

Couples Communication Builder

Building Trust & Connection in Recovery

For the Partner in Recovery & the Supporting Partner

The Recovery Files — Embrace, Empower & Evolve

This is your private, interactive communication tool. Work through each section together or individually, then share your responses.

How this builder is organised

- Getting Started
- Communication Agreements
- Daily Check-In
- Trust Building
- Communication Skills
- Recovery Navigation
- Growing Together
- Journal Prompts

Nothing has to be done in order.

Getting Started

How this builder works and what you are committing to together.

How to Use This Builder

- Each section has exercises for both partners — answer separately then discuss
- Shared exercises are meant to be completed together

Our commitment to this work (write together)

Communication Agreements

Healthy communication requires shared rules. Review these together and create your own.

Core Communication Guidelines

Ground Rules:

- One person speaks at a time — no interrupting
- Use "I" statements, not "you" accusations
- Take time-outs when emotions run high — agree to return within 30 minutes
- No name-calling, contempt, or stonewalling
- Assume good intent unless proven otherwise
- Repair quickly after conflict
- What we share here stays between us

Partner in Recovery — personal communication commitment:

Supporting Partner — personal communication commitment:

Our additional agreements (together)

Daily Check-In

A short daily check-in creates connection and catches problems before they escalate.

The Daily 5-Minute Check-In

Five Questions to Ask Each Other Daily:

- 1. How are you feeling right now — emotionally and physically?
- 2. What went well for you today?
- 3. What was challenging?
- 4. What do you need from me today?
- 5. One thing I appreciate about you today...

Partner in Recovery — today's check-in:

Supporting Partner — today's check-in:

Our agreed check-in time and place

Trust Building

Trust is rebuilt one consistent action at a time. These exercises help you name what trust means and how to restore it.

What Trust Means to Each of Us

Trust is not rebuilt by words — it is rebuilt by consistent behavior over time. It requires patience from both partners.

Partner in Recovery — what does trust mean to you?

Supporting Partner — what does trust mean to you?

Partner in Recovery — what actions would help rebuild trust for you?

Supporting Partner — what actions would help rebuild trust for you?

Three trust-building actions we commit to (together)

Honesty & Transparency

- Honesty is not brutal — it can be kind and clear at the same time
- Transparency means no secrets that affect the relationship
- You can be honest about feelings without blaming
- Timing matters — choose the right moment for hard conversations

Partner in Recovery — where do you sometimes hold back the full truth?

Supporting Partner — where do you sometimes hold back the full truth?

Partner in Recovery — what makes it easier to be fully honest?

Supporting Partner — what makes it easier to be fully honest?

Accountability & Follow-Through

The Accountability Loop:

- 1. Make a commitment clearly
- 2. Follow through — or communicate early if you can't
- 3. Acknowledge when you missed the mark
- 4. Repair without over-explaining
- 5. Re-commit

Partner in Recovery — an area where you want to be more accountable:

Supporting Partner — an area where you want to be more accountable:

Our accountability system

Communication Skills

Practical tools for expressing needs, listening actively, navigating hard conversations, and repairing after conflict.

Expressing Needs & Feelings

The "I" Statement Formula:

"I feel [emotion] when [situation], and what I need is [specific request]."

Partner in Recovery — a need you haven't fully expressed:

Supporting Partner — a need you haven't fully expressed:

Partner in Recovery — emotions you find hardest to express:

Supporting Partner — emotions you find hardest to express:

Active Listening

Active Listening Looks Like:

- Making eye contact and putting devices down
- Not planning your response while they speak
- Reflecting back: "What I heard you say is..."
- Asking: "Is there more?"
- Validating: "That makes sense that you feel that way"

Partner in Recovery — where do you struggle to listen?

Supporting Partner — where do you struggle to listen?

Listening practice — one partner shares for 3 minutes, the other reflects back (write reflections here)

Navigating Difficult Conversations

Rules for Hard Conversations:

- Schedule it — don't ambush each other
- Start with curiosity, not accusation
- One issue at a time
- Take breaks if emotions flood
- End with something positive

Partner in Recovery — a topic you've been avoiding:

Supporting Partner — a topic you've been avoiding:

Our time-out agreement

Repair After Conflict

The Repair Sequence:

- 1. Acknowledge what happened
- 2. Own your part

- 3. Express the impact on the other person
- 4. Ask what's needed right now
- 5. Re-connect

Partner in Recovery — your typical conflict pattern:

Supporting Partner — your typical conflict pattern:

Our repair ritual (how we come back together after conflict)

Recovery Navigation

Recovery affects both partners. These exercises build shared understanding and healthy support structures.

Understanding Recovery Together

- Recovery is not linear — hard days happen even in sobriety
- The brain takes time to heal — emotional sensitivity is normal in early recovery
- The supporting partner carries their own wounds and needs healing too
- Recovery is a shared journey, not one person's problem to solve alone

Partner in Recovery — the hardest part of recovery for you right now:

Supporting Partner — the hardest part to understand or accept about recovery:

What recovery as a team looks like for us

Triggers, Boundaries & Safety

Boundaries are not walls — they are guidelines that protect both partners and the relationship.

Partner in Recovery — recovery triggers (situations that put sobriety at risk)

Supporting Partner — emotional triggers in this relationship

Our shared boundaries (what protects both of us)

Supporting Without Enabling

Support looks like:

- Encouraging recovery activities
- Being present without controlling
- Setting loving limits
- Taking care of yourself too

Enabling looks like:

- Making excuses for behavior
- Managing consequences for them
- Ignoring warning signs
- Losing yourself in their recovery

Partner in Recovery — what support looks like vs. what feels controlling:

Supporting Partner — ways you may have been enabling without realizing:

Growing Together

Vision, gratitude, and intimacy — the building blocks of a thriving partnership in recovery.

Shared Vision & Goals

Partner in Recovery — your vision for this relationship in 1 year:

Supporting Partner — your vision for this relationship in 1 year:

Three shared goals we're working toward

Our relationship dream — the life we're building

Gratitude & Appreciation

Research shows couples who express appreciation daily are significantly more satisfied. Gratitude trains the brain to notice the positive — even in hard times.

Partner in Recovery — five things you appreciate about Supporting Partner:

Supporting Partner — five things you appreciate about Partner in Recovery:

Our daily gratitude ritual

Intimacy & Reconnection

- Emotional intimacy always comes before physical intimacy
- Small moments of connection rebuild closeness
- It's normal for intimacy to change in early recovery
- Communicate openly about needs and pace without pressure

Partner in Recovery — what helps you feel emotionally close to Supporting Partner:

Supporting Partner — what helps you feel emotionally close to Partner in Recovery:

Our daily connection rituals

Journal Prompts

Answer separately then share, or write together. Go at your own pace.

Couples Journal Prompts

The moment I knew this relationship was worth fighting for:

Partner in Recovery

Supporting Partner

A time I felt truly heard by you:
Partner in Recovery

Supporting Partner

What I wish you knew about how I'm really doing:
Partner in Recovery

Supporting Partner

A fear I have about our future I haven't said out loud:
Partner in Recovery

Supporting Partner

The version of us I'm working toward:

Partner in Recovery

Supporting Partner

Something I've never thanked you for:

Partner in Recovery

Supporting Partner

Our Progress Together

What we've learned about each other through this process
