

dangerous behavior.

With abstinence, we understand our behaviors with greater clarity. We can revise our boundaries, as needed, as we grow in the program.

Triggers

Situations arise that bring up the urge to act out. We call these triggers. An obvious trigger is being exposed to someone sexually exciting, such as seeing an attractive person in revealing clothes.

Most of the time our triggers are not as obvious. We often become vulnerable to acting-out when we are under stress or attempting to avoid some emotion. Emotional stressors are very important triggers to watch out for. As addicts, we use sex to avoid feeling our emotions. We respond to feelings of fear, anger, resentment, anxiety, loneliness, shame, and even joy with the desire to act out. Even when we are triggered by something sexual, we usually have some emotional trigger behind it.

As we become aware of our triggers, we take steps to avoid them. We can change our life-styles to reduce triggering situations. For example, we may change our routes around town to avoid places that trigger us or even change our job if it sends us on the road too often. In these ways, we defend our abstinence.

Still, we can't avoid all triggers but we can change how we respond to them. When triggered, we can call someone in the program, pray, or go to a meeting rather than act out. We remember to focus on the consequences of acting-out rather than the fantasy.

When we use the tools of the program, we often find the emotional source of our triggers, and the urge to act out passes.

Slippery Behaviors

Slippery behaviors are things we do that expose us to triggers. They may not be sexual in themselves, but they put us at risk to act out. Slippery behaviors include: driving by where we used to act out, calling former lovers, sexual obsession, watching T.V. for sexual content, and watching people we're attracted to.

Sometimes we do these things in order to become triggered; sometimes we are motivated by something else. We often fool ourselves into believing that we have a legitimate reason to be in a triggering situation when our true motivation is to become triggered. Accepting that we are powerless over our addiction means accepting that we cannot indulge in these behaviors without risking acting out.

Sexual Obsession

We don't have control over having sexual thoughts and feelings. They occur frequently, even among non-addicts. Sex addicts have sexual thoughts and dreams, and we do not consider them slips. It takes time for our addictive sexual thoughts to fade away.

However, when we indulge in sexual thoughts to escape our feelings or to get a high, they become more than thoughts. Losing ourselves in sexual preoccupation is sexual obsession. Examples include: fantasies about sex, replaying sexual encounters or pornographic materials, and planning future binges.

When we catch ourselves in sexual obsession, we choose to interrupt the process. We bring ourselves back to the present moment. We do this by taking a few deep breaths, counting to three, and focusing on what we are experiencing at the time. We get in touch with our senses. We ask ourselves how our body feels and what we feel emotionally. If the thoughts persist, we phone someone in the program and/or say a prayer to our Higher Power.

Some of us consider sexual obsession to be acting-out; almost all of us find it slippery. You will have to decide if sexual obsession is acting-out for you.

Summary

Abstinence in SAA means not acting-out achieved through the support of working a program of recovery. We suggest you consider acting out to be any sexual behavior which is abusive, high-risk, painful, costly, or compulsive. Slippery behaviors are anything we do which triggers us. We set boundaries around both our acting-out behavior and our slippery behavior. We change our routines to avoid triggers and use program tools when we become triggered.

With the help of sponsors and other recovering sex addicts, we define our own boundaries. We recommend that you start with boundaries restricting behaviors that are abusive to others or high-risk to yourself.

We are sexual beings, even as we are abstinent. We strive for healthy sexuality as part of being human, rather than eliminating sex from our lives.

We know that we will continue to have sexual thoughts. We are not concerned about our sexual thoughts so long as we let them pass. We set boundaries around the sexual obsession that we consider acting-out or slippery behavior.

Consult with your sponsor or experienced fellowship members about defining your boundaries. The **Three Circle pamphlet** is a helpful guide. Establish your boundaries now; they don't have to be perfect. We revise our boundaries as we grow in recovery.

We support you in your efforts to maintain your abstinence and work toward recovery. There is no limit to how healthy we can become when we work together.

ISO of SAA, Inc.
P. O. Box 70949 Houston, Texas 77270
(713) 869-4902
(800) 477-8191 info@saa-recovery.org

Tri County Recovery

Abstinence

Conference Approved May 1999
Revision: Dec 2015

©1999 International Service Organization
of SAA, Inc.
v 1.0.0.1

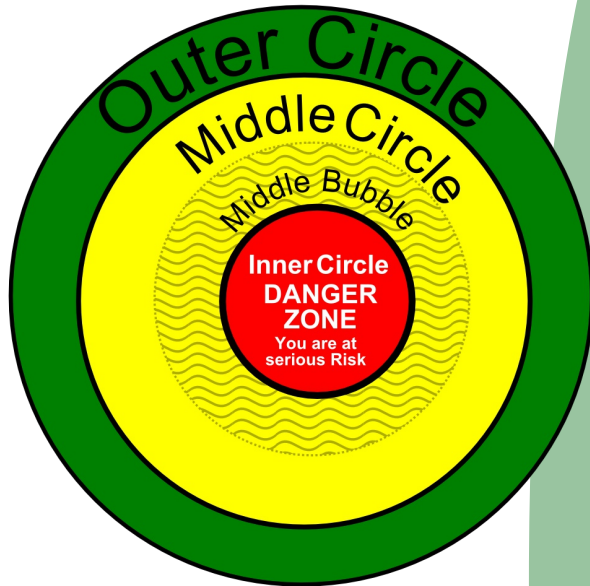


SAA

From Shame to Grace
Path to Healing and Recovery
<http://tcr.p2har.org>
info@tcr.p2har.org
Tel : 1-844-523-8676, ext 10827

Introduction

In SAA, we use the term abstinence but it may be difficult to know exactly what we mean. The purpose of this pamphlet is to clarify the word abstinence, based on our experience in SAA. In the process we define some of the basic terms we use in the program. The chart below



low illustrates how we categorize our behaviors.

Acting-out

When we admit that we are powerless over our addictive sexual behavior, we accept that we cannot behave in certain ways. These behaviors are very compelling before we do them, but afterward they leave us feeling shameful, remorseful, empty, and craving. We call these behaviors acting-out. The uncontrollable, nagging, urge to act out is called a compulsive desire. Acting-out is painful, costly and high-risk or dangerous. It is often abusive to others. If we weren't addicts, these consequences would be enough to make us stop. We need a program of recovery, because we are compelled to act out despite the consequences.

Abstinence

Abstinence means not acting-out. For the alcoholic, it means not drinking; for the compulsive eater it means not eating certain "binge" foods or not eating in a compulsive way. In SAA, we must define for ourselves what we abstain from. We write a list of all our acting-out behaviors and the patterns of behavior which lead us to want to act out. We then set restrictions on doing these things. This process is called setting **boundaries**.

Many of us write a sex plan with our sponsors. In it we write down our boundaries, date and sign the paper. We

agree to revise our boundaries only after reviewing them with our sponsors. Abstinence does not mean giving up sex. That is celibacy. While some of us have found it useful to practice periods of celibacy, it is not a requirement of membership in the program. We don't give up our healthy sexual expressions; we give up acting-out: compulsive, painful, and destructive sexual behaviors. We cannot rely on abstinence as our only means of recovery. Abstinence does not mean controlling our addiction by the force of our will power. That's **white knuckling**. In order to remain abstinent we need the tools of the program, each other, and our Higher Power. We maintain our abstinence and gain serenity by working the program of the Twelve Steps. As we work the program, our judgment improves, our thinking clears, our emotions emerge, and our compulsive desires lose their power.

The purpose of abstinence is to stop hurting ourselves and others, and to grow healthy in our sexuality and our spirituality.

We seek healthy sexuality. Healthy sexual behavior is safe, joyful, and within our personal moral standards. When we are healthy in our sexuality, we are intimate with ourselves, our feelings, and our partner (if we have one). We may struggle to maintain healthy sexuality so we need to be patient. Healthy sexuality is a spiritual experience that is worth working for.

Abusive and High-Risk Acting-Out

In SAA, you define for yourself what behaviors are acting-out. We don't require abstinence for membership in SAA. The only requirement for membership in SAA is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior.

Nonetheless, we offer the following recommendation for starting your list of inner circle behaviors. We want you to examine two types of behavior: acting-out which is abusive to others, and acting-out which is high-risk or dangerous to yourself.

Abusive to others means our sexual behavior violates other people's right to choose with whom they engage in sex and under what circumstances. We must have explicit permission from people to engage in sexual activity. Failure to do so violates their rights. Examples of abusive behavior include: sexual assault, incest, indecent liberties, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and stalking.

Our behavior is abusive to others when we use threats, power, or authority to coerce a person into sexual activity. We may tell ourselves that they have a choice, but it is not a free choice. Having sex with these people takes unfair advantage of them and violates their rights. Examples of this include: sex with someone you have power over, sex between a minor and an adult, sex with a person who is intoxicated or impaired, and sex with a patient or parishioner.

Having sex with people when we carry a sexually transmitted disease without informing them violates their right to choose the conditions of their sexual activity. It also exposes them and their partners to disease and possible death. Therefore, it is abusive.

Sexual affairs violate the right of the committed partner to know the full circumstances of their sexual contact. Many of us in SAA have found that our affairs are discovered by the partner, are destructive to the committed relationship, and cause great pain to all parties involved-including the children. We consider affairs to be abusive.

High-risk behaviors are those sexual activities which put you in danger. Some examples are: masturbating while driving a car, buying and selling sex, unsafe sex, anonymous sex, one night stands, sex in public places, and sex or relationships with dangerous people. Most behaviors which are abusive to others are high-risk as well. Many abusive behaviors involve the risk of disease, assault, blackmail, injury, arrest, or death.

These examples do not cover all behavior which is abusive or high-risk. Examine your behaviors with rigorous honesty to see if they are abusive or high-risk. We want our members to recover safely. There are behaviors which are not especially abusive or high-risk. Those behaviors which cause us pain; cost us time, energy, or money; or are compulsive; are still acting-out, even when they aren't abusive or high-risk.

SAA has no consensus about what behaviors are acting-out beyond those which are abusive or high-risk. We expect you to decide for yourself which of your behaviors are acting-out. Some of us consider all masturbation to be acting-out. Others set a boundary that we may masturbate in a healthy way. We have no policy regarding sex with people we aren't married to. Still, many of us choose to have sex only with people with whom we share emotional intimacy and commitment.

We recommend that you seek the guidance of others in the program to sort your behaviors into healthy, acting-out, high-risk and abusive. We know that our addiction has impaired our judgment about the consequences of our behavior. With support, we can break through this denial. Consult with your sponsor and other members in the program to decide how you feel about a behavior, the risks or costs, and your moral standards. One guideline is how you would feel telling others in the program about what you have done.

Sex addicts like to rationalize a behavior by saying I'm only hurting myself. We have three responses to that excuse. First, you have to ask yourself why is that ok? Second, people who care about us are hurt when we suffer - even when they don't know specifically what we are doing. And third, if we continue an acting-out behavior, we run the risk of our behavior escalating to more