



Disclosure [DRAFT]

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What is Disclosure?

Disclosure is the act of informing someone that we are sex addicts and that we are in a program of recovery. As sex addicts we led double lives. Secrecy, lies and shame are fundamental components of our disease. When we enter recovery, we make a conscious decision to stop the lies and secrecy. As part of this process, most of us find it essential to inform some of the people in our lives of our addiction and our recovery from it. That's what disclosure is.

Disclosure is a powerful and emotional moment for everyone involved. For most of us it is a life-changing event, and care should be taken to protect everyone involved. Done right, disclosure is one of the first steps toward healing.

This pamphlet is assembled from the experience, strength and hope of fellow sex addicts who have been through this process.

The purpose of disclosure, as with the steps and traditions, is to facilitate healing. As with amends, disclosure should not be undertaken solely as a means to ease our conscience we must be mindful of and compassionate toward all involved. We do not disclose at the expense of another, nor do we set ourselves up for abuse.

Our experience has shown that prudence and patience will pay off handsomely and help to mitigate unnecessary suffering. This is some of the most important work we will ever do, and haste for the sake of relief can and usually does backfire. In this and in all phases of our recovery, we cannot overemphasize the importance of help from our sponsors. Working with our sponsors, we gain clarity; we learn from their experience, strength and hope. Disclosure is an act of love.

Why Disclose?

Most of us have found it vital to disclose to the people closest to us, *when appropriate*. This includes partners/spouses and close friends. These relationships are founded on trust, openness and love, and disclosure is a giant step toward building a foundation of trust. With partners especially, most of us have found it essential to disclose as soon as possible, but with great care for the well-being of the recipient. (See section on partners below.) If there are real or potential employment/legal/financial consequences to our acting out, it is all the more important that we inform those most likely to be affected.

Likewise, if consequences of our acting out will or may affect our ability to perform our jobs, we find it best to tell appropriate people as soon as possible so they can at least be prepared for possible changes.

Beyond these immediate relationships, the question of "if, when and how" varies from individual to individual. As was mentioned above, patience and prudence are valuable watchwords for this process.

Risks of Disclosure

Initially, we may want to take care not to mention any aspect of our behavior that might force the hearer to report us to authorities. This is not to avoid consequences of our behavior, but to create a platform to begin the recovery process. As our recovery progresses, we will want to explore ways to make amends.

Prior to disclosing to therapists, some have found it helpful to ask how much detail they can have without being forced to report.

The above applies in cases where we have stopped those behaviors and are maintaining our sobriety and recovery. If we are in danger of repeating those acts, it is vital for our own sobriety that we get the help we need to prevent it. Being in recovery means we are stepping up to break the cycle of harm, fear and misery.

Disclosing to Partner/Spouse/Significant Other

This is often the most significant and difficult disclosure we make. Because it is with the person we are closest to, special care is important. When an alcoholic finally admits her/his addiction, the reaction is usually something like, "I'm glad you're finally getting some help." Sex addiction, on the other hand, often comes as a complete surprise and shock to the people in our lives. The power of denial for all parties involved is not to be underestimated.

If you are reading this pamphlet, you have probably already started building a support base to guide you in your recovery. If your partner is unaware of your addiction, it is likely that s/he does not have a similar support mechanism. Here we are not necessarily referring to friends and family, but to people who understand addiction and recovery. There are many stories of partners who, upon being told of their partner's sex addiction, felt completely alone and helpless. Even if we are compassionate and do our best to be helpful, we are not, at that moment, a source to be trusted. Therefore, our input may be disregarded or viewed as yet another threat. Even having our sponsor or a program friend present is not ideal as s/he could be perceived as an ally in our camp, making our partner feel even more alienated.

HOW: Many of us have found it not only best, but critical to give our disclosure in the presence of a professional (e.g. counselor, therapist, psychiatrist) who understands the addiction and who can keep the discussion fair. We have found it best to inform the therapist beforehand of the purpose for the visit.

It is common for our partners to be in a state of shock that can take days or weeks to work through. S/he will likely experience a wide range of powerful emotions.

In starting this process, we are asking our partner to have understanding for and patience with our disease and recovery. We, in turn, must be extra careful that we provide the same.

WHAT: We have found that the degree of detail appropriate in disclosures varies greatly from couple to couple, but the constant is that the level of detail we disclose should respect the hearer and honor our anonymity. In other words, we let our partner set the level of detail s/he is comfortable with and we honor that. Again, having a professional in the room is a great help in this process. In some cases, it may seem that our partner wants to know more detail than we are comfortable in sharing. See the section on anonymity below. Also, we avoid disclosing information which may harm another person. We should not and experience has proven that we cannot find true relief at the expense of another.

Disclosing to Employers

A principal consideration here is how circumstances around my addiction and recovery may affect my ability to function in the workplace. If there are charges pending or if I (may) lose my license to drive or to practice my profession, those to whom we are responsible deserve to know as soon as is practicable so that they can make arrangements. If there is no immediate need to disclose here, we will probably want to wait on guidance. While the world has gotten much more receptive to the notion of alcoholism

and addiction as diseases, it is not yet the same for sex addiction and many people have biases and prejudices that could inform their treatment of the situation. Essentially, if it's not ethically incumbent upon us to disclose as soon as possible, we can work our program and wait on clarity. If and when the time is right, we will not be afraid to share.

Disclosing to Family of Origin

This area varies greatly from person to person, and it is up to the individuals and the circumstances to determine the best course of action. Unless there are circumstances that may directly affect family members, this is an area where we may take our time and consider it in depth with our sponsor. Many of us have found that our families were uninterested, to say the least, in our recovery from sex addiction. This is a disease that thrives on secrecy.

Through introspection and discussion with our sponsor, we consider the following questions:

- Am I disclosing to make a point?
- Am I disclosing to let someone know how much I've suffered?
- Am I disclosing to try to get someone else into recovery?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," it is probably not the best time for disclosure. Many of us experienced neglect and/or abuse in our family of origin; now that we are breaking the cycle, our joy and enthusiasm may urge us to help those close to us or to submit a piece of damning evidence. Regardless of our family background, it's likely that there is a level of denial operating. It is not our job to change others – it is our job to break the cycle and to help those who want help. We do both by working the 12 Steps of SAA to the best of our ability.

Disclosure vs. Anonymity

As was mentioned in the first portion of this pamphlet, it is vital that we be considerate of the people to whom we are disclosing. We must not use this process as a vehicle to ease our guilt by sharing specific details that can only increase the hearer's anguish. We do that housecleaning by working the steps with a sponsor. If our partner wants to know, most of us have found it appropriate to share:

- The basic nature of our addiction
- How long we have been acting out
- If and when we have slips
- Any legal or employment issues arising from our addiction

There may be occasions, however, when the person to whom we are disclosing wants to know more detail than we feel comfortable sharing. This might include names of acting out partners. Here, we need to be considerate of everyone involved and not unduly incriminate another person for our behavior. As it says in the 9th Step, "... except when to do so would injure them or others." Most of us have found it impossible to gain serenity at the expense of another.

Also, our partner may wish to look at our step work. Our experience has been that it is vital that our personal step work be between ourselves, our higher power, and our sponsor; and that we feel safe to include anything and everything without fear of it being read by anyone else (and possibly misinterpreted). The disclosure process is a step toward healing and building trust. The process usually

takes a long time. Part of that trust is allowing each person to find and follow her/his individual recovery path.

Sometimes, there may be a person in our lives who wants us to disclose to another person, e.g., our spouse may want us to disclose to our parents. In these cases, we need to be extra careful – are we doing this for ourselves? Is it safe for me? Will it harm others?

Thank you for taking the time to review this draft pamphlet!

You may be asking yourself, “How can I be of service to this endeavor? What can I do to help?”

(We’re glad you asked!)

1. Print copies and bring them to your meetings. (This draft pamphlet is available online at <http://www.bayareasaa.org/resources.php?p=disclosure>.) Spread the word to your group during SAA-related announcements. Leave some copies on the literature table.
2. Send your feedback and comments on this draft pamphlet to lit@bayareasaa.org.