

In Sex Addicts Anonymous, working step 2 is done by reaching outside of ourselves for help. Step 3, while it looks to be simple, is also a major change to our lives.

Step 3 “Made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand God”

The first thing we need to address about this step is that while it uses religious language, working step 3 is most definitely not about religion. Many people have reported that their past experiences with religion have gotten in the way of comprehending this step. Working step three involves making changes to my attitudes and then my actions.

For many of us, this step occurs after we have been in the program for a while. At this point, we have gotten comfortable with calling for help. But, when we call out for help in step 2, in many cases, we do not get the help we wanted. In many cases, we want to find some nice co-dependent person who could rescue or comfort us. When we call another addict, we don’t get that. This other addict makes observations about how we had gotten ourselves into the situation and there were steps we could take to get out of it and actions to prevent the next time.

The program offers help in many ways different from what we expected. For example, often we can not reach the person we wanted to talk to. Or the people we wanted to reach do not show up at the meeting we go to. Instead of sharing our problems with an “old-timer”, we find that we are the longest time person at a meeting. Instead of being able to share this latest stress with someone whose wisdom we respect, we get to “12 step” someone new. Yet, somehow, in this process, we get relief. The program works even when we do not get the specific result we wanted.

The question of step 3 is: do we accept the help we receive?

The help we receive in the program points us back to the choices we made that put us into the acting out situation. In working step 3, we start realizing that we need to start making changes to our lives. Rarely are these changes directly linked to our sexual behavior. We start seeing that other parts of our lives were setting us up to be in a situation where all we knew was to act out. In order to get freedom from the addictive behavior, we need to start making changes in these other areas of our lives.

Seeing that we need to make changes to other parts of our lives is the next challenge of Step 3. Often, we see this need

after we have experienced periods of sobriety and after we have witnessed other people making changes to their lives.

For most of us, when we came to the program, the first thing we wanted was to be free from the acting out. Over time, we realize that the program offers far more than simple freedom from acting out. As we work the steps, we discover that our addiction affected other parts of our lives and many more areas of our lives affect our sobriety. As we start following the suggestions and ideas we hear in meetings and from our sponsor, we start to experience a caring we never had before. We find that the program cares for our “selves” far more than our addiction ever did. As we continue to change our lives, we find that we are caring for ourselves more and more. We find that we are turning our lives over “to the care” of the program.

Often in that caring, we get the opportunity to learn about limits. In our addiction, we never respected our own limits nor the limits of others. Now, we get to find and respect our own limits. We get to face that we can not “dream the universe and make it happen” and we are loved anyways. We learn that others can be cared for by honoring their limits

The program offers benefits for all parts of our lives and we start wanting those benefits. We find that the benefits of the program are far more than the benefits of the addiction. To get the rest of the benefits and to work step three, we are faced with the question of how committed are we to the program.

This program is not easy and it takes a commitment. At some point, we are faced with the fact that we need to make more than a “simple decision” about our recovery. We have to finally fully surrender; admitting that we don’t have power over our lives and have to work the steps with a sponsor. We come to the point of an emotional commitment to recovery. Without that commitment, we are going to continue to be stuck in a pattern of part time recovery and part time addiction. Step three asks us to make the commitment to make all subsequent decisions so that we do not act out today – day after day after day. It is the commitment to pay all the costs and to make all the changes that are required so that we do not act out again. For some of us, that commitment is expressed in doing the “3rd step prayer”.

In many cases, changing these other areas of our lives involve heavy costs. They may involve changes to our jobs, careers, marriages, or living situations. We do not make these painful choices in order to deprive ourselves. Instead, we have glimpsed a better future and we now value ourselves too much

to stay in the exploitive and degrading situations that fed our addiction.

At these decision points, our commitment to recovery is challenged. Sometimes, these decisions are very painful. But no longer do we have to face them alone or rely on the addiction to deal with them. Sometimes, we need to be reminded of the costs of the addiction. Some of us have gone back out to acting out at this point and then come back with a new appreciation of the costs and a new commitment to recovery. Others are reminded of the costs while telling their stories again to newcomers. Those of us who go through this step see that the cost of the addiction is far more than the cost of making these changes. Again, step 3 is the commitment to pay these costs so as to get free from the addiction.

Step 3 is also a commitment to continue with the program to get the rest of the program’s benefits. This commitment is often tested after a while in the program. At this point, our shame has been handled and we get some time free from the addiction. We often start coasting and stop looking for changes to our lives. What we may not have realized is that there may still be sections of our lives that will drive us back to the addiction. Most of us will be faced with either changing our lives further or going back to the addiction.

Also, in this step, we learn more about the difference between religion and spirituality. There is something about this program that transcends the persons in the group. What that is - is something each of us gets to discover for our self. Our individual experiences in the program help us define what that transcendence is. No matter how we joined the program, atheist or religious, as we grow in spirituality, we gain new understanding of what we can call “god”. We often find a dynamic relationship instead of static dogma.

We also gain a new purpose for life. Prior to recovery, the main purpose in our lives was sex. As we work step 3, we find that we are giving up that purpose. Our recovery offers the chance to learn a better meaning and purpose for our lives. Steps 4 and onward help us to discover that purpose and to embrace it.

Step 3 can be worked by asking how well we are living step 2. In that question, we ask ourselves, “Am I living as though I believe that a higher power can restore me to sanity in all my life, or am I living as though the rest of my life is sane?” An honest answer forces us to face the issues of accepting the help offered, committing to the program, and caring for ourselves.

The Twelve Steps

One: We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior - that our lives had become unmanageable.

Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Six: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Seven: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Eleven: 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.

Twelve: 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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*Commitment and
Changing Attitudes*

*Working Step 3 in
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