What to Expect at Your First SAA Meeting

I think my sexual behaviors are causing me problems. Now what?



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Coming to the realization that our sexual behaviors were causing pain in our lives and that we did not have control over them was tough for many of us. Admitting this reality was difficult enough; then we were encouraged to attend a Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) meeting. If you find yourself in this situation, the prospect of attending a meeting with a bunch of sex addicts may seem overwhelming. We know. We have been there.

Like you, we recognized that our sexual behaviors were causing us problems and came to realize we would benefit from attending SAA meetings. By attending our first SAA meeting, we began moving away from isolation and into fellowship and recovery. In meetings, many of us experienced acceptance, heard stories similar to ours, and realized that recovery from our problem was possible.

In SAA we found a fellowship of members who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other. We learned in SAA that sober sex addicts can help others recover from sex addiction.

At the meeting you may hear words or experience customs with which you are not familiar or comfortable. You may hear concepts that seem foreign to you at first. We hope you will not let this deter you. Keep coming back. Things will begin to make sense.

The information in this pamphlet will help you understand some of the words and concepts you may encounter at your first meeting, so you know what to expect. With this information, the idea of attending a meeting may become less intimidating.

What does SAA offer me?

Regardless of your gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, personal beliefs, or feelings, you are welcome in SAA. You will likely meet others who have experienced the same or similar issues. SAA offers a structured program of recovery, tools, and accountability. No matter what your sexual behaviors have been or are, SAA offers hope of a new way of life, free from compulsive sexual behavior.

Why are meetings important?

Meetings are the heart of the SAA fellowship. The assistance available at SAA meetings is unique. We understand the pain of sex addiction as no one else can and are able to share first-hand knowledge about the tools and actions we use to recover. At meetings we emerged from our shame, secrecy, isolation, and fear. For many of us, this was a liberating experience. We felt a sense of relief from carrying the burden of our addiction by ourselves as we sat among others like us and heard their stories. They were, it seemed, telling our story!

> "I was a little apprehensive about going to my first meeting of Sex Addicts Anonymous. I was afraid I'd find a room full of unshaven, drooling perverts in trench coats. What I found instead were perfectly nice, ordinary people who happened to have the same addiction that I have."

– Voices of Recovery, August 22, page 235

What can I expect at my first SAA meeting?

Acceptance and support: You will encounter a caring community of people who understands your problems and have experienced the same or similar issues. Our fellowship is open to anyone, regardless of gender identity, age, race, religion, ethnic background, marital status, occupation, or sexual orientation.

Who can attend? You can attend meetings as long as you think you may have a problem with sex addiction. There is no other requirement. You do not have to decide if you are a sex addict right away.

No Cost or Registration: You do not have to register and we do not keep attendance records. Meetings are free of charge. SAA has no dues or fees.

Voluntary participation: You do not have to speak; you may simply listen. All participation is voluntary. The only exception is that we will ask you to introduce yourself by first name at the beginning of the meeting.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Anonymity is a foundational principle of our program, which helps sex addicts attend meetings without fear of disclosure or discovery. In this spirit, we refer to ourselves by first name only. Whom we meet or what is shared in a meeting is treated as confidential and is not discussed outside of the meetings.

Duration: Most meetings last 60 minutes, although some may extend to 90 minutes.

Meeting leader: An SAA member will lead the meeting. They will explain how to participate and guide the meeting using a structured format.

Introductions: At most meetings the members will introduce themselves by their first name, simply saying, "My name is _____, and I'm a sex addict." You do not have to identify yourself as a sex addict. It is okay to say, "I'm _____ and I'm new."

Readings: There will be some introductory readings. These may be followed by a talk or individuals sharing about a topic.

Sharing: Most meetings have a period where members can talk about their personal experience of recovery. Again, sharing is voluntary; you are not required to speak if you do not want to. Each group has established guidelines which help everyone know what and how to share. The guidelines will usually be explained right before the meeting is opened for sharing.

Closing: There are different ways of closing meetings. Many meetings close with a prayer such as the Serenity Prayer. At some in-person meetings members may hold hands during the closing prayer. You are not required to participate if you feel uncomfortable.

Note regarding minors: Based on local laws and group needs, each SAA group decides for itself if it will allow minors to attend. If you are a minor, you will need to ask any group you are interested in attending if they will allow minors in their meeting. We also recommend contacting the International Service Organization (ISO) for more information. See below for contact information.

Basic Meeting Guidelines:

Here are some helpful hints on etiquette common at SAA meetings that will contribute to a positive experience at your first meeting:

- Silence or shut off your phone. It is best not to text during the meeting.
- Please avoid attire that is tight-fitting or revealing, such as exercise clothes.
- Be mindful of others' personal space — we are careful not to touch or hug anyone without permission.
- If you're running late, please come into the meeting anyway — just enter as quietly and respectfully as possible.

Tips on Sharing:

Groups often have guidelines for sharing, such as the following:

- If you wish to speak, preface your remarks with "My name is _____ and I'm a newcomer."
- 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 (Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 12).
- Do not speak directly to or about another member or interrupt someone else when they are speaking. If you have questions, talk to someone after the meeting.
- It's best to speak in terms of our own experience, using "I" or "my."

- We do not give advice or feedback unless asked.
- We do not share about “outside issues” such as politics or religion.

What if you are uncomfortable with your experience at the meeting?

Almost everyone is uncomfortable at their first few meetings. If you continue attending meetings, you will most likely begin to feel more comfortable. Every group is different. Many of us tried several meetings before we found one that fit our needs. Some of us also spoke to a member after the meeting about our experience. We encourage you to keep coming back!

We hope what you have read here will ease your anxiety about attending your first SAA meeting. May you find the freedom in SAA we have found. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

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