/recovery

NIDA Treatment and Recovery: https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/treatment-recovery

National Domestic Violence Hotline: https://www.thehotline.org/

Adapted from the original user-provided lesson. Original title, eight reflection themes, and five discussion questions retained. Claims about relapse rates, dopamine, and dating were qualified. Educational resource, not a diagnostic instrument.

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