Purpose

We have created this pamphlet to inform people in the helping professions about sexual addiction. Below, we talk about our personal experiences with addiction, how Sexual Recovery Anonymous (SRA) can help those who are addicted, and how SRA works in conjunction with counseling and therapy. We hope this may assist you in helping someone you know who shares our problems.

What Is Sexual Addiction?

To the majority of people, both in and out of the helping professions, the idea of sexual addiction may be new and puzzling. Can someone be addicted to sex? What is the difference between normal sexual desire and addiction? Even if sexual behavior is compulsive, is it necessarily harmful?

For us, sex had become a mood-altering behavior to which we turned in order to avoid our true feelings and emotions. This use of sex and sexual fantasy became compulsive; the need to escape, no matter what the cost, was greater than our ability to stop. The "high" we got from sex was so intense that we repeatedly used it in an attempt to avoid the realities of our lives. Sexual fantasy, the pursuit of sex and sexual acting out came to dominate ever greater parts of our existence. We found that no matter how hard we tried to stop or control our behavior, we could not.

Although there has recently been much research on sexual addiction, in this pamphlet we base our observations on our personal experiences. In our own lives, we have seen the obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior and the destruction it has wrought. We were driven to ask for help because we could not stop our addictive behavior by ourselves.

There is no single kind of behavior that typifies sexual addiction. Many forms of sexual activity can be used to escape one's feelings. We have found that common ones include compulsive masturbation, pornography, inappropriate affairs, voyeurism, exhibitionism, anonymous sex, patronizing prostitutes, and prostitution itself.

We have engaged in these behaviors despite enormous costs to ourselves and those close to us. By continually numbing ourselves with sex, we did great harm to our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. Our actions were regularly ruled by compulsion rather than common sense, and we put ourselves at great risk. We could not stop, despite the risk of AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases; the danger of violent crime while cruising for prostitutes on deserted streets; the threat of our stash of pornography being discovered by our loved ones; or the chance of pay-for-sex phone calls being traced to us at our work place.

For us, the first realization of our addiction came when we asked the following questions: Is our behavior repeated over and over? Is our behavior emotionally or physically damaging? Do we want to stop but cannot?

There is a checklist of symptoms of the addiction included in the pamphlet, Sexual Recovery Anonymous. Many people coming into recovery have found this pamphlet useful in determining if they have a problem with sexual addiction.

How Can SRA Help With Sexual Addiction?

Our fellowship is a Twelve Step program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. Our purpose is to recover from sexual addiction and to help others recover. For us, “to recover” means ending our compulsive and destructive sexual behavior, healing the emotional wounds that fostered the behavior and healing the damage caused to us and others by our behavior. In SRA we learn to integrate sexuality into our lives in a healthy way.

Our addiction was like a secret room, a very lonely place where we isolated ourselves. This place felt like a necessary part of ourselves, but the loneliness and fear could never be shared. The further we went into our room, the more it became like a cell.

As sex addicts, most of us are deeply ashamed of our compulsive behavior and this creates even thicker walls between us and others. Our addiction caused us to withdraw, so we lost meaningful contact with people. We struggled to keep our addiction a secret, especially from those we loved and who loved us. But this secret world was killing us.

How can our program help if an addict’s most vigorous efforts have failed? Our program offers what is not in any addict’s power to provide for themselves: communion with others, mutual understanding, help from other addicts, compassion and fellowship. Many members discover that the fellowship and love found in meetings is a power that affects their lives more compellingly than their individual strivings.

When newcomers attend their first meetings, they are often astounded to hear others sharing the details of their addiction openly, thoroughly, and honestly. Newcomers realize that they have found a place where they can open that room inside themselves, for the first time sharing honestly with other people. What they share about themselves is treated with respect and compassion. They are entirely welcomed by a fellowship of men and women. The healthy desire for connection with others, blocked for so long by the secret, shameful world, finally finds a place of fulfillment.

In SRA we learn about the Twelve Steps, which are suggested as an important part of our program of recovery. They are simple, thoughtful tools that, when applied with sincerity, demand a thorough appraisal of our addiction, our relationship with ourselves and others, and our spiritual nature. The Steps provide a framework for a housecleaning of the self which leads to an emotional and spiritual renewal.

SRA And Therapy

The SRA position on therapy is implied in our program preamble: "SRA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes." Therefore, our official position is that we take no stand on therapy. We neither encourage it nor discourage it. This leaves the choice of therapy up to the individual.

Many of us, in fact, have sought therapy as a companion to our SRA recovery. In our meetings we sometimes speak of our therapy and how it helps us. In fact, many of us have found our therapists through personal recommendations of fellow members. So, although we neither endorse nor oppose therapy, we recognize that many members find it valuable.

Do They Work Together?

Some therapists see Twelve Step fellowships as being at odds with therapy. Our experience shows that this is not true. Both may address the same issues but they need not be in conflict. Each suggests solutions to the same problem and each can support the other.

SRA offers the opportunity of group support while recovering. It offers this support, even outside of meetings. It also offers peer identification, so people can start to feel less lonely and isolated with their addiction. Knowing and being with others who are recovering can be immensely healing.

Members find that therapy offers professional support and guidance as suppressed feelings, memories and thoughts are uncovered. This can be especially helpful in the early stages of sobriety when volatile emotions often surface. Later, members find that the ongoing care and assurance of a professional can continue to provide a vital role in their recoveries. Therapists may be assured that should therapy end, the client may continue to have support through SRA.

In Conclusion

Sharing this information about our fellowship with the helping professions is part of an effort to reach out to those who are suffering from sexual addiction. We are always happy to meet with concerned individuals or to share our experience with classes, seminars, or other interested groups. If you or someone you know would like more information about our program you may contact us at the phone numbers or addresses listed below.

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SRA

To the Helping Professions