



Welcome to the Sunlight

A Newcomer's Introduction to COSA ®

Those of us who have come to COSA have found that we share a common thread. Although our stories may be as varied as the colors of the rainbow, each of us have been impacted by another person's compulsive sexual behavior. The relief we feel as we learn we are not alone allows us to open to the truth:

Although we may have been brought to our first meeting because of another person's acting out behaviors, we, too, are in the clutches of a dangerous illness.

We may have been too broken, despairing, and lacking in the self-confidence we once possessed to continue to cope with our own lives as they were. We come to find that although we may be capable, dependable, courageous people, we cannot control the impact of the illness of sexual addiction on our lives. We turn our attention away from the sex addict and detach from the emotional turmoil that sexual addiction can bring, turning instead to the proven, workable method by which we can arrest our own illness.

As the kaleidoscope of our personal stories attests, working the Twelve Steps is just as important for us as it is for the sex addict. To remedy our own emotional, physical and spiritual illness, the COSA program offers suggestions, but keep in mind that the basis of our program is spiritual, as evidenced by the Twelve Steps.

As a result of practicing the Steps, the fog that once shrouded our lives begins to lift, and the symptoms of our own dysfunction are removed on a daily basis. The Twelve Steps aid us in our process of surrendering to something greater than ourselves, and we find that the more total our surrender, the more fully realized our freedom from the coping behaviors we learned to use.

Can we guarantee YOU this recovery? The answer is simple. Those who find the most serenity and recovery do so by honestly facing the truth about themselves and their own illness and have been willing to rely on a power greater than themselves for direction in their own life. They also keep coming back to meetings to talk and listen to other recovering members of the COSA program, and take the Twelve Steps to the best of their ability. If you can commit yourself to these as well, we believe you, too, can indeed join the ranks of those who recover.

Once we become open to our own recovery, the preoccupation with the addict diminishes and in many cases leaves us entirely. As we walk further into the clarity of recovery, we find that to deal with our inner turmoil, we have to have a new way of thinking— of acting on life rather than reacting to it— in essence, a new way of living.

“But I'm too weak. I'll never make it.” Don't worry, we have all thought or said just about the same thing. The amazing secret to the success of this program is just that. It is our common weakness, not our strength, that binds us to each other and to a Higher Power and somehow gives us the ability to do what we cannot do alone.

If you decide you are one of us, we welcome you with open arms. Whatever your circumstances, we offer you the gift of acceptance. You are not alone anymore.

Step into the sunlight of the spirit.

Welcome to COSA!

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9219 Katy Freeway, Suite 212, Houston, TX 77024

www.COSA-Recovery.org

Phone: 866-899-COSA(2672)

E-mail: info@COSA-Recovery.org





Defining Co-Sex Addiction Sexual Codependency

Identifying the Problem

The word COSA is not an abbreviation and our members identify themselves in many different ways. Some choose "co-sex addict," "codependent to sexual addiction" or "sexual codependent." For others, "sex-addiction family member" or simply "co-addict" fits best.

One of the most difficult aspects of what we call co-sex addiction or sexual codependency, is grasping and **facing the truth** of our own condition. Another is **admitting our powerlessness** over the addict. The **continual attempt to affect or control the sex addict** renders our lives unmanageable.

Behaviors that are familiar to the co-addict/codependent are recognizable, and detrimental to both the addict and the co-addict/codependent themselves. This does not mean that we caused the addiction.

Denial and delusional thinking of the co-addict/codependent increases by making half-hearted efforts to stop the sex abuse, believing promises—"it won't happen again," or by ignoring others' reports of the sex addict acting out. Ways in which the co-addict/codependent **enables** the addict and progresses in her or his own illness are through **lying about, explaining away, or covering up** the sex addict's behavior.

Some clues in recognizing one's co-addiction/codependency might be the **obsession**, or **constant thinking** about the sex addict, **constantly looking for clues** to the sex addict acting out, checking on amounts of money spent by the sex addict, checking on where the sex addict has been and for how long, or checking in private journals or with friends of the sex addict for clues.

Because of the difficulty in admitting our powerlessness over the sex addict, continued attempts to influence the sex addict to quit the acting out escalate. The **duration and frequency** of these attempts to change or control the sex addict **increases** the unmanageability in our lives. This is known as **progression**.

Our **self-esteem** as sexual co-addicts/codependents continually becomes worse. We believe, if we just looked different, or were more intelligent or attractive, we could change the sex addict. **We do things to ourselves and others that are abusive and degrading**.

Through our co-addiction/codependency we experience **loss of memory, insane behaviors or destructive acts** against ourselves or others near us. At times, **accidents or other dangerous situations** produced by our **preoccupation** with the sex addict occur.

We get caught up in a **merry-go-round of our own emotions**, swinging from hope to fear, from grief to self-pity, from anger to guilt, and back to hope again, in cycles that progress, until we find ourselves numb as we enter the late stages.

Our own **sense of boundaries, morals or ethics erodes or rigidifies** as our co-addiction/codependency advances in its own debilitating stages.

Finally, in the progression of our own illness of co-addiction/codependency our spiritual being, **the essence of who we are, is lost**.

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TOOLS

for Working a Strong COSA® Program

COSA TOOLS

The tools listed here are those many of us have found helpful in our individual recoveries. Used and applied in our daily lives, these tools help us to achieve sanity and serenity, whether or not the sex addict chooses recovery.

MEETINGS ~

COSA members gathering in a program of recovery, either face-to-face or at a scheduled online or by telephone. Other Twelve-Step group meetings may be useful— many addicts have more than one addiction, and members can substitute "sexual behavior" when another addiction is mentioned. Members give and receive support, work the Steps, and share Experience, Strength and Hope in a safe environment. When participating on the online message board, members are encouraged to share about their Step work or the weekly focus topic. In face-to-face, online or telephone meetings, there are opportunities to hear and share our Experience, Strength, and Hope with one another. For information on meetings and online resources go to the COSA website www.COSA-recovery.org

The TWELVE STEPS of COSA ~

Working the Steps is the foundation of recovery in COSA; they are a set of spiritual practices COSA members use for personal growth and recovery. Many members suggest purchasing a guide to working the Twelve Steps and using it as a way to get started. It can be helpful to have a COSA Sponsor, Cosponsor to go through the Steps with, especially the first time. Listening to others share about their own experience working the Steps is often helpful to get the ball rolling. We also use written step-guides.

The TWELVE TRADITIONS of COSA ~

A set of guidelines which suggest how COSA groups conduct themselves. Studying the Twelve Traditions and applying them to interpersonal relationships, COSA groups, and COSA as a whole promotes our own growth.

COSA LITERATURE ~

Newcomer packets and other literature may be ordered at www.COSA-Recovery.org. COSA produces a newsletter called *Balance*, a valuable resource for recovery and news about the COSA fellowship, conferences, retreats, etc.

GIFTS AND PROMISES OF COSA ~

These are the "results" any member of COSA can expect from working the COSA Twelve-Step program. By holding on to these promises, many members have found hope and strength, as well as help to focus on their program. Reading the Promises is often helpful when we feel hopeless or like we'll never make it through the pain and turmoil we feel. Knowing that those who have gone before us have found the peace and serenity found in the Gifts and Promises helps us to know that the program works "if we work it."

The SERENITY PRAYER ~

Simple but profound appeal to a Higher Power to assist us in the process of receiving the "priceless gift of serenity." Many people utilize this COSA tool as a method to get through difficult experiences, or the obsession about the sex addict that is so common to COSA members. By repeating the prayer, either silently or aloud, whenever we are faced with a person, situation or issue that we need to let go of, we find that we are able to let go of our need to control and/or our worries— if only for a moment.

SPONSORS ~

A person who serves as a guide through the Twelve Step process; after you have been attending a meeting for a bit, you may find that there are people who have a story similar to yours, and also people who have the serenity you seek for your own life. It is your responsibility to ask another COSA member to be your sponsor; they will not come to you. A sponsor is someone who agrees to be your sponsor, can be honest with you and support you, knows your whole story, holds you accountable for working your COSA program, and helps you focus on how the Steps apply to your life. This relationship often becomes

the life-line that we seek, and we can form a healthy nurturing bond with our sponsors, who share their Experience, Strength, and Hope with us in working the Steps of COSA, and realizing the Promises and Gifts that COSA recovery can bring. Those of us who serve as sponsors most often find that our own recovery is enhanced by the experience.

If you do not have a face-to-face meeting near you, you can sign up for a long-distance temporary sponsor via our website, or join the online message board and make a posting asking if anyone is available as a Sponsor.

SUPPORT NETWORK ~

Communicating with other COSA members, either by phone, private email, internet messenger, or in person; asking for support when needed; corresponding with other COSA members; all can be especially important if there are no face-to-face meetings you can attend. This network is best cultivated in non-crisis times, so members often make a practice of calling or emailing their support people on a regular basis. Some groups encourage newcomers to make “practice” calls right away, in order to avoid the common problem of the “two ton phone” and continuing to isolate, if only between meetings.

SLOGANS ~

Quick references to important Twelve Step program concepts, i.e.: "One Day at a Time," "Progress, Not Perfection." "It works if you work it."

PRAYER AND MEDITATION ~

To some, prayer is talking to our Higher Power and meditation is listening to our Higher Power. Both can be difficult when we first come to the program. We may feel disconnected or even angry at our Higher Power and therefore resist or even avoid prayer. Meditation is a tool that may be difficult at first as well, as our minds are often spinning with the pain and anger we feel toward our loved one's compulsive sexual behaviors. Through patience and practice, both tools can become trusted allies on our recovery journey.

HONESTY ~

Striving to eliminate denial, half-truths, white lies, partial truths and overt dishonesty with others and ourselves. This includes denying or lying about our feelings. Learning to be rigorously honest with ourselves and others is a journey.

JOURNALING ~

This can be a very important part of recovery, helping us to investigate and examine our lives and record our thoughts, feelings and insights. Journaling can be any reflective writing and Step work, including poetry, letters (which we don't intend to send) to our Higher Power and people we have issues with, lists and stream-of consciousness-writing, to name a few.

SERVICE ~

Participating in activities that support the COSA group or COSA as a whole. There are many different opportunities, such as: cleaning out a coffee mug; leading the meeting as the secretary or trusted servant; setting up the room or putting chairs away at the end; Sponsoring another COSA member; serving on a planning committee; welcoming newcomers; sharing at meetings. There are no professionals at our meetings— we are all equal. Working together ensures the health and well-being of our group, ourselves, and COSA as a whole.

COSA CONVENTIONS AND RETREATS ~

These provide COSA members with opportunities to spend more time focused on the COSA program and issues, and build a support network. Most members find conventions and retreats to be an essential part of their recovery program, and feel that missing out on an opportunity to attend would be missing out on an important part of their recovery journey.

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY ~

What is said here, stays here. That sounds so simple, and yet, it is this simple rule that helps us all to feel safe discussing the sensitive issues we face as co-sex addicts.

DEFINING OUR SOBRIETY and INNER CIRCLE BEHAVIORS ~

In defining our own sobriety, we make a list of those behaviors we engaged in that made us, and the situation, worse. Most COSA members report that they find that their definition of their COSA sobriety evolves over time, and includes both those behaviors we choose to no longer engage in, as well as those new behaviors we begin to embrace that are self-nurturing.

CELIBACY ~

Some find that periods of celibacy can help couples focus on communication and intimacy, by taking the focus off being sexual and placing it on growth and true intimacy.

SETTING BOUNDARIES ~

Boundaries are personal choices, and no one in COSA will decide what your boundaries need to be. You can ask a COSA friend or your sponsor about the kinds of boundaries they have set and how they discovered their own boundaries, to get ideas and inspiration for discovering your own personal boundaries.

If this literature has supported your recovery, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution today. This is an important step you can take to help carry the message of hope to others who still suffer.

Please visit the COSA website at

<http://www.cosa-recovery.org/donations.html>
for information on how to support our fellowship.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Written with the COSA® Newcomer in Mind

The COSA Welcome

We extend a special welcome to newcomers. Although we are sorry for the circumstances which brought you here, we hope that we can share the privilege of being here together and that you find a combination of help and friendship, as we have. It is suggested that you try six meetings before you decide if the COSA program is for you.

A member phone list is available. People who put their names on this list are willing to take your calls and answer your questions. We encourage you to seek the support of the group.

◆ How do I know if I belong here?

If someone else's sexual behavior is causing you pain, then you can find comfort and hope in COSA. It is suggested that you try six meetings to see if the COSA program is for you.

◆ Why do I have to come to meetings when it's my loved one who has the problem?

When we come to COSA we are often spiritually and emotionally depleted. By focusing on ourselves and the part we have played in the dysfunction of our relationships, we can find healing. If we work the Twelve Steps of COSA for ourselves, we will learn to make better choices, set boundaries, speak our truth and avoid behaviors that may have enabled the sex addict to continue to practice his or her disease. We realize we cannot find serenity if we continue to focus on someone else's recovery, so we commit ourselves to our own recovery.

◆ Do I have to give my name?

COSA members identify themselves by first name only. Anonymity is the foundation of all COSA Traditions. We will treat your name and anything you say as confidential, and we ask that you do the same for us.

◆ Do I have to talk at the meeting?

No one is required to talk or "share" at COSA meetings. We respect your right to decide when you feel comfortable to talk. It is appropriate just to listen until that time.

◆ How much does the COSA program cost?

There are no dues or fees for COSA membership. We are self-supporting through our own contributions. Each member gives what he or she can when the basket is passed. COSA groups may choose to use contributions for rent, literature, scholarships to COSA events or support of Intergroups and our International Service Organization. We ask that you be our guest and not contribute until you feel you are a part of the COSA group.

◆ What do people talk about at COSA meetings?

COSA members meet to share their Experience, Strength and Hope. There is a variety of **Experience** in COSA recovery that we find helpful to share with each other. This includes:

- working the Twelve Steps of COSA
- working with a sponsor or sponsoring other members
- setting boundaries
- practicing new, healthy behaviors
- reading COSA or other recovery literature
- sharing feelings
- discovering how we work our program

Sharing our **Strength** means we talk about how we're growing and lending our support to each other. We share our **Hope** by being an example of how life gets better in recovery.

The safety to share honestly during meetings creates a trust level that many of us have never before experienced. Sometimes the COSA meeting is the first safe place we have to talk about our lives. Other places we can share in this way are on COSA telemeetings and message boards.

We also encourage you to call someone on the COSA phone list. Only members who are willing to take program calls put their names on the list, so you can be assured you won't be troubling the person you call. It is also very helpful to have a sponsor. Sometimes it is better to discuss some issues privately with a sponsor instead of taking them to a meeting.

♦ **What is a sponsor and why do I need one?**

A sponsor is another COSA member who agrees to help you work the program. Your sponsor will be there for you when you need someone to talk to or ask questions, as well as guide you through working the Twelve Steps of COSA. The best way to choose a sponsor is to listen at meetings for someone who has what you want. When you've chosen someone all that's left is to ask, "Will you be my sponsor?"

♦ **Can I ask questions during the meeting?**

In order for everyone to feel safe, the format of our sharing is that one person speaks at a time without questions, interruptions or cross-talk. Cross-talk is defined as "talking to, talking about or talking with someone else during the meeting." We'll be happy to answer questions after the meeting is over.

♦ **Can I ask about or comment on another person's sharing?**

If you want to talk about something someone else has said, please don't mention the person by name or point to him or her, or say "you said". We ask that you say, "I can relate to what I heard about..." "My situation is like this..." If you want to ask someone about what they've said, please do so after the meeting.

♦ **What is a "feelings check"?**

Some COSA meetings include a brief check-in, or "feelings check", at the beginning of the meeting. During introductions with a feelings check, members are invited to reflect on how they are feeling and share their emotions with the group in one or two sentences. Although brief, the "feelings check" gives each of us an opportunity to be aware of how we feel and to practice expressing our feelings. Like all sharing at COSA meetings, the "feelings check" is optional.

♦ **Is there a religious affiliation to COSA?**

It is not necessary to believe in God to work the COSA program. The word "God" is used in our literature to mean "a Power Greater than ourselves." Members decide for themselves what or whom they will call their Higher Power.

For more expanded answers to some of these and other questions, please see the FAQ page at www.cosacall.com

An excerpt from Sobriety in COSA:

Following the Twelve Steps is a way of life leading to freedom, happiness, and serenity. Our stories are similar, but each individual defines his or her own COSA sobriety. Below are responses of COSA members to the question, "What does COSA sobriety mean to you?"

- *A state of independence resulting from a reliance and trust in myself and in my Higher Power*
- *Minding my own business*
- *The ability to see alternatives*
- *Making healthy choices*
- *Freedom to learn about my sexuality*
- *Freedom to accept who I am, and what my Higher Power has created*
- *Trusting my own reality. Affirming my own thoughts and feelings*
- *Letting go of outcomes*

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