

Honesty

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

★ Circle one answer for each question.

1. Your 10-year-old daughter gets upset when you drink. She asks, "Did you drink today?" (and you did).
Would you: (a) Tell the truth? (b) Lie?
2. Your therapist says something that makes you mad.
Would you: (a) Tell the truth? (b) Say nothing?
3. Using a substance will get you evicted from your halfway house. You use cocaine one night. At the daily check-in the next day:
Would you: (a) Tell the truth? (b) Lie?

How many "a" answers? ___ How many "b" answers? ___

ABOUT HONESTY

Why is honesty important?

- It promotes recovery.
- It helps you respect yourself.
- It improves your relationships.
- Other reasons: _____

What is the cost of dishonesty?

- It keeps you hidden and alone—people don't know what's really going on with you.
- It makes you feel ashamed—it's hard to respect yourself when you're lying.
- It can hurt other people—they may feel betrayed when they find out.
- Other costs: _____

In both PTSD and substance abuse, honesty may be very difficult. Dishonesty is usually an attempt to protect oneself.

People with substance abuse may lie to feel better about themselves.

Dishonesty with others: Minimizing your drug use; cheating on urine testing.

Dishonesty with yourself: Denying that you have a problem with substances; telling yourself, "I can have just one drink."

People with PTSD may lie to avoid pain.

Dishonesty with others: Pretending to feel okay when you don't; keeping family secrets about abuse.

Dishonesty with yourself: Not facing what happened because it feels too painful; staying in an abusive relationship rather than leaving.

The foundation for all honesty is being true to yourself. Honesty with others first requires honesty with self: "owning" your own needs, recognizing your feelings.

(cont.)

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There are two ways to be dishonest:

- ◆ *Active lying:* You say something that isn't true. For example, you say you didn't use drugs when you did.
- ◆ *Passive lying:* You don't say something that is true. For example, you are angry at a friend, but you don't tell the person.

There are times when it's okay not to be honest:

- * When being honest is not safe (e.g., your partner will beat you).
- * When you have tried before and found the person could not "hear" you (e.g., telling your mother about your trauma).
- * When full honesty is not necessary (e.g., early in a dating relationship, you may not want to reveal your past trauma and substance abuse).

Honesty and relationships. Honesty in a relationship is like water and sun to a plant—essential for its survival. When people don't express what they really think and feel, eventually the relationship will die out. Also, if you avoid honesty, you may end up exploding with anger or acting out your feelings through actions (e.g., you are mad at your friend, so you show up late).

HOW TO BE MORE HONEST

☞ ***Recognize that honesty with yourself and others is essential for recovery.***

☞ ***Say your views calmly and kindly.*** No put-downs, sarcasm, or yelling.

☞ ***Use "I" statements:*** "I feel," "I think," "I want."

☞ ***Be specific:*** "I'd like you to stop making racist comments," or "I'd like you to stop offering me drugs."

☞ ***Emphasize positives that might help the person hear you better.*** For example, you might want to say that you believe that being honest will help the relationship.

☞ ***If you get a bad reaction, do whatever you need to do to protect yourself.*** Stand your ground, leave the situation, or decide that the other person can't hear you right now. But don't blame yourself. You tried something important and deserve to give yourself credit for that.

☞ ***A key point: Honesty is worthwhile even if others do not respond well.*** Honesty is a liberating emotional experience that is independent of how others react. Although it is nice if others accept your honesty, just by being honest you are being true to yourself, trying to help them know you in a genuine way, and "owning" your part of the relationship. These are values that go beyond what one gets in return. The twelve steps of AA, and all of the world's religions and ethical systems, value honesty for its own sake; there is a lot of wisdom to that.

★ *List on the back of this page any current situations where you want to be more honest.* Examples might include telling your therapist how you really feel; telling yourself that it's not safe for you to use drugs; telling someone that you feel angry.