

What it Means to be ‘In Recovery’ and be a ‘Supporter’

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Substance use affects individuals, families, and communities in complex and often challenging ways, impacting physical health, mental well-being, and relationships. Recovery from substance use is a deeply personal journey that involves not only stopping use but also rebuilding a meaningful and stable life. The journey from addiction to recovery looks different for everyone. Within this process, both individuals in recovery and the people who support them play essential but distinct roles. It’s important to identify the responsibilities and goals of both the individual in recovery and the loved one supporting the person in their recovery journey.

IN RECOVERY

The term ‘in recovery’ refers to an individual who struggles with a substance use issue that has taken or started to take steps towards addressing their addiction. This can range from a harm reduction method of reducing or controlling use of a substance or behavior to a goal of complete and total abstinence and sobriety.

- **RECOVERY IS A PROCESS.** Recovery is a process, not a single event or quick fix. It often involves progress, setbacks, and ongoing effort as a person builds new skills and coping strategies over time. Change doesn’t happen overnight, and each step forward—no matter how small—matters. Patience, support, and persistence are key components in sustaining long-term recovery.
- **RECOVERY IS COMMUNITY.** When abstaining from use, there is often a feeling of a gap left by the time and connection that substances previously filled. Identify the groups and people that fill that gap with positivity and things other than substance consumption. Conversely identify those within your social circle that would encourage relapse and remove contact and interaction. It may be tempting to maintain relationships with others struggling with substance use, but if they do not also have a recovery mindset then it can often make the recovery process impossible.
- **RELAPSE IS PART OF RECOVERY.** Relapse can be a part of the recovery journey, not a sign of failure. It often reflects the chronic nature of substance use disorders and highlights areas where additional support or new strategies may be needed. Many people use relapse as an opportunity to learn more about their triggers and strengthen their recovery plan. With the right support, individuals can return to recovery and continue making progress. Reducing shame around relapse helps create space for honesty, growth, and long-term success.
- **RECOVERY LOOKS DIFFERENT FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE.** Recovery looks different for everyone, and there is no single “right” way to do it. Each person’s path is shaped by their experiences, needs, strengths, and goals. Some people benefit from weekly individual therapy, others require more intensive detoxification or intensive programs, while others benefit from peer support groups. Often times sustained recovery is achieved by a mixture of different services and activities.
- **RECOVERY IS A MINDSET.** For those that struggle with addiction, recovery is often needed to be their focus. The nature of chemical addictions is sinister in that it forces the brain to prey upon itself in order to facilitate the addiction. For many, being in recovery needs to be at the forefront of thinking to encourage long term recovery and prevent relapse.
- **RECOVERY IS A LIFELONG JOURNEY.** Addiction is not something that can be cured or ended. When an individual makes the choice to be in recovery the process becomes a party for themselves. Whether that’s early recovery with intensive individual services, or sustained remission for the occasional group or individual therapy session.

SUPPORTERS

A supporter is someone who assists an individual in recovery from an addiction. Supporters can range from professional peer supports, counselors, family members, friends, and coworkers.

- **BE AWARE OF TRIGGERS.** It's important to be aware of triggers or needs of those in recovery as it relates to substances. When inviting or participating in social activities, be aware of the presence of their substance. For example, if inviting the individual for a meal not partaking in alcohol if that is their substance of choice.
- **SUPPORTING VS. ENABLING.** It can be tricky to maintain the balance of supporting an individual who is in recovery while also not enabling their addiction. If providing support be careful regarding providing monetary support. Often times the best support to provide to someone in recovery is social interactions and activities that do not revolve around substances.
- **BE PATIENT.** Creating a safe space for those in recovery will require patience with their journey. Sometimes a trigger for substance use may not be obvious to those who have never struggled with a substance addiction. Group activities that might appear benign can be major prompts or triggers for use for someone in recovery. Examples may include sporting events, certain types of music, films that glorify use, etc.
- **BOUNDARIES.** Identify your personal boundaries. Often times those that have struggled with a substance use disorder have harmed the trust of those closest to them. It is okay to love and support someone in recovery while being mindful of protecting yourself from further harm.

Being and loving someone in recovery is a challenge, but a worthwhile one. Inviting those in recovery within your community can show compassion and reinforce the truth that all people deserve connection. With the support of a community and establishing coping skills someone can reach sustained long-term recovery from substance use addiction.