

The Abstinence Statement

(1st Meeting of the Month)

Our goal when entering the SAA program is abstinence from one or more specific sexual behaviors. But unlike programs for alcoholics or drug addicts, Sex Addicts Anonymous does not have a universal definition of abstinence.

Many of us have no desire to stop being sexual altogether. It is not sex in and of itself that causes us problems, but the addiction to certain sexual behaviors. Since different addicts suffer from different behaviors, and since our sexuality is experienced in so many different ways, it is necessary that SAA members define for themselves, with the help of their sponsor or others in recovery, which of their sexual behaviors they consider to be “acting out.”

We carefully consider which sexual behaviors we feel powerless to stop, and which sexual acts lead to feelings of demoralization or other negative consequences. These are the addictive behaviors from which we seek to abstain. We also consider which sexual behaviors are acceptable to us, or even experienced with a sense of gratitude and enjoyment. Our program acknowledges each individual’s dignity and right to choose his or her own concept of healthy sexuality.

To help define our sexual sobriety, many of us use a tool developed in SAA called The Three Circles. We draw three concentric circles, consisting of an inner, middle, and outer circle. With the help of our sponsor or others in recovery, we write down various behaviors in each of the three circles. In the inner circle, we put the sexual behaviors we want to abstain from, the ones we consider “acting out.” In the middle circle, we put the behaviors that may lead to acting out, or that we are not sure about. In the outer circle we put healthy behaviors that enhance our life and our recovery. Outer circle behaviors include healthy sexuality.

Our circles are not set in stone for all time. We have found, however, that change our Three Circles, should not be done on a whim, but only after careful consideration and prayer, and with guidance from a sponsor or other more experienced member of the fellowship. Experience has shown that it is too difficult to sort through these issues by ourselves or to see through the denial that often obscures the truth about our behavior.

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. How 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 program of recovery, the Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous.