

**MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY  
ASK ABOUT  
SEXAHOLICS ANONYMOUS**



## **Why Would the Clergy Be Interested in Sexaholics Anonymous (SA)?**

People often come to clergy seeking advice and help in personal or family crises occasioned by compulsive sexual behaviors. Clergy are often among the few people who know about the sex problems of those they minister to. Some people in the grip of sexual obsession and compulsive behavior want to stop and recognize that they cannot. Others merely want to manage their behavior or think they can stop on their own. In either case, clergy and spiritual advisors can inform the potential sexaholic about SA.

## **What Is Sexaholics Anonymous?**

Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) is a fellowship based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The men and women of SA were driven here by many different forms of the same problem— the obsession of lust, usually combined with a compulsive demand for sex in some form. In SA we find a fellowship and a program— the Twelve Steps of SA, adapted from the Twelve Steps of AA— with which we may solve our common problem and help others to recover.

## **OUR PROBLEM— AND OUR SOLUTION**

### **How Do Members of SA Understand Their Problem?**

Our SA literature has many things to say



about the problem that brought us to SA, particularly about what we call *lust*. Once we stop acting out our compulsive demand for sex, the obsession of lust, which had been the driving force behind our acting out, emerges as central to our problem.

We find that lust is not the same thing as sexual desire for true union with another, but “an attitude demanding that a natural instinct serve unnatural desires. When we try to use sex to reduce isolation, loneliness, insecurity, fear, tension, or to cover our emotions, make us feel alive, help us escape, or satisfy our God-hunger, we create an unnatural appetite that misuses and abuses the natural instinct. It is not only more intense than the natural but becomes something totally different.” We speak of lust as “a screen of self-indulgent fantasy separating [us] from reality.”<sup>1</sup> Lust can take many forms, including use of pornography, erotic fantasy, an obsession with particular persons or series of persons, promiscuous sexual behavior, an obsessive desire to be lusted after, romantic obsession, not being able to say no, and constantly turning one’s head to gaze at attractive people.

Our literature does not mean to provide a final or comprehensive definition of the problem, nor a description of it that applies to all sexaholics in the same way. Rather it speaks from the point of view of sexual sobriety and recovery, about experiences that many of us have had. It invites sexaholics to compare their

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1 Throughout this pamphlet, quotations are to passages from SA literature.

personal experiences to those described in SA literature and deepen their awareness in these directions. Doing so, most of us find an addictive malady the depth, power and adverse effects of which we had not grasped before coming to SA. Knowledge isn't power here, but admission of powerlessness over lust is the first step toward the solution.

### **What Is SA's Solution?**

We begin by recognizing and admitting that we are powerless over lust. This often happens in the context of one's initial SA meetings and reading of SA literature. This recognition and admission prepares us to make a great change in our lives— to have a spiritual awakening and begin a process of thoroughgoing personal change.

Withdrawing from our habit, we stay sexually sober by working the Twelve Steps and participating in the fellowship of SA, including by going to meetings. And we find, to our surprise, that we can stop our compulsive sexual behaviors. Even more, we find that we can stay stopped. Over time, we can come to live free from the obsession of lust.

The process of change involves learning and putting into practice a spiritual way of living and a fundamental attitude change. We learn to look at ourselves honestly, admit our character defects, right our wrongs, offer ourselves in service to others, and connect with God and other people.

We find that we are never “cured” of our

sexaholism but our malady can be arrested as long as we practice the Twelve Steps and participate in the fellowship of the program. Likewise many of the issues that contributed to or resulted from our sexaholism can be healed— physical, emotional, and spiritual.

### **How Is SA Like Alcoholics Anonymous?**

The basic program of recovery is the same— the only change SA makes in AA's Twelve Steps is that where AAs admit powerlessness over *alcohol*, SAs admit powerlessness over *lust*. AA literature is frequently read in SA meetings, particularly *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

Most SAs identify with AA's description of the experience of the alcoholic in active disease and in the work of recovery. The basic shape of an SA meeting and the structure of the SA fellowship will be familiar to anyone with experience in AA.

### **What Makes SA Different from Other Twelve-Step Fellowships That Deal with Sexual Problems?**

SA is not the only Twelve-Step fellowship that addresses sexually self-destructive thinking and behavior. One thing that makes SA different from these other fellowships is the SA Sobriety Definition:

*In defining sobriety, we do not speak for those outside Sexaholics Anonymous. We can only speak for ourselves. Thus, for the*



*married sexaholic, sexual sobriety means having no form of sex with self or with persons other than the spouse. In SA's sobriety definition, the term "spouse" refers to one's partner in a marriage between a man and a woman. For the unmarried sexaholic, sexual sobriety means freedom from sex of any kind. And for all of us, single and married alike, sexual sobriety also includes progressive victory over lust.*

The SA Sobriety Definition is a statement of what we in SA have found we require for lasting freedom from the pain that brought us to SA. It is not a normative statement about sexuality or morality, but only about what SA members have found works for their recovery.

Another thing that makes SA different is that in SA we admit powerlessness over *lust*. We identify the obsession of lust and not any specific compulsive behavior as the basic issue in our sexaholism.

### **What Happens in SA Meetings?**

SA meetings typically follow a format of introductory readings from SA literature, followed by members sharing, and concluding readings and prayer. Sharing is the heart of the meeting. In sharing, we bring out our experience in the light of the readings and our experience working the Twelve Steps. We compare our lives before and after we came to SA. The ideal is a



“rigorous self-searching and self-revealing honesty about every aspect of our lives” in which “we lead with our weakness” in respect of our actions, mental habit patterns, and attitudes.

We avoid explicit sexual description or language. Since an SA meeting is not group therapy or a support group, we do not give advice or even discuss each other’s shares; rather we are encouraged to avoid “dumping, self-pity, and blaming others” and getting “carried away analyzing what caused our behavior or attitudes.”

The power of meetings is the unity of the group’s purpose in staying sexually sober and helping others. We identify and connect with each other, and the self-honesty of one facilitates the self-honesty of others, so that meetings are “... a safe haven where we could finally face ourselves...”

### **Why Is Anonymity Important in SA?**

SA, like AA, has a tradition of maintaining personal anonymity. This means that we do not disclose the identity of other SA members to those outside of SA. Anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as sexaholics outside SA meeting rooms, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers. A common saying in our meetings is, *Who we see here, what we say here, let it stay here.*

At one level, anonymity responds to members’ legitimate concerns about personal privacy or desire to avoid social

or professional stigmatization from those outside SA. At another level and among those in SA, it facilitates an atmosphere of humility, openness, and equality.

### **Who Is Welcome at an SA Meeting?**

SA meetings are open to and welcome everyone who desires to stop lusting and become sexually sober. In order to maintain the personal anonymity of our members and due to the nature of our problem, most SA meetings are “closed,” that is, open only to those desiring their own personal sexual sobriety, and not to the interested public. In this respect SA is different from some other Twelve-Step fellowships.

Outside of regular SA meetings, SA members are willing to meet with interested people who are not seeking their own personal sexual sobriety but want to learn about sexaholism. We refer those seeking recovery from the effects of another person’s sexual addiction to other fellowships, such as S-Anon.

## **SA AND RELIGION**

### **Is Religious Belief Part of the SA Program?**

This is an important and delicate question—and AA recognized it as such at the very beginning of the Twelve-Step movement!

On one hand, in Step Two, we came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. In

Step Three, we made a decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. In Step Six, we were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. In Step Seven, we humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. And in Step Eleven we sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God. SA literature makes frequent reference to a God who can restore us to sanity—who “could and would, if He were sought” relieve our sexaholism.

On the other hand, every reference to God in SA’s Twelve Steps and literature is understood through the concluding words of Step Three: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as we understood Him.*” In SA we are all free to bring our own understandings and ideas to the term God. Thus SA literature avoids making specific statements about God’s nature or revelation. This is not an endorsement of relativism or indifferentism—rather it enables people of many different backgrounds to focus on the common aspects of their problem and solution so as to foster the unity of group purpose that facilitates sexual sobriety.

### **Is Prayer Part of the SA Program?**

The Twelve Steps recommend prayer explicitly. Step Seven: “humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.” Step Eleven:



“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.” Step Three, “Made a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understood Him,” is usually taken through prayer.

The literature of SA also encourages us to begin and end the day with prayer, and to reach out to God when we feel a need for help. SA meetings usually include, in their formats for opening and closing meetings, a brief prayer.

SA does not tell us how to pray—nor does it prescribe how prayer works, its nature, form, or content. At the same time several simple prayers are recognized in SA literature and meeting formats. The Serenity Prayer is frequently recited at the opening or conclusion of SA meetings: “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. Thy will, not mine, be done.”

### **What Does SA Have to Say about Sexual Morality and Human Sexuality?**

Our literature reflects a general understanding that our sexually compulsive thoughts and actions were “neither right nor healthy,” and were “harmful to others and to ourselves.” Beyond that, SA literature neither endorses nor contradicts any particular understanding or theory of



sexual morality or human sexuality, whether religious, ethical, psychological, biological or otherwise. SA does not propose or contradict any ideas about whether specific forms of sex are in themselves acceptable, right, normal, or natural.

People come to SA with many different ideas about morality and sexuality. We find that we are able to meet and find unity and sexual sobriety together by focusing not on our ideas about sexuality and morality but rather on our common problem and our common solution.

## **MORE ABOUT SA**

### **How Did SA Start and Where Is It Present Today?**

SA was founded in 1979, when Roy K. initiated the first SA meetings in California. Roy wrote later that he had “discovered that the AA program of recovery for alcoholics would work for a sex drunk.” He carried the message to others. In 1981 “Dear Abby” published a letter from Roy, telling his story of recovery. Roy received 3,000 responses from men and women desperate to stop. By the end of that year SA had 11 meetings, about 100 members, its first newsletter, and its first convention.

SA was on its way. To serve the growing fellowship, in 1994 SA opened its International Central Office in Nashville, Tennessee. Today SA is a worldwide fellowship with regular meetings in over 70 countries.

## **What Is SA's Position on Sex Addiction and Psychotherapy? What Is Its Position on Other Twelve-Step Fellowships that Deal with Sex Problems?**

SA has no opinion on any medical, psychiatric, or psychotherapeutic questions related to sex. Likewise it has no opinion on other Twelve-Step fellowships, including those that deal with sex problems.

We refer to these and other issues that are not part of our common problem and solution as outlined in SA literature as “outside issues”— we use this term to mean that individual SA members are encouraged to deal with them however they choose but outside of SA meetings. Inside SA meetings, we avoid referring to outside issues. We do this in order to facilitate the spiritual unity and effectiveness of the group.

While having no opinion on outside issues, we can also say that SA does not claim to have the only solution to problems of sexually self-destructive thinking and behavior. Rather we have a solution that works for us. We frequently encourage inquirers to look at other Twelve-Step groups, particularly if they do not want SA sobriety. SA is not for everybody— it is for those who want to stop lusting and become sexually sober according to SA's sobriety definition. Everyone who wants this is welcome in SA.

## **How is SA Financed, Organized, and Managed?**

SA is self-supporting through the voluntary contributions of its own members. There are no dues or fees for SA membership, and it declines outside contributions. SA members elect “trusted servants” from among themselves, on a rotating basis, to manage the affairs of their groups and the fellowship as a whole. In these respects SA is similar to AA.

## **CLERGY & SA**

### **Do Members of the Clergy Belong to SA?**

Yes. Clergy of many faiths have found sexual sobriety in our fellowship. Sexaholism, like alcoholism, spares no vocation or religion. Coming to SA meetings, we deemphasize religious, occupational, and economic distinctions and membership in other groups. Participating in common meetings, we find that we have a common problem and a common solution.

### **What Can Members of the Clergy Tell Potential Sexaholics about SA?**

Members of the clergy counseling potential sexaholics may find it appropriate to tell them some of the following about SA and sexaholism:

- It is up to the potential sexaholic alone to determine whether he or she



qualifies as a sexaholic. On this point the literature and fellowship of SA will offer only guidelines for personal discernment.

- SA can help a person only if he or she has a desire to become sexually sober.
- There are a number of Twelve-Step fellowships that address sexual problems. SA is one of them. One point on which SA can be distinguished from the others is in respect of its Sobriety Definition.
- SA has a tradition and culture of maintaining the personal anonymity of those who call its help lines or attend its meetings.
- SA regards sexaholism as an illness that cannot be “cured” but from which one can be set free, one day at a time.
- In SA, the sexaholic will find thousands of men and women who, through their shared experience of a common problem and a common solution, can help him or her make the transition to a sexually sober, fulfilling life.
- The process by which people come into SA typically involves visiting our international website (sa.org) and/or local websites, noting our contact information, and leaving a message on one of our help lines or sending us an e-mail. Then an SA member arranges



an introductory telephone call. In this conversation the SA member shares his or her own experience of recovery in SA, answers questions, and confirms that the caller desires to become sexually sober according to the SA sobriety definition, and provides information about meeting locations and times, or provides access information for our online or telephone meetings.

### **How Can the Clergy and SA Cooperate Effectively?**

Members of the clergy can do several things to cooperate with SA:

- Inform potential sexaholics about SA as appropriate, and encourage them to visit our international website ([sa.org](http://sa.org)).
- Become familiar with the SA.org website and any local websites
- Become familiar with SA literature—such as the book *Sexaholics Anonymous* (also known as the White Book).
- Open their doors to SA meetings by providing meeting spaces to SA groups.
- If clergy would like to know more about SA and recovery from sexaholism, many local SA groups will, upon request, make informational presentations to interested clergy. A typical presentation might include a talk by one or more sexually sober SA members sharing their own experience with SA— what their lives were like before SA, what

happened to them in SA, and what they are like now— followed by questions and answers.

### **Where Are SA Meetings Held?**

SA meetings are held either in rooms provided by churches, other houses of worship, or community centers, or online via digital platforms. In the former case, groups typically pay rent for the use of space, which does not imply any affiliation between SA and the organization providing the space, nor that SA takes any position on the organization or its teachings. Rather, SA is grateful for the welcome we have been given by the clergy of many faiths and by other community groups.

### **How Can Members of the Clergy Contact SA?**

SA can be contacted through its international website, [www.sa.org](http://www.sa.org). There one can find contact information for SA's International Central Office as well as links to national, regional, and local SA websites in over sixty countries. At these latter sites you can find information on how to contact groups near you by phone or email.



## The Twelve Steps of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over lust—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 Him*.
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 Him 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 Him*, praying only for knowledge of His 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 sexaholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## The Twelve Traditions of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or Sexaholics Anonymous as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose— to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers.
6. An SA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Sexaholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Sexaholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SA 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, films, and TV.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

*The Twelve Steps and Traditions are adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. ("AAWS").*

*Permission to adapt and reprint the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions does not mean that AAWS has approved the contents of this publication, nor that AAWS agrees with the views expressed herein. AA is a program of recovery from alcoholism only. Use of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in connection with programs that are patterned after AA, but which address other problems, or in any other non-AA context, does not imply otherwise.*

## Statement of Principle

We have a solution. We don't claim it's for everybody, but for us, it works. If you identify with us and think you may share our problem, we'd like to share our solution with you (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, 2).

In defining sobriety, we do not speak for those outside Sexaholics Anonymous. We can only speak for ourselves. Thus, for the married sexaholic, sexual sobriety means having no form of sex with self or with persons other than the spouse. In SA's sobriety definition, the term "spouse" refers to one's partner in a marriage between a man and a woman. For the unmarried sexaholic, sexual sobriety means freedom from sex of any kind. And for all of us, single and married alike, sexual sobriety also includes progressive victory over lust (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, 191-192).

The only requirement for SA membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober according to the SA sobriety definition.

Any two or more sexaholics gathered together for SA sobriety according to the SA sobriety definition may call themselves an SA group.

Meetings that do not adhere to and follow Sexaholics Anonymous' sobriety statement as set forth in the foregoing Statement of Principle adopted by the General Delegate Assembly in 2010 are not SA meetings and shall not call themselves SA meetings.





I am responsible. When anyone,  
anywhere reaches out for help, I  
want the hand of SA always to be  
there. And for that: I am responsible.

If you think you may have problems with  
sex or lust addiction, we invite you to join  
us at an SA meeting. Look for Sexaholics  
Anonymous in your local phone directory, call  
SA International Central Office toll free (in the  
USA) at 866-424-8777, or visit our web site at  
sa.org. Online meetings and remote contacts  
are also available.

Additional copies of this pamphlet and a  
literature list can be ordered from:

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