

The Disclosure Process

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PURPOSE OF DISCLOSURE

- **PURPOSE** -- To provide a safe place for the addict and the partner to give and receive the disclosure in a safe and structured environment. To clear the slate for complete honesty and transparency as the couple begins the process of healing, repairing and rebuilding trust in the relationship. Shame, secrecy and self-loathing are fuels for addiction, so full disclosure can help stop fueling the compulsive sexual behavior.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS** -- Disclosure is recommended only for those who intend to repair and rebuild the relationship. Disclosure is not recommended if either spouse is sick at the time of disclosure, or if either party has already visited with a divorce attorney. Disclosure is also not recommended when there is potential for physical or emotional violence or abuse. Disclosing before the addict is fully ready to make a disclosure (forced disclosure), a partial disclosure, staggered disclosure (multiple small bits of disclosure) and non-disclosure can all be very damaging.

PREPARATION PROCESS

1. [ADDICT] -- **Preparatory Therapy Sessions.** Have addict come in for a session or two to prepare themselves for the disclosure and to process what they already know about the general situation. Recognize that this whole process will be painful for all. Feelings of betrayal, loss of self-esteem, anger, and shame will likely occur.
2. [ADDICT] -- **Sobriety.** If the addict can have some sobriety from the compulsive behavior and be actively working a program of recovery, that can be helpful in the process of repairing the relationship and rebuilding trust.

Active recovery includes:

- a. Attending 12-Step meetings -- Sexaholics Anonymous (SA), Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA), Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA), etc. (See <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sex-lies-trauma/201108/sex-and-love-addicts-how-find-the-right-12-step-group-you>)
 - b. Engaging in step work with a sponsor
 - c. Reaching out for emotional support as needed through phone calls, etc. with sponsor, accountability partners, fellow 12-step members in recovery
 - d. Continuing to be rigorously honest and transparent with self and others even when facing disapproval or other consequences
 - e. Staying "present" in the relationship
 - f. Going to therapy and looking inward
 - g. Practicing good self-care
 - h. Living in your integrity
3. [PARTNER] -- **Effects of the Addiction/Behavior Letter.** Have the spouse/partner write a letter to the disclosing partner regarding the impact/effects of the addiction/behavior on him/her. Also have the partner share what they need in order to keep working on the relationship. He or she is also welcome to bring any questions they have for the addict.
 4. [ADDICT] -- **Disclosure Letter.** Have the addict write a Full Disclosure Letter to the partner (see content ideas and sample letter). Keep it in a safe place while writing it, so accidental disclosure doesn't happen. Addict must determine their reasons for their disclosure. Are they ready for possible consequences? Review the letter with your therapist prior to the disclosure session.
 5. [ADDICT] -- **Disclosure Letter Content**
 - a. **First person.** Write as if speaking directly to your spouse.
 - b. **Accept responsibility.** Accept full responsibility for the behavior. Clearly state you were wrong in engaging in the behaviors.
 - c. **Not partner's fault.** Make it clear that it is/was not the partner's fault.
 - d. **No excuses.** Focus on the facts. Explain what you've learned about yourself throughout this process without making any excuses.
 - e. **Honesty.** Be honest and transparent with yourself and your spouse.

- f. **Appropriate detail.** In the disclosure letter, share the major elements of the acting-out behaviors but avoids the "gory details," which would just be harmful or unnecessary to the partner.
 - g. **Remorse.** Express genuine remorse/apology. Don't ask them to immediately forgive you, but allow them time to process and heal in their own time and way. You could say though that you hope they will someday be able to forgive you and trust you again. Addict may need to be prepared to genuinely apologize many, many times...as many as it takes to rebuild the relationship.
 - i. See *Making Advances* by Marnie Ferree, p. 235-256 for disclosure letter content to address.
 - ii. See "Guidelines for Writing a Disclosure to Relationship Partners" -- <http://www.samlouiemft.com/2012/06/sex-addiction-disclosure-what-women-need-to-know-part-ii/>
6. [ADDICT] -- **Schedule Disclosure Session.** Schedule a 2-hr disclosure session with a therapist (who is familiar with addiction and the disclosure process). Also schedule a follow up individual session for the partner to process the disclosure. It could be with the same therapist or the spouse's own therapist.

THE DISCLOSURE SESSION

1. [BOTH] -- **Drive Separately.** Be sure that addict and partner drive to the disclosure session in separate cars. Also have a place for the addict to go after the session so that the partner has time alone to process the disclosure, if preferred.
2. [SPOUSE] -- **Spouse Reads the "Effects" Letter.** Partner reads his/her "Effects of the Addiction" letter to addict. The addict is to strive to show empathy and genuine concern for the experience of the partner. Take deep breaths as needed to stay present in the moment and the emotion.
3. [ADDICT] -- **Addict Asks Permission.** Addict lets spouse know he/she has important yet painful information share. Ask partner if he/she is willing to receive the info, which the addict believes they have a right to know. Ask the spouse also if there is anything they don't want to know. While secrecy does feed addiction the partner does have a right to choose whether to hear the information or not.
4. [ADDICT] -- **Addict Reads the "Disclosure" Letter.** Addict reads his/her "Disclosure Letter" to the spouse all the way through. Take deep breaths as needed to stay present in the moment and the emotion.
5. [SPOUSE] -- **Spouse Responds.** After disclosure the spouse can respond and ask any clarifying questions. Don't rehash the disclosure information at home. Wait to discuss anything further with the help of the therapist in a next session.
6. [BOTH] -- **Current Needs.** Both of you (especially the spouse) determine what they need going forward. Encourage both to wait to make any big decisions.
7. [BOTH] -- **Support System.** Both the addict and the partner (especially) need to have a support system of people they can talk to, i.e. friends, therapists, sponsors, 12-step meetings to attend (SA, SLAA for addict or S-Anon or COSA for spouse).

OTHER DISCLOSURE RESOURCES

- See Sample disclosure letter, p. 353, Appendix, *Making Advances* by Marnie Ferree
- Additional disclosure information, p. 179 and p. 230, *Making Advances* by Marnie Ferree
- Disclosure Process Information
 - **Disclosure and Sex Addiction** -- <http://newyorkpathways.com/blog/disclosure-and-sex-addiction-by-michael-reilly/>
 - **The Anatomy of Disclosure: Breaking the News of Sex Addiction to a Spouse or Partner** -- <http://www.sexualrecovery.com/blog/telling-your-parnter-you-are-a-sex-addict/>
 - **Telling Your Partner: The Disclosure Process in Recovery from Sex Addiction** -- <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/06/19/telling-your-partner-the-disclosure-process-in-recovery-from-sex-addiction/>
 - **Dealing with Disclosure** -- <http://www.purelifealliance.org/Portals/0/docs/Dealing%20with%20Disclosure.pdf>
 - **Surviving Disclosure of Infidelity: Results of an International Survey of 164 Recovering Sex Addicts and Partners** -- http://www.jenniferschneider.com/articles/surviving_disclosure.html