

Sex Addicts Anonymous SAA public information article for

The Knock

### **Frank's Story**

Before I came to sex addicts anonymous, I didn't know my problem even had a name, all I knew was that I couldn't control my sexual behaviour. For me sex had become a consuming way of life, I returned to the same behaviours over and over despite the consequences to me and my family becoming worse and worse.

When I went to SAA I discovered that my sex addiction was a disease that it was affecting my mind, body and spirit. I heard about others sharing their own experience about how progressive this problem becomes, my behaviour certainly got worse and more severe over time.

Our out-of-control sexual behaviours might include high levels of promiscuity, compulsive masturbation, excessive use of both legal and illegal internet pornography, use of chat rooms and dating sites, multiple anonymous sexual encounters, exhibitionism, sex work and much more besides.

Sex addiction is a shame-based condition. Most sex addicts use the powerful stimulus of sex to escape the toxic feelings experienced from shame. Sex addiction can be understood as not dissimilar to other addictions. What sex addicts do is use sex in the same way as others use alcohol or drugs, gambling, or overeating. We do it to survive the intolerable. We get high on it, in almost trance-like states or stasis where we can block out our difficult feelings.

Discovering I wasn't alone was a liberating experience for me. It's a great comfort and relief to know that the fellowship of recovering sex addicts exists and that we have somewhere to turn, to help us recover.

At the meetings, which are run simply by members, I gradually emerged from my shame, secrecy, and fear and became part of a community that shares the common goal of freedom from sexual compulsion. By attending my first SAA meeting, I had begun to move away from isolation into fellowship and then eventually into recovery.

Paradoxically my first meeting was a freeing experience. I met others like me and heard their stories. It didn't seem to matter that I didn't identify with everyone's behaviour. But it was clear we all had a common problem.

I was amazed to find other people honestly sharing the challenges around sex addiction that I had. There are no professional outside facilitators, but I witnessed people talk honestly and openly about their own issues and so felt I could speak candidly about myself. It was nice to know we met as equals, one sex addict helping another, to achieve sexual sobriety and begin to practice a new way of life.

I also found that because of the sensitive nature of sexual addiction and society's views on it, I was

relieved that the meetings I went to were 'closed' to only those wishing to stop addictive sexual behaviour. It felt safe knowing that the practice of anonymity and confidentiality is so respected, it made the meeting a safe place for me. I only need to use my first name and anything I say in the meeting is treated as confidential and we're encouraged not to discuss things outside with non-members.

The programme of Sex Addicts Anonymous is a good addition to professional therapy and, whilst therapy is often weekly, I can always reach out to an SAA meeting or another fellow any day of the week, day or night.

Early on I got a temporary sponsor, a fellow traveller in the fellowship, who was abstinent from addictive sexual behaviour for some time and who was able to guide me through what they'd learned from working the steps. The program is based on the 12 steps and 12 traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous which is a more proven and understood addiction and fellowship. Each step presents a significant action that links to the other steps in the process to establish my new way of life on more spiritual principles.

Although the steps use the word God to describe a higher power or a spiritual way of life, we're not connected with any religion, creed or dogma. We just offer a spiritual solution without any specific set of beliefs and practices.

I also found it helpful to define carefully with my sponsor those specific behaviours I wanted to stay clear of. In AA it's clear, people just want to stop drinking. But as human beings we need to eat and we need to be sexual, so in SAA we define what is unhealthy and healthy sexual behaviour for each of us, individually. It's pretty straightforward to isolate those things that we keep doing repetitively, which we find are difficult to stop doing but now come with a lot of negative consequences to our lives and our families.

Negative consequences may include the loss of job or career, breakdown in relationships, arrest, and legal consequences. We risk our health, our freedom, even our lives. Yet it is a paradox that these severe negative consequences are not enough to help stop on our own.

Sex addicts come from all walks of life, young and old, gay or straight, bisexual or transgender. We come from all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Some of us experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse whilst growing up. Others of us report growing up in families where addictions already flourished, like co-dependency, alcoholism, eating disorders, workaholism and sex addiction itself.

We aren't bad, nor irredeemable. Many of us struggle with poor self-image. The media and society sometimes view excessive sexual behaviour as warped and perverted, whereas the reality is sex addiction is a long-term condition that needs managing.

While most people might think sex addiction is about sex, it's not. It's about deep feelings of unworthiness and shame. It is about poor attachment experiences in childhood about rejection and abandonment. It is about our inability to use the healthy methods of self-soothing that others have learned when faced with distress and negative emotional experiences.

SAA meetings are financially self-supporting, there are no financial sponsors and groups do not belong to any sect or religious denomination.

At meetings, I listen respectfully to what others say and then share my own experience. I'm learning not to judge people, not to tell anyone what to do or fix others' problems. Coming to SAA lets me mature emotionally, learn personal discernment and be respectful to others.

I am now starting to have a healthy and enjoyable life that I never had when I was acting out. I keep in touch with friends and other fellows, I volunteer, follow my passions and live in my values.

If you think you might benefit from the SAA fellowship, or if you simply want to find out more, meetings can be found by checking the Sex Addicts Anonymous website or calling or writing to their helplines: [www.saauk.info](http://www.saauk.info)

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