



# 21st Annual Midwest Conference on Problem Gambling and Substance Abuse

“Connections: The Key to Recovery”

## Couple Connection, the Missing Piece in Recovery: A Relational Approach in Treating Problem Gambling and Use Disorders



Robert Navarra, PsyD, LMFT, MAC  
June 19, 2024

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### Polling Question 1:

Couple recovery is usually contraindicated in the first year of recovery.

- A. Agree
- B. Disagree
- C. Not sure

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### Polling Question 2:

Partners should be discouraged from talking about their individual recovery with each other because it is unhealthy and may further blur boundaries.

- A. Agree
- B. Disagree
- C. Not sure

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### Polling Question 3:

Partners should be discouraged from asking their partner's about their recovery and to "stay on their own side of the street".

- A. Agree
- B. Disagree
- C. Not sure

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### Polling Question 4:

Partners should be encouraged to talk about the impact of recovery on their relationship, even in early recovery.

- A. Agree
- B. Disagree
- C. Not sure

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### Polling Question 5:

Typically, couples in recovery should be discouraged from talking with each other about the negative and traumatic impact of addiction, instead process individually.

- A. Agree
- B. Disagree
- C. Not sure

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### What Does the Research Indicate?



- ✓ The lifetime divorce rate for couples impacted by problem gambling is about 40% (compared to 18% in general population "Pathological gamblers" rates are as high as 53.5% (National Gambling Impact Study, 2013)
- ✓ People with pathological gambling are more likely to live alone through separation or divorce and to have experienced childhood trauma
- ✓ There is no empirical support to automatically delay treating couples

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### Impact of Trauma

Trauma experienced in family of origin creates triggers



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### Impact of Trauma

Trauma experienced from problem gambling creates triggers



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### Impact of Trauma

Trauma experienced in recovery creates triggers



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### Trauma of Recovery

#### What Happens Next is Normal

- ✓ Couple/family system becomes **destabilized**
- ✓ Relief is often followed by **fear and uncertainty**
- ✓ Recovery replaces problem gambling as organizer in relationship – **destabilization continues** well into recovery
- ✓ In current treatment models **couples are neglected**  
**when they need help the most**

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### Trauma of Recovery

destabilized  
 fear and uncertainty

destabilization continues

couples are neglected  
 when they need help the most

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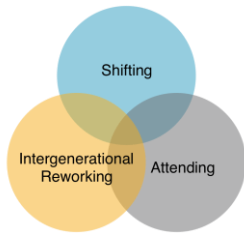
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### Couple Recovery Development Approach



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### Couple Development Recovery Approach

Shifting: Moving from an individual recovery focus towards an identity as a couple in recovery

Intergenerational Reworking: Explore impact of family of origin

Attending: Working on self-care and relationship-care

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**Couple Recovery  
Core Concepts**

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**Couple Recovery  
Typology**  
(Lewis & Byrd, 2001)

When assessing couples  
start by defining which  
type category they fall in

**Type 1**  
Both partners are in recovery, but they  
are in separate programs

**Type 2**  
Only one partner is in recovery

**Type 3**  
Abstinence only, neither  
partner is in recovery

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**New Category Proposal: Type 1+**



Both partners are in recovery, and they  
are working on a path toward couple  
recovery

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### The Three Components of Couple Recovery Include:

- 1. The person with the gambling use disorder recovery
- 2. The partner's recovery
- 3. The couple recovery




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### Codependency vs Interdependency

There are three different ways to manage and communicate reactions to partner's behaviors and emotions




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### Defining Codependency:

Behaviors like:

- 1. Manipulating and assuming responsibility for another's problem use
- 2. Enabling by protecting the other from the negative consequences of problematic use
- 3. Minimizing and Ignoring one's own needs
- 4. Avoiding and discounting feelings
- 5. Low self-esteem related to perfectionism - often because of a history of being criticized and blamed




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### Interdependency

Refers to partners agreeing to be able to express to one another their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and needs

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### Addiction Treatment is Trauma-Informed

This includes assessing for previous trauma, current trauma, and anticipating trauma

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### Addiction Treatment is Trauma-Informed

Direct impact and consequences of the trauma of addiction changes the partner's neural pathways often leading to

PTSD

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## Secondhand Harm

We need to change language to destigmatize SUDs for families, challenging the recovery label of codependency to include secondhand harm



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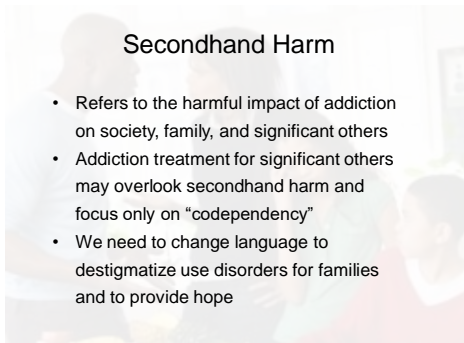
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## Secondhand Harm

- Refers to the harmful impact of addiction on society, family, and significant others
- Addiction treatment for significant others may overlook secondhand harm and focus only on "codependency"
- We need to change language to destigmatize use disorders for families and to provide hope



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## Interventions

1. Recovery Maps: My Recovery
2. Recovery Maps: Your Recovery
3. Recovery Maps: Our Recovery
4. Healing Emotions from Addiction Recovery and Trauma (HEART)



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## Recovery Maps Communication Guidelines

### **Speaker**

Share only what you are comfortable sharing

### **Listener: Empathy & Validation**

*Empathy:* to understand and share the speaker's feelings

*Validation:* accepting and respecting the speaker's emotions

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## 1. My Recovery



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**Counselor instructs each partner to share with the other something about their recovery that is important for the partner to know**

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## 2. Your Recovery

**Counselor instructs each partner to ask a question they have about the other's recovery.**

**Remind them to respect boundaries and reinforce permission to pass on the question or to say "I'll stop there"**

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### 3. Couple Recovery

**Counselor asks couple to agree to talk about some aspect of how recovery has impacted them as a couple or as a family sharing thoughts and feelings.**



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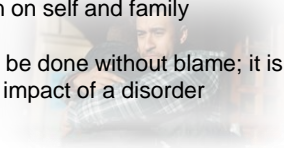
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### 4. Healing Emotions From Addiction Recovery and Trauma (HEART)

It is important for the person with addictive disorder and the partner to talk about the impact of addiction on self and family

This can be done without blame; it is about healing from the impact of a disorder



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### Healing Emotions From Addiction Recovery & Trauma

Have Both Partners Share: Keep It Dyadic

1. Describe a meaningful situation you remember during active addiction
2. Express feelings describing self not partner and how this affected you. Describe what you remember and how you felt at the time.



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## Healing Emotions From Addiction Recovery & Trauma

Have listener ask:

- *What can you tell me about how this event impacted you? Our relationship? Our family?*
- *What can you tell me about your feelings?*
- *What did you understand about addiction at the time?*
- *What do you understand about addiction now?*
- *What were your biggest concerns at the time?*
- *Are there any regrets?*
- *Has this reminded you of anything in your family history?*



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## Q & A



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