



Sexual Issues Relapse Prevention Plan Outline

David A Goldfoot, PhD

© 2006-2010 MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Revised February 10, 2010

Why Work So Hard?

Completing this plan and using it in your daily life is very likely your key to future success. This is a plan meant to be written about and followed, with frequent updates as you end sexual compulsions and improve your overall life choices and rewards. Make sure you don't just read through this plan. WRITE your plan, READ your plan, MODIFY your plan as you learn more about yourself and WORK your plan every day.

Why work so hard? Because not much else out there results in success for such difficult problems. There is nothing easy about ending patterns of behavior that are connected to the feelings of sexual release. You are up against a challenge at least as difficult as breaking a substance addiction such as cocaine. That's why.

1. CLARIFYING YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT ENDING A SEXUAL ADDICTION OR COMPULSION

1a. MISSION STATEMENT

In a short paragraph, summarize how you wish to live your life. What kind of a person do you want to be? What kind of lifestyle are you working to attain? Make sure this statement reflects the problem you are addressing.

Mission Statement:

1b. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

What specific sexual problem(s) is this plan addressing? Be completely forthcoming and detailed. Example: "I am using Internet pornography and chat rooms for sexual release while avoiding sex with my wife. I have tried to stop because I see how this is ruining my marriage, but I can't get control of myself."

Problem(s):

1c. FEELINGS OF ACTING OUT

Can you explain in detail what your feelings were before, during and after an episode of acting out sexually in an inappropriate manner? Was there excitement, anticipation? Was there shame afterwards? Describe in detail each phase of your feelings, starting from the time an hour or more BEFORE you did anything wrong right thru an hour or two AFTER you had acted out.

Feelings: (Before, during, after)

1d. ADDRESSING ROADBLOCKS TO CHANGE

Does it feel to you that you have been asked (unfairly) to give up something that is a significant pleasure in your life? The vast majority of individuals with a significant "addiction" to sexual problems hate the thought of stopping. What are you going to do about that? Are you afraid that nothing can take the place of this activity? How can you represent the ending of this activity not as a loss but as a gain? Why will ending this addiction be a positive to you instead of a terrible loss?

Roadblock(s):

1e. SINCERITY.

It's not too hard to agree to things that later are so difficult to resist. Here's a last stop on your pre-flight list -- can you REALLY stick to what you say you are going to do? Do you know what is truly at risk if you abandon this effort? Have you been here before? What makes this recovery attempt different than the last one?

Sincerity:

Why is this time different than earlier promises?:

2. DAMAGE CONTROL

If you are in a marriage or a relationship, your sexual conduct outside of the relationship has most likely caused serious harm to your partner. It is almost always the case that your partner feels betrayed, feels disrespected, and is painfully confused as to why you would turn to other sexual activity. It is also very likely that your partner feels very angry towards you, is considering ending the relationship or already has ended the relationship. Your partner also is outraged that you had a secret sexual life and that you have been lying to her. Your partner now has no idea if you are telling the truth or can be trusted in the future. What can you possibly do to re-establish trust? Perhaps it is too late. Clearly, just saying you are sorry doesn't come close to fixing things. It will take a long time to put things back together and you owe your partner a lot. Here are some steps that help, however:

2a. STOP THE HURT

They say that if you want to get out of a deep hole, the first thing to do is stop digging. Completely stop lying. Stop acting out. Find a therapist, get into a group support program such as SAA. Don't panic but also don't make promises that are impossible to keep. Do not be defensive and do not project blame to your partner. Destroy your stash completely, end all internet usage, stop communication with any person with whom you have had extra-relational sexual or intimate contact. Don't be half way about any of this or the hurt goes further. Cancel the credit card she doesn't know about. Show your partner the list and see if s/he wants more.

Stop the hurt actions I am taking:

1) Destroy all porn including my favorite hidden collection of DVDs.

2b. MAKE AMENDS

What steps can you take to make amends without causing more harm? Maybe your circumstances might prevent you from having contact with the one(s) you hurt. Nonetheless, are there steps to take to make amends?

Consider what goes into a 1 plan of making amends:

1. Acknowledging fully your wrongdoing
2. Expressing Empathy in your apology
3. NOT asking for the person to forgive you
4. Offering to compensate the person in any capacity
5. Identifying a plan so that no repeat of the offensive behavior occurs again

My Making Amends Plan:

2c. THERAPY AND SELF_HELP GROUPS

1. If not already there, get into therapy. Work with a therapist who has training in relapse prevention but also get a full diagnosis. Are you depressed, do you have a personality disorder, are you bipolar. Get all the help you need. Don't balk. You can't help the situation if you don't fix yourself.
2. Join a self-help group such as SAA (see appendix for information). If you are embarrassed or think "I'm not like those guys", well, get over it! You need this!
3. After you are having success in your own therapy and you've achieved honesty, ask your partner to go to couples counseling with you. The relationship is a mess and you aren't going to have success without help in communication, trust building, and an eventual return to intimacy.

My Therapy and Self Help Plans:

2d. STRUCTURE YOUR CONTINUED ACTION PLAN

OK, you've followed through so far. Now, what can you do DAILY, WEEKLY, MONTHLY to increase your chances of truly remaining free of the sexual compulsion(s) that has resulted in so much hurt? Make another list here of daily and weekly activities that will keep this going. Examples: On a daily basis, re-read your Mission Statement on page 1. Continue with this relapse plan so that you understand, on a daily basis, how to avoid high risk factors, how to keep from using cognitive distortions, and how to employ the one-look rule. Add routines to your life to break away from "dead" time and have more meaningful activities as a part of your daily routine. Make a long list of activities. On a WEEKLY Basis, attend a support group, have a check-in with your partner about your moods, close calls or lapses. Communicate. Keep working on the items in this Relapse Prevention Plan at least weekly!

My Continued Daily Action Plan:

My Weekly Action Plan:

2e. CONSTRUCT A FULL DISCLOSURE DOCUMENT

You are probably not going to like this, but it is time to be totally honest. Part of true recovery is to have a clear idea for yourself and for your partner just what kinds of problems you have been in sexually, not just now, but historically. Write an autobiography from the point of sexual milestones in your development that you can use in therapy and in conversations with your partner. You might want to discuss this in a "Disclosure session" in therapy with a therapist and your partner, or you might decide to try it on your own -- just you and your partner. It might end the relationship, no question about it. It might also result in full and complete honesty that can be used to re-build a relationship that was up till now perched on a lot of half-truths, lies, and deception. One way or another, it is better to come clean rather than to just dribble out pieces of the problem a little at a time. Don't believe me? Ask John Edwards, Bill Clinton, Tiger Woods ...

Outline of Major Sexual Events in my life (write a full history on separate sheets of paper -- just start the outline here):

1. Parents Attitude towards nudity, sex, etc.
2. First knowledge of sex, reproduction, seeing another naked person, etc.
3. First exposure to Porn
4. Abuse situations subjected to in childhood

Continue with outline -- first date, makeout, sexual touching, intercourse, first time cheating, etc. etc.

3. LEARNING THE TOOLS:

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BEAT A SEXUAL ADDICTION WHEN YOU FEEL URGES OR WHEN YOU WANT TO THROW IN THE TOWEL

3a. HIGH RISK FACTORS

A High Risk Factor (HRF) is anything that you see or feel that increases the likelihood of generating urges to act out. Identify your High Risk Factors (external circumstances and internal feelings, listed separately on the left column). Then, identify how you will escape, avoid, or minimize each of the HRFs listed. (Use the right column to address each HRF you have listed.)

EXTERNAL HIGH RISK FACTOR	ACTION TO AVOID, ESCAPE, MINIMIZE
Being alone and having access to porn sites.	Install a porn filter that I can't defeat. Have a job list of things to do.
INTERNAL HIGH RISK FACTOR	ACTION TO AVOID, ESCAPE, MINIMIZE
Feeling bored or restless.	Jog, shoot baskets, do push-ups, call a friend.

3b. COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Being in a high-risk situation is not sufficient to explain acting out. You still have to give yourself permission to do so. The permission is usually in the form of a thought or excuse that we call a cognitive distortion. Identify common cognitive distortions ("Self bullshit"; rationalizations). Write the counter-statement that reveals the CD as wrong. Example:

COGNITIVE DISTORTION	COUNTER-STATEMENT
This will be my very last time.	Yeah, right. I've said that hundreds of times and look where it's got me. The last time was the last time.

3c. DISRUPTIVE IMAGERY

List particular images or fantasies that occur during the day or prior to acting out that are acting as visual cognitive distortions or high risk factors. List Counter strategies to escape, avoid, or minimize the disruptive imagery. Experiment with distractions, with blinking hard, with substitute imagery, etc.

VISUAL IMAGE OR FANTASY	COUNTER STRATEGY
Sudden image of a naked porn star pops into my mind.	Blink hard, move to another room, see my wife or my kids' faces in my mind.

3d. SEEMINGLY UNIMPORTANT DECISIONS (SUDs)

There is almost never a reason to enter into a high risk situation. Sometimes, however, we can trick ourselves by “Camouflaging” our reasons for being where we shouldn’t. Giving yourself a reason to increase the risk of offending by justifying a reason for doing something that is seemingly disconnected to a conscious attempt to re-activate a trigger -- that’s a SUD.

SEEMINGLY UNIMPORTANT DECISION	COUNTER ACTION
I think I’ll go into that used bookstore to buy a gift for my buddy.	Wait, that’s the store I used all the time to buy porn - they have that section in the back. NO, I won’t go in there after all. What was I thinking?
I need a check cashed. Guess I could go to Clancy’s just down the street. They know me.	I’ve been sober for 3 months and Clancy’s is where I used to drink after work. If I go there, I’ll probably end up drunk, and then I’ll act out again. NO WAY. I can use my debit card.

3e. LAST DITCH PLAN

It is possible that you may have placed yourself in an extremely vulnerable situation and are just about to engage in the behavior you have been trying so hard to stop. YOU HAVEN'T RELAPSED UNTIL YOU ENGAGE IN THE BEHAVIOR, even if you are very close to doing so. What is a "last ditch plan" that will keep you from acting out? Be creative and even dramatic if you need to be.

EXTREME CONDITION	LAST DITCH PLAN
I went to the porn store and I bought an XXX-rated CD. It cost \$45.00!	Break it. Throw it away. Don't take it home or to the office. Think of the money you spent as a "fine" for not stopping earlier. You haven't relapsed yet, you've only "lapsed."

4. SOME IDEAS ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIOR

4a. ANCHORS TO REALITY

If your problem has to do with the Internet, you must face the extremely common observation of addicted individuals that the conversations or activities engaged in do not feel real --- everything is a game, an illusion, definitely not real. If you maintain this feeling, you will surely lose the battle of overcoming your problem. What can you do to keep focused that the internet IS REAL, that people you are contacting or viewing ARE REAL, that

Here's how I can stay anchored to reality:

4b. THE ABSTINENCE VIOLATION EFFECT

There is a HUGE difference between a Lapse and a Relapse. A Lapse is when you are just on the verge of returning to your addiction. Perhaps you have dialed the number of that phone sex number or you have entered the xxx website. You haven't relapsed yet but you are primed to do so. You are in a "LAPSE." There is now a huge sense of both excitement and defeat. You might say to yourself, "I've gone this far. It is impossible to control this. I might as well go all the way." That attitude of throwing in the towel is the Abstinence Violation Effect. DON'T GIVE IN!!! Bail out. You haven't relapsed until you have totally given into the urge!!

Examples in my life of the "Abstinence Violation Effect":

4c. RESOURCES

Record below people in your life you can turn to when you are struggling, nearing relapse, in a funk, etc. Members of your SAA group? Your therapist? A select group of friends in whom you have confided? Keep the list handy. Add to it when you can. Almost nobody succeeds without help.

NAME	HOME PHONE	BUSINESS OR CELL PHONE

5. BEHAVIOR IN THE GENERAL COMMUNITY THAT HELPS YOU STOP OVER-INVESTING IN SEXUAL FEELINGS

5a. USE OF THE ONE-LOOK RULE (3-Second rule)

Describe how you will work to acquire the ability to exercise and use the one-look rule. Train yourself to see women as people, not as sex objects. Recall, you have no permission to have a fantasy about a woman you see. Notice her and then change your thoughts without causing yourself arousal. Discuss how NOT using the one-look rule might continue the addiction if you fail to master this important step. Also, recall that "looking" is frequently connected to "looking for", or **scanning**. Don't Scan!!

How I can use the one-look rule (and not scan):

What can happen if I **don't use** the one-look rule:

5b REDUCE RISKS WHEN TRAVELING

In a strange city where you are not known, high risk factors skyrocket. You feel anonymous and therefore much less likely to be seen or recognized. If traveling by air, advertisers have targeted you for consumption of x-rated activities such as "Gentleman's Clubs" by placing their billboards near the airport. Hotels with x-rated videos, bellboys with knowledge of hookers, etc. etc. all raise decided risks for you. How will you avoid, escape from or minimize the impact of High Risk Factors when traveling?

Rules when traveling:

5c. FLIRTING AND BEING NOTICED

Are you involved in making yourself attractive to potential sexual partners/? Do you flirt even when there is no intention of taking the relationship to sexual endpoints? Identify here anything related to the "courtship" or introductions to sexual relations that you use even when you don't have specific awareness of trying to be seductive. What do you do? How does it feel when you are engaged in this activity? How can you break the pattern? HINT: If you are clearly acting differently around women (if you are straight) than men, you are engaging in this category of behavior.

5d. STOP SEDUCTIVE ACTIVITIES (If attracted to adult partners)

Many men have great difficulty feeling comfortable around women, but others love to flirt and seduce. Do you engage women in conversation and start flirting with them? Do you enjoy "how easy it is" to get sex within a short period of knowing a woman? Do you feel more masculine if you find a woman will go along with your seduction? Then you are into sex as a power trip and you are going to have a very very difficult time stopping this behavior.

How to stop being flirtatious and/or seductive:

5e. STOP GROOMING (If attracted to children)

If you are attracted to children, do you engage in activities that encourages them to trust you, to have fun with you, and which accustom them to your touch? If so, you are engaged in highly dangerous, inappropriate activity called "grooming", even though others without sexual attraction to children could engage in this behavior without risk. For you, the activity must forever be avoided.

Steps to avoid interactions with children, especially "grooming":

6. SOCIAL SKILLS AND VALUES TO DEVELOP

6a. SHYNESS/AVOIDANCE PROBLEMS?

Is social anxiety keeping you from meeting somebody who could be an appropriate sexual partner for you? Do you know steps to take to identify your thoughts, feelings, and behavior that keeps you from solving this problem? What are you going to do to fix this? Or, if you are already in an intimate relationship but you don't know how to talk to your partner to begin to address your sexual difficulties, then what will you do to begin that process? Using porn or other forms of acting out to cope with shyness is not going to solve a thing!

What steps I will take to overcome shyness/avoidance:

6b.FEAR OF COMMITMENT

Is your problem staying in a committed relationship? Do you become so focused on sex that relationships become less and less meaningful to you when the sexual excitement wears off? Have you identified core feelings such as fear of abandonment that might be operating in addition to overfocused values placed on sexual excitement?

Plans to address a fear of commitment (HINT: this is a tough one and might involve focused therapy discussions):

6c. ASSERTIVENESS DIFFICULTIES

Are you feeling that others take advantage of you because you are “walked on” by others? Alternatively, are you somehow enjoying in dominating or subjugating others either directly or indirectly? Discuss what you identify and what ideas you have about repairing this issue. Talk with your therapist if you don't know what to do. A give-away is that you “stuff” your feelings and don't know how to get them out tactfully but effectively.

Here's how I realize I'm not assertive:

Here's what I can do about it:

6d. MAINTAINING MATURITY – BEING YOUR MOST MATURE SELF

In many important ways, being mature means that you can rise to your best, delay impulses, see the big picture, and feel that masturbation and other forms of sexually acting out are immature, non-fullfilling, and sort of silly when perceived by your most mature self. Explore what that means. How do you know when you are at your most mature level of functioning? How do you maintain that state? Do you agree that being in this state works as an organizing principle where addictive or compulsive sex just doesn't make sense and is much easier to reject.

Being my most mature self:

7. MINDFULNESS - A PERSONAL SKILL TO MASTER

Mindfulness is a term used for reducing stress with mental exercises that typically involve relaxed breathing. One problem is that our emotions and our physiology are lock-stepped, so that if we are really upset, we trigger the release of adrenalin and other hormones that keep us revved up for some time. Mindfulness exercises gives us some control over this -- we can avoid the triggering of the hormones, and if we fail in that, we can reduce the intensity and duration of those physical changes. Try one or both of these exercises to learn how to get more control over temper, sexual excitement, or any strong emotion:

7a. The exercise of 5s (takes 1 minute or less!)

Take 5 breaths in and 5 breaths out, counting to 5 as you inhale and counting to 5 as you exhale, about 1 count per second. On the first exhale, relax the muscles in your scalp, face, and neck. On your second exhale, relax your shoulders, arms, chest and upper back. On the third exhale, relax your abdomen and lower back. On the 4th exhale relax the muscles in your pelvis, buttocks, and thighs. For your 5th exhale, relax your lower legs and feet. Then take a sixth inhale to bring yourself to a waking state, relaxed, alert, and calmer. Do this several times a day, first with your eyes closed while you are in a fully relaxed position. After getting pretty skilled, try it with your eyes open. It won't work quite as well, but keep at it. Then try it with yours eyes open while sitting on the edge of your chair. Then try it standing up. Finally try doing it while you are having a conversation with another person. The exercise can be used "invisibly" to keep you calm. You can use this for anger, for sexual arousal, for fear, in short for any strong emotion when it is important to stay calm and focused on the prevention of a relapse. For even better results, throughout the exercise, imagine that you are watching an object under tension become more relaxed (like a spring losing tension). If a stray thought enters your mind, let the thought be a reminder to keep "looking" at your spring so that you don't "follow" the thought. Let what you feel become what you see. The spring will move as long as you get more relaxed! Keep records of your progress using a form like the one shown here (Use a separate sheet --- figure you will make lots of entries):

Time/Date	Situation	Stress prior to use (1-100)	Stress following use (1-100)

7b. Staying in the present (A three-minute exercise)

Spend one minute breathing through your nose, thinking intensely about what it feels like to have the air pass through your nose. Notice the temperature and anything you can about the sensation. If you have other thoughts, don't "follow them", just be aware that you had them, and keep on paying attention to the sensation of breathing. Repeat the exercise for feelings in your chest and then feelings in your abdomen, spending about a minute for each body region. Keep the same log as shown above.

8. IMPROVING YOUR LIFE TO ADDRESS OTHER PROBLEMS YOU'VE NEGLECTED

In the following table you will find a list of common problems that many people need to address. We've found that individuals recovering from addictions have many of these problems. Identify those that fit and describe some personal goals you can address to begin working on these areas.

PROBLEM AREA	PLANS TO ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM
Procrastination	
Stress management	
Anger management	
Alcohol or drug issues	
Spiritual needs	
Poor relationship issues	
Poor sexual issues	
other (fill in)	

9. FILLING THE VOID: ACTIVITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS IN MY LIFE THAT I CAN PURSUE INSTEAD OF SEXUAL ADDICTIONS

How can you improve your life in meaningful ways so that you feel good about yourself and you have meaning to your life? This chart should help you get started.

BEHAVIOR TO IMPROVE UPON	PLANS TO BEGIN THIS IMPROVEMENT
Positive attitudes to develop	
Positive behavior to develop (hobbies, improved friendliness, etc.)	
Feeling competent and valuable	
Feeling appreciated	
Spiritual needs	
Developing important friendship networks	
Improving good work habits	
Taking care of my body (exercise, health, etc.)	

10. KEEPING IT GOING: MAINTAIN YOUR GOALS FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

Whenever you notice an increase in sexual urges, a slacking of the one-look rule, or other signs that you are having inappropriate sexual feelings, then ask yourself:

1. What is going on with me? What do these feelings mean? Am I not happy in life, am I disregarding high risk factors, do I not have enough general happiness in my life?
2. Am I telling people that I'm struggling? I need to check in with my therapist, spouse, support group such as SAA pronto. I can't keep this silent and expect to avoid relapse.
3. Am I being the best I can be? Am I letting my primitive self push me around?
4. What steps should I take to return to my best practices and use of this relapse prevention plan?
5. What are the CONSEQUENCES of my actions? I know people will be hurt. If I do it, it is only a matter of time before I am found out... again. Goodbye trust.
6. What are the BENEFITS to my maintaining sobriety and using positive behavior? I don't want to throw away all the good work I've done to beat this stupid addiction.
7. I can review the behavioral contract that I signed. I need to live up to that agreement.
8. What is the COGNITIVE DISTORTION I am telling myself?
9. When is my next appointment?

Appendix I

BEHAVIORAL CONTRACT

1. Having carefully considered the consequences of my unwanted behavioral pattern(s) upon others, and myself I hereby agree to work my hardest to end my cycle of acting badly. To accomplish that end, I further agree to the following:
 - a. I will use a written relapse prevention plan to identify my goals for ending the behavior
 - b. I will make a clear and detailed list of the unwanted behaviors I am targeting
 - c. I will identify rewards to grant to myself for accomplishing relapse prevention goals
 - d. I will be mindful of natural negative consequences that occur if I do not achieve or maintain my goals
 - e. I will introduce my own negative consequences in addition to natural consequences to further help myself with the achievement and maintenance of a life without unwanted behavior.
 - f. I will install and not defeat an Internet filtering device so that I cannot readily access pornographic material.
 - g. I will develop specific ways in which my appropriate and inappropriate behavior can be monitored. This may include self-report, the use of monitoring equipment on my computer, the opinion of my spouse, significant other or friend who will assist me in my recovery, and by honest and forthright reports to my counselor if I am in therapy.
2. This contract will be reviewed at regular intervals through appointments with my counselor, briefings with my spouse or community team, membership in a support group, or other means, as specified in my relapse prevention plan.
3. If I experience a relapse, I agree to report this situation to my therapist, my support team, etc. within 24 hrs and will follow recommendations developed in my relapse prevention plan for regaining control.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Witnessed: _____

APPENDIX II RESOURCES

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED AIDS TO MAINTAIN PROGRESS

Computer Filter to block porn:

There are over 200 products on the market to help you stay away from sexual sites and porn on the internet. For a review of products, try <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/>. Two of our favorites are listed below:

<http://www.bsecure.com>

or

<http://www.internetsafety.com/> (Safe Eyes).

Recommended Readings:

Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction, Carnes, Patrick, 2001, Hazelden

In the Shadow of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior, Carnes, Patrick, Delmonico, David, Griffin, Elizabeth, 2001, Hazelden

After the Affair, Janis Abrahms Spring, Harper Perennial, 1996

Reinventing Your Life, Young, Jeffrey & Klosko, Janet, 1994, Plume.

Hope & Freedom for Sexual Addicts and Their Partners, Magness, M.S., 2009, Gentle Path Press

Sex Addicts Anonymous

<http://www.sexaa.org/>

Therapies to pursue:

1. Relapse Prevention Therapy
2. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
3. Schema Therapy
4. Mindfulness
5. A group for support such as SAA or a group sponsored by your place of worship
6. Couples counseling