

Defining and Maintaining your own Sobriety

Sober living can calm us and bring us peace, joy, and a meaningful life. But what exactly is COSA sobriety? In COSA, we each have the opportunity to create our own *personal* definition. This tool can help us define our sobriety, and also to consider and understand the ways in which we can maintain that sobriety.

Defining your sobriety

To define our sobriety, the first step is to identify the unhealthy behavior patterns that we wish to discontinue. We can then move toward what our life will look and feel like without those behaviors. This will be our life in sobriety.

Identifying unhealthy behaviors

Observations

Observe yourself out in the world. Think about those behaviors in which you no longer wish to engage. Take your time. You might consider doing this over a period of a few days. Pay attention to your behaviors as you notice those that are harmful to you or to others. Use an app on your phone or carry a notebook with you so you can jot them down when you see them.

If you find yourself falling into a place of shaming or denigrating yourself, take a break. Check in with your sponsor or a COSA friend, or write yourself a love letter. Remember that your actions may have been coping mechanisms that served you in the past but need to be updated now for your growth and serenity.

Behaviors that violate personal values

Begin by making a list of your personal values. As you create your list, consider your behaviors that have violated them.

My personal values include the following:

Then make a list of the unhealthy behaviors and patterns, including those that cause dismay, discord, and dread in your life. As you create this list, remember to be gentle with yourself. Asking Higher Power for guidance before starting may be helpful.

My unhealthy or harmful behaviors that go against my values include the following:

Questions to ponder

Answering these questions may help you as you create your list:

What behaviors have you used to numb your pain?

How have you ignored your own self-care?

In what ways have you tried to prevent another person from acting out? Were these successful?

In what ways have you tried to control another's recovery? What was the result?

How have you spent time and energy trying to obtain information about another person's addictive behaviors? How have you tried to control or manipulate another person?

How have you used "being helpful" as an excuse to attempt to control others?

How can you tell the difference between being helpful and interfering in others' business?

Identify and describe some of the unhealthy behaviors you've used in the past that have made your life unmanageable.

Behaviors identified in Step work

If you've done Steps Four and Five, review the unwanted behaviors you uncovered then.

Unwanted behaviors I identified in my Fourth and Fifth Step work include the following:

If you've done Steps Six and Seven, review any other unwanted behaviors you found.

Other unwanted behaviors I identified in my Sixth and Seventh Step work include the following:

Understanding your Unhealthy Behaviors List

Next, for each behavior on your unhealthy list, write about:

- The purposes it has served in the past

- How you used it to cope with the effects of compulsive sexual behavior
- The ways in which it may have been a response to things that were out of your control
- Identify unhealthy behavior patterns you may see as you review your list.

Creative Exercise: What does sobriety look/feel like to me? For this exercise, you can use paper and watercolors, crayons, or colored pencils. Through drawings, words, or paragraphs, visualize and describe what you look like and what your life looks like when you are emotionally sober, behaving in healthy ways, and living in peace.

Creating your individual sobriety circles

When you're satisfied that your list is complete, at least for today, prioritize your list into 3 categories. Mark with an A the behaviors that you find most harmful and prevalent. B are those behaviors that you don't like to do, and C are the least harmful. While we are using the sobriety circles example, you may wish to use the red, yellow, and green light behaviors instead.

[Note: Blank circles will be provided here]

Inner circle

Starting with category A, choose 3 or 4 behaviors that interfere the most with your serenity and on which you feel ready to focus. Using a red pen, write these behaviors in the inner circle of your sobriety circles diagram. Consider only behaviors. The place for unwanted feelings will be your middle circle.

Once created, this circle will, in fact, be your individual sobriety definition! It is small to enable your sobriety definition to be specific, measurable, and attainable.

Middle circle

Middle circle behaviors, feelings, or triggers are those that often cause you to experience a loss of sobriety and behave in the inner red circle. To identify them, begin by writing each of your inner circle behaviors in the table below using a red pen. Next, for each red behavior, write in blue or black ink what you notice happens *before* you take that red circle action. When are you triggered to act like this? Importantly, what emotions and feelings do you experience right before the behavior?

Take your time with this. Perhaps you would like to take a few days to be an observer. Pay attention to situations when you are starting to experience a red circle behavior. What is happening around you? What do you see? What do you hear? How are you feeling?

My Inner Circle Behaviors*	What happens <i>before</i> this behavior? What causes it?

** other tables and circles will be included in the final Workbook*

Now in the middle section of your sobriety circle, write these behaviors, thoughts, situations, and emotions that tend to result in inner circle behaviors. Use an orange or yellow pen or highlighter for your middle circle.

Outer circle

What brings you joy? Start by making a list of all of your favorite activities. What do you love doing? What activities do you find soothing and that bring you peace? If you're feeling stuck, consider things you enjoy doing that engage your five senses. A gratitude practice may help with this as well. As you go throughout your day, pay attention to all you do that calms you or brings you happiness, even if it is fleeting or slight.

What types of healthy coping mechanisms have you learned in your Step work and from sharing with other COSAs, which can redirect you away from your inner circle behaviors? What types of activities reinforce your sobriety?

Now write these joyful, helpful things using green in the outer area of your sobriety circle. Keep in mind that the outer circle should include a myriad of options for your self-care. It is the biggest circle for that reason. The actions in the green outer circle keep you peaceful, composed, and sober.

Sobriety Prayer Exercise: Finally, write your own prayer asking your Higher Power to help you discontinue your red circle behaviors and move toward your green ones.

Maintaining your Sobriety

Reviewing your circles

What steps can you take to regularly review your circles? Consider taking a picture of your completed circles with your phone so they're easily accessible, or carry your circles with you in your wallet, or display them on your fridge. Early in recovery, especially if you feel mentally scattered, it can be very helpful to have your healthy green outer circle coping mechanisms with you, so that you can read them and remind/redirect yourself in difficult moments.

Your circles can also be treated as a living document so that you can regularly add to or change them. You can redo this exercise as needed. Over time, it can be incredibly helpful to recognize your progress in your recovery.

A Living Document

After you've worked for a while on putting your circles into action, notice: Which inner circle behaviors have been the easiest to shed or replace? Which ones have been more difficult?

Are you ready to move some of your Category B behaviors into the inner sobriety circle? Category C behaviors?

Continuing to develop your understanding of your healthy behaviors

How can you continue to focus on yourself and let others manage their own pain and their own recovery?

What cues can you look for to indicate that you're losing focus on your own care?

Have you identified new outer circle behaviors that help keep you sober?

Diagramming Exercise: Draw a chart or diagram, or create a spreadsheet of your unhealthy behaviors, marking their origins, how they helped carry you, and the difficulties into which they led you. Contrast this with how you now behave, or seek to behave, in sobriety. Meditate on how these new replacement behaviors and awareness have reduced the unmanageability in your life.

Your individual maintenance plan

Write a maintenance plan for yourself, including both short-term and long-term strategies. Be as detailed as possible, and include ideas that are attainable for you and that fit into your recovery and your life. Some ideas to consider are using prayer, affirming your feelings, self-awareness, regularly reviewing your circles, reaching out to other COSAs, or partnering with another COSA for accountability.

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