



## HOW TO LIVE WITH IMPERFECT PEOPLE

**Goal:** The goal of the Handout is to teach recovering food addicts how to stay calm and detached in the face of other people's behavior. This is important as relationship stress has been shown to be a leading cause of relapse into overeating.

**Application:** Often, food addicts have turned to food from early childhood to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Thus we grow up without learning non-food methods of managing relationships. This hand-out can be used to assure food addicts in recovery that relationship management is possible and desirable by following a few key concepts. Food addicts can also apply these approaches to avoid stress and prevent the activation of cravings.

**When to walk away and when to stay.** There are two key determinants that help food addicts decide whether or not to disengage from and or stay present to a situation. If the situation is abusive, we need to protect ourselves. Any threat of physical abuse can be an indicator that departure is prudent. Emotional abuse such as name-calling, angry accusations, or threats are also reasons to leave.

In the absence of these damaging actions, it may be worthwhile to listen, and then wait for a day before making decisions about further actions. Taking a walk, listening to a meditation, praying, writing the Eight Healing Questions, or doing a craft is also a good way to bring the brain back to a level place. If no threats are present, then feelings of fear and anger may be rising from another time of life and not necessarily applicable to the current situation. Because feelings may not be applicable to the current situation, we might miss something important if we leave because of them.

**Be aware of projections.** Projections occur when we see a current situation through the experiences of another situation. We might see someone through the lens of our experiences with another person. It's very easy for us to be reminded of other people, particularly family members, in a current situation. When this happens, we make assumptions about what the person is thinking, feeling, and motivating based on what we learned in old relationships. This can be particularly distorting if we were children when the learning occurred. We might have a feeling of helplessness, or powerlessness even though in recovery we have lots of tools and strengths for dealing with situations.

**Use the 'I heard you say' technique.** This technique is another way to break through habitual feelings from the past and become centered on the present. After each sentence, just try to repeat what the person said to you. Start the sentence with 'What I heard you say is...'. This allows you to hear what's going on in the moment and not rearrange words to fit a perception from the past. It slows down the conversation so each person can be calmer. The person speaking can also hear whether their own words are what they actually meant to say. It can clear up confusion as words can often be interpreted in a number of different ways. Sometimes, using 'I heard you say...' can resolve a situation peacefully if the speaker just needed to be heard.

**Give yourself time to reflect and get more information.** Particularly in early stage recovery, 'hangover' emotions may drive perceptions. Hangover emotions just means emotions that stem from biological reactions such as the release of neurotransmitters and hormones or changes in glucose levels. By the nature of the brain damage associated with processed foods, the brains of food addicts are conditioned to negativity because of down-regulated pleasure pathways as well as unstable hormones and glucose. Hangover emotions are as opposed to emotions that are driven by events in the moment.

These 'hangover' emotions are experienced as real and may even drive decisions. In time, food addicts develop serenity in the face of all kinds of behaviors from people around them.

It is also helpful to remember that processed foods damage the restraint centers in the brain. Just like it's hard to restrain the urge to act on a craving, it might be hard to resist acting on an emotion. The brain can repair from this. With stable neurotransmitters and hormones, we can detach and observe behaviors without judging the behaviors or being afraid of them. However, just like learning a food plan, learning detached compassion takes time and practice. Just like we clear our homes from cues to relapse into foods, we also clear our hearts and minds from judgments which might cause us to relapse into fear and anger and immediate decisions.

**Use 'I' statements.** This just means start sentences with the word 'I' so you can understand what's going on with yourself. Self-knowledge is a key to serenity. 'I' statements help us figure out whether we're in the past or present. Starting sentences with 'You' may be an indication of projection. 'I feel' and 'I would like' are good ways to start a sentence. Basic emotions are mad, sad, glad, afraid, ashamed, guilty, and lonely. If you're think you're in an emotion which is irrational or based on old habits, you can write out the Eight Questions to transform the feeling into one that you like better. Avoid the trap of 'I think that *you...*' *Keep the statement about your own feelings and perceptions.*

**When in doubt, apologize.** Apologizing is a powerful self-approval tool. Just like working a food plan, using new approaches takes time and practice. We're not likely to get it the way we want it right away. Apologizing keeps us from criticizing ourselves. It allows us to accept that we're learning and making progress. If you're not sure whether an apology is due, then err on the side of apologizing.

Employing these approaches may seem awkward at first, but soon they will become the new normal. You'll be proud of your ability to be present for inappropriate behavior and remain calm. It is so nice to be able to say, 'I need 24 hours and a conversation with someone else to figure out what happened here.' If you're experiencing discomfort in an Intensive setting, please PM Joan Ifland to talk about it. We have a head start on this process because we've already learned how to calm ourselves in defence of food cravings. Using the same calming-cues will help us manage relationships as well. We can do this.