

Activity 11-5: Recovery Attitudes Questionnaire

The Recovery Attitudes Questionnaire (RAQ-16) was developed by a team of consumers, service providers and researchers at the Hamilton County Recovery Initiative (Borkin et al, 2000).

The RAQ-16 consists of 16 questions designed to help you identify and think about your own beliefs and attitudes about recovery from concurrent disorders. There are no right or wrong answers. After you finish the questionnaire, read through the comments about each question that follow. They are meant to help you reflect on your responses. Try to complete the questionnaire before reading the comments.

Recovery is a process and experience that we all share. People face the challenge of recovery when they experience the crises of life, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, physical disabilities and serious mental illnesses. Successful recovery does not change the fact that the experience has occurred, that the effects are still present, and that one’s life has changed forever. Rather, successful recovery means that the person has changed, and that the meaning of these events to the person has also changed. They are no longer the primary focus of the person’s life (Anthony, 1993).

Please read each of the following statements and, using the scale below, circle the rating that most closely matches your opinion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. People who are in recovery need the support of others.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2. Recovering from mental illness is possible no matter what you think may cause it.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3. A good understanding of one’s mental illness helps in recovery.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4. To recover requires faith.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5. Recovery can occur even if symptoms of mental illness are present.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Recovery

6. People in recovery sometimes have setbacks.	SA	A	N	D	SD
7. People differ in the way they recover from a mental illness.	SA	A	N	D	SD
8. Recovering from mental illness can occur without help from mental health professionals.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. All people with serious mental illnesses can strive for recovery.	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. People who recover from mental illness were not really mentally ill in the first place.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. The recovery process requires hope.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12. Recovery does not mean going back to the way things used to be.	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. Stigma associated with mental illness can slow the recovery process.	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. Recovering from the consequences of mental illness is sometimes more difficult than recovering from the illness itself.	SA	A	N	D	SD
15. The family may need to recover from the impact of a loved one's mental illness.	SA	A	N	D	SD
16. To recover requires courage.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Comments about each question are provided below. You may not agree with all of them. They are included simply as a way to help you think about the different ideas of recovery.

COMMENTS

1. People who are in recovery need the support of others.

Feeling a sense of connection to people, such as other family members, friends and professionals, is very important to re-create a sense of belonging and closeness. We humans are social beings. We are most content and fulfilled when engaged in meaningful relationships with others. Support from people who are non-judgmental, compassionate and who accept concurrent disorders as legitimate illnesses from which a person can recover is crucial to the recovery of both consumers and their families.

2. Recovering from mental illness is possible no matter what you think may cause it.

Concurrent disorders are generally a result of a complex mix of hereditary, genetic, biological, psychological and social factors. However, people can sometimes hold mistaken beliefs about the causes of these disorders. This journey of recovery may take different paths and look very different from person to person, but yes, it is a definite possibility regardless of one's beliefs about the causes.

3. A good understanding of one's mental illness helps in recovery.

The experience of mental illness is often filled with fear and anxiety, grief and loss, altered expectations and dramatic changes in one's perception of oneself as a human being. These feelings increase when a substance use disorder is also involved. For many people with concurrent disorders and their families, becoming educated about concurrent disorders is essential for gaining a sense of control over these conditions and for recovery. It's important to learn about the signs, symptoms and effects of mental health and substance use disorders, possible causes, treatment methods, and the possibility for recovery.

4. To recover requires faith.

"Faith" holds many meanings. Some people may think that believing in a higher being or following a particular religion is necessary for recovery. However, for many people, "faith" may simply mean believing in yourself, having hope for a better future and believing in the people around you who care about you and want to help you.

Recovery

5. Recovery can occur even if symptoms are present.

Recovery from concurrent disorders doesn't necessarily mean that people will never again experience symptoms, go through hard times or relapse. Recovery implies learning from these experiences and having the courage to move forward in spite of them. Many people reach their goals and realize their dreams even if they have setbacks along the way.

6. People in recovery sometimes have setbacks.

As discussed above, people with concurrent disorders will likely have setbacks from time to time. This is not a sign of failure, but an opportunity to learn about potential triggers and sources of stress, and perhaps new and more effective ways to manage difficult aspects of life.

7. People differ in the way they recover from a mental illness.

"Recovery" means different things to different people. Some may recognize the importance of psychiatric medication for their recovery, while others may need more intensive ongoing support from health care professionals. Some people want to return to work, while others find work too stressful and become involved in self-help groups or other community support activities. Some people hold on to strong spiritual beliefs, while others find that simply enjoying the company of a pet or close friend sustains them. No two people recover in the same way.

8. Recovering from mental illness can occur without help from mental health professionals.

Many people in recovery from concurrent disorders will have contact with health care professionals at some point. Finding and working with compassionate and understanding health care professionals who respect clients' unique needs and goals is often very important to beginning the journey of recovery and to maintaining the gains that one makes. This contact with professionals may be intensive and continuous, as some clients may be part of supportive outpatient programs or have the ongoing help of a community case manager. Some clients may see a physician only once in a while, to obtain prescriptions for psychiatric medications. The type of contact may also change over time. As people become stronger and more comfortable in managing their illnesses and their daily lives, they may have less involvement with professionals and eventually may wish to stop seeing them, except in cases of relapse or more difficult times.

Some people recover without the services of health care professionals. They may have milder forms of mental illness and may be able to reduce or control their problematic substance use so that these problems do not significantly disrupt their lives. Some in this group find that attending self-help groups and maintaining close and supportive relationships with family and friends is enough for them to enjoy a life of recovery.

9. All people with serious mental illnesses can strive for recovery.

Yes. Any person with mental health (and substance use disorders) can work toward a life of recovery. Each person has the capacity for hope, for a sense of acceptance and belonging, and for goals and dreams.

10. People who recover from mental illness were not really mentally ill in the first place.

The old belief in the chronic and hopeless nature of mental illness and substance use problems has been challenged. The fact is that people with concurrent disorders can enter a life of recovery that involves emotional stability, good physical health, meaningful social and work-related activities and close, supportive relationships. It is no longer true that people with serious mental illnesses and substance use problems are on a downward course to chronic disability. People with very serious forms of mental illness and substance use disorders can indeed recover.

11. The recovery process requires hope.

Hope involves believing in your ability to overcome difficulties and looking to the future with optimism that recovery is possible. Having hope is considered fundamental to achieving and maintaining a life of recovery.

12. Recovery does not mean going back to the way things used to be.

Some people who are in recovery may be able to return to their former activities, such as the same jobs, school, friends and social interests. On the other hand, recovery does not necessarily mean going back to exactly the same activities, beliefs and overall lives as in the past. For many people, being in recovery often involves establishing a new and different or altered set of goals and dreams—a different job, a different school, new friends and social interests. People may find that their priorities have changed dramatically from the way they used to think.

13. Stigma associated with mental illness can slow the recovery process.

Stigma and discrimination can have devastating and destructive consequences for those with concurrent disorders and their families. Stigma and discrimination can definitely act as major obstacles to recovery. Stigma can make people lose confidence in themselves, undermine their attempts to reintegrate into the community and, in some cases, can even lead to such despair that a relapse occurs. It can also cause families to isolate themselves from others and feel shame and embarrassment.

Recovery

14. Recovering from the consequences of mental illness is sometimes more difficult than recovering from the illness itself.

The consequences of mental illness or substance use can vary dramatically. Some people may experience milder consequences, such as short leaves from school or work, taking medications or being hospitalized for a short time. Others may experience significant effects that might include jeopardized family relationships, loss of meaningful people in their lives, frequent and lengthy hospitalizations, inability to work or attend school, involvement in the legal system, medical problems, and so on. Once a person has become emotionally, mentally and physically stable, the person may have to deal with these consequences. This can cause more stress and anxiety, and possibly lead to despair, a sense of failure and relapse. This is why it is important to remember that recovery involves paying attention to the whole person—all of his or her needs, all areas of the person's life that have been affected. These can all be included in a comprehensive recovery plan.

15. The family may need to recover from the impact of a loved one's mental illness.

Ideally, this chapter will have helped you realize the importance of recovery for yourself as well. We have discussed the effects of concurrent disorders on family members, ranging from physical to emotional, social, occupational, economic and spiritual. It is very important for family members to allow themselves to recover their sense of emotional stability, feelings of control, peace of mind and an overall sense of well-being as they experience the effects of concurrent disorders.

16. To recover requires courage.

Having the courage to move forward in life despite experiencing the effects of both a substance use and a mental health problem is fundamental to the idea of recovery. Every seemingly small step forward, from getting out of bed in the morning, to getting through the day without using drugs, taking the bus to a community support program, calling up a friend, taking medications, going back to work, etc., requires more courage than most of us could ever imagine trying to muster.