

What is Sex Addiction?

Sex addiction is defined as any sexually-related, compulsive behaviour that a person feels unable to stop, despite the often severe consequences in their everyday life.

From experience we can tell you that it is a compulsive behaviour that came to dominate our lives. We made sex a priority more important than family, friends, and work. Sex became the organising principle - we were often willing to sacrifice what we cherished most in order to preserve and continue our habit.

No single behaviour pattern defines sex addiction. Rather sex addiction can include any number of behaviours which, as time passes, become unmanageable and control our lives. These include: obsessive fantasy, compulsive masturbation, compulsive heterosexual and homosexual relationships, pornography, prostitution, exhibitionism, voyeurism, sex work, indecent phone calls, child molestation, incest, rape and violence. In our experience even the healthiest forms of sexual expression can turn into self-defeating, addictive behaviours.

What are the characteristics of a sex addict?

Like an alcoholic unable to stop drinking, sex addicts are unable to stop their self-destructive sexual behaviour. Family breakups, sexual diseases and other health consequences, financial disaster, loss of jobs, and risk to life are often the painful themes of our stories.

We come from all walks of life. We are men and women - young and old - gay and straight - of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Some of us feel we were abused as children - sexually, physically, and/or emotionally. Many of us report growing up in families in which addiction already flourished, including alcoholism, compulsive eating, and compulsive gambling. Many of us grapple with other addictions too, like drugs, alcohol, eating disorders, compulsive gambling, compulsive working, etc.

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What symptoms does Sex Addiction have?

Sex addiction is different from generally high libido in two important and defining ways:

1. A pattern of out-of-control sexual behaviour ("acting out") eg:

- Compulsive masturbation
- Indulging in pornography
- Having chronic affairs
- Exhibitionism
- Dangerous sexual practices
- Prostitution
- Anonymous sex
- Compulsive sexual episodes
- Compulsive use of internet, chat, dating sites etc. to make sexual connections
- Voyeurism

2. Experiencing severe consequences due to sexual behaviour, and an inability to stop despite these adverse consequences:

- Loss of partner or spouse
- Severe marital or relationship problems
- Loss of career opportunities
- Unwanted pregnancies / Abortions
- Suicidal obsession / attempts
- Exposure to AIDS and STDs
- Legal risks

In other words, once we start we cannot stop - and despite often dire consequences, we find that we cannot stop starting. This addictive formula has led many of us into a combination of denial, despair and desperation.

Apart from these two defining characteristics, many of us also experienced:

- A persistent pursuit of self-destructive behaviour
- An obsessive ongoing desire or effort to limit sexual behaviour (despite repeated failures to do so)
- Sexual obsession and fantasy as a primary coping strategy
- Escalation of the type and amount of sexual behaviour because the current Level of activity is no longer sufficiently satisfying
- Severe mood changes related to sexual activity
- Inordinate amounts of time spent obtaining sex, being sexual, and recovering from sexual experiences
- Neglect of important social, occupational, or recreational activities because of sexual behaviour

Fortunately there is now a quick and simple self-assessment for people to take when they think they might be a sex addict. This test is found at the back of this leaflet, and at www.saa-recovery.org. Please feel free to direct your patients to this test if you feel it is appropriate and might help them.

What can SAA offer?

Sex Addicts Anonymous UK (SAA UK) is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other for the purpose of finding freedom from addictive sexual behaviour and helping others recover from sex addiction. Our programme is based on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, though we are not affiliated with AA or any other organisation.

Our local meetings offer an accepting, non-threatening environment where we can share our common struggles and learn how to apply the principles of the Twelve Steps to our everyday lives. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behaviour. There are no fees or dues.

We practise strict anonymity and confidentiality, so that our meetings are a safe place for all of us. Whom we meet or what is said in a meeting is confidential and is not normally disclosed or discussed with anyone else.

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Am I a sex addict?

You may find these helpful as a method of self-assessment. If you answer 1 or more questions "yes", then you may have an issue:

1. Do you keep secrets about your sexual or romantic activities from those important to you? Do you lead a double life?
2. Have your needs driven you to have sex in places or situations or with people you would not normally choose?
3. Do you find yourself looking for sexually arousing articles or scenes in newspapers, magazines or other media?
4. Do you find that romantic or sexual fantasies interfere with your relationships or are preventing you from facing problems?
5. Do you frequently want to get away from a sex partner after having sex? Do you frequently feel remorse, shame or guilt after a sexual encounter?
6. Do you feel shame about your body or your sexuality, such that you avoid touching your body or engaging in sexual relationships? Do you fear that you have no sexual feelings, that you are asexual?
7. Does each new relationship continue to have the same destructive patterns which prompted you to leave the last relationship?
8. Is it taking more variety and frequency of sexual and romantic activities than previously to be brought to the same levels of excitement and relief?
9. Have you been arrested or are you in danger of being arrested because of your practices of voyeurism, exhibitionism, prostitution, sex with minors, indecent phone calls etc.?
10. Does your pursuit of sex or romantic relationships interfere with your spiritual beliefs or development?
11. Do your sexual activities include the risk, threat, or reality of disease, unwanted pregnancy, coercion, or violence?
12. Has your sexual or romantic behaviour ever left you feeling hopeless, alienated from others, or suicidal?

What you can do?

Sex Addicts Anonymous UK is free, non-judgemental, and based on an approach that has helped millions of addicts worldwide. We welcome approaches from professionals and addicts alike, and will offer whatever help is needed to make SAA UK a safe and welcoming place for anyone who thinks they might be a sex addict.

If you think someone might be suffering from a pattern of addictive sexual behaviour, please don't hesitate to contact us by any of the methods described below:

Call us on:
0784 310 8302

This is a confidential message line checked by members of the group. You should normally receive a call back, if requested, within 24-48 hours (women who call may ask to speak to another woman)

Email us at:
info@saa-recovery.org.uk

Newcomers are welcome at any SAA meeting.

www.saa-recovery.org.uk

The views expressed in this pamphlet are those of the UK Intergroup of Sex Addicts Anonymous and do not necessarily represent those of Sex Addicts Anonymous as a whole.

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UNDERSTANDING SEX ADDICTION A GUIDE FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS