

Couple Recovery Map Card Deck Manual

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*PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE USING THE
COUPLE RECOVERY MAP CARD DECKS*



COUPLE RECOVERY MAP CARD DECKS



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Using the Developing Rituals of Connection Card Deck, partners select cards that can be used to create a dialogue for talking about and (re)establishing rituals in their relationship. Rituals are defined as activities couples create that bring meaning and predictability to the relationship. Rituals hold relationships and family life together through shared meaning and feelings of belonging that create cohesiveness to couple and family identity.

1. Speaker and Listener Guidelines for Using Recovery Map Card Decks

Instructions: Use the following guidelines for the Recovery Map Card Decks that define the speaker and listener roles. It is important to try to stay in these roles until the speaker feels understood, and then switch roles with the listener becoming the speaker.

Speaker Guidelines

Share only what you are comfortable sharing. See if you can identify at least one or more feelings you have about what you are sharing. The key is to **focus on yourself**, not your partner. Describe your thoughts, feelings, and needs.

In disclosure, there are different levels of sharing of details and specifics. It is important to limit disclosure to what feels comfortable.

For example, if you share about something you are struggling with in your own recovery, try to identify what's happening for you and how you feel about it. For example, "I am nervous about tomorrow's office party and how I might exit if I feel uncomfortable about the drinking part." If you are not comfortable talking about the specific content, you could say "I am thinking through how to handle a situation differently."

If you share something positive about what is happening in your recovery, you could identify what positive thing happened and how you felt about it. For example, "I had a good meeting tonight. Several people spoke about struggles with perfectionism, and I see how I too really raise the bar for myself and put pressure on myself to not accept my imperfections. It helped to focus on the idea of progress, not perfection." Sharing less, for example, could sound something like this: "I had a good meeting this evening, several things people said really hit home."

Finally, while there are different levels of sharing, there are also different reasons. You may simply want to update your partner on what's happening, or you may have a need or a request for your partner. For example:

1. “I just want you to listen and understand and know what’s going on with me.”
2. If you want something from your partner beyond just listening, you could say: “I would like help with (specific request)” or, “I would like to (name what you want to have happen).” For example, “Somebody shared stuff tonight that hit close to home. I would like a bit of time alone to just decompress. Thanks.”

The listener should decide if the request is neutral, helpful, or harmful to his/her own recovery – wellness and respond accordingly while also acknowledging and validating the request.

Listener Guidelines

Take this opportunity to deepen empathy and **just listen** to what your partner is saying. Try not to interrupt or add your own thoughts and feelings. The goal is to empathize and validate your partner’s thoughts, feelings, and needs. This is the gold standard in communication!

Empathy: You communicate to your partner that you understand what your partner is expressing and feeling, and that **you care**.

Empathy has several steps:

- Listen to what partner is feeling, not just saying– **focus on emotions**.
- Put yourself in your partner’s shoes, imagining what this emotional experience is like for your partner. Suspend your own thoughts and feelings for the moment, the focus should be on your partner.
- Communicate **what** you understand your partner is feeling (emotions) and **why** your partner feels that way (content).

Validation: You communicate that you understand and accept without judgement your partner’s feelings and that it makes sense to you given your partner’s perspective. The bottom line: Convey, “You have a right to have these feelings.”

Validation has several steps:

- Accept and respect that this is your partner's experience based on your partner's perceptions, feelings, history, biology, and emotional makeup (psychology).
- Actively communicate your understanding and acceptance that this is how the speaker feels and sees things.
- Encourage additional communication. If the speaker starts to get upset with your response, then the odds are the speaker isn't feeling validated.

Neither empathy nor validation has to do with placating, agreeing, liking, disliking, or determining if something is "true" (from your perspective). Every feeling is valid, based on the person's perceptions, beliefs, and history. Continued dialogue may change that perception or belief, but in healthy relationships partners need to be able to express their true thoughts and feelings at the time.

An example of an empathic and validating response would be to say something like this:

1. **"So, you are feeling...** (upset, happy, fearful, confused, excited, etc.)
2. **about...** (name the specific events, people, circumstances related to feeling),
3. **because...** (express the reason, motivation, belief, you hear that explains the speaker's feelings)
4. And **"I can understand** why you feel this way" or "That makes sense."

#1, 2, 3 above reflects empathy. #4 reflects validation

2. My Recovery – My Wellness Card Deck Instructions

Instructions: The goal of this exercise is to share something about your own recovery or wellness that you think is important for your partner to understand.

Use the Speaker Listener Guidelines to help with sharing and listening.

Speaker Role:

Sit facing each other, with the speaker holding the My Recovery - My Wellness card deck. Thumb through the deck until you find several cards that contain something you want to share to help your partner understand something about your recovery - wellness experience. You can modify ideas from the card deck or share something relevant to you that may not be in the deck. You can include what you feel is going well and/or share something about some of the struggles you may be having. **This conversation is about you and your recovery, not about the relationship or relationship recovery.**

Listener Role:

The partner's job is to just listen and try to understand. You can ask questions to clarify and to help you understand. **Do not express approval or disapproval, or problem-solve, or offer your opinion.** This is about listening and taking in what your partner is saying.”

Remember these are the speaker's experiences, feelings and needs. Respond simply with an accepting presence and an indication that you hear and understand. *You don't have to fix, change, or take responsibility for what you hear.*

After 15 minutes (or an agreed upon amount of time) trade speaker and listener roles.

3. Your Recovery – Your Wellness Card Deck

Instructions: The goal for the following exercise is to help partners learn to talk about recovery and to clarify and understand each other's positions, thoughts, and feelings.

Use the Speaker Listener Guidelines to help with sharing and listening.

Listener Role:

Sit facing each other, with the **listener** holding the Your Recovery - Your Wellness Card Deck. Thumb through the deck until you find several cards that contain questions you want to ask your partner to help you better understand your partner's recovery - wellness experience. Ask any additional questions to deepen your understanding of his or her perspective.

You can modify ideas from the card deck or ask something relevant to you that may not be in the deck. Be respectful of your partner's option to pass on the question or to limit or modify the question. Think of this as an interview not a two-way conversation. The focus is on understanding your partner's perspective NOT sharing yours. Avoid questions or answers that may lead to anything that relates to the relationship or relationship recovery.

Remember these are the speaker's experiences, feelings and needs. Respond simply with an accepting presence and an indication that you hear and understand. *You don't have to fix, change, or take responsibility for what you hear.*

Speaker Role:

Only answer questions you are comfortable and willing to talk about. You may pass on or modify any question, or stating, "I'll pass on that one", or "That is all I want to say about this for now". Help your partner understand what you think is important for your partner to know about your thoughts and feelings about recovery - wellness.

After 15 minutes (or an agreed upon amount of time) trade speaker and listener roles.

4. Couple Recovery Card Deck Instructions

Instructions: The goal for this exercise is to help couples talk about recovery so that it doesn't become the new "elephant in the living room." This intervention provides a tool for partners to identify and address the impact of recovery on the relationship.

Using the Couple Recovery card deck, split the deck in half and each of you look through your half of the cards. From there, choose several cards that you would be interested in talking about with your partner. Share with each other the cards you picked, then decide which **one** card you both agree to talk about. Each partner must agree with the suggested question. **If either partner is uncomfortable or prefers another question, go through the cards until you can select one card both of you are willing to talk about.**

Use the Speaker Listener Guidelines to help with sharing and listening.

Additional Guidelines: In this exercise couples learn to create a dialogue to discuss their couple recovery. Questions vary but have a theme related to, "How are we doing? What changes are taking place in our relationship since beginning recovery and what do we need to talk about related to these changes?"

This exercise tends to work best initially if partners stick with the speaker – listener structure. While it may be tempting at first to move into problem-solving, try to stay with sharing and listening. Suspend your own position and thoughts when in the listening role. The goal is to help each other to feel safe in expressing feelings and perspectives. Over time, these questions may create more of a dialogue and an exchange of thoughts and feelings leading to action or changes.

Decide how long you would like to spend addressing this issue

When people talk, listen completely.

Most people never listen.

—Ernest Hemingway

5. Rituals of Connection Card Deck Instructions

In the book “The Relationship Cure” (p. 221) John Gottman says rituals are like routines in that they are repeated over and over, becoming predictable. Everyone knows what to expect and what’s expected of them. The big difference between rituals and routines is that rituals have symbolic meaning and are important to relationships and family life as a way to connect and bond with each other and with larger communities.

Substance use and compulsive behavioral disorders are highly ritualized: “It’s 5:00 and time for happy hour.” Some couples will have formed bonds around drinking or drugging with each other, specific friends, or extended family. New rituals that support recovery and provide emotional and relationship stability not only replace the rituals surrounding use but serve to develop ways to reconnect and spend time together in meaningful ways.

Dr. Gottman says that rituals help couples stay connected despite conflict, providing anchors to ground relationships with things they can count on. In recovery, one thing people can count on in mutual aid groups are the consistency of rituals surrounding meetings, offering a place of predictability, security and safety.

These rituals of connection can be done simply and do not have to be time consuming. Informal rituals like sharing over a cup of tea and asking how the day has gone, may only take 10-15 minutes. Formal rituals are celebrations like holidays, birthdays, sobriety birthdays, and anniversaries.

Like routines, a ritual of connection needs to be thought out and planned. When will it happen? How often? Where? Who will initiate it? How will it unfold? How will it end?

Instructions

Use the Rituals of Connection card deck. Split it in half, and each of you look through your half of the cards. Each partner chooses several ritual of connection cards that you would like to work on with your partner. Share your choices with each other, then of those pick **one** to work on for now. Use the following questions to discuss and decide the details of how you would like to do this ritual together.

Use the Speaker Listener Guidelines to help with sharing and listening.

Questions for Exploration

- What's meaningful about this for you?
- When will this be done?
- How often will it be done?
- How long should it last each time?
- Who will initiate it?
- What will happen next?
- How will it end?
- How can we integrate this into our lives so we can count on it?
- Who will do what when?

About

Robert Navarra, Psy.D., M.F.T., M.A.C., is an author, researcher, and a Master Certified Gottman Therapist, Consultant, Speaker, and Trainer. He has worked in the addiction recovery field for over 30 years. He holds an Advanced Drug and Alcohol Certification and national certifications as a Master Addiction Counselor (MAC) and a Recovery to Practice (RTP) certification, both awarded by the National Association of Addiction Professionals (NAADAC). Dr. Navarra is a Research Scientist with the Gottman Institute, additionally, he is former Senior Research Fellow at Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California where he co-founded the Center for Couples in Recovery and developed the Couples Recovery Development Approach (CRDA). He is former Clinical Director of Sequoia Center, and a former Associate at the Addictions Institute, directed by Dr. Stephanie Brown. He is also a Lecturer at Santa Clara University where teaches graduate classes in addiction and Gottman Couples Therapy.

Publication credits include:

- Navarra, R. J. (2002). *Couples in recovery from alcoholism: Long-term and developmental processes*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation Abstracts International (63-02B 3042888)
- Navarra, R. J. (2007). Family response to adults and alcohol. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 25(1-2), 85-104.
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- Navarra, R. J. & Gottman, J. M., (2011) Gottman Method Therapy: From theory to practice. In Carson, D. K. & Casado-Kehoe, M., (Eds.), *Case studies in couple therapy: Theory-based approaches* (pp. 331-343). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Navarra, R. J., Gottman, J. M., & Gottman, J. S. (2016). Sound relationship house theory and marriage education: In Ponzetti, J. (Ed.), *Evidence-based approaches to relationship and marriage education*, (pp. 93-107). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dr. Robert Navarra and Dr. John Gottman co-authored articles in The Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy:

- Bids for Connection in Gottman Couples Therapy
- Trust in Gottman Method Couples Therapy
- Turning Toward in Gottman Couples Therapy
- Sound Relationship House in Gottman Method Couples Therapy

For more resources about from Dr. Navarra visit:

<https://drrobertnavarra.com>

<https://couplerecovery.org>
