

Sex Addicts Anonymous and the Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual / Transgender Sex Addict

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A Message of Hope for Sex Addicts
in the LGBT Communities

Literature Committee Approved

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A Message of Hope for Sex Addict's in the LGBT Communities

DO I HAVE A PROBLEM?

Sexual addiction is often characterized by our Inability to control sexual thinking and behaviors which result in destructive or negative consequences. Sex addicts usually find that these compulsive sexual behaviors and obsessive thoughts are progressive in that they worsen over time, and despite efforts to control the behaviors we are ultimately unable to stop on our own.

Both addictive and healthy behaviors exist in all sexual orientations and gender identities, and are not specific to any one group or population.

Addictive sexual behaviors within the LGBT communities may be influenced by the same factors which affect many non-LGBT persons such as ostracism, shame, fear, guilt, and isolation. Growing up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender into a society that lacks acceptance of our sexual orientations or gender identifications may heighten these factors, yet they cannot be used as a valid excuse for continuing in self-destructive conduct.

Some of our addictive sexual behaviors may include but are not limited to:

Compulsive masturbation, anonymous sex, acting out in bathhouses, backroom bars and strip clubs, sex in gyms and steam rooms; pursuing group sex, patronizing adult bookstores, cybersex, sex texting ("sexting") and other sexual phone/electronic activities, compulsive use of pornography websites, Internet hookups and chat rooms; prostitution, compulsive cross-dressing, cruising public places including bars, parks, malls, truck stops, and beaches for sex contacts; repeated exposure to HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexually transmitted infections; inappropriate sexual behaviors toward co-workers, family members, or strangers; money spent on pornography or phone sex instead of necessary living expenses; illegal activities, including sexual activities involving minors, use of escorts, hustlers and prostitutes, sex in public places; multiple or repeated affairs, deception of significant other, loved ones, employers, family, friends; guilt, shame and fear of discovery; ignoring social relationships or basic health needs of rest and food; frequenting unsafe neighborhoods for addictive sexual behavior, using drugs or alcohol during sexual activity which lower inhibitions to unsafe sex; unhealthy mental obsessions, addictive sexual fantasy, exhibitionism, voyeurism, objectifying; going to the bars looking for love, but settling for addictive sex; having sex with partners of friends; sexual anorexia, the compulsive avoidance of sex and intimacy; and many more compulsive activities. For some, serial monogamy and acting outside of gender identity, as well as romance addictions, can be

present. For others, gender or orientation confusion and acting outside committed relationships may be present.

Many of the sexual behaviors noted above produce negative consequences. Typically, no one person has all of these characteristics, but many of us share some of them. These behaviors are not gender-specific, and many cross lines of sexual orientation. In recent decades of sexual liberation, we may have been encouraged to engage in some of these activities as a way to foster "gay-positive" self esteem. Yet for some of us, these behaviors ultimately backfired and left us discouraged, isolated and demoralized.

It is often useful to review our own behaviors to help determine if we have a problem with addictive sexual behavior. The following questions are designed to assist you in this self evaluation.

Are you a sex addict?

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

Do you keep secrets about your sexual behavior or romantic fantasies from those important to you? Do you lead a double life?

Yes No

Have your desires driven you to have sex in places or with people you would not normally chosen?

Yes No

Do you need greater variety, increased frequency, or more extreme sexual activities to achieve the same level of excitement or relief?

Yes No

Does your use of pornography occupy large amounts of time and/or Jeopardize your significant relationships or employment?

Do your relationships become distorted with sexual preoccupation? Does each new relationship have the same destructive pattern which prompted you to leave the last one?

Yes No

Do you frequently want to get away from a partner after having sex? Do you feel remorse, shame, or guilt after a sexual encounter?

Yes No

Have your sexual practices caused you legal problems? Could your sexual practices cause you legal problems?

Yes No

Does your pursuit of sex or sexual fantasy conflict with your moral standards or interfere with your personal spiritual journey?

Yes No

Do your sexual activities involve coercion, violence, or the threat of disease?

Yes No

Has your sexual behavior or pursuit of sexual relationships ever left you feeling hopeless, alienated from others, or suicidal?

Yes No

Does your preoccupation with sexual fantasies cause problems in any area of your life - even when you do not act out your fantasies?

Yes No

Do you compulsively avoid sexual activity due to fear of sex or intimacy?
Does your sexual avoidance consume you mentally?

Yes No

If you are uncomfortable with your answer to any of these questions, we encourage you to consider the following options:

- * Contact the international Service Organization of SAA for more information,
- * Visit the SAA website to find a contact person in your local area.
- * Read additional materials about recovery from sex addiction
- * Attend an SAA meeting to learn more about the Twelve-Step Program and the fellowship of SAA.

** "Questions for Self Assessment excerpted from the pamphlet "Sex Addicts Anonymous" A Pathway to Recovery, copyright 1990 by ISO of SAA, Inc.

WE REACHED A TURNING POINT ...

"For many of us, the spiral of sexual addiction led to what we call hitting bottom. To hit bottom is to reach such a low point mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually - that we break through our denial."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 8)

Addictive sexual behaviors became a problem, not the solution we hoped they would be. The addictive use of sex had all but crowded out our attempts to have a healthy sexual life. Even when this realization began to slowly sink into our consciousness, we kept trying to make our sex lives "work" with more sex, less sex, better sex, different sex, and on and on. Our attempts to fix or control our sex lives and our feelings by the misuse of sex became less and less successful, even though we spent more and more time, money, energy, and preoccupation with it.

"In our addiction we . . . were using sex as a way to escape from reality, cope with anxiety, or deal with emotions we didn't want to face."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 70)

For some, negative consequences of addictive sexual behaviors can become the motivation for change. For others, it is an impending crisis that breaks through the sense of denial: break-up of a relationship, arrest or legal actions, or disease. Just as often an internal crisis motivates our search for help: desperation, the futility of years of trying and failing to change our addictive behaviors, with all our promises to stop resulting in nothing but failure and the loss of hope. Either way, we begin to recognize a life pattern of addictive sexual behaviors and obsessive thinking. We realize we must change if we are to regain sanity and health, and grow into happy and fulfilling lives. Recognizing and admitting our patterns of addictive sexual thoughts and behavior is our first step toward recovery.

We begin to use our sense of surrender in a healthy manner. Previously, we surrendered to the destructive addictive sexual behaviors that caused great damage in our lives. Now, we start to surrender and become teachable, to a more healthy way of life filled with hope, growth and change.

"For all of us now in recovery, there came a time when we realized that we simply could not keep on living as before. Our denial cracked and we felt the full force of our unbearable situation. We saw that we were at the end of our rope, and that all that was left was the knot. To continue to act out seemed impossible, and yet not to act out seemed equally impossible. We knew we had to change, even if we didn't know how. Out of this despair, we came to Sex Addicts Anonymous."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 9)

WE FOUND A SOLUTION...

"Our message is simple and profound: that recovery from sex addiction is possible through working the Twelve Steps of SAA, and that following this program results in a spiritual awakening."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 59)

When we grew sick and tired of the consequences of our addictive sexual behaviors, when our efforts at self-control had repeatedly failed to produce the desired improvements in our lives, our desperation produced a willingness to seek help for our damaging behaviors. We were compelled to admit that our best efforts to control and manage our lives and behaviors had failed. When we found we could not depend on our own self-will or thinking to solve our problem, we looked for help outside ourselves. Following the examples and suggested actions of recovering addicts who came before us in SAA, we, too, were able to begin a period of abstinence from addictive sexual behaviors and ultimately experience sexual sobriety through working the Twelve Steps of SAA.

"...while the SAA fellowship supports our recovery, the actual work of recovery is described in the Twelve Steps. Meetings are forums for learning how to integrate the steps into our lives. Working the Twelve Steps leads to a spiritual transformation that results in sustainable relief from our addiction. When we start attending meetings of Sex Addicts Anonymous, many of us are surprised to meet people who are enjoying life and experiencing freedom from the painful, compulsive behaviors that had brought them to SAA."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 20)

In addition to SAA meetings, whether face-to-face or by telephone, we benefit from the guidance and experience of other recovering sex addicts, as transmitted through our SAA literature. Also, working one-on-one with a sponsor - a more experienced member - and a self-chosen fellowship support group or SAA home group, we learn how to apply the principles of the recovery program, the Twelve Steps of SAA.

"The promise of recovery is a restoration of self. Sexuality is part of who we are, a part that became lost and distorted through our addiction. When we reclaim the possibility of healthier sexuality, we regain a vital aspect of our being."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 72-73)

The result in recovery is expressed as a "spiritual awakening." We can abundantly affirm that we have been granted a life free from the bondage of sex addiction and filled with gratitude, joy, and service to others. This is our experience, which we have found through recovery in the SAA fellowship: improved connection to our inner strengths, as well as reliance on the resources and support outside ourselves, to effect healthy growth in our lives. We invite you to join us!

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Does SAA welcome LGBT persons?

Yes! The support that we find in SAA meetings is the bond which ties us all together. As previously quoted from our SAA literature:

"Our fellowship is open to women and men, regardless of age, race, religion, ethnic background, marital status, or occupation. We welcome members of any sexual identity or orientation, whether they are gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual or transgender."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 1-2)

"The only requirement for SAA membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, Tradition Three, p. 81)

What if I can't find an SAA meeting for LGBT members?

There are not many LGBT meetings for SAA members, although there are LGBT members in most areas of the country. Here are some ways to get in touch with them:

- * Men's and Women's contact lists - Contact the ISO Office
- * LGBT telephone meetings
- * Meetings section of SAA Website
www.saa-recovery.org
- * LGBT Outreach service committee

Seek local SAA members who are LGBT as a support system and perhaps this will develop into a new SAA meeting for LGBT members. Attend LGBT telephone meetings and gain support from LGBT members via e-mail/phone.

If there are no LGBT meetings near you, here are some ways to connect with SAA members who are LGBT. LGBT SAA members will often share recovery stories that include their sexual orientation and gender identification. Members frequently find support and understanding in relating to other members with the same sexual orientation or gender identification. Just as often, supportive fellowship and encouragement can also come from non-LGBTQ members. We take advantage of all the healthy support we can experience. In relating to other members we seek honest, open relationships, and avoid sexual or emotional entanglements which can interfere with our growth in recovery.

Many of us have found wonderful support outside the LGBT community. Please be open to those members who are warm and willing to support your recovery. Please continue to go to meetings until you find support and the unconditional love that the fellowship of SAA can offer. Keep coming back - don't leave before the miracle happens!

What should I do if I experience discrimination in SAA related to my sexual orientation or gender identification?

Consult trusted SAA members, sponsors, your local inter group or the ISO office to share your experiences, or take these issues to group conscience if possible. The ISO Office is an appropriate repository of fellowship experiences and thus can respond to members inquiries. Try a variety of local meetings to find those in which you feel most comfortable. Connect with other SAA members who are LGBT through local meetings, inter group, telephone meetings, or phone contact lists.

See www.saa-recovery.org for a list of telephone meetings.

Prejudice exists in our culture, and attaining sobriety from sexual addiction may not instantly remove such character defects from everyone. SAA members who are LGBT can participate in the SAA fellowship with confidence that the principles upon which SAA is founded welcome all who wish to recover from sexual addiction. We can practice "principles before personalities" in acting as an example and sharing our recovery program.

What is a sponsor?

"A sponsor is a person in the fellowship who acts as a guide to working the program of SAA, a fellow addict that we can rely upon for support. Ideally, a sponsor is abstinent from addictive sexual behavior, has worked the steps, and can teach us what he or she has learned from working the program."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 13)

In SAA, sponsor and sponsee meet as equals. Essentially, the process of sponsorship is this: a sex addict who has made some progress in SAA shares that experience on a continuous basis with another sex addict in SAA who is attempting to attain or maintain abstinence from addictive sexual behavior

Does my sponsor need to have the same sexual orientation or gender identification?

Many SAA members find connecting is easier with members of the same sexual orientation or gender identification. However, many other members favor the opposite. It can be a joy to relate to persons different from ourselves and experience their understanding and acceptance. It is suggested that sponsees not choose sponsors to whom they are physically attracted. The same recommendation applies to sponsors. Our experience has shown that sexual or romantic attractions within a sponsorship relationship can interfere with growth and recovery. If these issues cannot be discussed openly and resolved, it may be best to work with a different sponsor or sponsee.

Where and how do I find a sponsor?

"Many of us ask someone to be our sponsor who has shared things in meetings that helped us, or inspired us through example."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p.13)

We can maintain a long-distance sponsoring relationship, by phone, e-mail, or letter."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p.14)

Sources for sponsorship are: local meetings, telephone meetings, contact lists available through the International Service Organization at www.saa-recovery.org, from service committees such as LGBTQ Outreach, Men's Outreach, and Women's Outreach.

What is sexual sobriety in SAA?

"In the inner circle we write down the sexual behaviors that we want to stop. Inner-circle behaviors are the addictive sexual behaviors that brought us to SAA, the things that made us hit bottom in our disease."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 16)

"Sexual sobriety, then, means abstaining from these inner-circle behaviors/"

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 17)

Sexual sobriety is abstinence from addictive sexual behavior combined with personal and spiritual growth that focuses on the healing work of recovery. Sobriety is a process that transforms our personalities, our thinking, feelings, and behaviors, toward healthy and fulfilling lives. For many in the LGBT community that has meant shedding the shame and guilt associated with sexual thoughts and desired intimacy that is not heterosexual in nature.

"Establishing our definition of abstinence helps to answer the "what" questions that face us when we enter SAA. What must we abstain from? What are our goals? But the crucial "how" questions still remain: ow do we get sexually sober? How can we live differently than before, so that we stay abstinent? The answers to these questions are contained in our spiritual program of recovery, the Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p.19)

Suggestions for defining sexual sobriety and achieving freedom from addictive sexual behavior are contained in our SAA literature, including the book Sex Addicts Anonymous and numerous pamphlets, all available from your local meeting or inter group, or from the SAA website www.saa-recovery.org. Please refer to the SAA literature concerning the "Three Circles" for a more complete description of how to define your own abstinence.

What about this "God" stuff ?

Many LGBT persons have experienced discrimination, ostracism, or rejection from - established religious institutions. As human organizations, some spiritual or religious groups are filled with all-too-human frailties including prejudice, ignorance, intolerance, and discrimination. Although the heart of most spiritual organizations is a message of compassion and acceptance, some institutions have strayed from this original message or focus on more restrictive or punishing aspects of their dogma. LGBT persons who have experienced discrimination or rejection in these settings have often developed resistance and resentment toward religious institutions and, by extension, to the idea of a Deity or Universal Power. In SAA, members are encouraged to develop their own understanding of a Deity or greater Power, which most experience as caring, supportive and accepting. The experiences of many members in recovery have demonstrated that belief and use of a Power greater than ourselves is not only necessary but extremely beneficial.

"... is not affiliated with any religion, creed or dogma. The program offers a spiritual solution to our addiction, without requiring adherence to any specific set of beliefs or practices. The path is wide enough for everyone who wishes to walk it."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 21)

What if I have problems other than sexually addictive behaviors?

Other needs exist, such as issues outside of the realm of sex addiction. Examples of outside issues include substance abuse, mental illness, other medical conditions. Qualified professionals may be consulted in regard to outside issues. Resources may be found in separate twelve-step fellowships or through qualified mental health and medical professionals. Recovery resources for partners, families or friends of sex addicts can be found through twelve-step programs for codependents of sex addicts.

"Outside resources are available as part of our self care. We also grow in our willingness and ability to reach out beyond the SAA program..."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 74)

How do I find support for my sobriety in SAA?

The Twelve Steps of SAA are a program of recovery from sexual addictive behaviors. Support for our recovery also comes from many of the "Tools for Recovery" listed elsewhere in our SAA literature, including meetings, sponsors, SAA literature, and service. Take advantage of as many as you can. Maximize your recovery efforts to attain maximum results!

Many publications describe in detail how to work through the Twelve-Step program of recovery, so those details are not included in this

pamphlet. Please refer to SAA literature including our text *Sex Addicts Anonymous*.

How do I disclose my addictive behaviors to my partner, family or friends?

Disclosure is a very sensitive event. Please ask for experience from your sponsor and other members of SAA who have walked through this process. If it is especially troublesome, sometimes an outside therapist or spiritual director can be useful for disclosure issues.

Many of those around us sensed there was a problem in our behavior, even if they were not aware of specific examples. As far as persons we have harmed, SAA's twelve-step recovery program has ample suggestions for repairing the damages we may have caused through our addictive behaviors. These actions will often need to be performed only after we have established a firm foundation of recovery through working the twelve-step program.

Other issues may arise, which can impact our recovery process, such as HIV status and disclosure or "coming-out"/closeted issues around our sexuality. These may not fall within the scope of addictive sexual behaviors, yet can produce negative consequences and unmanageability in our lives. As we learn to be honest and grow spiritually, many of these issues resolve through our own growth and with support from others. While the principles of twelve-step recovery can be applied, qualified professional guidance from outside medical or mental health professionals may be needed to successfully deal with such issues

"Outside resources are available as part of our self care. We also grow in our willingness and ability to reach out beyond the SAA program..."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 74)

What if I get "triggered" by other people at meetings?

"Triggers are any situation or behavior that causes us to feel a powerful desire to act out."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 68)

The spiritual transformation available in recovery through working the Twelve Steps of SAA will often help moderate our reaction to people that trigger us. This is often a gradual process - for some members this occurs early in recovery, while other members experience a progressive lessening of the triggering or obsessive thinking as their recovery continues. Each event can be a learning experience and an opportunity to grow by practicing the principles of recovery and using spiritual tools we have learned. Some helpful methods we have tried include:

- * avoiding triggering or difficult situations
- * sharing feelings with a sponsor or trusted friend

- * keeping the focus on recovery by practicing the spiritual solution described in the Twelve Steps of SAA
- * finding another meeting that feels safe
- * examining ourselves and our emotions to reveal the causes of our trigger reactions.

"Our emotions have often been a source of pain and confusion in our lives, and they frequently triggered our addictive sexual behavior."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 35)

If I get sexually sober in SAA, will my sexual orientation or gender identification change?

Our recovery in SAA allows freedom from addictive sexual behaviors, and is not aimed at changing our sexual orientation or gender identification. Through working the Twelve Steps of SAA we reclaim our healthier sexuality that was distorted and lost in addiction.

"when we are sexual with love, gratitude, and generosity, sex can be an expression of our highest spiritual ideals. We can use our sexuality to express our love, appreciation, and faith."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 73)

Discovering and defining one's own sexual orientation and gender identity can be one of life's great adventures. This is often a matter of personal growth and often requires the help of outside resources such as mental health professionals or community support groups.

"Being in recovery doesn't erase our personalities. On the contrary, most of us experience our personal qualities as becoming more special, colorful, and vibrant as we gain abstinence and grow spiritually, and our individual strengths help us to carry a message of hope."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous, p. 96)

Recovery in SAA is a way of life, and is not related only to our sexuality. Recovery is to be lived and experienced, not simply read about in a pamphlet or book. Each person who has decided that he or she wants recovery will have hesitation, questions, and road blocks. SAA is there for you, offering a solution.

*Note: All quotations © of SAA, Inc.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
LGBTQ Outreach Subcommittee
ISO of SAA, Inc.
P. O. Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270*

LGBT SAA Members Speak...

"I am a woman committed to health. I am a lesbian. I am a recovering sex addict. When I look at my life today-its balance and the many dreams that are coming true-it is hard to believe that there was a time when I did not want to live. I felt then that there was no place on earth for me where I could be fully the person I am and where I could be at peace with myself

(Sex Addicts Anonymous
"Her Dreams Are Coming True," p. 129)

"Another gift recovery has given me is the opportunity to explore my sexuality. I've had these fantasies my entire life but never allowed myself the opportunity to question my sexual orientation. In recovery, without acting out, I was able to explore those feelings. I was able to use words like "bisexual" and gay without cringing. I finally came to understand that I am indeed a gay man."

(Sex Addicts Anonymous,
"Two Worlds Collide," p. 172)

"Over the years, I have come to realize that I am truly a bisexual man, that I can love both men and women physically and spiritually. The fact is, however, that I can only be in one full-time, committed relationship. I choose to make that relationship with a woman. . . .

"We are now married and have a wonderful daughter. I owe a lot today to friends, to actively working the Twelve Steps, having an SAA sponsor, and talking with him and other SAA members"

(Sex Addicts Anonymous,
"A Time to Grow," pp. 242-243)

"Recovery opened up my life in so many ways. It was like finding the final, missing puzzle piece. It gave me the self-confidence to explore my feelings as a transsexual woman, and to transition to my true gender ."

(An SAA Member)

Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.

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