

Meeting Format and Readings

Meetings

“Meetings are at the heart of the SAA fellowship. At meetings we emerge from our shame, secrecy, and fear, into a community of people who share the common goal of freedom from sex addiction” [*Sex Addicts Anonymous*, p. 10].

At an SAA meeting we find members of the fellowship who can help others recover from sex addiction. These are called sponsors. These sober members will help newer members understand the disease of sex addiction and can show them how to get well. The sobriety, peace of mind, serenity, and happiness of the group members provides the hope that recovery is possible.

Tradition One of SAA emphasizes that “personal recovery depends upon SAA unity” and the group meeting is where members of the fellowship will see a tangible expression of that unity. It is in the group that we learn to be honest with ourselves and others, to identify with other sex addicts who share our common problem, and to respond to the needs of others. We begin to understand that our unity is much greater than simply identifying with a common problem (sex addiction). The cement that holds the fellowship together is that we have found a common solution. Our solution is found in the Twelve Step program of Sex Addicts Anonymous.

It is through meeting together as a group of suffering and recovering addicts that we can find a spiritual solution to the problem of sexual addiction.

Members respond to meetings in different ways. Some do not talk much; they are content to listen, finding comfort in identifying with others. Some members talk a lot in order to effectively process their thoughts and feelings. We encourage all members to focus on the solution (the Steps) rather than the problem and to ask themselves how their sharing can benefit others. A motto heard around the fellowship goes like this: “We take our problems to our sponsor and the solution to the meeting.” Meetings are not opportunities for preaching or establishing hierarchies. All members are equal and equally humble in their desire for recovery.

There are many different formats for meetings. Some meetings center around topic discussions, step presentations, individual check-ins, delivery of first steps, personal stories (speaker meetings), or studying from appropriate literature. No one format is better than another. Each group is autonomous and can decide by group conscience what is useful to its members.

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

Experience has demonstrated the importance of keeping the meetings focused on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. For this reason, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the Three Circles of SAA are always excellent meeting topics. A member can prepare and present a topic, or the meeting can be opened to the group right away for discussion. We should participate according to the group conscience decisions. Most meetings have an opening script that describes how the meeting will be conducted and guides the members of the group in their participation. Individuals may choose to share how a step has strengthened their recovery or they might check-in a current struggle but then follow that by sharing how they are applying and diligently working the program with a sponsor to grow spiritually.

Many groups use the book *Sex Addicts Anonymous* and read sections of the basic text or the stories in their meetings. Reading this material together can be a good way to find a topic to discuss. In addition, many of the stories in the second section of the SAA book have themes to which many members can relate. Other groups use *Voices of Recovery* as a source for meeting topics. Whatever literature the group chooses to use, our hope is that it is focused on the Twelve Step solution.

Some groups set aside a portion of the meeting for check-ins, during which members relate the events and feelings of the last week or since the last time they attended a meeting. These are moments of real communication when we reach out and come in touch with our brothers or sisters in recovery. The presence of the group helps break down our denial and overcome our fears. We find that we can share our most shameful secrets and receive acceptance, love, and support in return.

Careful attention is given to providing sufficient time for all who need to share. It may be necessary to break into smaller groups or to set time limits on check-ins so that all have a chance to share. Some groups have members form small groups; other groups establish check-in groups that stay together for four to six weeks.

Some groups do not use meeting time for personal check-ins. Instead, the meeting is devoted entirely to focusing on an aspect of the steps which the members can use to grow in their understanding of the program. They focus on how to better incorporate the program into their lives or how to become more effective in passing our message on to new members. Often, these groups schedule fellowship before or after the meeting where there is time for checking-in with other members.

Some groups forego their usual format when a member wishes to give a First Step presentation. In formal First Steps, we share with our group the behaviors and consequences which show our powerlessness over addictive sexual behavior and the unmanageability of our lives. For information about doing a First Step, please see the "First Step to Recovery" pamphlet.

Below are some suggested formats for meeting readings, adapted from the text *Sex Addicts Anonymous*. Some groups use readings from *Sex Addicts Anonymous* exclusively; other groups combine selected readings from the basic text with the group's traditional readings. Feel free to use whatever readings best fit the group's structure, time limits, and needs.

“Our prayer is that every sex addict who seeks recovery will have the opportunity to find it. And keep coming back” [*Sex Addicts Anonymous, p98*].

Optional SAA meeting agenda

Serenity prayer

The Serenity Prayer is sometimes recited while standing in a circle holding hands, and it may be preceded or followed by a moment of silence for those who are still suffering.

Meeting introduction

There are many versions, and two are included in this *Group Guide*.

- Opening
- What is Sex Addicts Anonymous?
- Who We Are – From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*.

Readings

- Our Addiction
- Our Program

Readings from program material

One or more readings chosen from appropriate literature including:

- *Sex Addicts Anonymous*
- *Voices of Recovery*
- Other SAA literature

Tools of the program

One or two members share how they use a program tool and why it is important in their recovery. For a listing of these tools see SAA booklet *Tools of Recovery* and *Sex Addicts Anonymous* pages 62-66.

Business

Announcements, issues, and concerns are brought before the group.

- Intergroup and/or area announcements
- ISO news
- Group inventory feedback
- Twelfth-step calls/help line updates
- Committee reports: outreach, cooperation with professional community/public information, prisoner outreach, etc.
- Service opportunity sign-up.

Seventh Tradition

Member donations are collected. Often, the trusted servant chairing the meeting reads the Seventh Tradition.

Medallions and anniversaries

Recognition is given to members for length of abstinence from inner-circle behavior or time in the program. The ISO office has medallions available for purchase.

Some groups choose to read a statement before the presentation: “The taking of medallions in our group is strictly optional. Medallions are offered to encourage individuals to meet their own personal commitments. Medallions do not set individuals apart as authorities; they do recognize milestones of achievement in an individual's program.”

Meeting focus

Groups choose one or a combination of the following, as examples, for the bulk of their meeting.

- Topic discussion
- Literature study
- Speaker-step presentation
- Speaker-personal story
- Qualification or I.D. meeting-newcomer focus

- First Step presentations

Closing

The closing is often done in a circle.

- Closing statement
- Closing prayer

Continued fellowship

Known as “the meeting before/after the meeting,” many groups enjoy conversations and informal gatherings before or after the meeting at local restaurants or other public locations. Including newcomers in such gatherings is a top priority. Often these meeting times and locations are included in the group opening or closing readings. Some groups plan meals, retreats, or all-day workshops to deepen fellowship among group members outside of the traditional SAA meeting.

Each group will need to make choices about what will fit its membership. Remember that by tradition, each group is autonomous and responsible to its own group conscience, while careful not to take actions that might adversely affect SAA as a whole.

Next is an example of a possible template.

Optional SAA Meeting Agenda

Opening

- Reading of “Who We Are” *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pg 1-2 and “Our Addiction”
- Moment of Silence/Serenity Prayer
- Introductions and Newcomer Introduction
- Chairperson asks all present to introduce themselves using first names only.
- “Hi, I’m _____ and I’m a sex addict.”
- “My name is _____ and I’m a recovering/recovered sex addict.”
- Reading of “Our Program”
- Reading of the Twelve Steps of SAA

- Read and pause for comments on one of the Traditions
- Reading of “Meeting Boundaries”

Topic presentation, reading of SAA literature, or First Step presentation

Introduction to discussion/sharing

Medallions and anniversaries

Fellowship business

Sponsorship reading

Seventh Tradition—Pass the hat

Reading of “How We Live” *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pg. 61 last paragraph

Reading of the closing, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pg.98

Closing prayer

Opening

Hello, my name is _____, and I’m a (recovering/recovered) sex addict. Welcome to this meeting of Sex Addicts Anonymous.

Who We Are

“We are sex addicts. Our addiction nearly destroyed our lives, but we found freedom through the recovery program of Sex Addicts Anonymous. In the fellowship of SAA, we discovered that we are not alone and that meeting regularly together to share experience, strength, and hope gives us the choice to live a new life.

“Our addictive sexual behavior was causing pain—to ourselves, our friends, and our loved ones. Our lives were out of control. We may have wanted to quit, making promises and many attempts to stop, yet we repeatedly failed to do so. For each of us, there came a moment of crisis. When we finally reached out for help, we found recovery through the program of SAA.

“We have found, through long and painful experience, that we are unable to achieve recovery from sexual addiction through our own efforts. Our program is based on the

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

belief, confirmed by our experience, that a Power greater than ourselves can accomplish for us what we could not do alone. By surrendering our addiction to a Higher Power, we receive the gift of recovery, one day at a time.

“Sex Addicts Anonymous is a spiritual program based on the principles and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. Although we are not affiliated with AA or any other organization, we are deeply grateful to AA for making our recovery possible.

“Our primary purpose is to stop our addictive sexual behavior and to help others recover from sexual addiction. We find a new way of living through the SAA program, and carry our message to others seeking recovery. Membership is open to all who have a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior. There is no other requirement. Our fellowship is open to women and men, regardless of age, race, religion, ethnic background, marital status, or occupation. We welcome members of any sexual identity or orientation, whether they are gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, or transgender.

“In our groups, there is a collective wisdom that has grown and been handed down over the years. We learn many new solutions to old problems. Central to these are the Twelve Steps, a spiritual program of recovery. Following these steps leads to freedom from addictive sexual behaviors and to the healing of our minds, bodies, spirits, relationships, and sexuality.

“Desperation brought us together. We found in each other what we could find nowhere else: people who knew the depth of our pain. Together we found hope and the care of a loving Higher Power. Our commitment is to help others recover from sexual addiction, just as we have been helped.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pages 1-2]

What Is Sex Addicts Anonymous?

Sex Addicts Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other so that they may find freedom from addictive sexual behavior and help others recover from sexual addiction.

Membership is open to all who share a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior. There is no other requirement.

SAA is supported through voluntary contributions from members.

We are not affiliated with any other twelve-step programs, nor are we a part of any other organization. We do not support, endorse, or oppose outside causes or issues.

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

Sex Addicts Anonymous is a spiritual program based on the principles and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are grateful to AA for this gift which makes our recovery possible.

Moment of Silence/Serenity Prayer

Please join me in a moment of silence, followed by the Serenity Prayer.

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Our Addiction

“Before coming to Sex Addicts Anonymous, many of us never knew that our problem had a name. All we knew was that we couldn’t control our sexual behavior. For us, sex was a consuming way of life. Although the details of our stories were different, our problem was the same. We were addicted to sexual behaviors that we returned to over and over, despite the consequences.

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

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 3]

Our Program

“Attending SAA meetings starts us on a new way of life. But while the SAA fellowship supports our recovery, the actual work of recovery is described in the Twelve Steps. Meetings are forums for learning how to integrate the steps into our lives. Working the Twelve Steps leads to a spiritual transformation that results in sustainable relief from our addiction.

“When we start attending meetings of Sex Addicts Anonymous, many of us are surprised to meet people who are enjoying life, experiencing freedom from the painful, compulsive behaviors that had brought them to SAA. Listening to other members share about their recovery, we gradually realize that in order to make the same kind of progress, we need to be willing to do whatever it takes to get sexually abstinent, and to stay abstinent. We have learned from hard experience that we cannot achieve and maintain abstinence if we aren’t willing to change our way of life. But if we can honestly face our problems, and are willing to change, the Twelve Steps of SAA will lead to an awakening that allows us to live a new way of life according to spiritual principles. Taking these steps allows fundamental change to occur in our lives. They are the foundation of our recovery.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 20]

The Twelve Steps of Sex Addicts Anonymous

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.

“These Steps are the heart of our program. They contain a depth that we could hardly have guessed when we started. As we work them, we experience a spiritual transformation. Over time, we establish a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, each of us coming to an understanding of a Higher Power that is personal for us. Although the Steps use the word “God” to indicate this Power, SAA is not affiliated with any religion, creed, or dogma. The program offers a spiritual solution to our addiction, without requiring adherence to any specific set of beliefs or practices. The path is wide enough for everyone who wishes to walk it.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 20-21]

The Twelve Traditions of Sex Addicts Anonymous

“Just as the Steps teach us the spiritual principles necessary for healthy individual recovery, the Traditions embody the spiritual principles necessary for the healthy functioning of our groups. Adhering to these principles safeguards our fellowship, thus protecting the

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

recovery of each individual member. We have found that they also help us to act with integrity in our personal relationships and as responsible members of society.”

Our SAA experience has taught us that:

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

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 76]

Abstinence in SAA

“Our goal when entering the SAA program is abstinence from one or more specific sexual behaviors. But unlike programs for recovering alcoholics or drug addicts, Sex Addicts Anonymous does not have a universal definition of abstinence.

“Most of us have no desire to stop being sexual altogether. It is not sex in and of itself that causes us problems, but the addiction to certain sexual behaviors. In SAA we will be better able to determine what behavior is addictive and what is healthy. However, the fellowship

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

does not dictate to its members what is and isn't addictive sexual behavior. Instead we have found that it is necessary for each member to define his or her own abstinence.

“We are individuals, and our addictive behaviors, while similar, are unique to us. What may be healthy for one member could be clearly addictive for another. SAA simply cannot predict every possible way of acting out and define them all for everyone. As a fellowship, we wouldn't want to deny that any particular behavior might be acting out for a member. Nor would we want to restrict behaviors that are healthy for some of us. Since different addicts suffer from different behaviors, and since our sexuality is experienced in so many different ways, it is necessary that SAA members define for themselves, with the help of their sponsors or others in recovery, which of their sexual behaviors they consider to be ‘acting out.’”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, pages 14-15]

Meeting Boundaries

“[In this meeting,] we use the words ‘I’ or ‘we’ instead of ‘you’ when sharing about our recovery. We do not interrupt or give advice unless asked. We address our sharing to the whole group, not to one or more individuals. A meeting is not a place to meet sexual partners, nor is it group therapy. We try not to use offensive language, or descriptions that are too explicit. We avoid mentioning specific names or places associated with our acting-out behavior. Because of the nature of our addiction, we are careful about touching or giving hugs to others in the fellowship without permission. Our focus remains on the solution, rather than the problem.

“We strive to practice anonymity and confidentiality, so that the meeting will be a safe place for each and every sex addict. We generally use only our first names in the group, to help ensure anonymity. Who we meet or what is said in a meeting is treated as confidential and is not discussed with non-group members.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 12]

Will all present please introduce themselves using first names only. New members need not admit to a sex addiction. Hello, my name is ____; I'm a (recovering/recovered) sex addict.

Phone List

“Most of us use the telephone on a regular basis, just to let someone else in the program know how we are doing or to reach out when we are struggling with our addiction. Some of us have made a commitment to call a friend in recovery whenever we're in a slippery situation or when obsessive thinking and desires begin to arise. Sometimes all we need is

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

for someone to ask us what is going on and to listen to the answer. Before long, we know what is bothering us, and once we know, the urge to act out usually passes.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 64]

Seventh Tradition

Our Seventh Tradition states: “Every SAA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” This means:

“Each group must meet certain basic requirements in order to sustain itself. We need members who are willing to meet together and share experience, strength, and hope on a regular basis. We need a meeting place that is reasonably accessible to sex addicts who wish to attend. We need to have SAA literature and meeting schedules available. Once a group has established itself, it can usually pay the rent and other expenses by passing a basket and taking voluntary contributions during the meeting. Experience has shown that if we are unable to fully support ourselves this way, it is better to lower our expenses than to rely on fundraising or other special events to sustain us. When we have met our own basic needs, most groups pass any extra funds on to the local intergroup or the ISO, in support of coordinated services and outreach efforts.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 88]

[Pass the contributions basket.]

Intro to Discussion / Sharing

“All participation is voluntary. We are not required to speak if we don’t want to. Just by listening we can learn how other members become honest, confront their addiction, find support from fellow addicts, and practice the program.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 11]

Option 1. The topic for this meeting is _____, taken from page ____ of the book *Sex Addicts Anonymous, Voices of Recovery*, or other SAA literature [Read selection.]

Option 2. The topic for this meeting is _____.

Option 3. Does anyone have a topic for discussion? [If none is suggested, it is a suggested responsibility of the meeting chairperson to come up with a recovery topic.]

How We Live

“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

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

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.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 61]

Sponsorship Reading

Examples of this type of reading might include one or combinations of the following examples.

- One of the most vital aspects of the program is sponsorship. A sponsor is a person in the fellowship who acts as a guide to working the program of SAA, a fellow addict we can rely upon for support. Ideally, a sponsor is abstinent from addictive sexual behavior, has worked the steps, and can teach us what they have learned from working the program.
- Newcomers are encouraged not to leave until they have a temporary sponsor. Will anyone willing to serve as a temporary sponsor please raise their hand?

Other phrases and wording to consider about emphasizing sponsorship:

- Many of us enter the SAA fellowship exhausted from living a life of lies, uncertainty, powerlessness, and chaos. On our own, finding a path out of the chaos was impossible. That is why each of us had an experienced guide to help us find and work a tried-and-true path which led us away from sexual addiction-toward sanity, serenity, and joy. We call this guide a sponsor.
- We encourage new members to make finding a sponsor a priority. Simply approach a more experienced member after a meeting and ask if they would be willing to be your sponsor. No matter their availability, most members are happy and grateful to receive such a request. Please don't be discouraged if you get a few "no's or "not right now." Many members who have experience in the program already have as

Group Guide: Handbook for SAA Groups

many sponsees as their schedule can bear. In time you will receive the "yes" that is meant for you.

Closing

“This is how recovery has been for us. Each of us has taken steps of courage and leaps of faith. Each of us has contributed, not only to our own recovery, but to the recovery of other suffering sex addicts as well. We have contributed by showing up at meetings and by sharing our experience, strength, and hope. We have listened to our fellow addicts and supported them in their recovery journey. Like the first members of our fellowship, we continue to remain sexually sober by helping our fellow addict stay sober. Our prayer is that every sex addict who seeks recovery will have the opportunity to find it. And keep coming back.”

[From *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, page 98]

Let's close with the Serenity Prayer (or the prayer of your choice said in silence).

Newcomers' Introduction

We would like to welcome you to our meeting. We know the courage it takes walking into these rooms for the first time. All of us in this room were in your shoes at one time.

After we have finished our opening readings, we will open up the meeting for sharing. This is a time when you may share your experience on the topic or the reading. We avoid cross-talk or interruptions when another person is sharing. We also do not offer advice or criticism. Stick around after the meeting if you have any questions.

We recommend that you come to at least six meetings and talk to as many members of the fellowship as possible before you decide whether SAA has anything to offer you. You will find that each meeting is a little bit different, but each meeting shares and works the same program called the Twelve Steps. The twelve-step program is what worked for us.

SAA is much more than meetings. SAA is a fellowship of sex addicts in action. We work the steps and help others to do the same. We encourage you to make finding a sponsor a priority. A sponsor can show you how to work the steps. It is our sincerest hope that you find what you are looking for.