

Saturday Mixed Meeting on Sex and Intimacy Avoidance

Welcome to the SAA Mixed Meeting on Sex and Intimacy Avoidance. My name is _____ and I'm your trusted servant for this meeting. This is a 90-minute meeting that ends at 4:30pm Pacific Time. It is also a closed meeting. Only those seeking their own recovery from sexual addiction or avoidance may attend. If you are a student or mental health professional conducting research or a partner of a sex addict, you should find an open meeting. If you are a sex addict or think you may have a problem with sexual addiction or avoidance, you are welcome to attend this meeting.

May we have a moment of silence for the sex addict in and out of these rooms who still suffers, followed by the Serenity Prayer?

Do we have any newcomers to this group? (*Note – if no newcomers are present skip this paragraph.*) We want to extend a special welcome to you. If you are new to this group, you do not have to participate until you are ready to do so. You are welcome to attend, observe, and ask questions after the meeting. We suggest that you attend six meetings before you decide if you belong here.

Anonymity is a cornerstone of the 12-step program. Our status or position outside this group is not an issue here. Confidentiality is essential to this being a safe place for all of us. Whoever and whatever we see and hear in this meeting must be kept to ourselves when we are outside of this group. No recordings or screen shots of the Zoom meeting should be taken.

Please mute your line when you are not sharing and make sure to unmute yourself before sharing. Also, to ensure the anonymity of the group, please use headphones and/or dial-in from a private area. Please silence your cell phone unless you are serving as timer. As a courtesy to our fellow members, we ask that you refrain from surfing, text messaging and/or playing games during the meeting. Also, please change your name in Zoom to an appropriate name for security purposes.

Since there is little conference-approved literature on avoidance of healthy sexual intimacy, we may read outside literature during the meeting. As a group, however, we do believe that using the conference-approved literature is essential for working the program.

- ◆ Would someone please read the "Meeting Preamble"?
- ◆ Would someone please read "Sex Addiction: Acting Out and Acting In"?
- ◆ Would someone please read "Compulsive Avoidance of Sex and Intimacy"?
- ◆ Would someone please read the "18 Symptoms of Sex and Intimacy Avoidance"?
- ◆ Would someone please read the "Abstinence and Recovery"?
- ◆ Would someone please read "The Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous"?

Introductions: Now let's introduce ourselves using our first names only and stating how long we've been attending this particular meeting.

This is a literature-study, step-sharing meeting. At this point in the meeting, we read and discuss a section from Patrick Carnes's book *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* or—on the first Saturday of the month—a reading from the SAA Green Book. Alternatively, someone can use this time to share some of their formal, written step work that they have previously read to a sponsor out loud with the group. Does anyone wish to do so?

(If someone wants to share step work)

Begin when you are ready, If you have not finished by 3:45pm, I will ask you to stop sharing. You may continue at our next meeting if you like.

(When he or she is done.) Thank you for sharing your step work with us. Would you like feedback on what you have shared?

(If so) We will now take 10 minutes for feedback. Examples of feedback include sharing what you identified with or liked about the presentation, or feelings it brought up for you. If you wish to get current or share about an issue you are dealing with, there will be time for check-ins after feedback or during fellowship. Who would like to begin the feedback?

(If no one wants to share step work)

We will now begin book study portion of the meeting. Our last reading was _____. Today, we will we read _____.

Please read a paragraph or two if you like, then pass to the next person. We will read for 10 minutes. Would someone be willing to serve as timer?

(Stop the reading at a convenient point.)

We will now take 10 minutes to discuss the material we have just read. Please keep your remarks as brief as possible and restricted to sharing your observations and reaction to the text. We will have time for open sharing and getting current later in the meeting. Who would like to begin?

The Seventh Tradition states we are self-supporting through our own contributions. Seventh Tradition funds are used to pay meeting expenses and for donations to SAA service groups at the local and national levels. We encourage you to send donations to ISO directly at <https://saa-recovery.org/contribute> or by texting "SAA" to 91999 as we cannot collect donations virtually/digitally at this time. Would someone please read the tradition of the month as well as Tradition Twelve?

It's now time for the Secretary's report and announcements.

Open sharing: Thank you. The meeting is now open for sharing. In our sharing, we use "I" statements and keep the focus on ourselves. We do not directly refer to another person's sharing or to any other member of the group by name. If someone feels another is being too explicit or inappropriate, they may signal by raising their hand. We ask that you be discreet about such sensitive issues as child abuse, rape or HIV positives engaging in unsafe sex. Do not reveal names, relationships or any unnecessary specifics that could be incriminating to you or others. This policy is recommended to protect the individual and the group from outside controversy.

After sharing a member has the option to receive feedback. Feedback is not advice. Feedback is not crosstalk, as the person receiving feedback just listens. Feedback is a responding share, limited to one's own personal experience, strength, and hope related to what was shared. Feedback often comes in the form of one's experiences and participation in the SAA program.

Shares should be kept to three minutes. A timer will sound as a courtesy reminder at two minutes and again one minute later. **If feedback is desired, two members will each have one minute to give feedback.** When we are ready for the next open share, I will recognize the next speaker. Who would like to begin?

(At three minutes before the meeting ends): That's all we have time for.

- ◆ Would someone please read the Sponsorship Statement
- ◆ Would someone please read the Closing Statement?
- ◆ Would someone please read The Promises?

After a moment of **silent meditation** for the sex addict who still suffers and for those who wish, let us close with the Serenity Prayer.

SECRETARY

Prior to the start of the meeting ask if anyone is willing to be the leader. Then pass out the following readings: "Meeting Format," "Meeting Preamble," "Sex Addiction: Acting Out and Acting In," "Compulsive Avoidance of Sex and Intimacy," "18 Symptoms of Sex and Intimacy Avoidance," "Abstinence and Recovery," "Twelve Steps," "Chip Format," "12 Traditions," and "The Promises" for volunteers/members to read aloud when called upon.

Good afternoon. My name is _____ and I am the Secretary for today's meeting.

1. Thank you, Buck, for allowing us to use your Zoom account for our meeting.
2. Just a reminder: This is a closed meeting. Only those seeking their own recovery from sexual addiction or avoidance may attend. If you are a student or mental health professional conducting research or a partner of a sex addict, you should find an open meeting. If you are a sex addict or think you may have a problem with sexual addiction or avoidance, you are welcome to attend this meeting. If you haven't done so already, please identify yourself using your first name only.
3. I want to welcome anyone who is new to the SAA program. This is a safe place -- you are among friends. We know the courage it takes coming to a meeting for the first time. Welcome and please come back. All of us here were in your shoes at one time.
4. Another reminder: Please mute your line when you are not sharing and make sure to unmute yourself before sharing. Also, to ensure the anonymity of the group, please use headphones and/or dial-in from a private area. No recordings or screen shots of the Zoom meeting should be taken. Please silence your cell phone unless you are serving as timer. As a courtesy to our fellow members, we ask that you refrain from surfing, text messaging and/or playing games during the meeting. Also, please change your name in Zoom to an appropriate name for security purposes.
5. This meeting ends at 4:30pm Pacific Time after which you may wish to continue with informal fellowship. If you did not have a chance to share during the meeting, you will have an opportunity to share during informal fellowship.
6. It is now time for the Secretary's announcements. Are there are any items for the business meeting scheduled for the 1st Saturday of the month.
7. It is now time for the Literature report.
8. I will put a link in the chat in case you would like to download or add yourself to the phone list. I will also put info in the chat on how to contribute to SAA online or via text.
9. Are there any SAA-related announcements?
10. Are there any non-SAA-related announcements?
11. If the Group Representative to the International Service Organization (ISO) is present, ask them if they have anything new to report.
12. It's now time to turn the meeting back over to the leader.

Meeting Preamble

Sex Addicts Anonymous is a spiritual program based on the principles and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. Our primary purpose is to stop our addictive sexual behavior, and to help others recover from sexual addiction. We find a new way of living through the SAA program, and carry our message to others seeking recovery. (Introduction, Sex Addicts Anonymous)

The focus of this meeting is on recovering from the compulsive avoidance of healthy sexual intimacy and closeness with others. As we come to understand our fear of intimacy and work the Steps around it, our lives change for the better.

Sex Addiction: Acting Out and Acting In

“Sex addiction is a disease affecting the mind, body, and spirit. It is progressive, with the behavior and its consequences usually becoming more severe over time. We experience it as compulsion, which is an urge that is stronger than our will to resist, and as obsession, which is a mental preoccupation with sexual behavior and fantasies. In SAA, we have come to call our addictive sexual behavior “acting out.” (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 3)

“Most of us came to our first Sex Addicts Anonymous meeting when we could no longer deny that we had a problem. [Acting out behaviors] seemed like the part of an iceberg that we could see above the waterline, and they deserved our immediate attention. Over time, though, other more subtle forms of sex addiction known as “acting in” behaviors that may have been lurking below come to the surface. “Acting in” is any compulsive sexual behavior that serves to avoid or block sexual, emotional, or spiritual intimacy with others, ourselves, or our Higher Power.” (Adapted from the SAA pamphlet “Recovery from Compulsive Sexual Avoidance: A Return to Intimacy”).

Compulsive Avoidance of Sex and Intimacy

"For some of us, the compulsive avoidance of sex and intimacy became a destructive pattern, dominating our thoughts and actions. We may always have felt unable or unwilling to be sexual. Or we may have experienced periods of feeling 'shut down' alternating with other periods of sexual acting out. We have come to realize that both extremes represent symptoms of the same disease. Whether we were acting out or not being sexual at all, our addiction involved being emotionally unavailable." (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 6)

Some of us have found ourselves 'shut down' sexually in recovery, afraid of sex because of its association in our minds with our addiction or with past sexual trauma, or because of a fear of intimacy and vulnerability. Trying to control our sexuality in this way is just another symptom of our disease. The solution lies in turning our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power, knowing that however unfamiliar we are with the challenges of healthier sexuality, we can put our trust in the God of our understanding." (*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 72)

18 Symptoms of Sex and Intimacy Avoidance

Symptoms some of us have experienced include, but are not limited to:

1. Practicing avoidance of sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
2. Obsessive sexual thoughts (about having sex and/or avoiding it).
3. A feeling that our sexuality is inherently bad and something we should feel ashamed of and guilty about.
4. Pretending that flirtation and sexual advances aren't really happening to us and acting uninterested purely based on fear of taking risks.
5. A pattern of sex and relationships with active sex addicts and/or other unavailable people.
6. A pattern of addictive sexual behavior (acting out), followed by a pattern of compulsive sexual avoidance (acting in).
7. Extreme fear of combining emotional intimacy with sexuality.
8. Finding fault or starting fights with a spouse or partner to avoid sexual relations.
9. Being emotionally unavailable in sexual and non-sexual relationships.
10. Only socializing in groups to avoid one-on-one relationships.
11. Avoiding social situations altogether due to extreme discomfort.
12. Only being sexual in non-intimate situations.
13. An inability to accept nurturing and care from ourselves, our Higher Power and others.
14. An inability to trust and rely on others, believing that people will always let us down and it is safer if we just do things on our own.
15. The compulsive use of masturbation, with fantasy and/or pornography, as a way to avoid intimacy with others, and prevent sexual abandonment.
16. Mistaking compulsive sexual avoidance for recovery and/or healthy sexuality.
17. Preferring fantasy over interacting with the people in our lives; so much that fantasy creates a wall between ourselves and the real world.
18. Hiding the joys and pains of our life from people we know and trust, due to self-pity, false-pride and/or fear.

(from *Recovery from Compulsive Sexual Avoidance: A Return to Intimacy*). This list is not meant to be diagnostic. Each person must determine their own pattern of avoidant behavior, with the help of a sponsor or others in the program. If you need a sponsor, please talk to someone after the meeting.

Abstinence and Recovery

For many of us, our goal when entering the SAA program is abstinence from one or more specific sexual behaviors. But unlike programs for recovering alcoholics or drug addicts, Sex Addicts Anonymous does not have a universal definition of abstinence. 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 sponsors or others in recovery, which of their sexual behaviors they consider to be "acting out." (Excerpted from *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pages 14-15)

In addition to abstaining from acting-out behaviors, recovery for many of us includes recognizing and abstaining from "acting-in." At first, this seemed to "highlight more of what was absent in our lives than what was present." But we "gradually became aware of a range of subtle but overt behaviors that enabled us to avoid authentic closeness or intimacy." (Adapted from "Recovery from Compulsive Sexual Avoidance: A Return to Intimacy")

One of the most dangerous aspects of intimacy avoidance is our inability to see it for what it is. This difficulty recognizing what we are doing, how risky and serious it is, and how much harm it may cause, we call denial. Working the Twelve Steps of SAA will lead to an awakening that allows us to live a new way of life according to spiritual principles.

The Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over our compulsive sexual behavior—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.

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The Twelve Traditions of S.A.A.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon S.A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for S.A.A. membership is a desire to stop compulsive sexual behavior.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose: to carry its message to others who still suffer.
6. An S.A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the S.A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every S.A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. S.A.A. should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. S.A.A., as such, ought never be organized, but we may create special service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. S.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues, hence the S.A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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Sponsorship Statement

Sponsorship is a vital aspect of S.A.A. program recovery. A sponsor is a person in the fellowship who acts as a guide to working the program; a fellow addict that we can rely upon for support.

We can learn from a sponsor's experiences, struggles, successes and mistakes. Sponsors guide us through the Twelve Steps and help hold us accountable for our behavior.

If you are looking for a sponsor, it is suggested that you attend several meetings first and listen to the sharing. Find someone you feel comfortable with, whose recovery you admire, and ask them if they are available to act as your sponsor.

Closing Statement

The opinions expressed here were strictly those of the persons who gave them. What you heard was spoken in confidence and should be treated as confidential. Keep it within the walls of this room and the confines of your mind. Please keep the name, address, or phone number of anyone in the group to yourself. Remember that anonymity is a core tradition upon which the group depends.

Whatever problems you have, there are those among us who have had them too. If you keep an open mind, you will find help. Let us talk to one another and reason things out, but let us not gossip or criticize one another. Instead, let the understanding, love, and peace of the program grow in each of us one day at a time.

The Promises

- If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.
- We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
- We will not regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it.
- We will comprehend the word serenity, and we will know peace.
- No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.
- That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
- We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.
- Self-seeking will slip away.
- Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
- Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
- We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.
- We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

—Alcoholics Anonymous, Third Edition. Format adapted for group reading by S.A.A. 1988.