



BUILDING TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS

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Trust is built through being open about your life. Hiding in the shadows and keeping secrets will erode confidence and damage the rebuilding process. Being open and willing to address the underlying issues will go a long way to restore trust. People want approval, but because they are afraid of being rejected, they will sacrifice honesty to protect themselves. Talking about your fear of rejection may help you reconnect with others and rebuild trust. In this lesson we will discover what builds trust and what blocks it. We'll also explore some ways to get started rebuilding trust in your relationships.

**This mental health e-lesson is available at
journeytorecovery.com**



BUILDING TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Discover how dishonesty breaks trust
- Recognize emotional reasons people are dishonest and deceitful
- Explore strategies to build security, develop consistency, and rebuild trust

Mental health is made possible when we are honest with ourselves and with others. When truth is denied, trust is broken. Being open and honest in a relationship builds intimacy, while becoming defensive, argumentative, and resistant to change will damage it. Anger and counter-attacks create distrust and block both parties from hearing each other. Rebuilding trust with someone is not just a decision to be made, it is a lifestyle change that requires honesty with yourself and those you have hurt. Lying and cheating weaken the foundation of relationships and it is important to work out the issues sincerely and without anger, defensiveness, or assigning blame. Take full responsibility for your actions as an important first step to rebuild a solid foundation of trust.

With whom have you damaged trust? Describe what happened and include how it damaged the relationship.

Who has broken trust with you? Describe what happened and how you felt.

**TRUST EQUALS
BEHAVIOR
OVER TIME.**

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NOTES

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

Trust is built through being open about your life. Hiding in the shadows and keeping secrets will erode confidence and damage the rebuilding process. Talking about what you did, and why you did it, is helpful. Most people appreciate the truth and understand the importance of honesty. Being open and willing to address the underlying issues will go a long way to restore trust. People want approval, but because they are afraid of being rejected, they will sacrifice honesty to protect themselves. Talking about your fear of rejection may help you reconnect with others and rebuild trust.

UNDERSTANDING THE REBUILDING PROCESS

Trust is restored when you value a relationship more than protecting yourself from rejection. Many people are willing to sacrifice honesty and hide behind a lie in a misguided attempt to maintain a relationship. Someone may lie about or minimize their symptoms or tell someone they were sick, when in reality, they were depressed. Trust takes considerable time and work to establish. Being dishonest can have devastating consequences and ruin newly-built trust in moments.

Consider a piece of fine furniture that perhaps takes 40 hours to construct. It would only take 40 minutes to burn that piece completely into ashes. It would take seconds to smash it beyond use. Trust is like that piece of furniture. It takes a long time to build confidence, security, and safety into your relationship. But it can be damaged or ruined very quickly. Rebuilding trust also takes considerable time. It would be unreasonable to think you could damage trust with someone and they would immediately put their faith in you again. Because you are the one who damaged the trust of another, the burden of rebuilding and re-establishing that trust falls on you.

CONSISTENCY BUILDS TRUST

Trust equals behavior over time. Being dependable over a long period of time, creating and establishing a new reputation built on honesty and integrity, and living a transparent life without deception or secrets will rapidly build security in your relationships and rebuild trust. When you lie, your integrity is damaged, leaving people little reason to believe you. They are cautious and sensitive to new lies and betrayal. Being honest and consistent does the most to restore your relationships.

DISHONESTY ERODES TRUST

Since consistent behavior demonstrated over a period of time builds trust, it stands to reason every dishonest gesture and lie told damages your integrity. Look through the following list and use it as an inventory to identify past problems with honesty.

- I have lied about my mental health symptoms
- I have misused my prescription medications
- I have felt suicidal and would not admit it or talk about it
- I minimized my emotional problems



- I lied or cheated others to get what I wanted
- I've used guilt to manipulate others
- I wrongly blamed others for my actions
- I led others to believe I wasn't in any trouble with my mental health
- I've lied about how much or how often I used alcohol or drugs
- I deceived myself, saying my life was normal
- I stole from friends and family
- I had good intentions but didn't deliver
- I borrowed something but didn't return it
- I committed to something, didn't deliver, and lied about the reason
- I lied to retain approval or not lose a relationship
- I rejected help from others and said I didn't need it or they wouldn't understand
- I didn't honestly acknowledge the pain I was in
- I didn't honestly acknowledge the pain I caused
- I was dishonest about how troubled I was
- I dishonestly blamed others for the trouble I caused or the trouble I was in
- I've lied about where I was going or who I would be with
- I lied to avoid taking responsibility for my problems
- I distorted the truth or lied about my problems
- I lied about missing work
- Even when I was caught in a lie, I denied the truth
- I invented new lies to cover up my past lies
- I lied so much, I couldn't acknowledge the pattern or see it as a problem

Most people care about the truth, desire to be honest, and would say lying is wrong. They also genuinely want acceptance and approval. When those two values collide, a choice between honesty or approval is forced. Some people lie to retain approval. This strategy often backfires, causing further damage to the relationship.

TROUBLE WITH HONESTY

Being honest and acknowledging dishonesty is difficult. Consider the excuses and reasons below, and check the ones you have used.

- Others will not trust me if they knew how much I lied
- I'm ashamed of what I have done
- If I'm honest, they'll make me go to the hospital
- I don't want others to be hurt or upset
- No one needs to know my business
- I'd lose my job if they knew the truth
- What they don't know won't hurt them
- I'd lose the approval of others if they knew the truth
- I might lose an important relationship

**KEEP YOUR
WORD** and admit
when you don't.

BUILDING TRUST
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NOTES

- I am sad and ashamed about how much I have hurt others
- If the truth was known, I would get in even more trouble
- I've lied so much, I don't even know what is true any more
- Dishonesty has become a deeply entrenched habit
- I just can't admit the truth
- I blame others for my dishonesty and poor ability to follow-through

There are many emotional reasons that cause people to have trouble being upfront and truthful. However, there are more, and better, reasons for telling the truth and being honest.

CHANGING YOUR BEHAVIOR

The importance of being trustworthy cannot be overstated. It allows others to predict your future actions, confident you will have the best interest of the relationship in mind. Trust is built on the conviction and guarantee you will choose what is right, and building it is the necessary first step in laying a solid foundation for strong and healthy relationships.

Read through the list below. Choose three to five items that would serve as first steps to rebuild trust in your relationships.

- Say what you are going to do and then do it
- Don't minimize your faults or failings
- Honestly admit a return of symptoms or relapse
- Be willing to apologize and seek forgiveness
- Do not blame others for your faults and failings
- Aim to understand others, rather than defend yourself
- Be honest about medications and treatment efforts
- Be on time and don't lie when you are not
- Be transparent about where you were and who you were with
- When accused, don't counter attack
- Admit when you are wrong
- Don't brag or exaggerate your accomplishments or successes
- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Don't make excuses for poor behavior
- Be upfront and honest with finances and spending
- Give information before it is requested
- Be consistent with your words and your actions
- Be up-front about isolation and avoidance patterns

Write down the items you selected to help you rebuild trust with others.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

GETTING STARTED

Rebuilding trust takes time and patience. The first priority is to be consistent, dependable, and responsible for your own actions. Avoid re-injuring the other person or becoming defensive about your behavior. These six guidelines will help you restore relationships where trust has been violated.

1 Be consistent with your actions.
Trust is built when your behavior is predictable and your words and actions are reliable and dependable.

2 Admit what you did was wrong and harmful. Take full responsibility for your own actions.
Don't blame others for your mistakes. Own your behavior: "It was me. I did it. I was wrong. I'm sorry. Please forgive me." Blame shifting erodes confidence and decreases your trustworthiness.

3 Find out what the other person considers important and be responsive to what they need.
Being considerate and understanding of the needs of others shows you care about their interests and not just your own.

4 Expect a bumpy ride.
You may be accused, not forgiven, misunderstood, rejected, blamed, ridiculed, and gossiped about. Don't be shocked or over-react and do not be surprised by imperfect reactions to your previous imperfect actions.

5 Keep your word, and admit when you do not.
You are on a slippery slope when you make a mistake, cover it up with a lie, get caught, and invent a bigger lie to explain the first one. With every step along this progression, honesty is the best policy. Keep your word. If you are not able, or fail to keep your word, admit it quickly and sincerely.

6 Get help when you get stuck.
Some people deceive, lie, steal, minimize, and deny problems for so long it becomes their native language. Lying is as easy as falling down, but it takes great effort to tell the truth in difficult or compromising situations. If telling the truth consistently seems impossible, get help from a sponsor or counselor.

*It takes great effort to **TELL THE TRUTH.***

*Strong, lasting,
and rewarding
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NOTES

In your relationships that have been strained in the past, what can you do to rebuild trust in each one?

WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN HURT

Trust is a two-way street. Just as you have damaged relationships through dishonest and deceptive words and actions, others have likely betrayed and deceived you. In the same way, your willingness to trust them needs to be rebuilt over time. Draw a boundary and distance yourself from someone who repeatedly demonstrates they are untrustworthy. Giving your jewelry to a jewel thief is not trust, it is bad judgment. Keep your distance until they have changed their track record and can be trusted again. If they fail to change behavior, take it as an indicator your boundary needs to stay in place.

With whom do you need to limit contact or set firm boundaries?

In what area of life could you set limits or better boundaries?

AN HONEST EFFORT

Stay honest with yourself and with others. Emotional health is built on personal and relational integrity and transparency. Examine yourself honestly and reveal yourself accurately. Trust is a foundational piece of any long-lasting, intimate relationship, and is well worth the effort to develop. Start by being intentional and making commitments and plans that require follow-through and perseverance. Strong, lasting, and rewarding relationships are built, not discovered.