

Tools of Recovery

A Practical Guide for New Members of SAA

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FROM Shame to Grace

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Introduction

Achieving and maintaining abstinence from compulsive sexual behavior is not easy. When we enter Sex Addicts Anonymous many of us feel demoralized and overwhelmed. Regardless of the powerlessness and unmanageability in our lives, our presence in these rooms signifies a desire to heal. In the stories of others we hear that recovery from the addiction is possible. One day at a time, we learn how to accept the past and to show up for the challenges and gifts of today. Eventually, we become willing to embrace sobriety as a way of life.

Abstinence from sexual acting out, however, doesn't always come quickly. Most of us had to have some distance from acting out before we could get a clearer picture of the seriousness of our condition.

The purpose of this booklet is to describe some of the tools that have supported our efforts toward abstinence and helped us get through the rough times when we wanted to act out sexually. Our definition of a "tool" is simple and broad. It is any resource, action, or attitude that supports our recovery - anything we can use to help keep us sober (Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 62).

We have found that by being open to using the tools of SAA we are continually led into a way of life that is much more satisfying and serene than the one we had before. We hope that you will find much within these pages that will safeguard your sobriety and strengthen your recovery.

The Twelve Steps

Recovery, in the full meaning of the word, comes through practicing the principles outlined in the Twelve Steps. These steps, listed in Appendix A, are the basic tools of SAA. Most members work through them with a sponsor. Doing it alone can be difficult, and as addicts, we may not always see ourselves clearly

You can begin on your own, however, by reading the literature. A wide selection of literature is available on the SAA website, www.saa-recovery.org. Don't worry if you don't like all the ideas, or if some of them seem not to apply to you. Try to keep an open mind and start getting familiar with the concepts. Also, it is helpful to regularly attend a meeting that focuses on the steps.

Through the steps, we open ourselves to a spiritual transformation that will lead us to a better way of life. In SAA, it is often described as going from shame to grace. Most importantly, we learn to lead sexually sober lives and eventually to carry the message to others who still suffer.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship moves our recovery into action. A sponsor provides guidance and support as we experience withdrawal and as we work through the steps. We encourage you to initiate a sponsor relationship by asking someone with whom you feel you might work well. Don't be

discouraged if you get a few "no's." In time you will receive the "yes" that is meant for you. When choosing, look for someone with qualities you respect, who is working the steps, and who has continuous sobriety from all "*inner-circle behaviors*" those behaviors from which he or she has committed to abstain. Do not ask someone to whom you are sexually attracted, as this is a bad mix. If you live in an area where there are no meetings, make a phone call to the International Service Organization of SAA or to a nearby intergroup to inquire about finding a "long distance" sponsor. Finding someone may take time. Some members have found it useful to get a temporary sponsor until a more permanent one can be found.

Honesty, commitment, openness, and willingness are important attitudes for a sponsee. As addicts, we have often led secret lives. We check in regularly with our sponsor. Establishing your Three Circles will likely be one of the first tasks of this relationship. You also might discuss your expectations as to how you will work together.

Sponsors are not professionals. They are sex addicts who have found a way to stay sober and want to help others. You may not understand or like all the suggestions he or she makes, so we encourage you to ask questions. Try to stay open; they have traveled the road you are on and speak from experience. Sponsors do have lives; don't be surprised if they are not always available. This is the time to reach out to others in the fellowship (Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 13).

Attending meetings

In meetings we learn how to live in the solution. Meetings keep our focus on recovery and on the importance of maintaining abstinence. Especially in the beginning of recovery, they give us a sober place to go rather than engage in addictive behavior. In meetings we share what is going on in our current lives, talk about our struggles and triumphs, and listen to one another's experience, strength, and hope. Speaking in meetings can help break through our isolation and shame. We find, much to our amazement, that people usually identify with our stories rather than see us as bad or different. The Twelfth Tradition states that, "*Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions...*" Personal disclosure is easier for us when we can trust that our presence and what we share will be kept confidential. We let each person tell his or her own story, and we avoid gossip.

We suggest you attend a number of different meetings before deciding whether SAA is for you. Attending a variety is helpful, as each has its own format and atmosphere. If you are having difficulty staying sober, you might consider making a commitment to attend a meeting a day for a specific period of time. If daily meetings are not available in your locale, you could commit to making phone contact every day with another sober sex addict.

Meetings also provide an opportunity to welcome newer members and

to express gratitude. We have made lots of friends in SAA, and we are sure you will too. There are many ways to get active in a meeting by doing service.

Often it was while doing these various tasks, such as setting up chairs or putting out the literature, that we were able to say hello and to start getting to know each other.

You may find yourself sexually attracted to someone in your meeting. Some of us have gone through this. Our experience is that these feelings usually pass. We do not have to act on them. We recommend discussing your attraction with someone who is not directly involved. This person could be your sponsor or another group member who you feel would keep it confidential. Talk with more experienced members.

You may not like all the people at the meetings. Don't worry about it. The important thing is to remember why we are here. In time, we have learned to respect each other and tolerate our differences. On a daily basis we are all dealing with life as sex addicts. Some day you may be helped by the person who you thought had little to offer.

Literature

Literature is like having a portable program. It goes anywhere, and it will reinforce the ideas you hear at meetings. There are a variety of SAA pamphlets and books. If you can't find them at your local meeting, you can get them from the International Service Organization. Keep the literature available and carry it around with you. It is especially valuable when you travel, as you may not have easy access to meetings. In early sobriety, read the literature even when you don't feel like it. It really helps! Even just a few minutes a day makes a difference.

The Three Circles

The Three Circles is a tool we use to define our sexual sobriety. We organize our behaviors according to whether they are addictive, healthy, or somewhere in between. Often a new member will ask, "What do I put in my circles? How do I know what behaviors are compulsive for me?" In the beginning, it is sometimes difficult to determine if a particular behavior is unmanageable. We may also be unsure which circle a behavior belongs in, or whether it belongs in our circles at all. Typically, our sponsor helps us with this task. If you do not feel ready to take the step of choosing a sponsor, ask a sober member of the program to assist you in a preliminary determination of Inner, Middle, and Outer Circle behaviors.

Each of the following characteristics may be an indication of compulsive sexuality:

1. You are unable to stop the behavior when you want to.
2. The behavior is something you keep secret.
3. Revealing your behavior may have negative

consequences in your life.

4. You use these behaviors to numb yourself from difficult feelings or to avoid responsibilities.
5. Your behavior is devoid of intimacy and respect for yourself and others.

You don't need to have your circles worked out perfectly. What is important is that you get them down on paper as soon as possible. By becoming accountable to a recovery plan, you will become more aware of what it means to be powerless over the addiction. Many of us did not know how bad it was until we set down concrete limits on our behavior. It is probably obvious to you that certain sexual behaviors belong in the inner circle. As you learn more about the program and begin to share your story, other details will become clearer. For a more in-depth explanation of circles, refer to the Three Circles pamphlet. The following is a short description:

INNER CIRCLE: These are compulsive sexual behaviors from which we choose to abstain completely. We are powerless over these behaviors, and they lead to pain and suffering. They create a drug-like state that alters our thinking. They can make us a danger to ourselves or others.

MIDDLE CIRCLE: These are behaviors that are much less destructive and much lower in intensity. They do not cause as much unmanageability in our lives. However, if practiced repeatedly, they can lead us back to the Inner Circle. Some members also use the Middle Circle to place behaviors about which they are uncertain.

OUTER CIRCLE: These are program tools and healthy alternative activities that enhance our lives, our recovery, and our spiritual connection. While the Inner Circle relates to behaviors that keep us in isolation and fantasy, the Outer Circle refers to behaviors that help keep us engaged with other people and with reality.

Many find that establishing their Three Circles provides a feeling of relief. It's like a map to help us be clear about where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. Some find it valuable to write them on a wallet-sized card and to read them each morning or to carry them with us through our day. Sharing our triumphs and struggles regarding our circles with our sponsor and in meetings helps us to stay abstinent.

Getting honest about the Middle Circle

One of the things we hear at meetings is that people sometimes relapse into their addiction. Invariably, we hear that the slip was preceded by Middle Circle behaviors. We may think we can get away with Middle Circle behaviors because they aren't in our Inner Circle and they aren't so bad. We are mistaken. Over time these behaviors gradually increase in intensity and duration until a slip is inevitable. We share this with you in

hopes that you won't have to make the mistakes some of us made. The Middle Circle is not a place to hang out.

Staying current with our sponsors about Middle Circle behaviors and preoccupations, and sharing honestly in meetings, can help stop this kind of escalation. Try to get clear about where temptation may arise. Triggering places where we are likely to walk, we agree not to walk. Provocative phone calls we are tempted to make, we choose not to make. We stay away from certain publications or keep them away from us. In the face of challenging situations, we encourage you to take whatever action you need to avoid feeling triggered.

If you don't yet have a sponsor and are struggling to stay sober, we suggest you commit to staying current with a specific person about your Middle Circle behavior. This is better than checking in with lots of different people. Committing to stay updated with one person will help you to see yourself more clearly. It will support you in taking the steps necessary to move out of slippery activities.

Using the telephone

The phone is a central tool of recovery for many addicts. If you hear a share that you particularly relate to, or find yourself in a helpful conversation, feel free to ask for that person's telephone number for the purpose of making program calls. Remember to ask whether it is okay to leave a message or text. Some people don't reveal their SAA membership to the rest of their household.

We encourage you to keep reaching out. Do not take it personally if someone prefers not to give out a number. Nor should you feel obligated to give out yours. It is suggested that we each honor our own needs in this matter. It is also recommended that you not exchange phone numbers with people to whom you are sexually attracted.

Carrying a list of phone numbers with us is beneficial because we never know when we will face a challenging situation. Sometimes we need to call people to help start our day. At other times, we may need to check in about current thoughts and behaviors. Some suggest calling three people every day in order to build and maintain a support system. The practice of making phone calls, even when you don't have any particular reason, will make it easier when you need support. If you are having a difficult day, consider using the phone to do service. Reach out to others who are newer in SAA or who are having a hard time; it can do wonders for your mood and your sobriety.

First Step presentation

There are many ways of taking a First Step. In some meetings, time is set aside for formal presentations. Essentially, this involves writing answers to a series of questions and then sharing them on a group level. These questions, found in the pamphlet, First Step to Recovery, range from the

specifics of our acting-out history to the consequences of our addiction. If formal First Step meetings are available in your fellowship, you may want to attend several to see how other people do

For a newcomer, the idea of this degree of self-disclosure with a group may seem unthinkable. This is to be expected. Typically, we first share this type of written First Step by reading it to our sponsor or to another trusted member. Doing so enables us to get some initial feedback about various issues, such as the amount of graphic detail and whether we focus enough on the elements of powerlessness and unmanageability. When we feel ready, we then share our first step on a group level to avail ourselves of the acceptance of people who have suffered as we have. By letting others hear the specific ways we acted out, we shine a light into that darkness. We form a bond by supporting and listening to one another. We find freedom from secrecy and shame.

One day at a time

Recovery from sex addiction rarely happens overnight. It takes patience – a quality often in short supply for us. Imagining that we have to find the courage to face abstinence from sexual behaviors for indefinite amounts of time can feel overwhelming.

Often at the end of acting out sexually, we said to ourselves, *"I'll never do that again."* It's not that we weren't sincere. It's just that it rarely turned out that way. We always seemed to go back for more. In recovery, we avoid making grand pronouncements about quitting forever. Instead, we just do it for today. No matter how tempted we are, we don't act out today. We find this approach to be more workable. By looking only at the day in front of us, with the help of others and our Higher Power, the challenge of recovery becomes more manageable.

In particularly challenging moments, committing to our sobriety for just an hour at a time is what we may need to do in order not to give in to our impulses. It is sometimes said that the person who has the longest abstinence is the one who woke up earliest that day.

Fellowship

Our fellowship is a society of men and women on the path of recovery. The fact is that we need each other to stay sober. The people we see at meetings are a lifeline for us. They understand in ways few people outside SAA do. Fellowship with people in the program helps to temper the isolation that we experience in our addiction. Remember, talking to someone after a meeting may be as helpful for him or her as it is for you.

After some meetings many go out for coffee or a meal. New members are especially welcome and encouraged to attend. Individuals or meetings sometimes put on events such as picnics, hiking, volleyball, or other activities that provide us with healthy ways of relating to each other. Anyone is encouraged to initiate a gathering and invite others to join.

Friendship

Developing friendships in SAA supports us as we face the challenges of recovery. The withdrawal process of early sobriety can be unsettling and scary if we try to do it alone. Some of us are naturally sociable, but many of us have led solitary lives and have avoided people except for those with whom we acted out sexually. Wherever we fall in that spectrum, we all have a lot to learn about relating to others.

Many of us treated others as objects: we saw people to whom we were attracted exclusively as sex partners; certain others were merely rivals standing in the way of our exploits. Beyond our own selfish or manipulative needs, we found ourselves disinterested in people. Some of us have been so completely absorbed by our addiction that it has left little room for the experience of anything else. In recovery we begin to see that we are all much more than what we offer sexually.

None of us is perfect. We try to give each other room to make mistakes. We learn to trust, respect and support each other. We learn to deal with conflict and to be honest. We experience the pleasure of engaging in healthier activities with people whose company we enjoy. Long-term sober addicts report that the quality of their friendships deepens and develops when they are not distracted by sexual compulsion.

Changing old routines

Most of our compulsive behaviors are intricately woven into the fabric of our lives. Certain times of day or specific locations, people, and activities are part of our acting-out patterns. Changing old routines that are associated with our addiction is an important tool for staying sober. Some of us may choose to change our route to work so that we do not pass a place where we have acted out. We may change our primary form of transportation: from car to train, from walking to biking, or we may join a different car pool. Certain times of day are higher risk for some addicts, and we may decide to set up new activities or support for these vulnerable hours. We decide, at least for a while, to avoid the company of certain people who have been part of our addictive patterns. We remove from our immediate environment any objects or media that we associate with our addiction, so that in the daily course of our lives we are not continually tempted by our old habits.

Willingness to change routines that threaten our sobriety helps us stay out of our Inner Circle. The distance that abstinence provides allows for a clearer perspective on the powerlessness and unmanageability of our addiction. Often, our defects of character that have been masked by our addiction become more apparent once we have time away from these behaviors.

Abstinence also gives us the opportunity to become more centered, serene, and connected to our Higher Power. It allows us the time and space to reclaim or develop interests that may have been marginalized for

many years while we were in the full swing of our addiction.

Please remember that recovery does not happen overnight. It takes time, patience, and the guidance of others to discover what we need to do to stay abstinent.

Living through the discomfort of withdrawal

If you become abstinent from addictive sexual behavior, you may experience withdrawal, just as you would from alcohol or any addictive drug. Withdrawal is not a metaphor. It is a physiological phenomenon with emotional and mental components. You may experience physical pain, depression, anxiety, anger, exhaustion, irrational thinking, or mood swings. You may find yourself drawn to new ways of acting out sexually or to problematic behaviors that never appealed to you before. No one can predict what your experience will be. Try and be patient with yourself. It took time for us to develop the sexual compulsions that came to rule our lives. It also takes time for the power of those compulsions to drain away.

Withdrawal is a stage in recovery that does not last forever. It is important to remember that no matter how uncomfortable your feelings may become, as long as you stay sober, they will pass. As addicts we unconsciously developed strategies to medicate our feelings. Withdrawal is often our first attempt at letting our feelings be without trying to change them. While this stage of recovery may be challenging, each time we turn back to our addiction and our old way of life, we interrupt the process of withdrawal instead of moving through it

Few of us can weather withdrawal on our own. Most of us need many program tools to get through this stage of recovery. Attend meetings, reach out to program members, make phone calls, and keep sharing your experience with others. Special attention to self-care will alleviate some of the stress of withdrawal. Also, don't underestimate the healing power that may come from doing service and being of help to others. The support of the program enables us to tolerate the discomfort of withdrawal. We survived it, and you will too.

By being active in SAA, we can draw inspiration and support from the newcomer and from those who have put together longer sobriety. Willingness to live through withdrawal is the cornerstone for recovery. Our continued abstinence is the foundation upon which all subsequent personal growth depends.

Prayer

Prayer provides a time for communing with our Higher Power. Prayers may come from any tradition, be self-created, or simply be a spontaneous conversation with the God of our own understanding. It is strongly suggested that we add prayer to our lives on a regular basis. Developing a relationship with our Higher Power may take time. In the beginning many of us had a belief in God that was tenuous at best; others of us were

actively resistant toward the idea of a Higher Power. The idea of a daily practice of prayer seemed difficult. If this is true for you, you can begin by praying for the willingness to have a Higher Power be a part of your life.

There is no right or wrong way to pray. We each choose what is most meaningful to us. It is the act of prayer that is important. We not only choose how we pray, but we also choose the content of our prayers. Beyond asking for help with our recovery, consider praying in gratitude for what we have and for the well-being of others. It is often enough just to pray for guidance. We do not always need to have clarity about what we are praying for. Praying simply for a relationship with a Higher Power can work wonders.

Some people find that a specific place or time for prayer can help make our practice more real and more personal. Some choose a traditional house of worship or a special spot in their home - a place set apart from the responsibilities and activities of life. Establishing a time each day for prayer and meditation, whether it is in the morning or before you go to sleep, helps bring the principles into daily life.

The Serenity Prayer (Appendix C) is widely used, and we recite it in most meetings. It provides immediate comfort and is an expression of our desire to align ourselves with our Higher Power. While in the throes of tension, anxiety, or insistent sexual urges some find it helpful to recite it over and over. It is sometimes just what we need to relax our tension.

The wisdom contained in this prayer can also provide us with guidance when we are faced with figuring out the next right thing for ourselves. We ask, what about this particular challenge can't we change? Once we identify what is beyond our control, we then try to turn it over to our Higher Power. Next we ask, what can we change? The question invites us to move into action. Is a change of attitude in order or is this a good moment to use one of the many tools of SAA? By inviting the God of our understanding to help us know the difference between what we can and can't change, we often feel more at peace. Appendix C includes a variety of prayers often used in SAA.

Defining the God of our understanding

Some find that the act of prayer can become more powerful if we take the time to define who God is for us. For those who have not found a home in organized religion, this tool can be especially important. If we are to turn our lives and will over to the care of something, it may be helpful to clarify what that something is.

In SAA, God is defined simply as a power greater than ourselves. We are free to choose whether we find that power in a traditional form or, for example, in the presence of a sober fellowship or in the magnitude of nature.

Try not to be discouraged. It usually takes time to develop an experience of a Higher Power. We have found that even the willingness to believe is a powerful beginning that puts us well on the way. The precise

concept of who God is for you is less important than the decision to work toward that relationship. Open-mindedness is the key here. If you are having difficulty with this idea, speak to others at meetings who are staying sober and appear to have a positive relationship with their Higher Power.

Let go and let God

When life seems to be more than we can handle or when we feel pulled toward our addiction, reconnecting with our Higher Power is a powerful course of action. Ask for help, let it go, and give it to God. Many use the prayers located in Appendix C. For guidance, many refer to the section on the Third Step in Sex Addicts Anonymous. Some use prayers from their own faith. Some write their own special prayers.

Regardless of what words we use or whether we simply remind ourselves to "let go and let god," the idea is to acknowledge that we are powerless in the face of our addiction and that much of life is out of our control. We need the help of a Power greater than ourselves. This help is available to us if we stop trying to run the show.

We have learned over and over that by placing our problemsâ€”big and smallâ€”in God's hands, we can have a measure of serenity, and we can maintain sobriety. The message is not that we sit passively and wait for things to happen. Rather, it is a shift in our attitude in which we admit that we don't always know where we should be going or how we should best get there.

Meditation

Most sex addicts with long-term abstinence report that their recovery is strengthened by a daily meditation practice. It can take many different forms. If you are not sure about how to meditate, speak with others in SAA about their own practices or explore the spirituality section in your local bookstore. As with prayer, we are free to choose a meditation practice from an established tradition or create one of our own. It may include moving or sitting still. A meditation practice is an opportunity to put aside the responsibilities and activities of our daily lives. It need not be complicated; it may simply consist of setting aside a few quiet minutes. It may be uncomfortable in the beginning. Take it easy. Your willingness to try is a great starting place. Any effort you make toward meditation will support your recovery.

Establishing a specific time each day, whether it is upon awakening or the last thing before going to sleep, helps to incorporate this spiritual practice into our daily life. As with prayer, some find it helpful to set aside a special spot in their home. A regular practice helps to keep us balanced during all the ups and downs that life presents.

SAA has published a meditation booklet, *Voices in Recovery*, that features meditations written by members of the SAA fellowship and based

upon SAA literature.

Writing

Some recovering addicts make a daily practice of writing. It often helps us clarify what we are thinking and feeling. It becomes an opportunity to commune with the deeper parts of ourselves. Writing can be especially useful when we feel overwhelmed by strong feelings, obsessive thinking, or impulses toward our addiction. It may be something you want to do regularly or from time-to-time. While there are numerous ways to use writing to enhance and support your recovery, many have found the following four exercises to be particularly helpful.

1. Powerlessness

Coming to terms with powerlessness is central to recovery and is a task of Step One. Even if you are not yet working the steps, you can begin to look at what it means to be powerless. When you feel overwhelmed with the desire to act out, write about what you are feeling and thinking. Writing about powerlessness is a means of breaking through denial. It may also help to diffuse the power these impulses hold over us.

When we admit our powerlessness and seek help from those around us, we tap into our willingness to find a Higher Power. The admission that we can't go it alone is the beginning of a new way of life.

2. Fears

Unacknowledged fear is often a pervasive aspect of our addictive thinking and behavior. Our sexual compulsions mask our awareness of the power this emotion has over us. By taking the time to write our fears down, we become more conscious of them and begin to understand how they influence us. Some fears seem to drop away just from being exposed to the light of reason.

Whether we end up taking specific actions, or turning these feelings over to our Higher Power, we have taken an active stance and are no longer victimized by this emotion. Doing this exercise may help to release

the energy tied up in our fears and support healthier solutions to the issues in our lives. Writing about fear in greater detail will also be a part of completing the Fourth Step.

3. Resentments

Like fear, resentments distort our thoughts and feelings. They undermine our serenity, shut us off from God, and leave us more prone to acting out sexually.

In this writing exercise we put down on paper what we are resentful about. We attempt to look honestly for the part we play in the situation. We ask ourselves how we have set it in motion or kept it going. While it is a fact that people sometimes do things that threaten or hurt us, we don't have power over what they do. The purpose of this exercise is to help us understand that we have choices around our own behavior and our reactions to others.

It is often our own character defects that keep us stuck in resentment. Laying all this out on paper is the beginning of a spiritual process that enables us to let go of these damaging feelings. Many members find that praying for those we resent encourages compassion for ourselves and for them. Writing about resentment, with your sponsor's guidance, will also be a part of Step Four.

4. Gratitude List

The process of recovery may be rocky and challenging. Especially in the beginning, our addictive impulses may feel out of control and overwhelming. We may lose sight of what is going right in our lives and of the many things that nourish and sustain us. Making a list of things we are grateful for keeps us more balanced. There is always something to be grateful for, such as a good night's sleep, health, friends, or sobriety. When times get rough, we can return to our gratitude list for an instant boost to our

morale. Sometimes just saying out loud that we are grateful for this day of sobriety helps to reinforce our commitment to stay abstinent. Gratitude is an attitude we choose for living well.

Book-ending

When upcoming events seem particularly triggering, it is helpful to arrange in advance to contact someone in SAA, both before and after. Occasions that we might want to book-end include: family visits, parties, business obligations, dates, or travel. Often the "before" call is an opportunity for us to become more aware of what we are feeling. The contact allows us to enter the challenging situation feeling less alone. We create accountability for ourselves, which supports our sobriety. We can make commitments to another person about what might be the best way to handle ourselves in this situation. The "after" call often provides an opportunity to process what happened, to look at how we conducted ourselves, and to acknowledge the ways in which we showed up for the occasion. We also have the opportunity to reflect upon what we might do differently next time.

Some find it helpful to book-end self-care and program commitments. Also, for those of us who have a problem with procrastination around step work, book-ending blocks of time for writing or specific step tasks is especially helpful.

When reaching out to others for support, whether we anticipate a difficult situation ahead of time or simply find ourselves in the midst of one, it is useful to remember that we may be helping them as much as they are helping us.

H.A.L.T.

H.A.L.T. is an acronym reminding us to never get too hungry, angry, lonely or tired. Each of these conditions leaves us more vulnerable to our addiction. Together they can make for real trouble. We have seen it happen time and time again that people relapse when these simple needs of living are not considered. By taking care of these basic requirements, we can keep our systems from going into emergency mode, where our thoughts become clouded and we imagine that our addiction will provide us with what we need.

As active sex addicts, we often ran through life on adrenaline and were out of touch with what it feels like to be tired or hungry in a natural way. Many of us did not take time to get decent rest or food. Our situation is further complicated by the agitation that can come during withdrawal. It can feel like nervous energy that just won't stop. You may have trouble getting to sleep at night, or on the other hand, find yourself sleeping more than usual. All of these are normal reactions. While everyone is different,

we all come into SAA having stressed ourselves beyond the usual limits. We encourage you to slow down, get some rest, and take good care of yourself.

In our active addiction, it often seemed that sex was the solution for all our troubles. Remembering this H.A.L.T. tool can be the occasion to stop and consider what might be contributing to our impulse to act out. Are we avoiding an unpleasant situation or feeling? Have we gotten enough sleep? Did we forget to eat? Have we been spending too much time alone? Being aware of what is going on beneath our craving provides some distance from our sexual impulses. We are then better able to take preventative measures to lessen the possibility of a slip and reclaim our serenity. We create the space in which we can compassionately redirect our attention toward fulfilling our authentic needs. Often a good meal, some honest talk about our feelings, fellowship after a meeting, or a good night's sleep are all we need to regain a sense of well-being and our commitment to sobriety.

Three-second rule

This is a tool used for dealing with visual stimulation or addictive fantasy. As we go through life, we are not in control of what thoughts pop into our minds. However, we make a distinction between that experience and the practice of indulging in addictive fantasy. The three-second rule helps keep us on the right side of that line.

Likewise, even with the best intentions, we cross paths with people or encounter images that we could use addictively. That is part of life. However, obsessively scanning for attractive people on the street, focusing on people's body parts, or staring at stimulating images serves to fuel the addiction. These activities make us vulnerable to more serious behaviors.

The way the rule works is that we make an agreement to give ourselves a maximum of three seconds before turning our attention away from triggering images or thoughts. It is not a license to engage willfully in sexual obsession or behavior, even if only for a few seconds. The spirit of this tool is that as soon as we become aware, we turn the behavior over to our Higher Power and ask for help as quickly as we can. By doing so, we acknowledge our powerlessness and also our freedom to choose the solution.

During difficult times, we may use this tool many times throughout the day. Practicing turning away from our addiction and asking for help from our Higher Power is an important aspect of recovery. We have found that as we stay sober and grow in the program, we experience more and more freedom from the call of our addiction.

Looking at consequences

One of the hallmarks of the addictive personality is denial, even in the face of overwhelming facts. Not one of us comes into SAA without some degree of unmanageability in our lives. We couldn't see beyond our compulsive sexual thoughts and behaviors even when they threatened our health and well-being and short circuited our lifelong dreams and aspirations.

Some of us have found it helpful to write out an inventory of consequences and carry it with us. This could include many different aspects of life: emotional, physical, spiritual, family, social, educational, and career. When we find ourselves heading in the direction of Middle or Inner Circle behavior, we take out the list and read it as an immediate and sobering reminder of where our addictive impulses lead us. Reading the list allows us to momentarily reconsider our plans. It allows us to stop, get ourselves to a meeting, or make a phone call to an SAA friend. Sometimes we read it each morning as part of our daily practice. Staying aware of the consequences of our addiction motivates us to embrace sobriety as a foundation for a good life.

Thinking a slip all the way through

In the throes of impulses toward Inner Circle behavior, our thinking becomes impaired. All we can think about is being relieved of our insistent craving. During these moments, we rarely have the presence of mind to consider the consequences of our sexual compulsions.

When you find yourself considering acting out, stop and think through your plans. It is important to include all the details of the behavior you want to engage in; and, equally important, its aftermath. By the time you get to the part after the slip, you are likely to see yourself feeling demoralized, facing certain consequences to your health and well-being, and once again having to face the struggles of withdrawal. Sometimes, this simple exercise is all we need to come to our senses and remember that sex addiction is a dangerous and life-threatening disease. We can then find the willingness to pick up the many tools of recovery that help us stay sober and choose healthier ways of dealing with the challenges of life.

Letting go of old ideas

Distorted thinking is common among sex addicts. We rationalize and justify our acting out. We may be invested in seeing our behaviors as fun or as our birthright, without any sense of the harm we do to ourselves or to others. We may resist the idea that we are sex addicts.

I need this to relieve tension... I'm not harming anyone by what I do... I need to play around before I settle down... sex is a form of liberation... it will be different this time... these days, everyone is into porn... just because I like a lot of sex doesn't make me an addict...

Do not be dismayed if you resist letting go of some of your ideas. This is a normal part of changing old behaviors and attitudes. As we attend meetings and listen to the stories of others, we come to see the irrationality of our thinking. In truth, this addiction is a condition that distorts our natural sexuality.

Over time, we come to see that we are not morally bad but that we have a disease that strikes without regard to gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or social or economic class. We have a problem against which our best intentions and most valiant solo efforts are ineffective. Our personal histories are living proof that willpower alone is not enough. If we keep an open mind to what we hear and are willing to take guidance from sober SAA members, we eventually see the limitations of our old thinking.

Rigorous honesty

Rigorous honesty demands much more than what we wish to believe about ourselves and what we imagine others might want to hear. It takes courage and faith to tell the truth, especially when deceit and denial were a significant part of our acting-out patterns. Rigorous honesty is an element of all aspects of our program. It includes:

1. willingness to be forthcoming with our sponsor in determining our circles and in our regular check-ins;
2. willingness to be honest about what we need to do to stay sober, such as setting healthy boundaries around specific people and places;
3. willingness, over time, to alter those aspects of our lives that still support our addictive behaviors;
4. willingness to be honest in an ongoing way about how we conduct ourselves in our relations with others; and
5. willingness to keep sharing our struggles with learning to live in sobriety.

In meetings, we have the opportunity to muster all the honesty we can and tell the truth of where we are in our program and what we are currently feeling or facing. When sharing in meetings, we need not be afraid to discuss the specifics of our Middle and Inner Circle behaviors, although we do refrain from using graphic language. We also exclude the names of acting-out establishments or locations, and the names of any specific printed or visual media, apps, or websites.

Identify, don't compare

When we first enter SAA, it can sometimes be tempting to compare our

own behavior with that of others. When we concentrate on differences, imagining that their sexual conduct is much more (or much less) serious than ours, we make judgments that inadvertently reinforce our own denial. The subtle message may be that we aren't as sick as they are and that perhaps our problem is not that big a deal. Sometimes it is the reverse, and we believe that we are the very worst - that no one could be as sick as we are. These sorts of comparisons are distractions from the fundamental reality that all sex addiction is potentially dangerous and destructive. For all of us, it is a progressive disease that gets worse over time, if we don't stop acting out.

Many of us come into the fellowship feeling quite isolated. We feel bound by secrecy and shame. We fear that our case is unique and that we won't fit in. This too is a form of focusing on differences and only serves to reinforce the experience of our separateness. Yes, it is true that our stories are not all the same, but if we are open, we find we can always relate to parts of someone's experience. At the very least, we share in common a bond of powerlessness and unmanageability. By being willing to identify instead of compare, we not only break the bonds of our own isolation, but we help others. Together, we can support each other in our efforts to stay sober and to live in the solution.

Progress, not perfection

Recovery can feel like a roller coaster. Sometimes it can seem like one step forward and two steps backward. Our progress may feel tentative. We may experience long plateaus in which it seems nothing is changing. If we relapse, we can feel terrible despair and hopelessness. We may believe we have failed. Cultivating self-acceptance along the way is an important tool in recovery. Most have found that during challenging times, if we look at what is going on and how we are conducting ourselves, we can usually identify some positive growth. We learn to look for progress, not perfection.

With the help of the fellowship, we take an honest look at ourselves but we also try to avoid unnecessary judgment. No one grows in an atmosphere of criticism. Abstinence from compulsive sexual behavior sometimes happens quickly, but it may also happen over time and with some false starts. We try to be gentle with our own imperfections and the imperfections of those around us.

Easy does it

Many of us have lived our lives as if sex was the answer to everything and there was no such thing as enough. When we enter SAA, some of us have a tendency to turn the intensity that we experienced in our addiction toward our recovery. We throw ourselves into SAA and make grand pronouncements about all we intend to do for our program and all the old behaviors we will never do again. The combination of our demoralization

and our hopes for a better future often creates a fervor that can set us up for setbacks. This is not to suggest that intention, commitment, dedication, and effort don't serve us, but simply that moderation is equally as important. Turning our will over to a Power greater than ourselves also includes letting go of trying to push our recovery. Addiction is lifted in God's time. As we hear stories of people who no longer act out, we find we can begin to trust that the program works. We can begin to unwind and slow down. Recovery is a lifelong process that we are unlikely to outgrow.

This applies equally to all troubles, big and small, that we encounter as we go through our day. When things aren't going the way we think they should, or when it seems problems are piling up, we can slow it down. Instead of trying harder to do more, we can pause and give ourselves some time to reassess the situation. We may find that the tools we use to help us with our addiction may well be just what we need for many aspects of our life. Often, within just a few hours or days, we regain perspective and things can feel more manageable.

Live and let live

It is to be expected that from time to time, you will feel irritated with people both in and out of SAA. You may not agree with how they conduct their program or how they run a meeting. They may say or do things you don't like. You may not agree with their values or how they relate to others. When we give into reactions such as condemnation, gossip, or judgment it may compromise our well-being and, if let run riot, threaten our sobriety.

Live and let live reminds us that tolerance is an important quality to develop. It liberates us from being at the mercy of other people's behavior. We learn to turn uncomfortable feelings about others into opportunities to practice keeping our focus on our own lives. We learn not to be distracted from our primary purpose—recovery from sexual addiction.

The Twelfth Tradition reminds us to place principles before personalities. We find support in talking to our sponsor and trusted friends. We practice the Third Step, which reminds us to turn over our struggles with others to our Higher Power. The Fourth Step invites us to take personal responsibility for our feelings and to look for our part in situations. We pray for the serenity to accept the things we cannot change. As we become more adept at living a sober life, we develop interests and activities that fulfill us and bring us joy. We become less likely to get caught up in what everyone else is doing or saying. Practicing the tool of Live and let live is key to our serenity.

Asking questions

Entering SAA may be a daunting experience. Out in the world in the midst of our addiction, we suffered alone; in recovery, we heal together. Having lots of questions is to be expected of a new member in SAA. In fact, it is

an indication of an open mind. There is no such thing as an unimportant or stupid question. Asking questions is a form of reaching out and helps to build connections with others. The questions asked by newcomers give members the opportunity to be reminded of the fundamentals of SAA. Your questions provide an opportunity for others to be of service.

Feedback

Feedback from sober individuals is a vital part of our program. On our own, it is difficult to get perspective on how we conducted our sex lives. A fellow recovering addict provides us with a more objective view of where we have been and where we are. He or she can also offer concrete suggestions for our recovery. As with any advice, we are always free to take it or leave it. In addition, we remind you that feedback also includes observations of strengths and recovery progress.

Some members get together in weekly "feedback groups." These are not regular SAA meetings. Typically, they are small, closed groups of four to six people who commit to meet with each other on a regular basis. Each person, in turn, is given time to speak about what is happening in his or her recovery. This is followed by constructive feedback from the other members. It is important that the group maintain its focus on recovery from sex addiction. Anyone who feels the need can start a feedback group simply by asking others if they are interested. The group defines its own structure and guidelines. It is helpful to talk to other members of SAA who have been in feedback groups.

Outside resources

At various times, all of us have made use of professionals outside of SAA. We have seen therapists, doctors, dentists, lawyers, financial advisors, vocational counselors, and many others. Without this kind of help, many of us would not be living the healthy and balanced lives we now have. You may hear people in the fellowship offer opinions about the value of particular outside resources. We are a varied group and come from many different points of view. SAA does not encourage or discourage you from getting any specific kind of help. We are responsible for our own choices. You may find that these outside services support your efforts to stay abstinent.

Once we get sober, some problems do fall away. At the same time, new ones may reveal themselves. This is not uncommon. Addiction may have been a coping mechanism that served to cover up difficult memories or feelings. During the full-blown chapters of our addiction, some of us may have experienced particularly traumatic or degrading moments. Our sexual preoccupations may have left us unable to attend to aspects of our health and well-being. The underlying feelings and consequences of our addiction may not become fully evident until we are abstinent. If you feel

the need for additional help, we encourage you to find it. We respect each person's right to decide.

Three things a day

Making a commitment to use the tools of SAA to stay sober can ground each day in the principles of the program. Attending meetings, staying in touch with our sponsor, prayer, meditation, program literature, and phone calls to SAA members are among the most widely used and are often considered the fundamental tools of SAA. In different stages of our recovery, we might be drawn to different tools. It is important to be flexible, as well as honest, about what we need to do to stay sober. There are many tools, and they are all here to help us.

In early sobriety, it is sometimes helpful to commit daily to at least three things on paper. Then, check them off or call your sponsor or another SAA friend to confirm that you have completed them. This structure provides accountability and for some is a source of comfort. Consider adding extra tools on days when the pull toward your addiction feels strong. After years of acting out compulsively, it feels good to know that we are taking constructive action.

Handling travel

When travel requires us to leave the familiar comforts of home, friends, and meetings, even briefly, it is helpful to create a recovery plan. We can often anticipate particular challenges we may face. Prepare for your trip ahead of time with your sobriety in mind. Some specific suggestions for travel include:

1. Attend SAA meetings or telemeetings. To get information on either of these, contact the ISO or visit the SAA website at www.saa-recovery.org. Although SAA has no affiliation with other twelve-step fellowships, some members choose to attend open meetings of other sex-related twelve-step groups, known as "SFellowships," to work the Twelve Steps. If no-SFellowship meetings are available, some members choose to attend other open twelve-step meetings, even if they are not sex-related.
2. Decide beforehand that you will avoid parts of town or people that might threaten your sobriety.
3. If television or the internet is a problem for you, request before you arrive that the television and/or the internet be removed or disconnected (Reference:

Sexual Sobriety and the Internet pamphlet).

4. Discuss your travel plans with your sponsor. You may also want to prearrange whatever contact you will need to support your recovery.
5. Make program phone calls and/or texts. They will be even more important when you are out of town than when you are at home.
6. Book-end challenging events with phone calls and/or texts.
7. Before leaving, set up a daily recovery plan. This might mean making agreements about prayer, meditation, literature, or other tools of SAA.

It is better to anticipate and plan for a difficult time, and find that the commitment of staying sober is manageable, than to throw ourselves headlong into a new situation without a safety net.

On occasion, some members of SAA have cut their travel plans short because the challenge of staying sober became too difficult. Returning early is not a failure but an act of courage and self-care. Ultimately, you and your sobriety are more important than whatever you might have wanted to accomplish during your trip. Sobriety is the foundation upon which our lives are built.

Being positive

Much attention in early sobriety goes to admitting all our shameful behaviors and all the compulsions from which we have committed to abstain. We become so focused on what is difficult that we may overlook the successes we have each day. The tendency to sink into self-loathing or self-pity can be balanced by regularly considering all the ways in which we are showing up for our sobriety. Being aware of our positive efforts helps to support a compassionate and loving attitude toward ourselves.

Some sponsors suggest that check-ins include an update on what is going well in our program of recovery. Consider sharing the positive changes you are experiencing in yourself and in your life. No success is too small to share. Every positive step is one step closer to a better life. This practice encourages us to keep our awareness on the solution. When talking to other members on the phone or after meetings, it is helpful to listen for the success in what we are hearing. It can be a great gift to remind others of their efforts and their progress.

Outer Circle activities

Ultimately, the purpose of SAA is to have a good life. This is what the Outer Circle is all about. Its scope is vast and touches every aspect of our

lives. Here, we focus on one aspect of the Outer Circle - developing healthy activities.

Our addiction often robbed us of simple pleasures. Some of us were so bogged down in the gloom and doom of an addict's life that we carried that same attitude into recovery. We did not know how to do anything else. Developing Outer Circle activities can help diffuse our impulses toward addictive behavior. These might include

1. cultivating hobbies such as art, music, cooking, or hiking;
2. attending sober activities like movies, plays and community events;
3. taking a class or learning a new skill;
4. gathering with friends to play sports or games, indoors or out; and
5. in time, dating and healthy sexuality.

All Outer Circle activities support our recovery process. Do the things that sound fun and interesting to you. We have spent years of our lives caught up in the insanity of sex addiction, and we can now begin to enjoy ourselves. If it doesn't feel right, there is no need to rush. Plenty of rest is important too. In other words, we balance new activities and interests with time to heal.

Getting some exercise

While physical exercise is clearly an outer-circle activity, we feel it deserves special attention because so many have found it to be a valuable support for maintaining sobriety. When we enter SAA and begin to refrain from our addictive behaviors, we eliminate our familiar way of dealing with and releasing energy. Having an alternative outlet helps to temper the symptoms of withdrawal. Moderation, as with all tools of recovery, is a key here. Easy does it.

What works for one individual may not work for the next. Also, what used to be okay for you may not be now. Be honest about where you choose to exercise. Obviously, deciding to work out in a location where you had formerly been acting out, or any place that seems to set off your addiction, is not a good idea.

Service

When trying to break a habit, it is helpful to substitute a different behavior. As newly sober sex addicts, we sometimes did not know what to do with ourselves. We were on unfamiliar ground and walking into a meeting where we did not know anyone could be uncomfortable. Doing some service—even a tiny bit can break the ice and make us feel more at home. You might join in and assist with setting up chairs or literature or

just stick out your hand and say hello. This helps get our minds off our own problems.

Fundamentally, we do service by staying sober. Everything grows out of that. Being a sober member at a meeting on a regular basis helps keep the solution available to all. Each meeting has ongoing service positions, some of which are particularly appropriate for new members. Consider volunteering to be a "greeter"; the person who welcomes people as they enter. This position is an excellent way to get to know people. Simply staying after a meeting and helping to straighten up the room can do wonders, especially in early sobriety, when most of us feel pretty low.

Service deepens our program at every stage of recovery. No matter how new we are, when we reach out to others, we do as much for ourselves as for them. Before long, we will undoubtedly have the experience of seeing someone walk into a meeting for the first time with that unmistakable expression that says in a hundred different ways, "Help! I am new!" This is an opportunity for us all to reach out and welcome the newcomer, to help them know, as we have come to know, that they belong and can recover.

Appendix A

The Twelve Steps of SAA

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.

Appendix B

The Twelve Traditions of SAA

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon SAA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as expressed in our group conscience.
3. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
4. The only requirement for SAA membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior.
5. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or SAA as a whole.
6. Each group has but one primary purpose to carry its message to the sex addict who still suffers.
7. An SAA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
8. Every SAA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
9. Sex Addicts Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers. SAA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Sex Addicts Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SAA name ought never be drawn

into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Appendix C

Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Eleventh Step Prayer

(Adapted from a prayer in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions)

God, make me a channel of your peace,
that where there is hatred,
I may bring love that where there is wrong,
I may bring the spirit of forgiveness - that where there is error,
I may bring truth - that where there is doubt,
I may bring faith - that where there is despair,
I may bring hope
that where there are shadows,
I may bring light
That where there is sadness,
I may bring joy.
God, grant that I may seek to comfort
rather than be comforted
to understand, than be understood
to love, than be loved.
For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

SAA READING LIST

The following pieces of literature explain more about our Twelve Step

program. We have found them to be helpful to us in our recovery from sexual addiction. These items may be purchased from the ISO Office.

ISO CONFERENCE APPROVED

Sex Addicts Anonymous-A Pathway to Recovery (English, Spanish, French)

The Bubble (English, Spanish)

Three Circles (English, Spanish)

Abstinence (English, Spanish)

Sexual Sobriety and the Internet (English, Spanish)

Getting Started In SAA (English, Spanish)

Tools of Recovery (English, Spanish)

ISO LITERATURE COMMITTEE APPROVED

Sex Addicts Anonymous (English, Spanish)

Group Guide (English, Spanish)

First Step Guide (English, Spanish) Abstinence and Boundaries (English, Spanish)

Intergroup Guide (English)

Getting a Sponsor (English) A Special Welcome to the Woman Newcomer (English, Spanish) Safe and Sexually Sober Meetings-Helping Women

Feel Welcome in Your Meeting (English) Recovery from Compulsive Sexual Avoidance (English) SAA and the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Sex Addict (English)

Writing to Prisoners (English)

ANOTHER USEFUL PUBLICATION The Outer Circle:

Newsletter of the ISO of SAA ISO of SAA P. O. Box
70949 Houston, Texas 77270

(713) 869-4902

(800) 477-8191 info@saa-recovery.org Website: saa-recovery.org

