

The First Step Inventory

See...
Confess...
Send Away



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A word of caution: We should never confuse this inventory with the First Step experience itself. One can give an honest and telling First Step inventory without ever having experienced the First Step and thus block entrance into the entire program. No First Step inventory can ever take the place of the intuitive in-depth admission of one's powerlessness over lust and the unmanageability of one's life; ideally, the inventory should help confirm this. It is provided here as a convenience to those groups and members doing such an inventory. It is suggested that Step One in the book *Sexaholics Anonymous* be read prior to such an exercise.

The First Step Inventory is our sexual inventory; it consists of writing out our sexual and lust history and then giving it first to the sponsor, and then to the group. Its purpose is threefold: to see, confess, and send away.

In the written review of our past we face ourselves as we really are. The words, "I am a sexaholic, powerless over lust" come out of this insight. Bringing what we are to the light keeps us from hiding what we are and becomes the act of putting it all behind us and sending it away.

The essence of doing a written and spoken First Step is that we want to be done with our sexual wrongs and lust and give up our "right" to them, accountably with others. Mere catharsis or honest self-disclosure miss the mark if that's all it is. The aim is to bring our misdeeds and thoughts to the light so we can be done with them. In a very real sense, we send them away by bringing them

into the light of others. When done from such an attitude, the First Step can become a decisive spiritual experience.

The idea is to look fearlessly at the whole of our lust, fantasy, sex, and relationship history from the very beginning to face who and what we really are, detect the destructive patterns of thinking and behavior, and see the powerlessness and unmanageability of our lives. Indeed, by means of such an effort, some may conclude they are either not sexaholics or have no compelling need or desire to work the program.

There are certain implied prerequisites before one sets about writing and then giving their First Step to their SA sponsor or group. First, the person should be a regular participant in the SA fellowship over a long enough period of time to ensure his or her own commitment to sexual sobriety. Secondly, the person should do it with the guidance and support of an SA sponsor or friend who has already been through it. And thirdly, the person should have established a friendly connection with at least a few other SA members in the group for additional support.

Some prefer to make notes; others write their First Step in narrative fashion, as though telling a story. Whatever the format, we suggest that you simply jot down each key incident bearing upon your sexual/lust history from first to last. Where applicable, you may also want to describe how you felt at the time and ask what it tells you about yourself. This might even be done in chart form. Rather than suggesting that the inventory be cast in a certain format, however, we encourage individuals to use the technique that works best for them. Preferably,

members will have witnessed at least one other First Step given before the group before they give their own so they know what to expect.

We start at the very beginning, as far back as we can remember any incidents bearing on our sexual thinking or experience. We avoid explicit sexual descriptions that may provide triggers for us or others. Rather than trying to do a perfect job, which we can never do, we just sit down and have at it. The idea is to get the sweep of the whole history down on paper so we can see it emerge before our very eyes and have it in a form we can give orally to the group. A First Step well prepared has the value of a good final exam; it pulls the details together into an integrated picture; we see and learn as we write. And what a relief to get the “final” over with at the beginning of the course!

We describe our inner sexual thought life as well as our sexual acting out, use of the media, dependency relationships, use of the tease and eliciting lust in others, etc. We don’t psychoanalyze; we simply state the facts, what we thought and did. Trying to figure out *why* we did it never gave us power over it.

If you find you are blocked on the past, there’s no sense trying to force it; willingness to face and surrender it should come with continued sobriety. If you find you cannot do it without erotic arousal, something is wrong. Better to shelve it and look forward to the time when you are free to do it in a different spirit. In such a case, the aborted attempt has already told you something about your attitude that needs more surrender.

With some of us, the First Step inventory came out gradually in the course of time as we became more aware of what we were and what we had done and were increasingly willing to give it up. Never-

theless, a First Step experience before sponsor and group can have great value.

Giving The First Step

We will want to discuss our First Step with our sponsor before giving it to the group. When we are finally ready, we let the group secretary know in advance so it can be scheduled and announced.

We try to avoid letting the person descend into erotic detail in relating sexual experiences. If the person is where he or she should be, they are turning away from and releasing, rather than merely reliving those experiences.

A First Step may run the better part of an entire meeting, depending on its length and amount of group feedback afterward. It is suggested that members giving their First Step be allowed to do so without interruption, yet under the guidance of the leader. The person is thus free *to tell their story* however they may, even if it comes out haltingly or doesn’t meet the expectation of others. It takes time for some to warm up to their story. Listening members indicate by a quiet raising of the hand if the subject matter becomes too provocative or gets too far off track.

Group Feedback

The purpose of feedback from listening members is to help the individual see patterns of thinking and acting-out they may have missed, question them on various points, challenge their desire for sobriety or honesty, “play back” their attitude toward their own illness and readiness to work the program, and help them avoid such pitfalls as rationalization, self-pity, blaming others, and getting too analytical. The objective of feedback is for the group to *assess the basic question of whether the*

person is a sexaholic and whether he or she really wants sobriety.

Members should listen to see how pertinent questions are answered, which they or the leader can raise during the evaluation period which follows. The one overriding criterion by which the First Step should be judged by the group is, Does it feel like the person is putting this way of thinking and acting behind them?

1. What does your First Step tell you about yourself?
2. Do you think you are addicted? To what? How do you know?
3. Are you powerless over your thinking and acting-out?
4. Have you shown us how your thoughts and activity are affected? Is your life unmanageable? In what way?
5. Do you want to stop? What? Why?
6. What does all this tell you about what must happen if you are to recover?
7. Will you turn to God now?

When done from identification and love, such feedback can be very helpful to the person in revealing blind spots and unhealthy attitudes and tendencies. It is like holding up advance warning signals from the road ahead and can accelerate recovery. If done from any other motives, feedback can be destructive. This is another reason why the

individual should have some time in the group and should have established close ties with at least a few other members.

If writing out the First Step is of great value to the individual, giving it to the group can benefit the group as well. We always see ourselves more clearly when the perspective is broadened by hearing another’s story, especially the full account, even if that person’s habit is different than ours. Also, just being there and listening is a gift to the other person.

Every time we tell our story in meetings thereafter, we will be putting the pieces together better. This voluntary and spontaneous self-appraisal, one of the hallmarks of the Twelve Step program, becomes an ongoing process.

Every group should have the benefit of hearing the full First Step of each of its members. However, we’re still in the learning process in all of this. Some members have used the First Step Inventory *process* to deal with matters other than their sexual past—current lust, resentment, fear, or dependency, for example.

The First Step inventory can be the beginning of a lifelong ability to increasingly face ourselves, know ourselves, walk in the light, take responsibility for our own recovery, and give of ourselves to others. And it can help prepare us for doing our Fourth and Fifth Step moral inventory on the other aspects of our lives. It can thus be a breakthrough in beginning to see the truth about ourselves, a most important aspect of our recovery. Until we can write it out fully, we apparently cannot see or face our past or present; until we give it away to others, we aren’t fully willing to give it up to God and be free.

Send Away....