

Updated March 1, 2020

ISA Step Study Guide and Homework Invitations

Weeks -1 through 12

***First Meeting (Startup / Meet & Greet)

Welcome

Welcome to the first meeting of this Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance Step Study!

While people are joining the meeting and working out any technical issues, we'll briefly go over some ZOOM etiquette and features for those who may be new to ZOOM, and then we'll go around for introductions.

ZOOM Etiquette and Features (brief)

•**Muting** When you're not speaking, please mute your microphone so that any background noise will not disturb whoever is speaking. The mute icon is often in the lower left-hand corner of the screen. You may need to tap the screen for it to appear.

Sometimes the meeting host or co-hosts may eliminate background noise by muting participants. This is to help maintain the safety and flow of the meeting and is not meant to be offensive. Participants can easily unmute themselves when they would like to share. (For phone-in participants, muting and unmuting happens by pressing *6.)

•**Environment** As a gentle reminder, please dress and behave as if this were an in-person meeting, and be sensitive and aware of what is on your camera. Potentially triggering or distracting movements, clothing, or backgrounds should be avoided.

•**Stop video** You may stop your video feed temporarily. (Examples of good times to stop your video would be when walking from one room to the next, before standing up or reaching across the screen, or if coughing, eating, etc. These and other distracting movements can cause participants to have difficulty paying attention to the speaker.)

•**Display name** The name displayed when you join the meeting may be changed by you or by the Host or co-host. This can be done by clicking the blue square with white dots in the upper right-hand corner of your picture, or click "Participants" at the bottom, and click on your name.

Introductions

Now let's go around for introductions. You're invited to share your name, where you're from, and 1 or 2 other things you'd like us to know about you. **Since there are so many of us, let's use a timer to make sure everyone has a chance to share. Each person will have 1 minute.**

Action Items

This week you're encouraged to:

- **Begin Making Outreach Calls**

Each participant is invited to make several outreach calls this week, preferably to other Step Study participants (current or past). (A contact list will be sent out.) The purpose of these calls is to get to know each other and build – or strengthen – a network of support. This will be an ongoing homework invitation throughout the Step Study. Outreach call tips will be sent in the email following this meeting.

- **Read “Healthier Sexuality” from the SAA “green book” (pages 69-73) and make a note of what you would like to manifest in your life.**

Some SAA members may feel uncomfortable reading or talking about healthier sexuality. It's okay to experience and express discomfort. There are some great insights in that section of the “green book,” though -- and not all of them are even about sex! It talks about experiencing a “change in our emotional presence and connection with others,” and letting go and “trust[ing] in another person, trust[ing] in ourselves, and [having] faith in a Higher Power.” (page 72)

- **Recommended book - Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred by Patrick Carnes**

Starting the 3rd week, the homework invitation will include reading from *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Dr. Patrick Carnes. (Until SAA fellowship members have written (and the Literature Committee has approved) literature to guide people through working the 12 Steps of SAA with the focus of Intimacy Avoidance and/or Sexual Avoidance, we will use non-SAA-approved literature for this Step Study. We recommend participants immediately start working on purchasing or borrowing the book.

- **Think about a potential Sharing Partner**

More information and tips about the Pair-and-Share system will be sent with the email.

Closing: “Lightening-quick” Feelings Check (10 secs each)

(TS screen share the Feelings Faces pictures)

In closing, we’re going to do an exercise where we look at one of these feelings charts and each of us names **2-3 words** which we can currently relate with. We’ll take a few seconds of silence to review the charts and tune in to what we’re feeling, and then we’ll go around and quickly share 2-3 words. **Note: “Good,” “Fine,” and “Tired” are not very depictive feeling words. You are encouraged to be more specific and genuine.**

HOW DO I FEEL RIGHT NOW?



Aggressive



Angry



Anxious



Ashamed



Bashful



Bored



Cautious



Confident



Confused



Curious



Depressed



Determined



Disappointed



Disbelieving



Disgusted



Ecstatic



Embarrassed



Enraged



Envious



Exasperated



Exhausted



Frightened



Frustrated



Grieved



Guilty



Happy



Hopeful



Hurt



Indifferent



Interested



Jealous



Joyful



Lonely



Loved



Loving



Miserable



Optimistic



Overwhelmed



Pained



Puzzled



Regretful



Relieved



Sad



Satisfied



Shocked



Shy



Smug



Sorry



Stubborn



Stupid



Surprised



Suspicious



Thoughtful



Withdrawn







EXHAUSTED



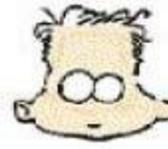
CONFUSED



ECSTATIC



GUILTY



SUSPICIOUS



ANGRY



HYSTERICAL



FRUSTRATED



SAD



CONFIDENT



EMBARRASSED



HAPPY



MISCHIEVOUS



DISGUSTED



FRIGHTENED



ENRAGED



ASHAMED



CAUTIOUS



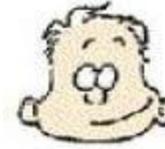
SMUG



DEPRESSED



OVERWHELMED



HOPEFUL



LONELY



LOVESTRUCK



JEALOUS



BORED



SURPRISED



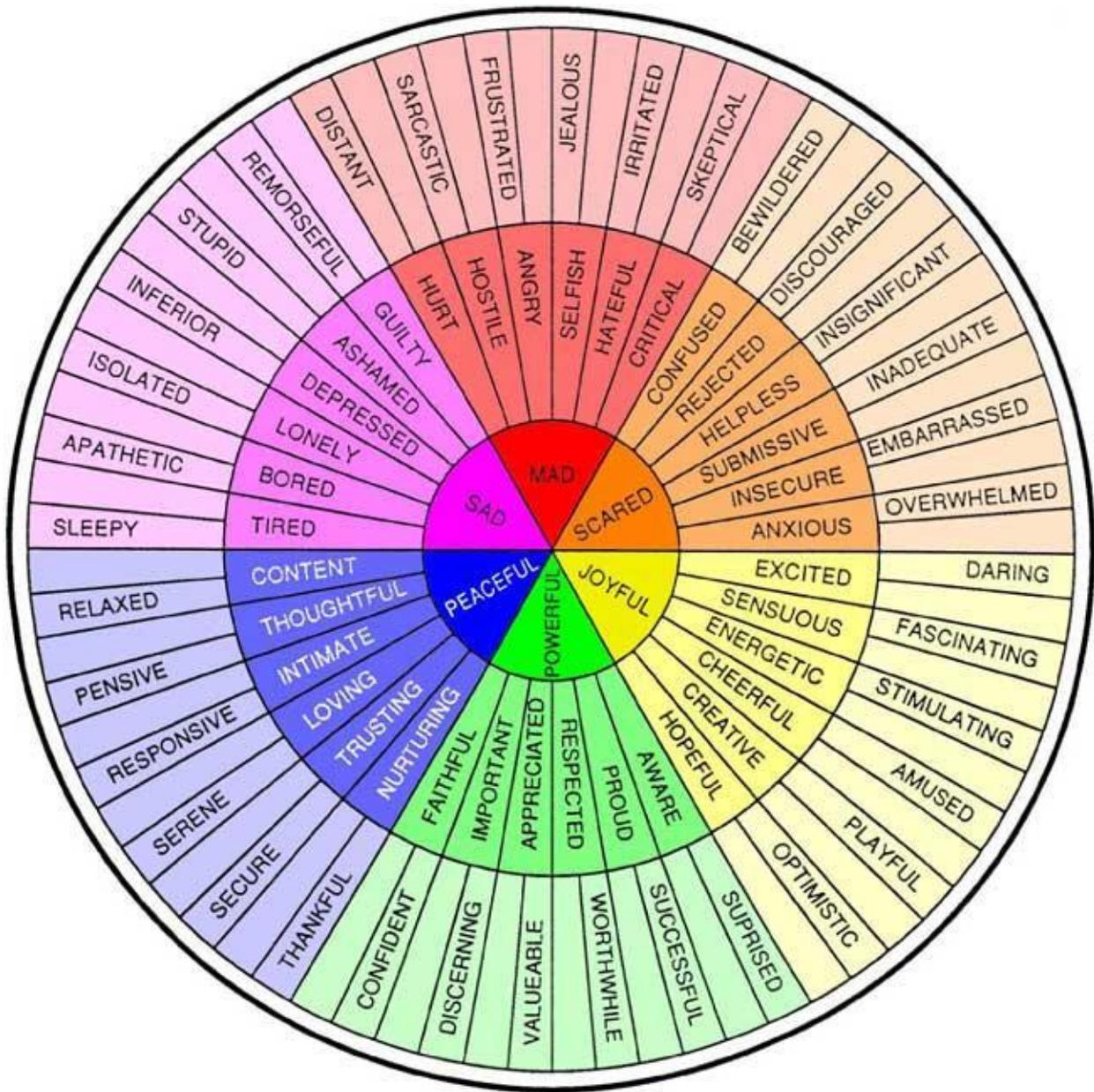
ANXIOUS



SHOCKED



SHY



Step Study Meeting Closing- If the Group Conscience supports reciting the Serenity Prayer together, this is one option for closing. If non-religious participants are not comfortable with joining in a prayer, they may drop the first word or abstain, or the Group Conscience may decide to open or close the meeting in another way, such as reciting meaningful words that are not a prayer, or having a moment of silence with no prayer.

Prayer, all together:

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

Potential Reminders to Email to Participants

ZOOM Etiquette and Features

•**Muting** When you're not speaking, please **mute your microphone** so that any background noise will not disturb whoever is speaking. The mute icon is often in the lower left-hand corner of the screen. You may need to tap the screen for it to appear.

Some people have experienced an echo or feedback from their speakers when using ZOOM. This problem is usually solved by using earphones.

Sometimes the meeting host or co-hosts may eliminate background noise by muting participants. This is to help maintain the safety and flow of the meeting and is not meant to be offensive. Participants can easily unmute themselves when they would like to share. (For phone-in participants, muting and unmuting happens by pressing *6.)

•**Environment** As a gentle reminder, please dress and behave as if this were an in-person meeting, and be sensitive and aware of what is on your camera. Potentially triggering or distracting movements, clothing, or backgrounds should be avoided.

We ask that during the meeting **everyone please wear a shirt which covers their chest and shoulders** to avoid triggering anyone. Please **sit in a chair**; it is inappropriate to attend this video meeting lying down on a couch or in a bed.

Whenever possible, everyone is encouraged to find a **quiet, private place** where you can get a **good wifi signal** so you won't keep dropping in and out of the meeting. If it is not possible to

find a quiet, private place with good wifi, participants can always join the meeting using the phone-in feature.

•**Stop video** You may **stop your video feed temporarily**. (Examples of good times to stop your video would be when walking from one room to the next, before standing up or reaching across the screen, or if coughing, eating, etc. These and other distracting movements can cause participants to have difficulty paying attention to the speaker.)

•**Display name** The name displayed when you join the meeting may be changed by you or by the Host or co-host. This can be done by clicking the blue square with white dots in the upper right-hand corner of your picture, or click "Participants" at the bottom, and click on your name.

•**Group text** You can use the text feature (it's called "chat") to communicate something to the group or to the facilitator. Please be aware that the default setting is to text this entire group. If you want to communicate with just the facilitator, please change the name in the "to" field.

•**Gallery or Speaker View** In the top right corner of your screen, you can change how you view participants. "Gallery View" will display everyone in same-sized images, and "Speaker View" will highlight whoever is speaking in the large center screen.

•**Pronouns and Crosstalk** To keep the meeting safe, we keep sharing focused on our own experiences, thoughts, and feelings by using "I" or "me" statements instead of "you" or "we." During the meeting, participants will please refrain from directing their comments to a group member or using another participant's name during sharing. (Issues or concerns may be directed to a facilitator.)

Facilitators may sometimes respond to a participant's share. For example, they may ask a clarifying question or add their experience, strength, and hope.

Unity in the group

Just a note here: You will likely find yourself feeling irritated by someone on the meeting. It's practically inevitable. We all come from different backgrounds and each have our own issues... and often another person's issues can kind of rub us the wrong way. But let's keep in mind the first Tradition of SAA: **Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon SAA unity.** So, you are encouraged to try to send kind thoughts every time you catch yourself thinking unkind thoughts. In recovery many have found that things are often not as they might seem, and also that our Higher Power puts people into our lives to push whatever buttons we need pushed so that we can see the unhealed pain behind the resentment, bring it forward, and allow it to be healed. Someone from a past ISA Step Study said, "There are some people I associate with today that, when I first met them, I was either afraid of them or they had some personality trait or mannerism which drove me crazy. I am no longer afraid of those I used to fear, but it has been replaced with a deep love and respect. Those who used to irritate me are people whom I have learned to love, and things that used to bug me are barely

noticeable now." Try to keep a loving, prayerful, open mind about each other, and we will become a close-knit family.

Step Study Pace

This Step Study is a 6-month tour through the Steps with the focus of intimacy avoidance. It will be like a class which meets weekly, but with discussion facilitators instead of "teachers." Each week, participants will be given reading assignments and questions to answer. After a couple of weeks, the group will be closed to additional participants.

This Step Study moves at rigorous pace. To gain the maximum benefit from the Step Study, members are encouraged to make every effort to stay current with homework assignments, even if they miss a meeting. The weekly meetings are where participants can hear others' shares and practice developing intimacy as a group. Participants will have briefly explored all 12 steps by the end of the Step Study, which should take approximately 25 weeks. People may wish to spend more time on a particular step individually, which is great – AND you're also encouraged to keep up with the Step Study as well!

Outreach Call Tips

When calling unfamiliar people, many participants have found it helpful to follow a short, basic "Check-in Call" format, consisting of the following:

- Your name and where you're from
- How you're feeling emotionally in that moment
- Briefly describe something you're doing for your program today

An example "Check-in Call" might sound like this: "Hi, this is _____ from _____, just making outreach calls. Do you mind if I check in? (Yes) I'm feeling happy but a little anxious right now, and today I had quiet time with my Higher Power, attended a meeting, and I've made 2 outreach calls. Would you like to check in?"

Another idea for outreach calls might be to ask specific questions, such as, "What stood out to you in this week's reading assignment?" or "I had difficulty answering that question; did you?" Whether it's a brief, 30-second check-in call or a 30-minute discussion, pushing through the discomfort and reaching out to connect with others working the Steps on intimacy avoidance is **essential** for growth in this area.

Participants are encouraged to **ask before offering feedback** (which, if offered, is safest if it consists of their own experience, strength and hope rather than advice) during outreach calls. We are here to support one another, not fix one another. And remember, what is shared on outreach calls should be treated respectfully and not gossiped about.

Sharing Partner (Write, pair, share)

During the weekly meetings, participants will share the highlights of their experiences and insights gained from reading the assignments and/or answering the questions. There will not be enough time for each person to share all of their answers with the group. So, in addition to weekly outreach calls, after the second meeting, each participant will be invited to call someone and share your answers to the assigned questions and/or sharing insights gained from reading the assignments. We realize this is scary! But many of those who have done this before have found it to be a healing and freeing experience. (Does any one of the co-facilitators want to share about the sharing partner experience?)

The mechanics of teaming up and sharing are varied. One method of "pairing and sharing" is called "co-sponsorship," when participants team up and take turns sharing about the homework assignment. Perhaps one person might read their answer to a question, and then the other person reads their answer. Alternatively, one sharing partner may read their answers to all of the week's questions, and then allow the other person to share their answers.

Another method of "pair and share" is to go over the homework assignment with a sponsor. If you don't have a sponsor, there may be someone who has participated in a past ISA Step Studies who might be willing to be a sponsor or a sharing partner. You can ask them during outreach calls! It is a good idea to ask for that person's insights and experience, strength, and hope (ESH) during the sharing process.

It is up to each person to decide how to work out the mechanics of "pairing and sharing." Things like whom to reach out to, or if you want to have the same sharing partner each time or share with different people each time, or to share with more than one person will depend on your situation and your needs. Your Higher Power will help you work out the details.

After listening to your sharing partner, some suggested responses are "Thanks for sharing," or, "I can relate," especially when you're just getting to know each other. Just like outreach calls, it is important to ask the person sharing if they're open to feedback before sharing any of your own experience, strength, and hope in response to what they shared. Sometimes we just need to be heard and validated, and sometimes we need to hear other peoples' stories to know we're not alone.

Many sharing partners from the other groups benefited from having a discussion about what surfaced for them in thinking about the questions or the readings, if they were responded to in a way that helped them process their emotions and realizations. Working with a sharing partner gives Step Study participants opportunities to practice listening and sharing in a way that builds intimacy. Please be aware that the urge to get off the phone quickly or to monopolize the conversation are common intimacy-avoidant techniques!

You're encouraged to take notes during the discussions with your sharing partner. During the next ZOOM meeting, participants will be invited to share things they learned about themselves

from answering the questions or from hearing another person's answers to the questions or any discussions that resulted.

Recommended book - Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred by Patrick Carnes

Starting the 3rd week, the homework invitation will include reading from *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Dr. Patrick Carnes. (Until SAA fellowship members have written (and the Literature Committee has approved) literature to guide people through working the 12 Steps of SAA with the focus of Intimacy Avoidance and/or Sexual Avoidance, we will use non-SAA-approved literature for this Step Study. We will read a few chapters as part of the Step Study to help lay the foundation for anyone to develop more intimacy (closeness and connection) of any or all types, including intimacy with themselves, with a Higher Power, and with friends and family, as well as with a sexual partner. So, regardless if a person has or wants a romantic partner, benefit will be gained from reading and discussing certain parts of the book. Participants may purchase the book or borrow it from a library or friend if they do not have a copy. Also, recordings have been made of people reading the book aloud. We recommend participants immediately start working on purchasing or borrowing the book.

Feelings

In active addiction, we did not practice awareness of our feelings and needs. ***Identifying how we're feeling and sharing that with safe people is essential to recovery from intimacy avoidance.*** The "feelings charts" might be helpful in discovering what words go with which feelings. You're invited to practice spending a moment to quiet yourself and become aware of your interior state, and then name a few feelings/emotions you may be experiencing. Sometimes it's surprising how many emotions come to our awareness when we give them the time.

Action Items

This week you're encouraged to:

1) Begin making outreach calls when you receive the contact list

2) Read “Healthier Sexuality” from the SAA “green book” (pages 69-73)

(and make a note of what you would like to manifest in your life)

3) Sexual Anorexia book

(Be thinking about how you're going to purchase/obtain/borrow the Carnes book)

4) Sharing Partner

(Be thinking and praying about who you would like to be a sharing partner with)

5) Practice identifying feelings

(This is a great daily exercise as well as a good thing to express on outreach calls.)

Week 1 (2nd meeting)

Overview

During the Meeting -

Briefly review ZOOM etiquette

Prayer, Steps, Introductions and Feelings Check (brief- 30 sec each)

Show of hands: who made 1 outreach call this week? 2? 3? More?

Sharing about Healthier Sexuality reading (may use breakout rooms)

This Week's Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Set your intention

Read First Step to Intimacy Guide & answer first question

Obtain/borrow Carnes book

Choose a sharing partner (in preparation for the next week)

Meeting Format

Welcome to Week **One** of the Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance Step Study!

ZOOM Etiquette and Features (brief)

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•**Environment** As a gentle reminder, please dress and behave as if this were an in-person meeting, and be sensitive and aware of what is on your camera. Potentially triggering or distracting movements, clothing, or backgrounds should be avoided.

Opening - If the Group Conscience supports reciting the Serenity Prayer together, this is one option for opening the meeting. If non-religious participants are not comfortable with joining in a prayer, they may drop the first word or abstain, or the Group Conscience may decide to open or close the meeting in another way, such as reciting meaningful words that are not a prayer, or having a moment of silence with no prayer.

Prayer, all together:

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Intros: "Lightning-quick" Feelings Check - 10 secs each

(TS screen share the Feelings Faces pictures, if desired)

To introduce ourselves, we'll take turns saying our name, where we're from, and naming **2-3 words** to describe how we're feeling right now. **Note: "Good," "Fine," and "Tired" are not very depictive feeling words. Encourage participants to be more genuine.**

Sharing -

Now we'll have a few minutes for sharing insights from the "Healthier Sexuality" section of the SAA "green book."

•**Pronouns and Crosstalk** To keep the meeting safe, we keep sharing focused on our own experiences, thoughts, and feelings by using "I" or "me" statements instead of "you" or "we." During the meeting, participants will please refrain from directing their comments to a group member or using another participant's name during sharing. Facilitators, however, may sometimes respond to a participant's share. For example, they may ask a clarifying question or add their experience, strength, and hope as they feel led by their Higher Power.

•**Notes** Please feel free to take notes! Many find it helpful to jot down "gold nuggets" of wisdom and things that resonate with us during the shares. Try to avoid writing during the entire meeting, though.

The floor is open for sharing. Who would like to begin?

Wrap-up and Thoughts for Next Week –

These action invitations will enhance your life and help lay the foundation for a healthier connection with self, others, and a Higher Power. This email may be long, but these action items don't need to be overwhelming. We are each in different stages of our recovery, and we're each invited to do what we can, and leave the rest to our Higher Power.

(And Potential Reminders to Email to Participants)

Action Items Week 1:

• Outreach Calls

Starting this week, each participant will be invited to make outreach calls, preferably to other Step Study participants, either current or past. The purpose of these calls is to get to know each other and build – or strengthen – a network of support. This will be an ongoing homework invitation throughout the Step Study.

Tips on Outreach Calls will be sent in a separate email

•Set Your Intention

Helpful quotes:

"Your problem isn't the problem. Your reaction is the problem."—Anonymous

"Life is not about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."—Lolly Daskal

"The most important thing to remember is this: to be ready at any moment to give up what you are for what you might become."—W. E. B. Du Bois

"You will never finish if you don't remember why you started." – Anonymous

"You must have a compelling response for: "Why the hell am I doing this?" – Elana Carter

"If you commit to nothing, you'll be distracted by everything." – James Clear

"Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve." – Napoleon Hill

" 'Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.' – Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Decide what you want, or someone else will. You are the designer of your destiny. What will it be?" – Benjamin Hardy, *This Is How You Train Your Brain to Get What You Really Want*

A vision statement is a company's road map, indicating both what the company wants to become and guiding transformational initiatives by setting a defined direction for the company's growth. You're invited to contemplate what you would like to see change for yourself as you're doing this work. The promises from the AA Big Book or the Ottawa Promises or the last two paragraphs in the section on Step 12 from the SAA "green book" may have some good ideas for what we might want for ourselves in our recovery.

"If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are halfway 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, pages 83-84)

"Through a renewed Relationship with God/Higher Power, the healing force of recovery will take hold in our hearts. By giving ourselves over to God/Higher Power and working our program, our lives will become manageable and we will be restored to sanity. We will receive the inner strength and support needed to face our anxieties and fears, and deal with the painful feelings that feed our addiction.

Relations with others will improve as we learn to respect our boundaries and allow others freedom to be themselves. Reaching out in trust and connecting with others will come easier, dispelling our sense of isolation and loneliness. Degrading fantasies and obsessive sexual thinking will diminish.

Relating to ourselves, self-absorption will give way to self-discovery; secrecy to honesty; feelings of unworthiness to dignity; and shame to grace. A restored integrity will guide our behavior. We will feel more alive and regain a sense of happiness. We will hear ourselves laugh again and rediscover play. We will embrace change and will grow. A Spiritual Awakening will free us from the tyranny of our addiction. An awareness of being guided by a Higher Power and supported by caring friends will sustain us. Regret

for the past and worry for the future will give way to living for today. We will open ourselves to the amazing possibilities of a life worth living.

Are these extravagant promises? WE THINK NOT! We have seen them fulfilled. They are ours, if we want them and work for them." (The Ottawa Promises)

"Practicing these principles in our lives means applying program principles at home, at work, and wherever else we gather with others for a common purpose. As we grow spiritually, we find opportunities for service in virtually any situation. Our closest relationships may offer the most challenges to our honesty, compassion, and integrity, but we are often rewarded beyond our expectations. We find that spiritual principles can guide us in the everyday challenges of life, and they can help us face even loss, grief, and death with fortitude and grace. What we gain in this program is a blueprint for full and successful living, whatever may come.

We maintain our recovery by working a daily program, in the knowledge that although we can never be perfect, we can be happy today. We can live life on life's terms, without having to change or suppress our feelings. Our serenity and sobriety grow as we continue to live according to spiritual principles. We enjoy the gifts that come from being honest and living a life of integrity. We ask for help when we need it, and we express our love and gratitude every day. We realize that everything we have been through helps us to be of service to others. We learn that the world is a much safer place than we had ever known before, because we are always in the care of a loving God." (Sex Addicts Anonymous, pg 61)

The SAA Promises
(Adapted for Intimacy & Sexual Avoidance)

By cultivating a sober and spiritual connection with ourselves, our Higher Power, and others, we will discover healthier experiences of connection and sexuality. Our serenity will grow as we continue to live according to spiritual principles. The miracle of recovery from the addiction of intimacy & sexual avoidance will become a reality we experience every day.

Working the twelve steps brings us many gifts:

1. We will find freedom from our addictive sexual behavior; including intimacy & sexual avoidance.
2. We will live in the present and enjoy our lives.

3. We will learn to be emotionally present during sexual experiences, and use our sexuality to express our love, appreciation, and faith.
4. We will grow in humility, and will be able to admit when we are wrong.
5. We will deepen our compassion and become more forgiving of others and ourselves.
6. We will keep the company of people who love and respect us.
7. We will start to see life in terms of growth, change, and transformation.
8. We will have a greater sense of belonging, emotional intimacy and true friendship with others and ourselves.
9. We will learn to express our affection, rather than seek isolation, false protection, power, or control.
10. We will ask for and receive help when we need it.
11. We will experience profound healing from shame as we learn to let go and cultivate vulnerability.
12. We will see that the world is a much safer place than we had ever known before, because we are always in the care of a loving Higher Power.

(Adapted from Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA Green Book) by a WA, Puget Sound group, and several women from a women's ISA telemeeting)

A note of caution: Expecting things to look a certain way (for example, wishing to have a romantic relationship with a specific person) or defining your happiness as dependent upon externals (as in, "I will finally be happy when _____ happens or I have _____") are not productive. These are based on fantasy, meaning they use the imagination to create an unrealistic picture which is not always likely.

Instead, many have found it helpful to focus on what is within the sphere of our influence.

Someone said, "Healthier intimacy with my romantic partner was a result of cultivating healthier closeness and connection with myself, my Higher Power, and with my friends and family members. Stating what I want for myself in "I will" statements has a double meaning. One, it's what I hope for in my future. But two, it is also something I choose by my behavior. In a way, my promises are also promises to myself." Some examples:

I will nurture my soul with positive energy and fill my life with what sparks joy in me.

I will pursue interests and activities that stem from a desire to show love towards myself.

I will allow myself to relax and play on a regular basis.

I will feel dignity and respect for myself.

I will choose to live courageously, knowing my worth is independent of my behavior.

I will allow myself to be present to my emotions without judging, changing or suppressing them.

I will allow God to help me interpret my past and present through the lens of love and understanding.

I will respect my intuitive thoughts.

I will ask for help when I need it.

I will express my love and gratitude every day.

I will enjoy both the peace of solitude and exhilaration of connection with others.

I will cultivate an intimate relationship with the God of my understanding, and invite connection with Him often.

I will accept myself and others without judging or trying to control or change anything or anyone.

I will be present mentally and emotionally when in the company of family or friends.

I will respond with love to myself and others, instead of reacting from anger, shame or fear.

I will relate to others genuinely and from a state of wholeness.

I will invite consultation from my guides.

I will extend myself for the purpose of nurturing my own or another's spiritual growth.

I will put my trust in God, and I will be able to trust others because I set and maintain appropriate boundaries.

I will express love and devotion through my sexual behavior, rather than using it like a drug or a weapon.

• **Read ISA 1st Step Guide (stopping at the questions). Please answer the **NEW first question**, listed below, instead of the question(s) in the pamphlet.**

We will read the SAA pamphlet First Step to Intimacy – a Guide for Working the First Step on Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance or Sexual Anorexia. A paper copy of the pamphlet can be purchased for \$.75 from the ISO office by visiting <https://saa-store.org/pamphlet/> or calling 1-800-477-8191

Or you can read it online for free by visiting <https://saa-recovery.org/literature/first-step-intimacy-guide-working-first-step-intimacy-sexual-avoidance-sexual-anorexia/>

There are several questions at the end of the pamphlet. **To increase the usefulness of the questions, they are being re-tooled.** We are being requested to test out the new set of questions in our Step Study and offer feedback about their helpfulness in

examining our powerlessness and unmanageability concerning intimacy and sexual avoidance.

This first week we'll be writing our answers to the new first question:

1. For which of the 18 symptoms listed in *Intimacy Avoidance: Another Aspect of Sex Addiction* can I offer a specific example from my life? (Not all of these may apply)

Do I or have I done any of the following symptoms of intimacy avoidance?

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.

(To answer the first “new” question, please write 1-2 examples for each one you relate to.)

- **Sexual Anorexia book**

Starting the 3rd week, the homework assignment will include reading from *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Dr. Patrick Carnes. Though not SAA-approved, this book will help lay the foundation for anyone to develop more intimacy (closeness and connection) with themselves, with a Higher Power, and with friends and family. So, regardless if a person has or wants a romantic partner, benefit will be gained from reading and discussing certain parts of the book. Thus, we recommend participants immediately start working on purchasing or borrowing the book.

- **Sharing Partner (Write, pair, share)**

In addition to weekly outreach calls, after the second meeting, each participant will be invited to choose **someone to call and share your answers to the assigned questions and/or sharing insights gained from reading the assignments.**

It is up to each person to decide how to work out the mechanics of "pairing and sharing." Things like whom to reach out to, or if you want to have the same sharing partner each time or share with different people each time, or to share with more than one person will depend on your situation and your needs. Your Higher Power will help you work out the details.

Tips on Pair-and-Share process will be sent in a separate email

Action Items Week 1:

1) 3 Outreach calls

2) Set your intention / write your promises

3) Read ISA 1st Step Guide & answer NEW question 1

4) Sexual Anorexia book

5) Find a sharing partner

-----End of first email-----

Step Study Meeting Closing- If the Group Conscience supports reciting the Serenity Prayer together, this is one option for closing the meeting.

Prayer, all together:

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

-----Beginning of Outreach Calls email-----

Tips and Guidance for ISA Step Study Outreach Calls

WHY OUTREACH CALLS?

Outreach calls help build a network of support. This work can be challenging and can bring up difficult emotions, or we might be going through life challenges which make this work seem more daunting and overwhelming. Talking about what we're going through is essential for healing and growth. And it's much easier to call someone when in crisis if we've talked with them during other occasions when we're doing alright. Even for those who have a sponsor, they will not always be available when you need someone to talk with. Thus, it's important to cultivate friendships with several people, building a network of support.

Outreach calls are a way to increase accountability. Whether we're struggling to complete assignments or celebrating a sobriety milestone, having someone to share this information with raises our chances of success.

Outreach calls offer us a way to try out communication skills and to practice connection and empathy. Who better to practice with than other intimacy avoidants? They will recognize and understand our discomfort and struggles. Sharing how we're feeling gives us an opportunity to practice tuning in to what's going on inside us, and listening to another person's emotions allows us to learn to be a safe person to share both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings with. Sometimes empathy is less about what is *said*, and more about how well a person *listens*.

Outreach calls give us a place to practice boundaries. For example, we might need to set a boundary regarding how long we are on the phone with someone. One idea is to determine how many minutes we are willing/able to spend talking before calling someone, (for example, 10 minutes), and at the beginning of the conversation, let the other person know how much time we have available to talk.

Outreach calls are a great way to do service. You may not realize how much of an uplift a 5-minute phone call can give someone. It can make a world of difference to know someone cares and is thinking of you.

WHEN TO CALL

Some people have "**hours of operation**" during which they would prefer to receive calls. If you have those preferences, you are invited to communicate that to the group, either by mentioning it during the beginning or end of a meeting, or email your request to everyone on whichever outreach list(s) you received in your inbox.

The act of reaching out can be powerful when we're struggling with something. It's amazing how knowing that someone will hear (or read) a message sooner or later can give strength and comfort during challenging times, even if we're not talking with a person in the moment.

If you prefer to **receive a text** asking if you're available **prior to a phone call**, you're encouraged to make that known.

WHAT TO SAY

When calling unfamiliar people, many participants have found it helpful to follow a short, basic "Check-in Call" format, consisting of the following:

- Your name and where you're from
- How you're feeling emotionally (you may wish to refer to one of the feelings charts for guidance)
- Briefly describe something you're doing or have done for your program

An example "Check-in Call" might sound like this: "Hi, this is _____ from _____, just making outreach calls. Do you mind if I check in? (Yes) I'm feeling happy but a little anxious right now, and today I had quiet time with my Higher Power, attended a meeting, and I've made 2 outreach calls. Would you like to check in?" You can also leave a voice mail message with this information. It is a quick, safe way to start to connect with others.

As you get to know each other a little bit through the meetings, another idea for outreach calls is to ask specific questions, such as, "What stood out to you in this week's reading assignment?" or "I had difficulty answering that question; did you?" Whether it's a brief, 30-second check-in call or a 30-minute

discussion, pushing through the discomfort and reaching out to connect with others working the Steps on intimacy avoidance is essential for growth in this area.

Participants are encouraged to ask before offering feedback (which, if offered, is safest if it consists of their own experience, strength and hope, rather than offering advice) during outreach calls. We are here to support one another, not fix one another. And remember, what is shared on outreach calls should be treated respectfully and not gossiped about.

PRINCIPLES BEFORE PERSONALITIES

Now, there may be people listed on the Contact Lists whom you don't think you like. Maybe they annoy you or they don't feel safe for one reason or another. **Please do not force yourself** to talk with anyone. Forcing oneself to do something we don't want to do traumatizes us. Instead, you are encouraged to honor your "Inner Child" by gently acknowledging whatever you're feeling, whether it be fear, shame, or anger behind the things you might be thinking about yourself and others.

Then, you are encouraged to practice BECOMING OPEN TO COMPASSION. You can ask to be filled with love and light, or patience, or empathy, or whatever words resonate with you. Healing and forgiveness happen as we learn to accept ourselves and others and see us all through eyes of understanding and empathy.

Next, you can INVITE yourself to do something, rather than force yourself. Inviting means the person has/I have the choice to accept the invitation or decline it. Perhaps we're not ready. That's okay. Keep praying and pondering. More will be revealed.

Perhaps you can INVITE YOURSELF to see someone differently, INVITE YOURSELF to consider reaching out to someone with whom you don't think you have much in common, INVITE YOURSELF to ask your Inner Guide or your Higher Power whom can you consider reaching out to today. Again, we can accept or decline an invitation. If we're not ready, we can acknowledge that we're not ready without shaming ourselves, but we can also ASK FOR WILLINGNESS.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT ABOUT BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are crucial to recovering from intimacy avoidance. If your "gut" or "Inner Child" or intuition is telling you something isn't right for you, it's important to listen. As we practice taking care of ourselves, we build trust in our ability to discern where and how boundaries need to be placed in our interactions with others, and our confidence in our ability to protect ourselves increases.

-----End of Outreach Calls email-----
-----Beginning of Sharing Partners email-----

Sharing Partner Information and Ideas

History

During the first ISA Step Study, we quickly realized that there would not be enough time for participants to share ALL of their answers and insights during the hour-long meeting. Deb asked her sponsor, (a teacher by profession) for guidance and she suggested the "Pair-and-Share" method. It was exactly what was needed. Talking with a sharing partner before the meeting allows the best GOLDEN NUGGETS of wisdom surface – and those are what we share in the meetings!

So, in addition to weekly outreach calls, each participant is also invited to **call someone and share your answers to the assigned questions and/or sharing insights gained from reading the assignments**. This is scary!! But many of those who have done this before have found it to be a healing and freeing experience. There are several people from past ISA Step Studies that still maintain contact with their sharing partners months or years after the Step Study ended.

The **mechanics** of teaming up and sharing have been varied. Some people reach out to someone who is currently participating in the Step Study. Some contact a former ISA Step Study participant. It's up to you.

One style of "pairing and sharing" is called "co-sponsorship," when participants team up and take turns sharing about the homework assignment. Perhaps one person might read their answer to a question, and then the other person reads their answer. Alternatively, one sharing partner may read their answers to all of the week's questions, and then allow the other person to share their answers.

Another method of "pair and share" is to go over the homework assignment with a sponsor. If you don't have a sponsor, or if your current sponsor doesn't feel comfortable helping you work the Steps on intimacy avoidance, there may be someone who has participated in a past ISA Step Studies who might be willing to be a sponsor or a sharing partner. You can ask them during outreach calls!

It is up to each person to decide how to work out the mechanics of "pairing and sharing." Things like whom to reach out to, or if you want to have the same sharing partner each time or share with different people each time, or to share with more than one person will depend on your situation and your needs. Your Higher Power will help you work out the details.

After listening to your sharing partner, some suggested responses are "Thanks for sharing," or, "I can relate," especially when you're just getting to know each other. Just like outreach calls, it is **important to ask the person sharing if they're open to feedback** before sharing any of your own experience, strength, and hope in response to what they shared. Sometimes we just need to be heard and validated, and sometimes we need to hear other peoples' stories to know we're not alone.

Many sharing partners from former ISA Step Study groups benefited from having a discussion about what surfaced for them in thinking about the questions or the readings, if they were responded to in a way that helped them process their emotions and realizations. Working with a sharing partner gives Step Study participants opportunities to **practice listening and sharing in a way that builds intimacy**. Please be aware that the urge to get off the phone quickly or to monopolize the conversation are common intimacy-avoidant techniques!

You're encouraged to **take notes** during the discussions with your sharing partner. During the next ZOOM meeting, participants will be invited to share things they learned about themselves from answering the questions or from hearing another person's answers to the questions or any discussions that resulted.

-----End of Sharing Partners email-----

Week 2

Overview

During the Meeting -
ZOOM reminders

Introductions and Feelings Check

Sharing - insights from reading First Step to Intimacy – A Guide for Working the First Step on Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance or Sexual Anorexia and answering NEW first question (regarding the list of 18 symptoms)

Week 2 Assignments -
3 outreach calls

Re-Read ISA 1st Step Guide & answer NEW questions 2-9

Read Green Book Step 1

Write, pair and share

Obtain/borrow Carnes book

Week 2 Meeting Script

Welcome to Week **Two** of the Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance Step Study!

ZOOM Etiquette and Features (brief)

•**Muting** When you're not speaking, please mute your microphone so that any background noise will not disturb whoever is speaking.

•**Environment** As a gentle reminder, please dress and behave as if this were an in-person meeting, and be sensitive and aware of what is on your camera. Potentially triggering or distracting movements, clothing, or backgrounds should be avoided.

Prayer, all together: If the Group Conscience supports reciting the Serenity Prayer together, this is one option for opening the meeting.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Intros: "Lightening-quick" Feelings Check - 10 secs each

(TS screen share the Feelings Faces pictures, if desired)

To introduce ourselves, we'll take turns saying our name, where we're from, and naming **2-3 words** to describe how we're feeling right now. **Note: "Good," "Fine," and "Tired" are not very depictive feeling words. Encourage participants to be more genuine.**

Sharing -

Now we'll have a few minutes for sharing insights from reading the First Step to Intimacy - A Guide for Working the First Step on Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance pamphlet.

•Pronouns and Crosstalk To keep the meeting safe, we keep sharing focused on our own experiences, thoughts, and feelings by using "I" or "me" statements instead of "you" or "we." During the meeting, participants will please refrain from directing their comments to a group member or using another participant's name during sharing. Facilitators, however, may sometimes respond to a participant's share. For example, they may ask a clarifying question or add their experience, strength, and hope as they feel led by their Higher Power.

The floor is open for sharing. Who would like to begin?

Wrap-up and Thoughts for Next Week -

(And Potential Reminders to Email to Participants)

Thoughts on Avoidance Symptoms and Behaviors

"Intimacy avoidance" refers to conduct and attitudes that serve to avoid or block sexual, emotional, or spiritual connection with others, ourselves, or our Higher Power.

(*Intimacy Avoidance – Another Aspect of Sex Addiction*) This prompted a member to break down that sentence into separate categories. Then they changed the word "intimacy" to "closeness and connection." Here's what they came up with:

"Examples of behavior that:

helps me **avoid** closeness and connection **sexually**

- with others - starting fights, going to bed at separate times
- with myself - overeating, feeling 'shut down'
- connection between my sexuality and my Higher Power - a feeling that my sexuality is bad, poor body image

"helps me **avoid** closeness and connection **emotionally**

- with others - not engaging in social activities
- with myself - obsessing about other peoples' issues
- with my HP - keeping too busy to have any quiet time to myself

"helps me **avoid** closeness and connection **spiritually**

- with others - isolation, negative attitudes about people at church
- with myself - not waking up early enough to have quiet time alone
- with my Higher Power - omitting prayer/meditation and personal study

"helps me **block** closeness and connection **sexually**

- with others - Having sex while not emotionally present
- with myself - using sex like a drug to medicate uncomfortable feelings
- with my Higher Power - omitting prayer bookending sex

"helps me **block** closeness and connection **emotionally**

- with others - being emotionally unavailable
- with myself - not feeling any emotions except anger or depression
- with my Higher Power - not being honest in my prayers (public performance)

"helps me **block** closeness and connection **spiritually**

- with others - sticking to superficial topics that don't matter
- with myself - stifling tears, distracting myself when starting to feel touched or moved
- with my Higher Power -second-guessing myself (nudges/prompts)"

Outreach Calls

How are you doing with those outreach calls? Reaching out to others, especially for intimacy avoidant people, can be very, very difficult. Most of us didn't grow up in homes where we were encouraged to get in touch with how we were feeling and talk about it. But in order to be free from the painful and compulsive avoidance of closeness and connection with self and others, we need to **PRACTICE** identifying our feelings and our needs and sharing about them.

Action Items Week 2:

1) 3 brief Outreach calls

You're invited to share your name, where you're from, how you're feeling, and something you're working on for your recovery today, and possibly ask questions about how the Step Study is going,

2) Sexual Anorexia book

Next week we'll begin reading selected chapters from the book ***Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred***. If you haven't already, please purchase or borrow the book.

3) Re-read First Step to Intimacy, answer NEW questions 2-9

This week you're invited to **re-read the ISA First Step Guide**, listening for thoughts and feelings which catch your attention. Some may find it helpful to read aloud with a sharing partner. Write your answers to **the following questions**, possibly answering one or two a day this week to break it up into manageable pieces:

2 - Do I turn to food, shopping, other behaviors or substances to help me stifle, limit, or control my feelings, or to avoid feeling emotions in the first place? What do I waste time doing? What are my less healthy self-soothing behaviors? Are any of the things I do subconscious, automatic, unintentional, or difficult to stop doing?

3 - Do I know what I need? Do I refuse to meet some of my needs? Do I refrain from asking for help?

4 - Are there ways I'm not being true to myself? Do I feel fulfilled in my work, my education, and my home, or am I afraid to be seen or heard?

5 - Do I doubt the validity of my opinions, beliefs, or my perception of reality? Do I question my judgment or the appropriateness of my impulses or decisions?

6 - What negative or untrue things have I thought or felt about myself or my choices? Am I able to receive compliments as well as constructive criticism?

7 - How has my lack of intimacy with myself and others negatively impacted my mental health? Have I experienced a feeling of extreme high energy or elation in interacting with others which brought no lasting fulfillment, or hid in my home due to fear, or sunk into deep depression due to isolation and loneliness?

8 - How does my body image contribute to my intimacy and sexual avoidance? Am I trying to change how I look to impress someone?

9 - How does my lack of connection with myself, others, and my Higher Power affect my physical health? Are my health habits extreme – either in deprivation (such as going without something) or excess? Does physical exercise connect me with myself and/or my Higher Power or bring me joy?

Just a note: Since SAA literature is written by members of the fellowship, if there is anything you feel could be improved, added, edited, etc. in that pamphlet or addressed in another piece of literature, email the ISA Awareness Committee at avoidance@saa-recovery.org and send them your suggestions.

4) Read Step 1 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 22

In addition, we will read **Step 1 in the SAA "Green Book," page 22** or online at <https://saa-recovery.org/literature/sex-addicts-anonymous-green-book-saas-basic-text/>

5) Write, pair, and share

We will also begin the practice called, "**Write, Pair, and Share.**" This week, *in addition* to your 3 brief **outreach calls**, you're also invited to choose a person with which to **share the insights you gained from reading Step 1 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, the First Step to Intimacy Guide, and also your answers to NEW questions 2-9 (above).** (And, if applicable, they'll share their answers with you). You're invited to **take notes during these discussions**, to be prepared to share some

of your highlights or epiphanies from that conversation during the next ISA Step Study meeting.

Step Study Meeting Closing-

Prayer, all together: If the Group Conscience supports reciting the Serenity Prayer together, this is one option for closing the meeting.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

Week 3

During the Meeting -

ZOOM reminders

Introductions and Feelings Check

How did you do with outreach calls?

Does anyone need help getting the Sexual Anorexia book?

Does anyone need help getting connected with a sharing partner?

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Insights from re-reading First Step to Intimacy (1st Step Guide)

Answering NEW questions 2-9

Insights from reading Step One in Sex Addicts Anonymous, pg 22

Insights from discussing why Step One is part of the solution

Week 3 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Pair and Share –

NEW First Step Questions 10-20

First ½ of Chapter 6 (Nurturing) Carnes

Week 3 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If Group Conscience approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing -

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. The floor is now open for **introductions and a brief "feelings check."** You're invited to use 1-3 words to describe how you're feeling. This means we just name the feelings without explaining why we're feeling that way! **10 seconds each!** (Each person, including facilitators, briefly checks in with their first name, where they're from, and how they're feeling in 1-3 words.)

The floor is now open for sharing the insights you gained from your sharing partner discussions on:

- Insights from re-reading First Step to Intimacy (1st Step Guide)
- Answering questions 2-9
- Insights from reading Step One in Sex Addicts Anonymous, pg 22
- Insights from discussing why Step One is part of the solution

We will allow for _____ minutes per share. Who would like to begin?

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

Anonymity and confidentiality are essential to keeping our meeting safe. Therefore, please join me in reading the following slogan: Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave here, Let it stay here! (Here, here!)

(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

"Step One took some time for a number of us. When it felt too overwhelming, we found it important to be gentle and go slowly. Perhaps we gave ourselves permission to skip

questions and come back to them later. Or, we limited the time spent each day on Step One by setting a timer or only answering a set number of questions in one sitting. There was no need to rush the process. We found it was less stressful when we gave ourselves exactly as much time as we needed."

Remember, this is just a brief pass through the 12 Steps when it comes to intimacy and sexual avoidance. You're invited to do what you can. Nobody will do this perfectly. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to answer these questions. This is your journey! You may need to skip a question or two and come back to them later on. Any effort you make will bring you growth and healing.

Action Items Week 3:

1) Outreach Calls

Just a reminder about outreach calls – It is **crucial** to get used to picking up the "500-lb-phone" and calling people, no matter if you feel like you're doing well or not, or feeling like talking with anyone or not. Part of healing from intimacy avoidance is learning to share genuinely from whatever space we're in emotionally. So, an action invitation this week (and every week) includes making 3 outreach calls.

2) Read, Write, Pair and Share

This week you're invited to read from the Carnes book (see #3) and answer some questions from the First Step to Intimacy Guide (see #4). Then call a Pair-and-Share partner and talk about epiphanies and insights you've gained from reading and writing.

3) First ½ of Nurturing Chapter

We will also be reading the first half of a chapter from the book *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Patrick Carnes. The book is geared towards people who have a spouse or partner, but not all of the book will be assigned in this step study; we'll just be reading 4 chapters from it and discussing it with sharing partners. The first part of the book helps the reader understand what is meant by the term "sexual anorexia" and how a person becomes that way. Then, in the second part of the book, the author takes each of the 12 Steps and ties them to dimensions of healthy sexuality. This week, you're invited to read pages 103-118 from chapter 6: Nurturing in *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Patrick Carnes.

There are questions at the end of the chapter and some suggested exercises. **They are not officially part of this Step Study, but are optional.** (Many have found them useful, though.)

4) ISA First Step Guide **NEW questions** 10-20

We'll also continue answering the NEW First Step questions. This week it will be questions 10-20. You are invited to share the answers to the questions and your insights from reading the Nurturing chapter with a sharing partner.

10. What measures do I take in order to avoid interacting with others? What do I wish I did instead?
11. With whom do I keep conversations surface-level? Why? Do I wish it were different?
12. Do I feel close to my family members? Am I emotionally present and able to listen to my loved ones, or am I thinking of other things or preparing a rebuttal?
13. When I help or serve, is it because I'm trying to gain approval from myself or others? Do I always feel greater-than or less-than others, instead of connecting as equals in a shared, emotionally-safe space?
14. When talking with someone, what message does my body language send?
15. Have I felt overwhelmed or stressed by a deepening emotional connection with someone? What did I do?
16. Have I ever felt desperate to keep someone close to me? What did I do?
17. When have I blamed others for my distress in a relationship, or tried to deny, justify, rationalize, minimize, or explain my avoidant behavior to myself or others?
18. What thoughts and feelings does the phrase, "being sexual" bring up for me?
19. Have I found myself unable to prevent, stop, or control compulsive intimacy avoidance or sexual avoidance? (For example, have I broken commitments to myself and/or others, or made attempts to manage distancing behaviors?)

20. Has my intimacy avoidance been activated after seeing an object, person, or image? In what ways did I further isolate myself, not follow through with plans, or find myself withdrawing when I wanted to connect with someone?

Thoughts About Question #20

Sometimes participants mention struggling with question # 20: “Has my intimacy avoidance been activated after seeing an object, person, or image? In what ways did I further isolate myself, not follow through with plans, or find myself withdrawing when I wanted to connect with someone?”

This question corresponds to a similar question in the "regular" SAA First Step Guide (*First Step to Recovery - a Guide for Working the First Step*) which reads, "In what ways have you been lured into sexual escapades or activities by being confronted by an object, person, or image that "set off" addictive behavior when you were planning to do something else?" In the other First Step Guide, it follows another question which gives examples of unplanned sexual behavior such as planning to go to the grocery store and finding yourself in a porn shop, or just cruising, etc. The question in the original First Step Guide which asks about being "confronted" by something that "set off" behavior, as well as question 8 from the ISA First Step Guide, are both asking us to consider the compulsivity of our addiction from a trigger-reaction standpoint. However, it is a WHOLE LOT EASIER to cite examples of acting out behavior which were triggered by an object, person, or image. It can be more difficult to spot intimacy avoidance as a result of a trigger.

One participant said, "My best example of this is when my husband and I would be being sexual, and a word, gesture, facial expression, or noise would trigger a PTSD-like response in me which would cause immediate shut-down. Those were scary and emotionally painful times when I didn't fully understand what was happening and felt very frustrated and humiliated. The trigger-and-reaction sequence was lightening quick and happened without my knowledge nor consent, which, being a control freak, especially bothered me!"

Another example of intending to do one thing but when triggered, veering off course and doing a completely different thing is when a participant and their partner were traveling somewhere together in the car, and the participant looked down and saw something in the vehicle's trash basket which triggered unkind feelings that evaporated the affectionate feelings they were experiencing prior to that. They had originally intended

to use the time traveling together to connect emotionally and spiritually, but that was immediately replaced by an argument.

One final example for question 8. One time, a participant and their partner were having a pleasant, animated conversation and the participant was feeling really connected. Then, when the partner paused in speaking in order to think of a word, the participant supplied a suggestion. The partner felt irritated and snapped, "Can I just finish my sentence?" The participant was immediately filled with shame, and no longer was interested in talking but remained painfully silent.

Just some thoughts. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer to any of these questions, and maybe you won't find examples for a question or two right away. Don't worry. You can skip it for now if nothing comes to mind. If the trigger-reaction thing is something you experience, a clear example will show up some day! Now that you're thinking about it and looking for it, you'll probably find examples for all of the questions eventually. More will be revealed as you become ready for it.

Week 4

During the Meeting -

ZOOM reminders

Introductions and Feelings Check

How did you do with outreach calls?

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Insights from reading First ½ of Carnes' Nurturing Chapter
Answering questions 10-20

Week 4 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Pair and Share –

Second ½ of Nurturing in Sexual Anorexia

NEW questions 21- 26

Answer the question, "Why do you think Step One is part of the Solution?"

Week 4 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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.

ZOOM Etiquette Reminders:

- As a gentle reminder, please sensitive and aware of what is on your camera.
- When you're not speaking, please mute your microphone
- To keep the meeting safe, we use "I" and "me" statements
- We refrain from directing comments to another participant
- Facilitators may sometimes respond as they feel led by their Higher Power.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing:

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. The floor is now open for introductions and a "feelings check." You're invited to use 1-3 words to describe how you're feeling. (10 seconds each)

Thank you.

The floor is now open for sharing the insights from Sharing Partner discussions:

Insights from reading first ½ of Carnes' Nurturing Chapter

Answering questions 10-20

We will allow for _____ minutes per share. Who would like to begin?

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

Anonymity and confidentiality are essential to keeping our meeting safe. Therefore, please join me in reading the following slogan: Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave here, Let it stay here! (Here, here!)

(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

In some of the past Step Study meetings, people have expressed stress, discomfort, fear, or shame regarding not doing the Step Study "right" in some way, whether it be not making or receiving outreach calls, not sharing answers with a sharing partner, or not being caught up or feeling like they were not answering questions "correctly." **There is no right or wrong here, friends.** We each are on a journey, and this is an opportunity to walk our paths together, but each must walk their own path. Some of us are able to do more than others, for whatever reasons. It's okay. Just do what you can... and please – **KEEP COMING BACK!! We need each other.** Much can be gained from listening to each other's shares, regardless of how much effort we have/have not put into our work. However, having said that, you are invited to do the best you can. This Step Study moves at a rigorous pace. It is a brief overview of the Steps with the lens of Intimacy Avoidance. As individuals, you may wish to take some more time with a particular step with the help of a sponsor or fellow traveler, either now or later. The group will move on, though – and you're encouraged to keep up as best you can. **Please don't drop out solely because you've gotten behind!** If it doesn't feel like the right thing for your recovery right now, of course you're invited to listen to your intuitive voice and the guidance from your

Higher Power, but we encourage you to **make a decision you feel led to do and feel peaceful**, rather than make a decision based on shame or fear.

If you're behind, perhaps you could just skip that for now and focus on this week's homework. If you still don't have a sharing partner, you could pray for courage and willingness to reach out to invite someone to share with, or to ask a facilitator for help. This work will not be done perfectly. But we each will benefit from whatever effort we put into it. Some weeks it may be easier than others. No shame here, only love and acceptance.

There is an acronym for shame: **S**hould **H**ave **A**lready **M**astered **E**verything !!
Try to give yourself some grace, love, and understanding, knowing that we each are already more than enough. Do what you can do and give the rest to HP.

We miss you when you're gone! Please let one of the facilitators know if you can't make it to the meeting, and please read the emails and reach out to others to find out about the homework assignments.

Action Items Week 4:

1) Daily Nurturing Activity

An important part of recovering from intimacy avoidance is developing intimacy with ourselves, which includes learning to feel and express our emotions, and becoming aware of what our bodies need. One way to accomplish this is to practice self-nurture. So, this week we will begin **doing something to nurture ourselves each day**. It does not have to take a lot of extra time or planning or money. We do things to take care of ourselves every day, such as grooming, eating nutritious food, getting adequate rest, staying hydrated, etc. Nurturing can also be doing an activity you enjoy, like a hobby or form of entertainment. Nurturing can be doing nice things for yourself. Ideas and examples of nurturing activities can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.gateways-to-inner-peace.com/self-nurturing.html>

http://www.straightfromtheheart.com/growth_selfnurture.htm

You are encouraged to **keep a log of your nurturing activities** (for example, you can carry a notebook or use a notes app on your phone). This will give you something to reference next week when we report on things we each did. Because we who suffer from intimacy and/or sexual avoidance have difficulty receiving nurture and care from self and others, this will be a **an action item each week throughout the rest of the Step Study**. So it is suggested that you have a set place to record one nurturing activity every day.

It will probably take a while to get in the habit of thinking of doing nurturing things. Putting a **reminder** on your calendar or phone may help you remember. Ask people who call you for outreach what they're doing to nurture themselves! The goal is to do one nurturing thing daily,

but you can do two or three things in one day if you want to "catch up." Or, just start with today. Each day is a new day!

2) Second ½ of Nurturing chapter in Sexual Anorexia

We will read pages 118 – 132 in Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-hatred by Patrick Carnes. Share insights with a sharing partner.

3) Write Answers to **NEW Questions 21 - 26** Pair and Share

We will also **answer the last questions**, numbers 21-26. Share your answers with a sharing partner.

21. Is my spirituality or faith experienced mainly through thinking? Do my spiritual practices connect me with myself and my Higher Power?

22. How has my intimacy avoidance been misaligned with what is important to me or what I want from life? Do I spend time on what is meaningful to me? Do I feel pleased with my contribution to the world?

23. What circumstances led to my most recent episode of isolation, deprivation, or sexually shutting down? What were my feelings and thought patterns before, during, and after the incident? What attempts did I make to control or prevent myself from continuing in the avoidance cycle?

24. What key events from my childhood and youth contributed to my intimacy and sexual avoidance?

25. How have my behaviors worsened over time?

26. In what ways do I want my life to change as I work the 12 Steps of SAA with the focus of recovery from intimacy and sexual avoidance?

3) Outreach calls

Continue making those outreach calls!

4) Bonus Question:

You're also invited to consider the question, **"Why do you think Step One is part of the Solution?"**

Week 5

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Insights from reading second ½ of Nurturing,

answering NEW questions 21-26

answering the question, “Why is Step One part of the Solution?”

Week 5 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Pair and Share –

Three Circles

Intimacy Avoidance Pamphlet

Week 5 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
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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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- Facilitators may sometimes respond as they feel led by their Higher Power.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing:

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. First, the floor will be open for brief "popcorn" sharing about how we're feeling and what we've done to nurture ourselves this week. We'll spend ____ minutes total on check-ins. (Or each person is given a time limit, whichever works best)

The floor is now open for sharing the insights from discussing with a sharing partner about last week's assignment, which was Sharing Partner Discussion Insights from reading the second ½ of Nurturing in Sexual Anorexia and answering questions 21-26. Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

Anonymity and confidentiality are essential to keeping our meeting safe. Therefore, please join me in reading the following slogan: Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave here, Let it stay here! (Here, here!)

(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

Now that you've answered the questions in the ISA First Step Guide, you are eligible to share those answers in an SAA meeting! (Yay!!) :)

Possibilities include sharing in an in-person "regular" SAA meeting, giving the group members a chance to learn more about avoidance, or sharing on a "regular" or an ISA-focused telemeeting. There is a huge need for ISA First Step Presentations, (especially from men). Those who have shared their First Steps as well as those who have listened to First Steps have often found it to be a powerful and healing event.

There is no "right" way to give a First Step Presentation, but reading the questions from the First Step to Intimacy Guide and answering them is one way to organize a First Step. It is a good idea to have a sponsor or fellow traveler read or hear your First Step presentation before it's presented during a meeting, both to help you keep it within the

time frame of a typical meeting as well as to decide together the best way to present the material to an SAA group.

Some Avoidance First Steps have been recorded. Here is a link to a document that gives the sites and access codes to recordings of ISA First Step Presentations.

[https://saatalk.info/us/resources/resource?xresource\[id\]=31](https://saatalk.info/us/resources/resource?xresource[id]=31)

Action Items Week 5:

1) Outreach
calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Pair and Share – Three Circles

This week we will explore the tool of the **Three Circles**. More information about the Three Circles can be found at:

<http://saa-recovery.org/SAALiterature/English/ThreeCircles/>

Using the tool of the Circles is optional in this program ; some have found it helpful to count days of freedom from Inner Circle Behaviors, and some do not. But for this week, whether you already have Three Circles or not, everyone is invited to think about it, talk about it, and write about it. Then later you can choose **if and how** you want to use this tool – or not.

Idea: Review your Vision Statement or your "Personal Promises."

Many have found it helpful to first become clearer as to **what intimacy means to them** before filling out or editing their Circles. At the beginning of this Step Study, participants were invited to **set goals** for themselves or create a **vision statement** about what they want for themselves in regards to healthier intimacy with themselves, with friends, with family, with their Higher Power, and with a romantic/sexual partner if that fits for their situation. If you haven't done so, you're invited to consider writing down what you would like for yourself. (It would be a great topic for this week's outreach calls, too.) If you

have already written a vision statement or personal promises, perhaps you could review them.

The ISA First Step Guide questions are very helpful in helping us think about what we DON'T want in our lives anymore. Expressing the opposite of some of those things is one way to create goals or a vision statement. The table on page 123 of Carnes' Sexual Anorexia which describes addictive sexuality versus healthier sexuality has also been helpful for some. Another helpful section of the Carnes book is found in the chapter on Partners (which we will not be reading as part of this Step Study). On pages **299-301**, Carnes lists some dimensions of healthier intimacy versus some dimensions of unhealthier intimacy. Some have found this section to offer solace and hope, especially after answering the First Step questions, because they can see **areas in which they already do have or are actively working on and making progress in healthier intimacy.**

Becoming clearer about what you want in your life can make it easier to see why certain behaviors do not move you towards those goals. For example, if you want your sexual behavior to be a way to express feelings of love, devotion, and affection towards your partner, instead of being used as a drug to change how you're feeling or to try to have power or control over someone (including yourself), then masturbation to fantasy or escaping into fantasy while being sexual with a partner are behaviors that won't serve you.

Inner Circle

The Inner Circle contains the behaviors that are "addictive, harmful, or unacceptable for us." (*Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 16, Defining Abstinence chapter*) Acting out with addictive or compulsive sexual behaviors may sometimes give the *illusion* of intimacy without actually fostering healthy intimacy, which qualifies as intimacy avoidance. Fantasy and objectification are other behaviors that help people avoid connection. Using television or food or other behaviors or substances can help people avoid intimacy with themselves by numbing their feelings.

Some suggested criteria for knowing what goes in the Inner Circle are:

Behaviors I want to stop

Behaviors I'm powerless over, that I'm unable to stop when I want

Behaviors devoid of intimacy or self respect

Behaviors that lead to demoralization

Abusive, painful, costly or cause suffering

Things I keep secret, that revealing would have negative consequences
Behaviors I use to numb discomfort or avoid responsibility
Behaviors or substances that create a drug-like state that alters thinking

Intimacy and sexual avoidance can manifest in blatant behaviors such as sexual acting out, sabotaging relationships, or preferring to live in fantasy rather than reality. But it is also about not doing something – not trusting, not committing, not surrendering. However, it is very difficult to try to "not **not** do something."

Many have found that the tool of **the Inner Circle is most useful** if what's in it is **concise and quantifiable**. For example, objectifying others may be a behavior you want to stop, which you feel powerless over and is devoid of intimacy of self respect, etc. But the words, "objectifying others" is somewhat vague. "Staring at others' body parts" is a more specific example of an objectifying behavior. But at the beginning of recovery when that compulsion was something which is done subconsciously, one might have been staring at someone for many seconds or even minutes before realizing they were doing it. So, it may not serve someone in that situation to put it in the Inner Circle worded as "staring at others' body parts." Then, every time they caught themselves staring, they would have had to reset their days. What some found helpful was to give themselves a 3-second rule; *from the moment they realize* they are focusing their attention on someone's body part, they give themselves 3 seconds to turn their attention elsewhere. So, "Focusing on other's body parts for longer than 3 seconds" is a specific, measurable, and reasonable item to list in the Inner Circle.

Examples of Inner Circle behaviors:

Dressing in a way that objectifies myself
Escaping into fantasy while having sex (3-second rule)
Having sex when I don't want to
Focusing on other's body parts for longer than 3 seconds
Reading/watching erotic or suggestive material (i.e. novels, porn)
Euphoric recall (purposely recalling past acting out)
Intentional sexual fantasy
Masturbation/self-stimulation
Listening to or saying innuendos or sexual jokes
Sex with strangers
Sex in inappropriate places
Sex outside a committed relationship
Looking for sexual partners online

Each of us may have different things in our Inner Circle relating to intimacy and sexual avoidance. And with time and experience, some things can shift from one circle to another.

Middle Circle

The Middle Circle gives us a warning: when we find ourselves in the middle circle, we need to exercise caution, reach out for help, and take actions to move into the Outer Circle. Many avoidant behaviors best fit in the Middle Circle, because they're so challenging to quantify – there is often no clear line that gets crossed, nor a definite choice to act in a certain way. Some behaviors or indicators might belong in the Middle Circle because there might occasionally be a valid reason why you're doing it (for example, going to bed at a different time as a spouse or partner, or going longer than 30 days without having sex) but you might not want it in the Inner Circle because you don't want to have to reset your day count if there were some unusual circumstances which made those behaviors or situations likely.

Also, some things may be best in the Middle Circle because they may or may not be inappropriate, depending on the circumstances. Consider the case of "avoiding feelings by using distraction or other means to avoid sitting with unpleasant feelings." When a person is experiencing an uncomfortable emotion, it can be difficult to determine if attending phone meetings or talking with sponsees or doing service at their child's school are helpful, Outer Circle activities, or if they're serving as distractions from experiencing those feelings... Sometimes it's a good idea to clear one's schedule just to provide time and space to feel emotions. And sometimes it's necessary to wrap it up and shelf it for a while in order to function, as long as it can be pulled out later when there's time to journal and pray and make outreach calls, etc. to help deal with those feelings. Each situation is different, and the appropriate response depends on several things.

Additionally, many have found it helpful to not only put behaviors in the Middle Circle, but to also list of events, circumstances, or situations which could lead to acting out or acting in, or which contribute to an unhealthy lifestyle. These are situations where extra caution and support is recommended. Examples are being sick, being on vacation, get-togethers with extended family, traveling, HALT (being too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired) etc.

Some ideas for criteria for Middle Circle Behaviors and Situations:

Behaviors I'm unsure about

Behaviors I don't want in my life but aren't as severe as Inner Circle ones
Anything that leads me back to the Inner Circle
Behaviors, feelings, or situations that trigger me
Signs that I'm neglecting Outer Circle behaviors

Examples of Middle Circle Symptoms or Behaviors:

Omitting daily prayer and meditation
Avoiding feelings (using distraction or other means to avoid sitting with unpleasant feelings)
Isolating
Escaping from social situations
Avoiding responsibilities
Spending unreasonable amounts of time reading, watching a screen, or crafting
Building resentment
Refraining from expressing feelings to safe and appropriate people
Having a "victim" attitude
Obsessive thinking
Romantic obsession
Trying to control others
Scripting (imagining what others might say or do)
Multitasking
Hoarding
Emotional eating
Fearful response
Going longer than 30 days without having sex
Staying up too late
Going to bed at a different time than my husband several nights in a row

Outer Circle

"Behaviors we list in our 'outer circle' bring recovery and are to be encouraged, praised and practiced. ... We want to be gentle with ourselves – to practice behaviors that are self-nurturing. These outer circle behaviors are clearly the antithesis of our old way of life, and it is the practice of these actions which will lift our obsessions and compulsions and bring us serenity and joy." (*Three Circles - Defining Sexual Sobriety in S.A.A.*)
"Outer-circle behaviors encompass a wide range of healthy activities." (*Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 19*)

Recovering from intimacy avoidance (and compulsive sexual avoidance, if applicable) is best done by focusing more on the "yes" behaviors rather than avoiding the "no" behaviors. The Outer Circle is most useful if it has a **TON** of possible good, healthy behaviors ranging from things we do every day, to things we choose to do once in a while. Some people include short-term or long-term goals. Spending a lot of time doing things from our Outer Circle is, in fact, avoiding the intimacy avoidant behaviors of our Middle and Inner Circles.

Ideas for criteria for Outer Circle Behaviors:

Alternatives to acting out

Target behaviors that promote healthy living, healthy relationships, and healthy sexuality

Self-nurturing behaviors

Behaviors that keep me engaged with other people and with reality

Behaviors that enhance my life

Possible categories for Outer Circle behaviors:

Things I want to do daily, weekly, monthly, yearly

Self-care items (grooming, allow for enough sleep, eating healthy foods in appropriate amounts, staying hydrated, exercise, doctor, dentist, etc.)

Program (outreach, step work, talking with sponsor, meetings, service, etc.)

Spiritual activities (spiritual community, prayer, meditation, reading, etc.)

Outdoor activities (walk/run/hike, bird watching, go to park, lake/river/beach, sports, etc.)

Musical activities (listen to recorded music, sing/play music, attend concert, etc.)

Creative activities (cook, sew, artwork, journal, etc.)

Home improvement projects (organize, fix something broken, solve a problem, repurpose, etc.)

Self-improvement activities (take a class to learn a new skill or hobby, join a book club, practice new habits such as mindfulness, breathing, or posture, etc.)

Social activities (share a meal with friends, attend a social gathering, family, church, or community activities, invite someone to do something, etc.)

Entertainment or enrichment activities (watch a movie, read a book, play a game, watch or play a sport, etc.)

Community service activities (volunteer at a library, soup kitchen, humane society, etc.)

So, this week you are invited to begin a list of Inner, Middle, and Outer Circle behaviors. **It will not be perfect, nor will it be permanent.** Although it is not something to edit on a whim – especially when it comes to changing things in the Inner Circle, which defines your sobriety and should be done with a sponsor or accountability partner – these things are not set in stone, either, and can evolve with time and recovery as you gain insights and grow in sobriety and understanding. It is suggested that you think about the avoidant behaviors you wrote about in your First Step and ponder where you might put them in the 3 Circles, but don't solidify anything or make any permanent changes to existing Circles without consulting a sponsor, a co-sponsor (for example, your sharing partner) or an accountability partner. In other words, it is recommended that you confer with someone – don't do it alone.

3) Pair and Share – Intimacy Avoidance pamphlet

Besides writing (or possibly editing) your Circles, you are also invited to **read the pamphlet:** *Intimacy Avoidance – Another Aspect of Sex Addiction* which can be found at:

<https://saa-recovery.org/literature/recovery-from-compulsive-sexual-avoidance-a-return-to-intimacy/> . There are some valuable insights and guidance in that pamphlet about the Steps and the Circles in relation to Intimacy avoidance.

We will continue the method of Write, Pair, and Share. You are invited to share your experiences with putting avoidant behaviors into Circles and about what from the Intimacy Avoidance pamphlet resonated with you with your sharing partner.

We will also **continue doing daily nurturing exercises** this week, as well as making at least **3 outreach calls**. This week during outreach calls, you might consider asking others about their vision statement or personal promises, or how they're Circles are going, or what they've done to nurture themselves. Don't forget that recording those nurturing exercises not only helps you know what to report during the meetings, but will also help remind you to do something nurturing every day.

Week 6

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Exploring **Three Circles**,

Reading **Intimacy Avoidance** pamphlet

Week 6 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Pair and Share –

Sexual Anorexia Chapter 7 (Sensuality, page 135)

Step 2 Sex Addicts Anonymous "Green Book" page 25

Week 6 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior—that our lives had become unmanageable.
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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.
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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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- We refrain from directing comments to another participant
- Facilitators may sometimes respond as they feel led by their Higher Power.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing:

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. First, the floor will be open for brief "popcorn" sharing about how we're feeling and what we've done to nurture ourselves this week. We'll spend ____ minutes on check-ins. (Or each person is given a time limit, whichever works best)

The floor is now open for sharing the insights from discussing with a sharing partner about last week's assignment, which was **Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -**

Exploring **Three Circles**,

Reading **Intimacy Avoidance** pamphlet

Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

Anonymity and confidentiality are essential to keeping our meeting safe. Therefore, please join me in reading the following slogan: Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave here, Let it stay here! (Here, here!)

(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

Creative Ways to Use the Three Circles

People have shared various different ways of using the tool of the Three Circles for avoidance/anorexia step work. One person inverted their circles and put things they want to *work towards in the center*, innermost circle and things that they want to *avoid* in the outer circle. It is what made more sense to that person.

Another person talked about choosing a couple of key avoidant behaviors to focus on addressing currently. Their short-term circles chart only had a few items in each of the circles, and they all were directly related to each other. For example, the middle circle behaviors cause or can lead to the particular inner circle behavior being focused on, and the outer circle behaviors specifically counteract or are helpful to prevent the middle and inner circle behaviors listed. No matter how (or if) you use the tool of the Three Circles, it's great how we can adapt things to serve our individual needs!

For next week – We are moving into Step 2! Yay!

Set-Aside Prayer

As we begin Step Two, it can be helpful to become aware of old ideas that may be hindering our healing and progress. Some have found the following prayer useful:

Dear God,
Please help me to set aside everything I think I know about [people, place or thing] so I may have an open mind and a new experience. Please help me to see the truth about [people, place or thing]. Amen

This prayer comes from the Chapter to the Agnostic, primarily pages 47 and 48.

Suggestion: Inner Observer

Something that many have found necessary in working Step Two is to practice becoming more self-aware. Coming to believe in a Higher Power and becoming open to connecting with that Power is something that, for many people, requires exploring the spiritual side of themselves – the aspect of ourselves that observes what we are thinking, feeling and doing in each moment as the thoughts, feelings and actions are occurring. Some call this a spirit or a soul, and some call it an "inner observer."

The inner observer is unattached to what is occurring with the ego and observes without judgment. One participant put it this way: "We are the sky, and everything else is the weather."

Another way to look at it is to think of the cinema. To project a movie requires a screen. The images move and play on the screen; vivid emotions and high drama are enacted. Despite all that, the screen itself is not engaged. It is not part of the movie.

Here is an exercise that may be helpful in getting in touch with your Inner Observer. Sitting quietly with your eyes closed, try to observe thoughts and emotions as if they were clouds passing by in the sky or a leaf floating down a stream. Hopefully you will begin to notice that there are spaces between your thoughts, like patches of blue between the clouds. In this space of inner silence where there is no impulse of fear, no strong emotions or sensations, the mind is just itself, being itself. That is the spirit/soul/inner observer.

One of the simplest and most effective ways of strengthening the inner observer is to witness the breath and body. The body and breath are always in the present moment with no agenda. The body and the breath are always in the present moment – they can't possibly exist in the past or the future.

(For more information, you can visit

http://www.goconscious.com/home/articles/inner_observer_practice0.html or

http://m.selfgrowth.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.selfgrowth.com%2Farticles%2Fzaritsky2.html&utm_referrer=#2868)

Here is a website address of a recording of an interview that Oprah did with the author of a book called, "The Untethered Soul." They talk about a similar concept.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbMcUueg4Sc>

Action Items Week 6:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Pair and Share – Sexual Anorexia, chapter 7 (pg 135)

This week we will be **reading Chapter 7 (Sensuality)** in *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Patrick Carnes (page 135). In this chapter, the author ties Step 2 (Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity) with the 2nd dimension of healthy sexuality, which is sensuality (meaning, "of the senses," i.e. sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.) Again, at the end of the chapter are optional questions and exercises to consider.

4) Pair and Share – Step Two, Sex Addicts Anonymous (pg 25)

We will also be **reading Step 2 from the Green Book**, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*. Other ISA Step Study participants have found that reading these chapters from the 2 different books one right after the other offered interesting insights into the principles of Step 2.

Week 7

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Reading *Sexual Anorexia* **chapter 7 (Sensuality)**

Reading **Step 2 Green Book**

Week 7 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Daily Sensory Exercises

Pair and Share –

Answer HP questions 1-6

Week 7 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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.

ZOOM Etiquette Reminders:

- As a gentle reminder, please sensitive and aware of what is on your camera.
- When you're not speaking, please mute your microphone
- To keep the meeting safe, we use "I" and "me" statements
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7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing:

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. First, the floor will be open for brief "popcorn" sharing about how we're feeling and what we've done to nurture ourselves this week. We'll spend ____ minutes on check-ins. (Or each person is given a time limit, whichever works best)

The floor is now open for sharing the insights from discussing with a sharing partner about last week's assignment, which was **Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -**

Reading Sexual Anorexia **chapter 7 (Sensuality)**

Reading **Step 2 Green Book**

Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

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(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

Story and Videos about supporting each other

Sex Addict in a Pit:

A sex addict fell into a pit and couldn't get out. A businessman went by.

The sex addict called out for help. The businessman threw him some money and told him get himself a ladder. But the sex addict could not find a ladder in this pit he was in.

A doctor walked by. The sex addict said, "Help! I can't get out!" The doctor gave him drugs and said, "Take this, it will relieve the pain." The sex addict said, "Thanks." But when the pills ran out, he was still in the pit.

A renowned psychiatrist rode by and heard the sex addict's cries for help. He stopped and said, "How did you get there? Were you born there? Were you put there by your parents? Tell me about yourself, it will alleviate your sense of loneliness." So the sex addict talked with him for an hour, then the psychiatrist had to leave, but he said he'd be back next week. The sex addict thanked him, but he was still in his pit.

A clergyman came by, and the sex addict called for help. The clergyman gave him a book and said, "I'll say a prayer for you." He got down on his knees and prayed for the sex addict, then left. The sex addict was very grateful, and he read the book, but he was still stuck in that pit.

A recovering sex addict happened to be passing by and the sex addict cried out, "Hey! Help me! I'm stuck in this pit!" Right away, the recovering sex addict jumped in the pit with him. The first sex addict said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck here!" But the recovering sex addict said, "It's okay, I've been here before, and I know how to get out."

There is a way out. Those who have gone before have experienced more freedom, healing, and connection with themselves and others than they'd ever imagined possible. Reach out to them and listen to their wisdom.

Frogs stuck in a hole: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yy-7exFxiNk>

Martial Arts Class: There is a touching video of a Japanese martial arts children's class video which has been shared in previous ISA Step Study. It illustrates how important having a network of support is for our ability to achieve what we want to accomplish. The site is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4F98joi104&list=PLrxFFbDk2pRJ3gn9PyWXydUfy3kN6mgZT&index=11>

Action Items Week 7:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Daily Sensory Exercises

This week, in addition to the outreach calls and doing something daily to nurture yourself, you're invited to **begin recording things you've noticed with each of your 5 senses** daily. Many of us have learned that opening ourselves up and becoming aware of what our senses are telling us helps us tune in to our emotions, and also to sense guidance from our Higher Power through our own intuitive thoughts.

4) Pair and Share – Answer HP questions 1-6

We will also continue to Write, Pair and Share. This week we will answer the following questions and share our answers with our sharing partners:

1. What would sanity look like for me?

Step 2 says that we "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." This, as the Green Book says, implies that we are insane in our addiction. The compulsive avoidance of intimacy (whether sexual or not) is not sane, either, especially for human beings who are hard-wired for connection. So if we are insane in our hiding, our controlling and our deprivation behaviors, what would sanity look like?

2. Who (or what) were the Higher Powers in my life until now?

This is an open-ended question. Consider any person or force that you didn't have control over and write about how you felt about it/them.

3. How are they similar to the Higher Power of my current understanding? How do they differ?

These questions may help you become aware of some connections between the God or Higher Power of your current understanding with the people or forces that may have had control or power over you in the past.

4. If you were seeking to "hire" someone for the position of "Higher Power," what would you need/want your HP to be or do – or NOT be or do?

This creative exercise has produced some marvelous insights. Some have uncovered subconscious beliefs that don't serve them. Some realized more clearly how they connect with their Higher Power. One idea that some have found helpful is to consider what you're looking for in an acting out partner, or what needs your addiction is meeting, and then ponder and write about how a Higher Power could meet those needs.

The following questions offer you a chance to evaluate what you believe about yourself and about others, and about life. They can be very general and broad, or can be specific to God/Higher Power. You're invited to just start journaling and see what comes up when you ask yourself the following:

5. What do you think you know?

It's an open question and you can interpret it any way you wish. For example, you can think about your life experiences and education. You're invited to ponder what the question means to you, and journal any thoughts that come up for you in response to the question. The next question (equally open), is,

6. What do you refuse to believe?

Again, ponder and journal about anything that applies. These two questions have produced a variety of interesting thoughts and reactions in other ISA Step Studies.

Week 8

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture, Sensory Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

HP questions 1-6

Week 8 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Daily Sensory Exercises

Pair and Share –

Answer HP questions 7-10 - c

Week 8 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

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courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior—that our lives had become unmanageable.
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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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7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing:

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. First, the floor will be open for brief "popcorn" sharing about how we're feeling and what we've done to nurture ourselves this week. We'll spend ____ minutes on check-ins. (Or each person is given a time limit, whichever works best)

The floor is now open for sharing the insights from discussing with a sharing partner about last week's assignment, which was **Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -**

HP questions 1-6

Who would like to begin?

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Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

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Potential Reminders to Email Participants

"When I pray for something and I get what I want, I feel it strengthens my belief in God. But what if I don't get what I want???" asked a participant. Others agreed, saying things like, "If I trust my Higher Power, bad things could still happen to me. Can I still find Higher Power's presence in weakness and pain?"

There is a song that talks about how pain can be a doorway to coming to believe in a power greater than oneself. It's called, "Pain."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC6QvInucVU&index=1&list=PLrxFFbDk2pRJVTQZepTG1Y98Tk9Hg3r6d>

Another song by the same singer, Jason Gray, called "Stolen" talks about how tragedy was the thing that helped him become open to being healed by God.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCWx91uC_nQ&list=PLrxFFbDk2pRJVTQZepTG1Y98Tk9Hg3r6d&index=2

As we continue nurturing ourselves and conditioning ourselves to be aware of our senses, we become more and more connected to ourselves and more present in the current moment. As we make those outreach calls, share with a sharing partner, and attend these meetings, we become more connected to others.

Action Items Week 8:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Daily Sensory Exercises

4) Pair and Share – Answer HP questions 7-10c

Those who have not received much spiritual training might not recognize how their Higher Power interacts with them. The following question is designed to help us think about occasions when we may have felt the power or influence of a Higher Power.

7. What are some examples of times you've felt

- **loving** towards someone **or loved** by someone?
- **safe and secure or confident**?
- **contentment or happiness**?
- **Joy, peace or tranquility**?
- **Enlightened** or an "ah-ha" moment?
- **Guided or nudged** to take action?

- Had circumstances work together for your good or received unexpected help from someone?

(See if you can list examples for each of these sub-questions.)

8. How does someone find their way into your heart?

Consider ways people get to know each other or develop closeness and connection, and then decide how you could begin to implement some of these things into your daily routine. Perhaps these might be great additions to your Outer Circle.

9. How does my Higher Power touch me?

10. Recall a story from your life where a Power greater than yourself helped you feel safe in the face of fear and it was an experience that you really valued.

10 – a. How did the experience of safety start?

10 – b. What did the experience of safety mean to you?

10 – c. What do you still carry with you from that experience of safety, both mentally and viscerally?

Bonus idea: Step 2 Collage

Some people have found it fun and helpful to make a collage of images which represent different aspects of their Higher Power.

Week 9

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture, Sensory Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

HP questions 7-10c

Week 9 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Daily Sensory Exercises

Pair and Share –

Step 3 in Sex Addicts Anonymous (page 28)

Sexual Anorexia, chapter 8 (Self-image, page 159)

Week 9 Meeting Script

Welcome:

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HP questions 7 – 10 c

Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

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Potential Reminders to Email Participants

IF YOU ARE NOT FEELING CONFIDENT AND COMFORTABLE WITH WHERE YOU'RE AT WITH YOUR BELIEF IN A HIGHER POWER, THAT IS COMPLETELY OKAY. Step 2 *isn't*

about "figuring out" who or what your Higher Power is. It's merely about beginning to believe that it *is possible* for you to be restored to 'sanity' or spiritual fitness through a power or force that is separate from your own abilities.

Don't forget – this Step Study is a very quick trip through the Steps focusing on intimacy and sexual avoidance issues. Doing this work could bring up things that participants may want to spend some more time on individually with the help of their sponsor or fellow travelers. That is a good idea. You could either do that now, if you feel led to do that, or come back to it later on. **IF YOU CHOOSE TO SPEND ADDITIONAL TIME working on a step at this time, you are ALSO encouraged to MOVE FORWARD WITH THE GROUP in studying Step 3.** There is no "perfect" way to work the Steps, and many people have found that continuing to move forward with the group continues to cultivate the connections and friendships which help us heal from our addictions and traumas.

EACH OF YOU IS A VALUED MEMBER OF THE GROUP. Our little family wouldn't be the same without you!

Here are some thoughts which may be helpful for those struggling to come to believe in a Power Greater than themselves, especially when they have challenges with the concepts of God or

religion. It has been helpful for some to ask, "What is the most loving response?" or, "What would Love say/do?" The following is from a meditation.

"Love is often presented as the opposite of fear, but true love is not opposite anything. True love is far more powerful than any negative emotions, as it is the environment in which all things arise. Negative emotions are like sharks swimming in the ocean of love. All things beautiful and fearful, ugly and kind, powerful and small, come into existence, do their thing, and disappear within the context of this great ocean. At the same time, they are made of the very love in which they swim and can never be separated. We are made of this love and live our whole lives at one with it, whether we know it or not.

"It is only the illusion that we are separate from this great love that causes us to believe that choosing anything other than love makes sense or is even possible. In the relative, dualistic world of positive and negative, darkness and light, male and female, we make choices and we learn from them. This is exactly what we are meant to be doing here on earth. Underlying these relative choices, though, is the choice to be conscious of what we are, which is love, or to be unconscious of it. When we choose to be conscious of it, we choose love. We will still exist in the relative world of opposites and choices and cause and effect, and we will need to make our way here, but doing so with an awareness that we are all made of this love will enable us to be more playful, more joyful, more loving and wise, as we make our way. Ultimately, the choices we make will shed light on the love that makes us all one, enabling those who have forgotten to return to the source.

"This world makes it easy to forget this great love, which is part of why we are here. We are here to remember and, when we forget to remember again, to choose love." (Article in the DailyOM by Madisyn Taylor)

From another source:

"You may wonder why you would ever want to draw painful feelings in closer. Isn't it better to keep them away? Think of it this way: Your painful emotions are being experienced by parts of your soul that need to be heard, honored, and understood in order for you to be able to help them. Furthermore, the parts of your soul experiencing these difficult emotions have much to teach you when you get to know them. As with the people in your life, the key is to establish comfortable distance with these parts of your soul." (from a devotional on the You Version Bible app, likely from the book *Boundaries For Your Soul- How to Turn Your Overwhelming Thoughts and Feelings Into Your Greatest Allies* by Alison Cook, PhD and Kimberly Miller, MTh, LMFT)

This week we'll be moving on to Step 3. In addition to the outreach calls, nurturing and sensory activities, you're invited to read Step 3 in the SAA green book and chapter 8, Self Image, from the Sexual Anorexia book.

Bonus: Thomas Merton Prayer

Here is a prayer that was shared on one of the Step Study meetings:

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
- Thomas Merton, 2012

Action Items Week 9:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Daily Sensory Exercises

4) Pair and Share – Step 3 in Sex Addicts Anonymous (page 28)

5) Pair and Share -- Sexual Anorexia, chapter 8 (Self-image, page 159)

Week 10

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture, Sensory Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Step 3 in *Sex Addicts Anonymous*

Chapter 8 (Self-Image) from *Sexual Anorexia*

Week 10 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Daily Sensory Exercises

Pair and Share –

What else helps you work Steps 2 or 3?

Acceptance Was the Answer AABB pg 407-420, Fourth Edition

Week 10 Meeting Script

Welcome:

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courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

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Step 3 in *Sex Addicts Anonymous*

Chapter 8 (Self-Image) from *Sexual Anorexia*

Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

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(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

Carnes reminds us in the second sentence of Chapter 8, Self Image: "Our sexuality cannot be separated from the rest of our being." (*Sexual Anorexia, page 159*) Some of us sometimes wish we could separate them! But our sexuality is more than just the erotic part of our body, our life. As our sexuality is healed by our Higher Power, it becomes a more beautiful and spiritually integrated part of ourselves as a whole. We may become more open to viewing and experiencing our sexuality in a much more holistic sense, rather than in a compartmentalized, restricted way (which is often due to fear).

In Step 3 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, it says, "We are **not abandoning ourselves** to the direction of some powerful taskmaster forcing us to do things that are not of our choosing. Instead, we become open to **making new choices for ourselves** in the light of a Higher Power's transforming love and care." This way of gentleness and compassion allows us to stop obsessing about the past or worrying about the future. "We can **turn our attention to the present, where we really live**, and become open to new solutions. ... We become **willing to walk through all experiences and emotions, including painful and difficult ones**." (*Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 29*)

The Welcoming Prayer is a method of consenting to God's presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen our relationship with God through consenting in the ordinary activities of our

day. The Welcoming Prayer helps to dismantle the emotional programs of the false-self system and to heal the wounds of a lifetime by addressing them where they are stored — in the body.

The Welcoming Prayer (by Father Thomas Keating)

Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today
because I know it's for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons,
situations, and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
approval and pleasure.

I let go of my desire for survival and security.

I let go of my desire to change any situation,
condition, person or myself.

I open to the love and presence of God and
God's action within. Amen.

Just a reminder for everyone that this Step Study is not meant to be a slow and thorough look at the Steps from an Avoidance perspective. Instead, it is meant to be a BRIEF OVERVIEW of the Steps with that focus. An individual may want to spend more time on a particular Step with their sponsor or co-sponsor/sharing partner *in addition* to keeping up with the group Stepwork assignments, or perhaps revisit the Steps at a slower pace after the Step Study is over. You are encouraged to **keep moving forward** with the Step Study group, though, regardless if you feel you've "sufficiently worked" a Step or not, because we are just STUDYING the Steps as a group; the actual step work people do is a personal and individual thing which could take some time.

So – action invitations this week: Is there an exercise, practice, or thought that has helped you work Step 2 or Step 3? If so, please share with your sharing partner, as well as with the group next week. We will also be reading Acceptance Was the Answer from the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book, pages 407-420 in my book (Fourth Edition). Here are some places you can read it online in case you don't have that book.

Bonus: Third Step Prayer

Some have found it helpful to create their own version of a Third Step prayer, using the AA Third Step prayer as a guide.

God, I offer myself to Thee - To build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will.

Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness
to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.

May I do Thy will always!

https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/en_bigbook_personalstories_partII.pdf

<http://www.guardureyes.com/gue/pdfs/theystoppedintime16.pdf>

Action Items Week 10:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Daily Sensory Exercises

4) Pair and Share – What else helps you work Steps 2 or 3?

5) Pair and Share – Acceptance Was the Answer AABB pg 407-420, Fourth Edition

Week 11

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture, Sensory Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

What else helps you work Steps 2 or 3?

Acceptance Was the Answer AABB pg 407-420, Fourth Edition

Week 11 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Daily Sensory Exercises

Pair and Share –

Step 4 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 31

Chapter 9 (Self-Definition) from Sexual Anorexia (page 177)

Week 11 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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.

ZOOM Etiquette Reminders:

- As a gentle reminder, please sensitive and aware of what is on your camera.
- When you're not speaking, please mute your microphone
- To keep the meeting safe, we use "I" and "me" statements
- We refrain from directing comments to another participant
- Facilitators may sometimes respond as they feel led by their Higher Power.

7th Tradition -

Now it's time to honor the 7th Tradition by encouraging everyone to contribute to SAA by visiting saa-recovery.org or calling the ISO office at 713-869-4902.

Sharing:

It is now time for the sharing portion of our meeting. First, the floor will be open for brief "popcorn" sharing about how we're feeling and what we've done to nurture ourselves this week. We'll spend ____ minutes on check-ins. (Or each person is given a time limit, whichever works best)

The floor is now open for sharing the insights from discussing with a sharing partner about last week's assignment, which was **Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -**

What else helps you work Steps 2 or 3?

Acceptance Was the Answer AABB pg 407-420, Fourth Edition

Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

Anonymity and confidentiality are essential to keeping our meeting safe. Therefore, please join me in reading the following slogan: Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave here, Let it stay here! (Here, here!)

(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

Just a reminder here: This Step Study is a brief look at the Steps through the lens of Intimacy Avoidance and/or Compulsive Sexual Avoidance. Participants are invited to individually spend additional time on any Step they wish – but to also keep moving forward with the group. Great things are in store as we begin the Fourth Step!

The action invitation for this week is to continue making outreach calls, doing nurturing and sensory exercises, and to read Step 4 from Sex Addicts Anonymous and also to read Chapter 9 on Self-Definition from Carnes' Sexual Anorexia - Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred, and discuss what stands out to you with a Pair-and-Share partner. Remember, if your current Pair-and-Share partner situation isn't working, ask for courage to reach out and ask someone else to share with you!

Action Items Week 11:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Daily Sensory Exercises

4) Pair and Share – Read Step 4 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 31

5) Pair and Share – Sexual Anorexia chap. 9 (Self-Definition), pg 177

Week 12

During the Meeting -

Introductions and Nurture, Sensory Reports

Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -

Step 4 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 31
Sexual Anorexia, Ch 9 (Self-definition) pg 177

Week 12 Assignments -

3 outreach calls

Daily Nurturing Activity

Daily Sensory Exercises

Pair and Share –

Step 5 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 37

Fill in 2-5 Resentments

Week 12 Meeting Script

Welcome:

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer. (If GC approved)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The Twelve Steps of SAA

1. We admitted we were powerless over addictive 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 floor is now open for sharing the insights from discussing with a sharing partner about last week's assignment, which was **Insights from Sharing Partner Discussion -**

Step 4 in Sex Addicts Anonymous "green book"

Chapter 9 (Self-Definition) in Sexual Anorexia

Who would like to begin?

(Allow everyone to share who wishes. Encourage those who haven't done homework to share what resonated with them from others' shares.)

Wrap-up and Invitations For Next Week:

Thanks, everyone, for your shares. Here are some final thoughts from the facilitators and the assignments for next week.

Tradition 12:

Anonymity and confidentiality are essential to keeping our meeting safe. Therefore, please join me in reading the following slogan: Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave here, Let it stay here! (Here, here!)

(Action Items discussed, close with Serenity Prayer or other closing reading)

Potential Reminders to Email Participants

We are starting our Step 4 Inventories this week! Just a reminder that this Step Study is a QUICK overview of some things that may be helpful when working the Steps on Intimacy

avoidance and/or sexual anorexia. Individuals may want to go back and take another look at or spend some more time on a certain step.

Step 4: *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

Step 5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

Traditionally, a person would answer some inventory questions for their 4th Step and then share all of those answers at once with a sponsor, often face-to-face, which can be a powerful and healing event.

However, due to the long distances and group dynamics of this Step Study, we are going to apply the principles of Steps 4 and 5 a little differently. We will be working one focus area of the inventory EACH WEEK, listing between 2-5 examples for each area of focus. For example, this week we're focusing on RESENTMENTS. One week is not a lot of time! Many have found it helpful to set a timer and work a few minutes each day on this.

Next, we will be sharing with our sponsors (if we have them) and/or our pair-and-share partners. **THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT IS OUR STEP 5.** (If your current pair-and-share situation is not working, whether it's not a good match or you still don't have a sharing partner, now is a good time to ask someone to be your sharing partner during outreach calls). You do not have to share all of your inventory with your pair and share partner, as long as you have a sponsor or other accountability partner with whom you will share all of your inventory. **IT IS A POWERFUL AND HEALING PART OF THIS STEP WORK TO SHARE ALL OF YOUR INVENTORY WITH A TRUSTED PERSON IN RECOVERY.** If you have questions about this process, feel free to ask a facilitator.

THERE IS A **WORKSHEET** WE'LL BE USING FOR STEPS 4-9, AVAILABLE IN DIFFERENT FORMATS. See [https://saatalk.info/us/resources/resource?xresource\[id\]=57](https://saatalk.info/us/resources/resource?xresource[id]=57) to download, or request an emailed copy from someone in the Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance Awareness Committee by emailing avoidance@saa-recovery.org.

- an **Excel spreadsheet** for those who like to work in rows and columns so as to more easily compare answers to separate items and look for similarities and patterns. It works best to fill in answers with an electronic device, but some have printed it, taped it together, and filled it in by hand. It is available as a SHEETS document or can be emailed as an Excel file.

- a **Word (docx) file** which a person can edit on a computer, adding the answers right into the document or print and write in their answers. It is available as a Google Docs file, which can

be copied and pasted into a new (editable) Google Doc, or printed. It can also be emailed as a PDF and printed.

Use whichever format best suits your needs and your situation.

Suggestions for doing the inventory work:

First, pray. One suggestion is to invite your Higher Power to show you what you're ready to see, and to protect you from what you're not ready for.

Next, list 2-5 separate resentments in the "Why?" (What was the offense?) spaces. IF YOU ARE USING THE WORD OR PDF FILES, **YOU WILL NEED 2-5 COPIES OF PAGES 1-2 OF THE RESENTMENTS SECTION.** If you are using the Excel file, just list each separate resentment in a new row.

The "Who" can be the same person for multiple entries. That's fine – just separate out different "whats."

Be as specific as possible. For example, you may resent a parent for generalized things like "not being there for me," "being judgmental," or "being an alcoholic," but recalling a **specific example or event** which exemplifies whatever you resent will help you become clearer about the true nature of the resentment. There may be many examples to choose from, but try to focus on one event which stands out more clearly in your mind.

Then fill in the answers to the questions. You can answer them in order, or skip around. Answer as best as you can – there is no "wrong" way to answer (except to purposely lie!) The questions are intended to assist you in your inventory, but it may not be possible or necessary for you to fill in everything right now. If something doesn't seem applicable or nothing comes to mind, feel free to skip it and move on.

Remember the purpose. Step Four is about getting to know ourselves better. Inventorying resentments is a good place to start because it is an emotion which is easy to access and identify.

NEEDS/RIGHTS AFFECTED OR THREATENED, FEELINGS, HOW DID IT AFFECT ME?

The questions about which needs/rights were threatened, what your feelings at the time were, and how the event affected your life are designed to **help you understand why you're carrying the resentment.** For many, it is important to validate pain or anger at being treated in a way that wasn't fair or loving.

MY ROLE (NOT NECESSARILY MY FAULT)

It is also important to examine how you might have **contributed to the situation**, if it applies. Sometimes it doesn't apply -- but answering that question with the honest declaration that you had no fault in a given situation can be freeing and healing. It can also be freeing and healing to admit it if you WERE involved somehow, perhaps by allowing something to happen, or by an action or behavior that started a series of events.

The Fourth Step helps us look for our "character defects" (some prefer to call them "defaults" or "character aspects"). Some common "defaults" are selfishness, dishonesty, fear, and self-seeking behavior. The words and sub-questions on the worksheets in the "My Part" section might help you better understand what to look for and help you recognize it.

SELFISHNESS

For the purposes of this inventory, the word "selfish" will sometimes simply mean "what I wanted to happen." It doesn't NECESSARILY refer to a negative type of selfishness. For more information, if desired, see the following article:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/cui-bono/201501/good-neutral-and-bad-selfishness>

DISHONESTY

When the situation didn't turn out as you had hoped, did you make up a story about what it meant about YOU? In doing this inventory, many of us found that we were telling ourselves lies without even realizing it. Or, we may have believed and accepted as true what another person told us about ourselves. Did you invent a story that helped you cope with difficult circumstances as a child, such as, "If only I were _____ enough, this situation would change," or something similar?

SELF-SEEKING

This word originally comes from the AA Big Book (as do the other titles of "selfish," "dishonest," and "fearful.") It is easy to confuse "selfish" with "self-seeking."

One way to remember it is that "selfish" is an attitude. It's like a little child stomping their foot, saying, "I want _____ right now!" For this inventory, **selfish means what you wanted to happen.**

As described in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 60-61 (which talks about the actor who wants to run the whole show) **self-seeking** is another way of describing **attempts to control things**. It includes actions you took to get what you wanted, such as acting like a victim or trying to get attention or sympathy, freezing into inaction, or doing something to get even.

HOW HOLDING ONTO THE RESENTMENT HAS AFFECTED ME

After looking at the ways the event(s) affected you in the moment and perhaps throughout your life, and after looking at what you wanted to happen, what you made it mean, what you feared,

and what you did as a result, now you can contemplate the effect that YOUR holding onto the resentment has had on your life.

DID I CAUSE HARM? What you put in the space under the question, “Did I cause harm?” might be placed on your 8th Step (amends) list.

OTHER CHOICES?

Some inventories ask, “What should I have done?” or “What could I have done differently?” If these questions seem more helpful, go ahead and use them here. Some of us prefer, however, to give ourselves the opportunity to imagine doing things differently in the FUTURE, versus the “could-have/should-have” mindset, since it could provoke shame.

The last section (the "Self care" section) is designed to help you deal with any strong emotions that might come up while answering these questions, and offers some suggestions or options for actions that may be helpful in the moment. (If they aren't helpful to you right now, you can skip them.)

AFFIRMATIONS

Reaffirming truths about yourself can help you transition from the uncomfortable emotions and possible lies, etc. you may have uncovered during your inventory work into a place of speaking your truth and owning your power.

REACHING OUT

As intimacy avoidants, our tendency is to run and hide and/or medicate ourselves to cope with uncomfortable feelings. In recovery, we practice reaching out and sharing with safe people what we're feeling, and asking for and receiving support and experience, strength, and hope from each other.

GENTLE CONSIDERATIONS

The “gentle considerations” space gives you a chance to ask yourself what you need in the moment. Instead of “self-seeking” behavior, which tries to deny, stuff, or numb feelings, what healthier Outer Circle activities might help you connect with yourself and others, including and especially your Higher Power?

RELEASING

The "Releasing" sections offer possible actions for resolution of the resentment, if delving into the resentment brings up a desire to take some action. (This section can be left blank if you don't feel ready for action at this time.)

One practice that some have found helpful is Ho’oponopono. It’s a simple clearing exercise consisting of 4 steps, which can be done in any order: I’m Sorry, Please Forgive Me, Thank You, I Love You. For more information, visit:

<https://www.laughteronlineuniversity.com/practice-hooponoono-four-simple-steps/>

Don't forget the outreach calls and nurturing/sensory exercises this week as well as reading Step 5, along with filling in 2-5 resentments. May your Higher Power be with you to lovingly show you some healing and freeing things!

Action Items Week 12:

1) Outreach calls

2) Daily Nurturing Activity

3) Daily Sensory Exercises

4) Pair and Share – Read Step 5 in Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 37

5) Pair and Share – Fill in 2-5 Resentments