

## RELATIONSHIPS PRE AND POST BARIATRIC SURGERY - HANDOUT

### Examples of Dynamic Relationship Changes Pre- and Post-Bariatric Surgery

#### Self

The **far most important relationship change** that you can have before and/or after surgery – is the one you have with yourself. Those **older patterns of being neglectful or berating** the self, are being asked to be changed to ones of **empowerment and in the most kind, caring, and loving way**. The internal messages or the inner critic need compassion and understanding. Life can be tough when we allow shame, blame, and harshness to take over. **Becoming aware of how we treat ourselves** is the first way to reawaken those parts of the self that want to be heard and discovered.

Developing newer ways of viewing the self can lead to **higher levels of peace, satisfaction** in life and **overall happiness**. Support groups, counselors, coaches, friends or family can help support the changes you are making. Don't ever be afraid to reach out to ask for help if needed.

*No one else or even anything else (new house, car, job) can ever “make” you happy or sad. That is a choice that you hold within yourself! Developing, growing and ever evolving is paramount!*

#### Spouse/Significant Other

This is the **person with the most at stake for change** in your life. They care about you, but they are also **“losing” some version of you**. Their perception and your perception of **who you are** may be changing. A whole new you may be developing. The **older version is transforming** – not only physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Some **fear that the change will affect their own power**. They or you may sense a change in the way that you interact as you take back your own power. They may consider the changes as a certain type of **“rejection”**, even if you feel you haven't taken them for granted and treated them with kindness and affection.

**Spouses can react in many different ways**, but they usually adjust if you do. Again, leading back to the relationship you have with yourself. **If you are secure with who you are, they adjust accordingly**. Support groups sometimes invite spouses (most are happy for the perspective) and some programs have separate events for spouses. Many programs now even have a consent process before surgery, which can take some pressure off you to get them to understand the basics.

When it comes down to it, **strong relationships can grow under stress, but weak relationships may likely grow apart or fail**. Being **open and honest with yourself and your loved ones** can be a tremendous catalyst as change occurs. Including them during the process can be helpful. Counseling may benefit you and them if that is needed.



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### Parents

If your mom is alive, she may be the **toughest to convince**. Her **“baby” is always going to be the center of her world**. No matter what age you may be, she may make it known that her decision is important in this matter. It may be **difficult** for her to make a **non-emotional assessment of the risks versus the benefits**, even with current overwhelming evidence that **quality of life** supersedes most expectations.

The second issue can be the **reflection on her**. Often, moms can have hurt feelings if they **perceive that they created the problem** (even if you never said such a thing). Or it is **possible that jealousy may come into play** if she sees all the attention shifted to you.

The **biggest thing to remember is not to give up on your parents**, because they can be your **“rock”** afterwards even if they aren't necessarily accepting the idea of surgery beforehand.

Dads are so varied. Sometimes they express **fear by withdrawing**, and that can seem like disapproval. They are **often the slowest to share** but can be your **most vocal supporter** once they see how you are able to use your weight-loss surgery tool functionally. This relationship can be hard to predict, but often it is dependent on the relationship prior to surgery. **Foster the positives and let go of the negatives.**

### Children and Siblings

So many different family systems are around today, it is **probably hardest to predict** how your kids and siblings will react. In regard to siblings, and for me, one of the biggest shifts was how I **perceived myself** within my family group. I always considered myself “the biggest” and after my weight loss, I found myself feeling like I more easily fit in or was “more the same size”. I don't believe they ever judged me; it was me judging me. My siblings were always super supportive. Many times, if siblings also have weight issues, **you may inspire them into weight loss or having weight loss surgery**. Your successes may motivate them to know that they also **“can do it”**.

The other issue with **kids or grandkids** in the home is the grocery shopping and pantry. Or it may be when you are going out of the house to eat. It **may not be fair to ask them to deprive themselves for you, but it is also not fair to you to have to always be tempted**. Compromise happens from both sides, and in a loving, functional way. You can likely find some treats for them that don't appeal as much to you, and they can follow some basic household rules to keep you from temptations.



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### Work Friends

Work relationships can vary... **There are so many different types.** Many times, co-workers **join together to have surgery or lose weight together**, other times, you may find that relationships may feel **threatened** or become altered by **jealousy**.

Some have mentioned that they felt they were being **“watched” carefully**. You have to remember that your own self-judgement plays into these relationships. As you **monitor how you feel and respond directly to that**, you may off-play many of the uncomfortable situations that may arise.

You may also find that many around you may just completely **admire and greatly respect** you. For the small changes may be also affecting your overall quality of life and your attitude, including with the work you do.

### Old Friends

Friend relationships **may fall away, and new ones develop** as the relationship with we have with ourselves change. Don't worry about those who no longer enjoy the same things that you do, as **new people will pop into your experience**. For **those who do stick around**, it's likely that they already have a healthy respect for you (and themselves) and may be your **biggest supporters and cheer leaders!**

For those that **do challenge your transformation**, you may hear things like...

- “are you sick” (due to a quickly changing body and rapid weight loss)
- “you need to stop losing weight” (because they are struggling to see the new evolved person you are becoming)
- “your weight is making you look shriveled, look at all those wrinkles” (they don't understand that weight loss positively affects your health more than just the physical implications of losing)

*Remember, in the end, it's **not what other people think of you... but what you think of you!** How you respond can benefit you and also the person that you are talking to. You might help them better understand what you are going through and the underlying “why” you had surgery.*

### Strangers/New Friends

Sometimes **it seems appropriate to introduce** the issue with people you meet casually and **sometimes it isn't**. Listening to your gut instincts is important if you want the direction of the conversation to go well.



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### Some questions that you may want to ask yourself...

- What are your intentions for bringing up the subject?
- By being transparent and sharing, will this better facilitate your conversation?
- Will it help them in some way?
- Will it allow them to be more accepting of the idea of surgery?
- Will it inspire them in their journey?
- Will it promote them to have weight loss surgery?
- And importantly, will it help them understand you on a deeper level?

If you answer **yes, to any - then share**, if you **answer no to all of these... then you may want to wait until the right timing to share**. It's ok to disclose or even not disclose that you have had surgery. It's a personal thing!

### Program Team and Surgeon

Once you are **through surgical recovery and the bandages are off, your relationship with the team changes**. All of the pre-work has been done and now it's your team backing you up for your greatest successes. Many times, patients are uncomfortable because they **worry that coming back for their follow-ups that they will be judged in some way**. They feel vulnerable about talking candidly about real issues... sometimes it's medical issues and sometimes it's that some may feel that they are not losing fast enough or concerned that they are gaining weight back.

If you have a good team, you will find that **they are there to work "for you"**. By being honest with them and yourself, you will have the support you need to problem solve through most any issue! They have likely seen it all and can get you the resources you need to keep you on the track to where it is that you want to go.

Resource:

Walter Medlin, MD, FACS, (2011). Relationship Changes Before and After Weight Loss Surgery.

OAC website, accessed 8/21/20 at: <https://www.obesityaction.org/community/article-library/relationship-challenges-before-and-after-weight-loss-surgery/>

