

Regaining Your Credibility - How to Get Honest In Recovery

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Many people, while active in addiction, engage in deceptive, dishonest behavior, and diversionary tactics. These are part and parcel of addiction and the need to keep the extent of their problem hidden. It is difficult to juggle all the demands of being addicted with all the "normal" demands of living, plus hiding the addiction from others. Other people in an addict's life are affected by the addiction. Conflict is inevitable.

Performance in various areas of an addict's life begins to slip as the disease progresses. The addict feels compelled to do whatever is necessary to maintain the status quo, keep up appearances and/or keep going. Deception and dishonesty often become the norm rather than the exception.

Use these questions to identify ways that the disease has impacted your ability to be honest and how your dishonesty may have undermined your credibility:

Identify your pre-recovery dishonesty.

What kinds of things did you do to hide your addiction? How were you dishonest in word and in deed? Who did you lie to? What were the lies you told. Did you lie when it didn't even matter to your consequences? Were you in a habit of lying?

What other kinds of things were you dishonest about?

Did you stubbornly persist in a lie when you were aware that your significant other knew you were lying? When this happened, did you move into an "offense position", exclaiming your innocence and being offended because you were questioned, accused, or called a liar? Did you believe that your "word" was enough to convince someone to not trust their own intelligence and experience, and to believe you instead of themselves?

When you were being dishonest were you acting outside your own value system? How did that affect you? What did you think and feel about yourself?

What did you do with the feelings that were generated by your dishonesty and the betrayal of your values? Did you just use more of your drug of choice to not feel your feelings? Did you project your feelings on to the person?

Identify your current dishonest behavior.

Now that you are in recovery, what are you still being dishonest about? Who are you lying to? Are you being dishonest about the effects of the disease on your life and the lives of significant others? Are you being dishonest with yourself and/or others about the damage caused by your disease?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Who has my disease harmed? How? What explanation am I giving them? What have I done to make amends? If I am avoiding amends, why? What am I afraid will happen or not happen?

Sometimes people in early recovery continue to employ defense mechanisms that allow them to distort their reality. An example might be rationalizing that making amends to a loved one about stealing from them to buy drugs would only hurt them more. In reality the addict does not want to deal with the guilt and shame of her behavior and to humble herself by making amends. She fears that she will be lessened in the eyes of her loved one and will be rejected.

Identify your defense mechanisms and justifications for not being honest at this point in your recovery. Examples of defenses include: outright denial, rationalization, intellectualization, justification, blaming, minimization, projection of anger or hostility.

Are you being dishonest about your recovery efforts or some other areas or issues in your life?

Identify ways that your resistance to be honest could jeopardize your recovery.

Recovery is not possible without honesty. If you are working on identifying the people you have harmed and are in the process of making amends to them, the experienced guidance of a sponsor could come in very handy at this point. Most people need some direct guidance and feedback during the process of making amends.

How to get real in recovery

Identify any positive effects that could come from taking the risk to be honest about the things that you are dragging your feet about.

If you have anxiety about taking the risk to be honest about something you have been avoiding, write yourself a script on how to broach the subject and what you want to say.

Identify the probable best time to do this and make a plan on how to carry it out.

Keep your message about yourself. Do not blame the other person or anyone else.

Say it simply without a lot of extraneous and confusing details. Don't defend your behavior or analyze it. Tell him or her what you need to say, then make amends.

Continue to practice developing your honesty skills by reviewing daily when you were and were not honest.

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