

## Tool: Acknowledging Grief

Before we can move forward in our own personal recovery, many of us find we need to acknowledge that we are grieving. **Unrecognized grief can** be a significant impediment to working the Twelve Steps of COSA. We feel powerless over our grief. Yet it is not healthy to suppress or deny it. Recognizing that we are grieving can often free us from the bondage of being immobilized by **unacknowledged**, unexpressed grief.

**Many** of us come to COSA having experienced profound loss. We may **have been** betrayed. **We may** be in shock. We are baffled by the depth of pain, sadness, **or anger** that has entered our minds and hearts. Our lives are in upheaval, and we feel unable to manage them anymore. Our suffering is so paramount that it may be difficult to begin our Step work and to look at ourselves and our personal history in Step One.

Our grief may affect our ability to function in many ways: physically, **mentally**, and emotionally. Grief can manifest itself in nausea, anxiety, a burning hole in the heart, or a **knot in the pit** of the gut. Grief **often** clouds our thinking. Naming what is happening to us and acknowledging that we are grieving brings relief and allows us to move forward in our recovery. Just as we admit in Step One that we are powerless over compulsive sexual behavior, we acknowledge that we are powerless over grief, loss, change, and upheaval in our lives.

When we recognize that we are mired in grief, we can begin to mourn the loss of what we thought we had: the loss of familiarity; the loss of plans for the future; the loss of safety and security; the loss of a relationship as it was, or as we believed it was. The most important foundation of our lives, **such as** our family unit, may no longer be intact. We **may** mourn that our children are experiencing upheaval; this is not what we want for them. Even if the relationship with our qualifier continues, we grieve because it will never be the same. We **may** feel embarrassment and shame. Our self-esteem may suffer.

If we experienced the effects of compulsive sexual behavior as children, we may not have been safe or protected. We grieve that we did not grow up with a sense of security and stability. We grieve our loss of innocence, and **we** often **experience** confusion. We **may** mourn the betrayal of our trust by someone we loved. If it is our child who has engaged in compulsive sexual behavior, we feel devastated for them and for ourselves. If we are affected by compulsive sexual behavior at work or in friendships, we may feel bewildered about how to move forward. We may lose promotions or income in our careers. Our financial well-being or career aspirations may be affected by the decisions we make as a result of another person's sexual behavior.

Many of us experience post-traumatic symptoms. We can't eat, **or maybe we overeat**. We can't sleep. We lose clarity of thought. We may suffer from depression or feel that we cannot go on. We

feel that we will never get over what has happened, that our hearts are permanently broken. Every day feels like a nightmare. We can't believe that this loss has actually occurred. For many of us, the upheaval in our life dominates our thoughts and minds and is the first thing we think about when we open our eyes in the morning after a fitful sleep.

We may hear dismissive comments from others outside of COSA like, "You don't need that relationship anyway. It was not good enough for you." But we know this is not true. Our relationships with our qualifiers may be filled with good times and moments of joy and innocence. Or we might hear, "Everybody does it; just get over it." We may feel misunderstood and judged by others, but we know that there is something else going on. We learn that this person in our lives was overpowered by an addiction. It was the addiction that was running the show and making the choices. We grieve that addiction is controlling the person with whom we believed we were building a relationship of trust and mutual support. We grieve the loss of status quo or the changes in expectations that the discovery of sex addiction brings to our lives. Our life will now follow a new and unfamiliar direction, and the challenges feel insurmountable until we discover the gifts of COSA.

The crushing pain of grief can make us feel insane. Many of us struggle with obsessive thought processes. Our lives seem unmanageable. Grief leaves a burning hole in our heart, a void ultimately to be filled by cultivating a spiritual awareness of our Higher Power. Supports like journaling, talking with sponsors, and creating a grief timeline may begin the journey of healing. With the acknowledgment of our grief and the acceptance of our complicated feelings, we can move toward the Steps of recovery in earnest and become ready to heal in COSA.

As we process our grief, the hurtful actions of our qualifiers begin to take up less space in our lives. We realize that our relationships are a part of our lives, but they do not define *all* of our lives. We can view the trauma with an improved perspective, as something that happened to us, something that we experienced, but which is no longer running our lives. We accept that our old relationships have now changed or ended. If we were a participant as co-addict, our Step work helps us acknowledge our role, and our Higher Power gives us the courage to change. We may find that we must grieve the loss of our old coping mechanisms and character defects. Even our most desperate, wounding losses and discoveries are just a part of our lives. They do not define our lives.

In COSA, we share without judgment. There is no criticism. We feel heard by compassionate witnesses. Recognizing that we are grieving, and sharing it out loud with unconditional acceptance by our sponsors and meeting groups, is a balm for our souls. In COSA, we can acknowledge that we are grieving, find unity in this validation, and move forward together in our recovery.