

Reflection on Step One

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We admitted we were powerless over sexual compulsion - that our lives had become unmanageable"

Each step is about a fundamental change in thought, attitude and belief. Each step builds on the change embodied by the step before. Step one encompasses three basic changes:

(1) WE

We stop trying to face life and our addiction alone. We are natural isolators and acting out with anonymous sex reinforces this isolation. Sometimes it's a fear of intimacy or fear we're not enough. As addicts, the best way to avoid being rejected or hurt by anyone is to keep a distance by having sex with everyone.

We can do together what we could never do alone. That means taking the action of going to lots of meetings on a consistent basis to get known and get to know people. When we hear others tell our story we learn about ourselves and don't feel so terminally broken and unique. We get hope from others sharing they used to do what we do, but don't have to do it anymore. When we share honestly and others accept us, we don't feel so alone and ashamed. Participating in fellowship activities, workshops and retreats builds our sense of community and reduces our isolation.

Making multiple calls each day to fellow members keeps us connected between meetings. Getting a sponsor that we can trust with more intimate details we might not share at meetings is essential. A sponsor can also guide us through the steps of recovery.

Service is the most powerful tool to reduce the agony of isolation. Imagine a picture of yourself in a lifeboat after shipwreck on stormy seas. The turbulent waters of acting out are seething all around you. The other survivors in the boat are your circle of friends and support in SCA. Whenever a wave of acting out threatens to sweep someone out of the boat, we grab each other to pull them back into safety. Being of service with meeting commitments and reaching out to help your fellows stay sober works when all other program tools fail.



(2) POWERLESS

No one likes to admit they can't control their acting out behavior. Sometimes we only want to quit the most dangerous behaviors but hang on to the lesser behaviors. Or, we want to let go of the consequences but keep doing the acting out to moderate our feelings.

First we need to take the action of writing a sex plan and sharing it with a sponsor. A sex plan is not an oppressive chastity belt. It is simply a snap shot of the behaviors we wish to let go of and what we want to bring into our lives instead. A plan is always a work in progress that changes as we get more honest with ourselves. We often bargain with our plan until we get more willing to let go of different sexual behaviors.

Once our ideal is clarified on paper, we often find that no matter how hard we try, we can't stay sober. We tried blocking apps to keep us away from porn sites, but always figured a work around. We deleted our profiles on acting out sites, but managed to hang onto one in reserve or set up new ones. We deleted the phone numbers of sex buddies in our phone, but reengaged when they called or texted back.

Some of the most dangerous phrases in addict thinking are: It won't hurt me this time; I'll look but not act out; I'll get sober tomorrow; I've already acted out - might as well do more before I have to stop; or What's the use anyhow?

Accepting we're powerless is a process of trying to control it and falling down repeatedly. In our experience, we have to get beaten into a reasonable state of acceptance by slipping and slipping until we finally accept deep down that we really really can't control this thing.

(3) UNMANAGEABLE

Building a WE for support in (1) and coming to admit I was POWERLESS in (2) wasn't enough until we hit a bottom from our sexual behavior. The pain of acting out had to grow until it was worse than the pain of facing life without the escape of acting out.

We use sex as a drug to moderate our emotions and reality around life. When we act out it medicates and numbs painful feelings. When we act out the multiple difficulties in our life fade to the background in a very temporary state of relief.

Unfortunately that state of relief never lasts and we have to keep acting out to cope with life. Often our problems pile up because we are avoiding and medicating problems instead of facing and taking action on them.

In this sense, sex isn't our problem, it's our solution to dealing with life. It's our "higher power" to cope with discomfort over people places and things. Sex does something for us that it normally doesn't do for the non-sexual compulsive. It literally changes our perception of reality. Suddenly our problems don't seem so big or we don't fear so much.

When faced with giving up this provider of relief in order to stay sober, our addict brain repels at the prospect. Our sponsors may say "you'll feel better if you stop acting out". However when we stop acting out for a day or week our problems feel worse (because they're no longer being medicated). That discomfort would always suck us back into a slip and we kept relapsing.

We sex addicts have a very high tolerance for pain. Eventually the pain of acting out gets so great that we are between a rock and a hard place. On one side we'd rather die than act out again. On the other side we'd rather die than face life without the relief from acting out.

From this place of hitting bottom and complete deflation, we became willing to let go of sex as our higher power and reach for something bigger that might solve our problem. We throw ourselves into working program as if our life depends on it. Driven by pain we get into a place of surrender and willingness that we'd never been able to muster before.

From that moment on, we often start to get some time on our plans. Sobriety often doesn't come all at once. For most people it's ever longer periods of abstinence mixed with ever shorter periods of acting out. Finally abstinence sticks and we are graced with longer term sobriety (contingent of course on working the rest of the steps).

SUMMARY

Think of step one as as three fundamental changes:

(1) WE

Are you trying to do this alone? Are you connected to a circle of support on a daily basis? Do you have a sponsor you can trust with your deepest fears and secrets? Have you accepted that I can't but we can.

(2) POWERLESS

Are you powerless over when, where or whom you have sex with? When you start acting out, do you find you can't stop? Are you finally willing to be honest with yourself about the true nature of your condition?

(3) UNMANAGEABLE

Have you had enough? Is the pain of acting out greater than the pain of facing life without the acting out? Are you in enough pain that you're finally willing to go to any length to work a program of recovery?

Each of these is a process of change and change takes time. Be gentle with yourself and remember that Rome wasn't built in a day. It took years for the addiction to build up, it will take time to turn things around. Things will get better, past is not prologue if we're working a program of recovery. Immerse yourself in the fellowship and let the love of others come in until you learn to love yourself.

