

Step 1

"To help us define our sexual sobriety, many of us use a tool developed within SAA called The Three Circles."

"We draw three concentric circles, consisting of an inner, middle, and outer circle. With the help of our sponsor or others in recovery, we write down various behaviors in each of the three circles. In the inner circle, we put the sexual behaviors we want to abstain from, the ones we consider 'acting out'. In the middle circle we put behaviors that may lead to acting out or that we are not sure about. In the outer circle we put healthy behaviors that enhance our life and our recovery." Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 16

"In the inner circle we write down the sexual behaviors that we want to stop. Inner-circle behaviors are the addictive sexual behaviors that brought us to SAA, the things that made us hit bottom in our disease" Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 16

"When we're new to the program, our sponsor may suggest that we put compulsive sexual behaviors that don't have serious consequences in our middle circle rather than our inner circle. This allows us to concentrate on our most destructive behaviors first." Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 17

For example, people who have committed felonious behavior in their past may want to put only those behaviors in their inner circle.

It is vital to making progress to put as few items as possible in our inner circle. For many of us, at some time during the first 12 months of sobriety, the compulsion comes back in full force. If we can avoid the most harmful behavior at that point, we are improving our lives. Thus, we recommend putting only the most harmful behavior in the inner circle.

At this point, fill in the inner circle.

"The middle circle helps us avoid being perfectionists about our standards for sexual sobriety. In the middle circle, we place behavior that is 'slippery' for us or about which we are uncertain.

"Most of us come to SAA without really knowing what healthy sexuality is. We're usually uncertain about whether some behaviors are addictive or not. We place them in the middle circle until we can determine if they are addictive or have negative consequences." Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 17

We can place in the middle circle all those activities that lead up to acting out. For example, we can put in things like contacting an old partner, "cruising", the driving to an acting out place, etc.

At this point, fill in the middle circle

"Finally, we put those behaviors in the outer circle that we consider healthy, safe, and beneficial to our recovery. Practicing these behaviors is a way of being gentle with ourselves. These are acts of self nurturing that help bring meaning, fulfillment, serenity, and joy into our lives.

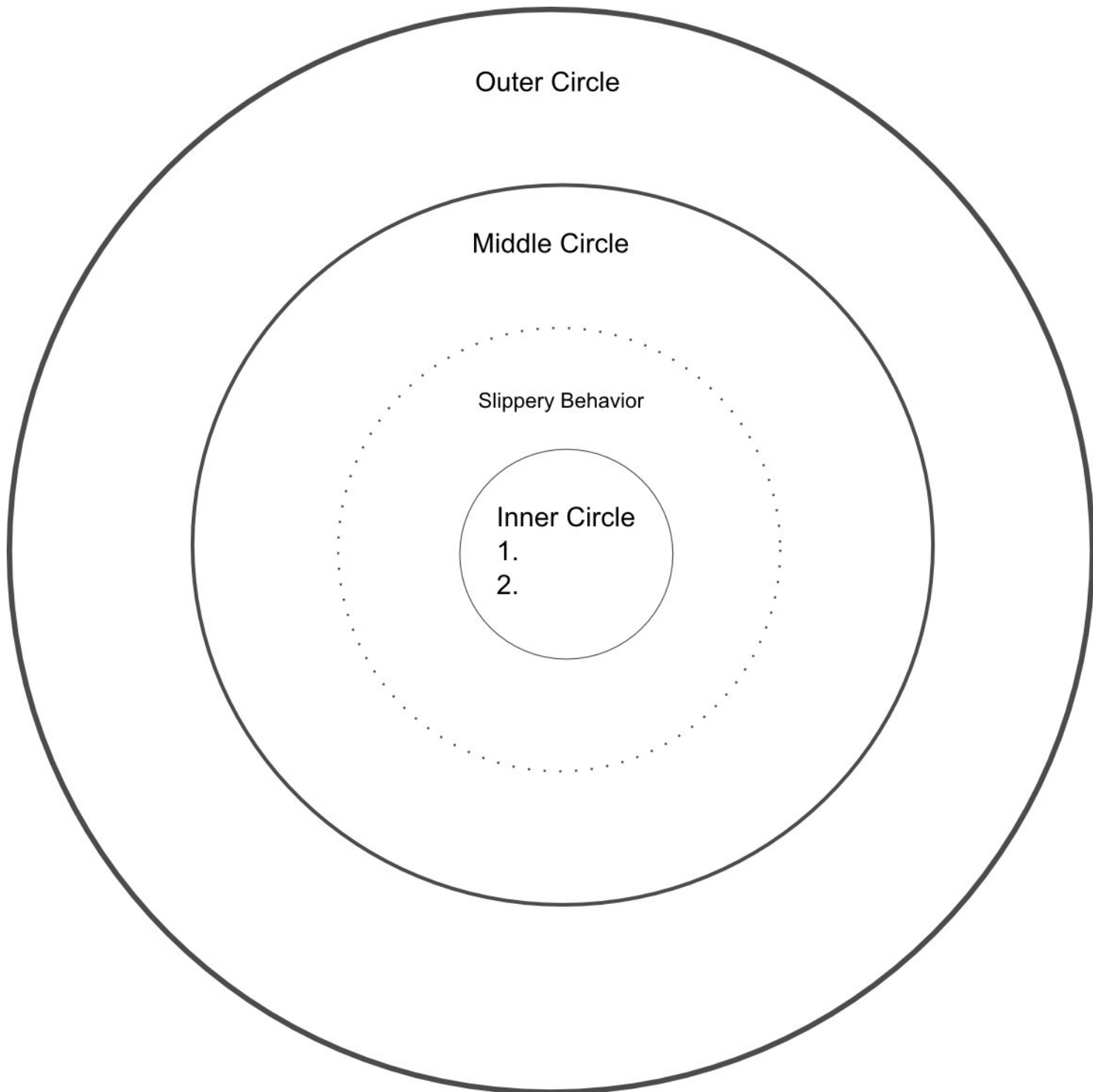
Outer circle behaviors include healthy sexuality. Healthy sexual behaviors are ones we choose that enhance our life, our recovery, our connection to others, and our spiritual life. Examples might include dating, non-abusive sex within a committed relationship, healthy masturbation with or without fantasy, taking a dance class, wearing attractive clothes, or enjoying affectionate touch.

Many of us include in our outer circle other healthy activities in our lives, not just healthy sexual behaviors. These are frequently the things we didn't have time to do when we were acting out." Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 18

Many of us start the program not knowing what to put in our outer circle. One way to find out items to put here is to do a "gratitude list" where we list all the things, relationships, and activities in our lives that we can be thankful for. This list can suggest many items to put in our outer circle.

At this point, fill in the outer circle

Three Circles Worksheet



Working the Middle Circle

Many of us find that the hardest work in this program is when we are acting in our middle circle, either on our way to acting out again or having acted out. Many times, we will disappear into "the bubble" of the addiction and start going down the path towards our inner circle. All of a sudden, we will have a "moment of clarity" where we realize what we have just done. At those points, if we take recovery actions no matter how difficult that might be, we will move our lives closer to sober living. Many of us need to plan specific actions to take at those moments lest we continue down the same paths we have followed for so long.

"If we engage in middle-circle behavior, we have not lost our sobriety, but it is a signal that we need to reach out to others and use the tools we have learned in SAA to get us back on track." Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 18

Write down middle circle behaviors, situations, etc. and for each, decide what you will do (what action to take) to reconnect with recovery when you find yourself there. Some people will try to use actions such as telling a partner of the middle circle activity or saying a silent prayer. Our experience is that choosing to do those actions have not helped our recovery very much. For you who are new to the program, our experience is that these two actions, going to a meeting and talking about the activity or making a phone call to someone in the program and admitting the activity, are the most powerful ways we have to deal with the activity and are recommended.

Middle Circle item

Action to take

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"The middle circle can be seen as a safety net, allowing us to walk the tightrope of abstinence without having to fear that a false step would necessarily be disastrous." Sex Addicts Anonymous pg 18