

Sexual Addiction Recovery: What Are We Trying to Accomplish Here?

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One of the significant challenges in recovering from sexual addiction is establishing a clear definition of sobriety. An individual, along with their counselors and support group, collaborates to develop an "initial" personal definition of recovery. The ultimate goal in recovering from sexual addiction isn't lifelong abstinence from sex but rather learning how to engage in sexuality differently. In recovery, sex shifts from being a problem or a coping mechanism to a means of celebrating relationships and life.

Initial celibacy serves as a pathway to renewing healthy sexuality. From celibacy emerges a process of rebirth. Early recovery involves abstaining from specific "inner circle" behaviors and halting the addictive process. Sometimes, ongoing struggles with maintaining abstinence from core behaviors stem from persistent engagement in "middle circle" behaviors.

Many of these behaviors are part of the addictive cycle but have yet to be identified as part of the definition of recovery. These behaviors typically serve as triggers for repeating inner circle behaviors.

Recovery is a gradual process. Significant life changes occur as destructive patterns and behaviors are identified and eliminated. Behavior, lifestyle, beliefs, attitudes, and relationships all undergo transformation. The individual builds a network of relationships where sex isn't central. Sex within a marriage transitions from initial abstinence to genuine intimacy. After addressing other relationship issues, partners openly discuss their sexual desires and expectations.

Couples resolve many previously unresolved issues. Non-addictive sex becomes fulfilling. Rediscovering healthy, non-addictive sex is crucial for the recovering individual. Ceasing compulsive behavior doesn't signify a

complete transformation of one's sexuality. Trust in oneself and others develops gradually, which may take years. When people with sexual addiction eliminate compulsive behavior and engage in introspection, they may feel vulnerable and experience profound shame. Addressing internalized shame and tracing its origins to interpersonal experiences is essential. This process transforms one's sense of self from feeling defective and alienated to feeling whole and valued. Healing shame is driven by openness, honesty, and willingness, often facilitated by a spiritual recovery program.

After a period of recovery, some people with sexual addiction undergo a sort of "new adolescence" and discover a new sexual identity. They may feel a renewed sense of innocence and experience themselves in ways they haven't before.

Spirituality-driven recovery facilitates profound change in their life. Every sincere attempt to battle addiction begins with a desire to change addictive behavior. In early recovery, individuals essentially "reform" their behavior by replacing destructive actions with constructive ones.

Throughout this process, they may recognize the spiritual significance of their struggles and feel drawn toward something more profound. By substituting one set of behaviors for a less destructive and healthier set, they fill the void left by addiction and pave the way for a more profound transformation. Internalizing a program of recovery transforms desires and changes lives.

Sources: Carnes, P. (1989). *Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict*. Hazelden Publishing Company.

May, G. (1988). *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addiction*. Harper Collins, New York.

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Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy."