

What Does Recovery Look Like?

Based on the book "The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitive Relationships," by Patrick J. Carnes Phd.

Committing to Reality at All Costs

Trauma distorts our perception of reality. It is very common for spouses of addicts to talk about how learning the truth is like learning a whole new reality and truth. And that is exactly what it is. Everything you have known and been told is reality is now coming out into the light and being shown for what it is, lies.

When we are in trauma it seems normal to us, it makes the abnormal/unhealthy behaviors and experiences of the traumatic relationship look normal. Normally it takes bringing a significant other, therapist, or mentor into our lives for us to be able to see that what we have known as normal, is not.

In order to heal we need to commit to reality, to accepting and owning the truth, and stepping out of trauma for good.

Being OK with the Misperceptions of Others

Once we have committed to reality we must be okay with others misperceiving us. It is natural to want to explain, make other people understand, and not want others upset. Our life experiences have taught us that bad things happen when others get upset, or when we are different from others. But the truth is that even if we were to give the perfect explanation to our victimizers, or to others in the abusing system, they will not understand or believe.

We need to be ready for others around us to give push back. When a victim is starting to make changes, step out of the victim role, establish boundaries and heal, you can BET the others around the victim will not like it.

We need to recognize the shame in us that is causing us to desire the approval and support of others. Shame is at our core and the core of our addiction/betrayal-bond. We need to step out of shame and remember that others in the abusing system need to go through the appropriate steps for healing before they can acknowledge the truth as well.

Having Boundaries

Once we have decided that we are willing to have others misperceive us then we must run the risk of drawing boundaries.

Boundaries force a restructuring of all relationships. They can no longer go on as they have been. There must be a shift in the way that interactions occur.

As a victim we typically draw lines in the sand that people step over, or make promises to ourselves that we do not keep. We are used to being disrespected and not taken seriously.

This adds to our own shame!

Once we start maintaining our boundaries and meeting our own needs we will develop a sense of self-respect. Others will also start to respect us because we are establishing ourselves as a person of value.

By successfully implementing boundaries we will discover a new trust for ourselves that we lost in the midst of trauma. We learn that we can and will take care of ourselves, which provides a new sense of safety.

This is perhaps one of the most important parts of recovery: Developing a trustworthy relationship with self.

Saying GoodBye When Those Boundaries are Not Respected

After we have implemented our boundaries we must be willing to say goodbye when they are crossed. If someone does not respect our boundaries we need to leave.

This is why boundaries are so important, when we state very clearly what is acceptable and what is not, along with the consequences of boundaries being crossed. When the line is crossed, despite being very clear about our boundaries and the consequences, we have our answer about the value of the relationship to the other person. The best and healthiest thing we can do is face the reality of the relationship and leave.

This is where we must confront our deep desire for the dream, fantasy, promise and seduction to be true. (We all have a promise, dream, or fantasy that we are hoping will be met by this relationship or person. What is that for you?)

We must confront the loss of that dream and fantasy and accept the overwhelming grief that comes from that loss. The grief WILL BE overwhelming.

This is where the question comes into play of "How far are you willing to go for freedom?"

Being Okay With Being Alone

Beneath the grieving of past losses hides the fear of being alone. For those who fear abandonment, the shift to regarding ourselves positively, enjoying time with ourselves is one of the key changes that occurs when leaving an abusive environment. Instead of experiencing shame we move into autonomy. Many people suffer terrible relationships because they fear being alone.

SOMETHING is not better than NOTHING. When people do not fear being alone they are able to demand relationships that work. They are not desperate. They learn to be alone and be okay.

Being Spiritual

First comes connection with self and the acceptance of our own brokenness. Then comes the acceptance of the community and a renewed trust of others. The ability to trust oneself and others clears the path for trusting a creator. This leads the way for trusting in a larger purpose, a purpose in which bad things can happen to very good people.

If we know we are untrustworthy then it is difficult to believe that others will be trustworthy.

In the trauma bond we were unfaithful to ourselves and someone hurt us. By being true to ourselves we will heal.

Being Honest

This is where we learn to be honest about ourselves and about who we are.

Admit the hard things about ourselves
Be clear about hard things that others must hear
Do not mislead anyone
Do not live a secret life
Abandon false fronts and false pride
Be clear about our intent
Tell the truth
Do not hide from difficult moments or emotions
Give up being nice all the time
State our needs and wants without shame
Do not cover or lie for anyone

Being Vulnerable

Being vulnerable is terrifying. When our vulnerability has been exploited, trying to be vulnerable again with others can seem like too daunting of a task. However, involving people in our inner world, thoughts, fears, desires, failures, insecurities, allows others to know who we are. It allows them to provide insight, ideas, problem-solving and new perspectives into our life.

Common experience reduces shame. When we know we are not alone we are no longer afraid to face our fears and our failures.

The greatest gift we can give to our future children is to acknowledge our darkside. Because doing that means being vulnerable.

Learning to Fight

Our life experiences have taught us to avoid conflict. Conflict usually means anger, violence, and danger. We learned to keep the peace, to lie and say nice things. But we need to learn to fight now. In order to remove ourselves from the trauma bond we need to insist on our rights and boundaries.

Let go of being nice
Protect yourself
Let yourself be heard

Fighting/conflict resolution is an important skill to have even in a healthy relationship. All relationships have struggles and each party always has differences. Learning to fight fair, accept differences and respect each other is the only way to sustain intimacy.

Defining Yourself

When we come out of trauma bonds, or out of exploitive relationships, we sometimes feel that we don't know who we are. We didn't realize how much that other person defined our lives, and regulated our daily choices and values. Self-care, and self-love can seem like a foreign concept to us.

Defining ourselves will be difficult. But that is part of our journey. We need to accept the ups and downs and provide space and acceptance for every part of the journey.

Taking Responsibility for Yourself

To us, there is always something kind, noble and redeeming about someone who has betrayed us. It is natural for us to want to hold on to those things even as our world comes crashing down around us.

We need to learn to let go of those things.

Your life is up to you.

Take charge of it, or someone else will.

Turning Suffering into Meaning

This is where it is up to us to decide the meaning of the suffering. But it is important to do so.