

## Honesty

Honesty is vital for meaningful recovery. The more deeply we can practice honesty, the further we can take our recovery. For real change and growth to occur, we must be willing to open our eyes and hearts to the whole truth about how we feel, who we are, and how we have behaved.

## Honesty and the Twelve Steps

While honesty helps us to more genuinely work the Steps, practicing the Steps gives us ongoing opportunities to work on honesty. In Step One, we become truthful with ourselves about our powerlessness and the unmanageability of our lives. Steps Four through Ten require us to be honest with both ourselves and others, especially when we make amends. Steps Two, Three, and Eleven emphasize honesty with a Higher Power. The Steps challenge us to engage in keen and balanced self-reflection, to acknowledge how our behaviors have affected us and others, and to be accountable.

Most of us came into COSA with broken trust and a distorted sense of truth. We had been lied to repeatedly, which made it difficult to know the truth and to trust our own sense of reality. Some of us had been lied to by parents or **the people to** whom we **looked** for our care when we were young. To feel safe and accepted, we learned to ignore our gut feelings, often trading our truth for someone else's.

When we discovered that the addicts in our lives had deceived us with a web of lies, we felt shocked, deeply wounded, furious, betrayed, disrespected, **or** even abused. Perhaps we tried to shield ourselves from our pain, shame, and grief by holding tightly to illusions of well-being, **thus failing to acknowledge how compulsive sexual behavior had affected our lives.** To stay in denial, we shut ourselves off from reality. This may have felt safe in the moment, as it served to protect us temporarily from experiencing devastating hurt and sadness. **Yet that sense of safety was deceptive, because denial limits** our ability to experience the intimate emotional and spiritual connection that comes with vulnerability. **Ultimately, denial leaves us feeling empty, lonely, and lifeless.**

Without honesty, our feelings and experiences are shallow, and we miss out on the richness of true joy and happiness. When we face reality, we open ourselves to fully experience life.

## Learning to Be Honest in COSA

In COSA, **instead of focusing on** the sex addict's behaviors, we **pay attention to our self-care** and trust that our Higher Power will let us know what we need to know when we need to know it. We can listen to and trust **our Higher Power's guidance**. We can discuss concerns with our sponsors and other COSA members. **As we begin to recognize that** some people may not currently have the ability **to be honest, we can accept our powerlessness over them. We learn to stop obsessing over the actions of others. Instead, we concentrate on working the Twelve Steps ourselves.**

**As we recover in COSA,** we learn that we do not have to forfeit our own truth and power when what we are being told doesn't feel right. We practice trusting our intuition. We can refuse to buy stories **that seem to us to be** spun from deception and manipulation.

Our sponsors and other COSA members model honesty for us by speaking their truth and setting boundaries, even when it's difficult. We hear and see how they trust their inner wisdom and Higher Power, and we feel hopeful and motivated to do the same. We discover healthier ways to deal with situations in which we feel unsafe or sense that others are not being honest with us.

### **Sharing within the Fellowship**

Some of us are able to be truly honest for the first time in COSA. Our program's Traditions and guidelines help to ensure that meetings are safe places where members can freely share from the heart. COSA's emphasis on anonymity and a judgment-free zone, where "crosstalk" or advice-giving are discouraged, allows many to feel secure enough to be profoundly vulnerable.

On the other hand, we may struggle with knowing just how much of ourselves to share. We may have overshared in the past, especially when we needed relief from our emotional burdens. It is true that once we tell a secret, it can never be untold. We may ask for support and guidance from our Higher Power, sponsors, and fellow COSA members while we learn how to assess the safety of situations, identify our boundaries, regain our sense of authenticity, and recover the ability to trust. **We can be** gentle with ourselves and listen to our inner voice.

Many of us struggle with whether to share the truth about the effects of sex addiction with family members, friends, or others outside of COSA. We practice patience as we listen to the experience, strength, and hope offered by others, and we work to determine what is best for our situation. Being authentic does not mean we must reveal all the details of our lives to everyone, even if we are pointedly asked. We take care of ourselves by learning to listen to our inner truth and to discern when and where we feel

safe. Sometimes the most honest approach is to state that we do not feel comfortable sharing about it.

## **Truly Connecting with Higher Power, Self, and Others**

Recovery requires rigorous honesty. In order to heal, we must become honest with ourselves about both our current situation and our past. When it comes time to make amends, our authentic acceptance of who we are and what we have done allows us to feel true remorse and empathy. This might require us to acknowledge things that we would rather forget. Until we can recognize and accept all aspects of ourselves and our lives, our shame will hold us back. Secrets feed shame and shame thrives in the darkness. Honesty is the pathway into the light.

Spiritual connection and honesty are intricately entwined. We can have a clear and genuine connection with our Higher Power only when we are completely honest about who we are. The more honest we can be, the more connected we are to our Higher Power. And conversely, the more we connect with our Higher Power, the closer we get to accessing our own truth and inner knowing.

Often honesty requires courage and discernment. Sometimes we may not recognize that we are being dishonest **or we may not** know how to be honest. We need to be patient with ourselves. Honesty is an unfolding process. As we grow in our recovery, our understanding of honesty grows. When we are unsure of our own truth, we can pause and seek an intuitive connection with our Higher Power. Honesty removes distortions and frees us to regain a connection to our true thoughts and feelings. Gradually, we learn to trust in ourselves.

## **Self-acceptance**

Some of us spent a lot of time and energy trying to build a false or inaccurate persona. We feared that if others saw the “real” us, we would be rejected or excluded. Some of us masked our denial of reality by calling it optimism. We put on a happy smile and told others that we were OK and that all was well, when really, it was not. Deep down, we were betraying our true feelings.

When we deceive ourselves by denying our truth and ignoring our feelings, we bury our authenticity. This deep denial of self tends to result in reactions, such as anger, rage, stress, resentment, depression, and grief. Swallowing our truth can suffocate the essence of who we are. We cannot celebrate and love ourselves when we are locked in the shadow of deception, afraid to acknowledge **our very being.**

In contrast, we honor ourselves when we embrace our truth. When we get in touch with our feelings, thoughts, and fears, the very core of who we are is set free.

## **Authenticity and Intimacy**

Honesty is necessary for authentic relationships. We cannot experience full acceptance from others when we hide away our true selves. Only when we are honest with ourselves can we allow other people to know, accept, and love us for who we really are. When we are honest and open, we lower our barriers and allow ourselves to connect completely with another's heart. The person we are on the inside is aligned with the person we present to the outside world.

When we do not want to face difficult or uncomfortable feelings, it might seem easier to fabricate a story than to admit the truth. But in the long run, lies and fabrications harm us. Even if we aren't telling an outright lie, we lack honesty when we are not direct and forthright or when we withhold important, relevant information. We are dishonest when we tell white lies, maybe in the guise of protecting another's feelings. We may wish to head off a potential conflict or try to protect someone from disappointment. While we might mean well, when we play with the facts instead of being direct, we disrespect the other person and ourselves. When we withhold significant information, we sabotage intimate and authentic relationships. Instead of trying to change reality, to present a different version of it, or to insincerely please someone, we validate ourselves by speaking the truth.

With authenticity and true intimacy as our goal, we are careful to be honest with ourselves about our motives in communicating. Honesty is not a license to self-righteously judge, criticize, or punish others. Honesty is not an excuse for passing our anxiety and anger onto others instead of practicing emotional self-regulation. If something bothers us and we are not sure how to handle it, we may take some time to pause and reflect on our options and reasoning before taking action. We may call our sponsor or another COSA member to consider our perceptions and motivations and to practice expressing ourselves as we learn new behaviors. We may ask our Higher Power for guidance.

As we learn to be honest in our recovery, we can shed all pretenses of who we want to be and embrace who we truly are. We move toward a life of self-acceptance, honor, and dignity. Our self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-love grow. We need honesty for self-care and to set healthy boundaries.

## **Living our Truth**

Honesty is not just telling the truth; it's living the truth. It's seeing the situation for what it is, not for what we want it to be. Recovery is not about getting what we want. It is about moving forward and finding joy no matter what our reality is. As we step out from hiding behind a cloak of mistruths, honesty helps us move into the ease of sincerity and authenticity. Trust in ourselves returns only when we are honest. We feel whole and can make choices from a place deeply centered in knowledge of self and Higher Power's guidance. Recovery helps us live life on life's terms. Honesty opens the door to a greater sense of true peace and joy.

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