

# RECOVERY ACTION PLAN FOR THE SPOUSE

An action plan is a document that lists what steps must be taken in order to achieve a specific goal. Benjamin Franklin once said, “If you **fail to plan**, you are **planning to fail**.” The *Recovery Action Plan* is a valuable tool for anyone wanting to take a proactive approach to their recovery and their relationships.

Your *Recovery Action Plan* will be a resource you can use to identify reasonable and necessary steps to take in response to a [relapse](#) by your spouse. Before joining a Pure Desire group, sexual acting out was a way of medicating pain. Now, as your spouse learns to walk in [sobriety](#), the *Recovery Action Plan* will give you and your spouse a new tool to help transform [addictive behaviors](#) and the healthy response to those behaviors in your marriage.

The goal is to re-establish trust and implement actions that need to be taken in order to process the relapse and [trauma](#) in a positive, intentional manner. Group leaders report less relapse and a higher rate of sobriety among members who have developed a *Recovery Action Plan*. This approach encourages the group member—and the spouse, when possible—to identify natural and logical consequences if a relapse occurs. Natural consequences are the inevitable result of the addict’s own actions. Logical consequences happen as a result of the addict’s actions, but are imposed by the spouse or the addict themselves. These consequences are not meant to be punitive. Rather, they are designed to help you, as a spouse:

- 1 feel safe and learn to respond, rather than react to the relapse;
- 2 recognize that your spouse is taking concrete steps toward recovery; and
- 3 rebuild trust and intimacy in your marriage.

**Keep in mind:** Develop a *Recovery Action Plan* for **yourself**. If your spouse gets to the point in recovery where they have created their own *Recovery Action Plan*, combine your *Recovery Action Plan* with theirs. Schedule a good time to talk, when you both share your plan with each other in a non-reactive way. Communicating your *Recovery Action Plan* to your spouse will help you find your voice and share honestly how your spouse’s behavior affects you.

## FOR GROUP MEMBERS WHO ARE SEPARATED OR DIVORCED

Your *Recovery Action Plan* will provide additional boundaries and direction in dealing with co-parenting, as well as establishing individual and relational health, regardless of the marriage outcome. Healing family system issues that involve sexual addiction can be painful, emotional, and especially challenging if the children have two separate homes. It is important to have clarity, support, and well-defined goals that are specific to managing a divorce or separation in a way that reduces the impact this trauma may have on you and your children.

If your situation has escalated to the point where divorce or separation is necessary, your boundaries and recovery steps will also need to be redefined, according to what the relationship is now and the desired outcome: reconciliation or divorce and co-parenting, with as little damage as possible. If your divorce is final, and you are experiencing stability and healthy boundaries, then you can use the [Three Circles Exercise](#) instead of a *Recovery Action Plan*. You can find the *Three Circles Exercise* on page 69 in the *Eight Pillars to Freedom Workbook II*, page 153 in the *Seven Pillars of Freedom Workbook*, page 282 in the *Betrayal & Beyond Workbook*, and page 78 in *Living Free*.

**Everyone** who completes a *Recovery Action Plan* should find trusted individuals to share their plan with: your group members would be the ideal place to start.

*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed!*

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV)

## CONSEQUENCES

When an addict is living a secret life, it can produce heavy amounts of shame. It is vital to the recovery process that consequences are put in place: self-imposed or otherwise. When an addict can start associating their actions with a specific consequence, it will help them weigh the outcome of their behavior and whether it's worth the risk. The pain of consequences also creates change in the [punishment/reward center of the brain](#). If the brain begins to connect painful consequences to a relapse, a person is less likely to choose that path. Consequences help an addict own the effects of their behavior rather than withdrawing, blaming, hiding, lying, getting angry, or spiraling down into the depths of shame. Consequences will help you respond to your spouse's relapse in a non-emotional way.

Pre-determined consequences, which have been discussed with wise counsel, will reduce the need for you to feel like the rescuer, or the police officer, in the situation. As painful as relapse is, having consequences decided ahead of time will allow you to fall back on your plan instead of allowing your emotions to take the wheel. After a relapse occurs, it may be tempting to bring peace to your relationship or yourself as quickly as possible. This approach is not effective for long-term health and recovery. Having consequences written out ahead of time will give you the ability to immediately take action without falling back into old patterns of "trying to make this all go away."

## NATURAL CONSEQUENCES VS. LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

### NATURAL CONSEQUENCES

A natural consequence occurs as a result of a choice, without anyone imposing it. Here are some examples of natural consequences for an addict when they relapse:

- **Trust is broken**, and my spouse feels betrayed when I act out sexually, causing them to become angry, reactive, and distant from me.
- A **relapse creates guilt or shame** in me, which makes me feel distant from others.
- Becoming absorbed in my addiction **costs me valuable time, energy, and money** that could have been invested into my family or others.

### LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

A logical consequence is a **reasonable and necessary** outcome imposed personally or by another. These are examples of logical consequences an addict might face after a relapse:

- Since I acted out after watching YouTube videos alone late at night, I will turn off all electronics after 10:30 pm and disable access to YouTube.
- My cell phone continues to be a source for viewing inappropriate images, so I will disable the Internet through my phone carrier.
- When on social media, I have flirted with others. I will close my account or only have a joint account with my spouse.

Identify behaviors or actions that would help you see your spouse's sincerity and commitment to the marriage. The *Recovery Action Plan* is designed to give you a clear picture of what you need in order to process the pain and feel free enough to move forward in intimacy. Essentially, you are creating a detailed list of actions your spouse can take in order to regain trust and re-establish intimacy. Rebuilding trust and intimacy takes intentionality and time.

**Step 1:** Identify what constitutes a relapse in your mind. When has your spouse crossed a line that requires intentional recovery? The goal is not to make your spouse perfect in every way, but to identify which behaviors, specifically, cause a fracture in your trust and intimacy.

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**Step 2:** Determine who your spouse needs to share their relapse with, and in what time frame. This typically includes a group member, a mentor or friend, and you. A good time frame is to share within 24 hours of the relapse.

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**Step 3:** Write out **natural** consequences of your spouse's behavior. [Some examples are noted after these steps.](#) Try to be clear about how their behavior impacts you.

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**Step 4:** Write out **logical** consequences connected to the behavior that would help you see that your spouse recognizes the serious nature of their actions. Again, some [examples are listed after these steps.](#)

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**Step 5:** Make a list of steps you will need to personally take in order to find health and stability, and be ready to fully engage in the relationship. [Examples are given after these steps.](#)

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**Step 6:** Describe your desired outcome for creating this plan. If you have a clear vision of how this plan will help you rebuild trust, you are more likely to follow it. The goal of a *Recovery Action Plan* is not punitive, but to keep you focused on what steps are needed to rebuild trust.

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If a relapse occurs, review your written *Recovery Action Plan* and begin to implement it immediately. When lying, blaming, hiding, and withdrawal take place after a relapse, it will only make recovery more difficult and increase the likelihood of multiple relapses. In order to encourage your spouse to come clean right away, consequences should be greater if the relapse isn't disclosed within 24 hours. Again, having measurable consequences is the key.

## REBUILDING TRUST

Rebuilding trust and intimacy takes intentionality and time. When trust is broken, it can be a long rebuilding process. It will be important for your spouse to be patient in re-establishing that trust, even while actively working on the relationship. Before full disclosure, there were probably many lies and deceptions present in your marriage. Because of this, it will be difficult for you to trust your spouse's words or your own instinct. You will need to SEE things that will help you start trusting again. You're learning how to believe behaviors and not just words. Your spouse's willingness to do the things necessary for you to feel vulnerable and safe enough to trust again is going to be the key to your marital health and reconciliation.

You are encouraged to identify behaviors or actions that would help you recognize that your spouse is sincere and committed to the marriage. The *Recovery Action Plan* is meant to give your spouse a clear picture of what you need in order to process your pain and feel free enough to move forward in intimacy. Essentially, you are giving your spouse a detailed list of things they can do in order to regain trust and re-establish intimacy. When your spouse shows that they are absolutely committed to following this plan, even without your insistence or pressure, they will begin building trust after a relapse.

The *Recovery Action Plan* is an outline that includes examples of what may be included in a plan. Additional action steps, or behaviors, may be incorporated to best meet the needs of the parties involved. When stuck or uncertain about how to proceed, consult with your group leader, pastor, or **Certified Sexual Addiction Therapist (CSAT)**.

## EXAMPLES OF NATURAL CONSEQUENCES WHEN A SPOUSE RELAPSES

**Write out your own natural consequences on a separate sheet of paper.**

- When my spouse relapses, I feel devalued, objectified, not worth fighting for, and unprotected. I no longer feel stability in our marriage.
- When my spouse relapses, my trust is broken, and I feel vulnerable and exposed. I have a difficult time discerning what is true in our marriage and if my spouse is serious about recovery and our relationship.
- When my spouse relapses, I feel emotionally disconnected from them and no longer feel secure enough to be close and intimate.
- When my spouse lies about a relapse (including delayed confession), it creates anxiety in me that causes me to wonder what else is a lie in our marriage. I begin to replay the days and months in my head, trying to figure out what signs I missed. I start to doubt my own intuition about something being “off” in our marriage.
- I compare myself to the person(s) my spouse fantasizes about and feel less attractive.
- I feel like I am not good enough.
- My spouse is contributing to an industry that is destroying society and families.
- My relationship with God is distant because of the anger and isolation I feel.
- I am not engaged with my children because my mind is preoccupied.
- I am distracted at work and become unproductive.
- I feel pain and insecurity.
- I receive less of my spouse’s energy and attention.
- I become angry and, at times, irrational in my words and treatment of my spouse.

[← Back to the Recovery Action Plan](#)

## EXAMPLES OF LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES WHEN A RELAPSE OCCURS

**These examples are tied to an action to help you understand the connection of relapse to consequences. Write out your own logical consequences on a separate sheet of paper.**

- Because I feel devalued and objectified after a relapse occurs, I will need space and time to process what happened. I will ask my spouse to sleep in another room, on the couch, or on the floor for \_\_\_\_\_ days/weeks until I can feel stability again and ready to move forward with emotional intimacy and then physical intimacy. If relapse occurs again, the number of days out of the bed will double.
- If flirting or inappropriate behavior with a coworker takes place, my spouse will agree not to travel alone with a coworker of the opposite sex. They will keep conversations to work topics only. If relapse continues to occur or if physical boundaries were crossed, then seeking other employment or moving departments will be necessary.
- If my spouse misuses social media, they will delete any triggering person from their contacts and stay off social media for one month. If they keep repeating this behavior, then they will delete their social media accounts indefinitely until they have established six months of sobriety in all areas of addiction.
- If movies are a problem, my spouse will remove their access to movies in our home. They will agree to not rent movies alone or search any movie stories, real or online.
- If my spouse views pornography on their phone, they will block Internet access on the phone for one month. If a relapse occurs on their phone again after the month is up, they will remove Internet access until sobriety has been established for a six month period.

- If they visited a strip club, my spouse will donate \$50 to an organization that rescues individuals from the sex-trafficking industry. If my spouse visits any kind of strip club or massage parlor again, the self-imposed fine will double, then triple, and so on.
- Reading romance novels triggered my spouse, so they will remove the romance novels from our home and only read literature that is good for personal growth before bed.
- If my spouse crossed physical boundaries (such as kissing or other inappropriate touching), they will immediately schedule a counseling appointment, call their group members, and sleep in a separate bedroom for at least one month.
- Within 24 hours of disclosing the relapse, my spouse will help arrange for me to have time away from the kids to process or meet with another group member.
- After a relapse, my spouse will sleep in a different room for two weeks.
- They will make an appointment with their counselor, pastor, or group leader for advice and accountability.
- My spouse will fill out a FASTER Scale daily and share it with my spouse.
- They will seek professional counseling for their addiction and childhood wounds.
- My spouse will abstain from going to massage parlors of any kind.
- They will allow access to any email or social media accounts to me or an accountability partner, at any time.
- My spouse will have no private communication (non-work-related) in any form (phone, text, instant messaging, etc.) with any person of the opposite sex, other than immediate family.
- My spouse will read healing-oriented literature about shame issues, boundaries, addiction, codependency, trauma, betrayal, and restoring trust.
- They will share with our children (age-appropriate conversation) why they are not sleeping in our bedroom.
- My spouse will install pornography-blocking software on all electronic devices.
- If relapse occurs on a non-essential electronic device (tablet, gaming system, etc.), they will lose access to that device for a specified period of time.

**If infidelity has occurred, my spouse will:**

- Immediately schedule a counseling appointment and disclose to me and their group and/or pastor.
- Agree to not contact the other person with whom they acted out, accept any contact from them, or respond to any contact from them.
- Arrange for STD testing for me and my spouse.
- Move out of our home (or stay in another room) for a minimum of \_\_\_\_ months to give me time to process the affair. At the end of that time period, we will discuss the future of our marriage, which may need to be with the support of a marriage counselor. If my spouse is still involved with the individual or has not shown commitment to our marriage, I will need to seek counseling advice and initiate a separation or divorce proceedings.
- Agree to share with our children (at an age-appropriate level) why they will no longer be living in our home/or bedroom.
- Agree to tell our close family, friends, and pastor what has happened, so I don't have to be the secret keeper or be the one to take on the responsibility of letting our family know what happened.

*All consequences should include sharing your relapse and your plan for recovery with your accountability partner and your spouse (if married). Every time a relapse occurs, the consequences should be greater than the previous time.*

## EXAMPLES OF STEPS YOU CAN TAKE FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL HEALTH

- After my spouse discloses a relapse, I will immediately call \_\_\_\_\_ from my group so that I can have a safe person with whom to process. This will help me avoid asking questions that are not useful for my healing, refrain from saying hurtful things that I can't take back, not shut down, and keep my mind from replaying the scenario or feeling bad about myself.
- After my spouse discloses a relapse, I will pray and journal about my feelings.
- I will share with my group and tell them about the logical consequences I will implement from my *Recovery Action Plan* in order to make sure I allow myself time to process the pain without rushing in too quickly just to "keep the peace."
- Within 24 hours of disclosing the relapse, my spouse will help arrange for me to have time away from the kids to process or meet with another group member.

## ACTION PLAN IF SEPARATION OR DIVORCE IS NECESSARY

As you create this separation/divorce plan, incorporate any steps that are applicable from above. This plan should be used **in addition** to what you have already created.

### **Create a list of items/documents you would need to bring if leaving the house becomes necessary:**

- Social Security Cards and birth certificates
- Driver's license and registration
- Insurance papers
- Medication
- Sentimental items
- School records

### **Action steps to secure support on the job and in public:**

- Inform my boss and coworkers about my situation.
- Shop at different stores and at different hours than my spouse.

### **Action steps to seek support and clinical help for children to process trauma:**

- Make an appointment with a family counselor.
- Ask trusted family or friends to come over to help with the kids on counseling days, court days, or other days that may be challenging for me.
- Sign up for parenting classes that deal with separation or divorce.

### **Create healthy boundaries regarding your spouse/ex-spouse and a Recovery Action Plan if those boundaries are crossed.**

- Since relapse, my spouse and I have been living separately for 90 days while we process and rebuild trust through counseling. My spouse came inside after dropping me off at home, and we were intimate. I realize I rushed physical intimacy before regaining emotional intimacy and trust. Now I feel anxious and used again. My children are confused about us being back and forth. We will now ride separately to counseling and not be in each other's houses at night, so we can work on building trust and intimacy at a healthy pace for both of us.
- I found out that my ex-spouse was out on a date. I was so hurt and angry that I shared those details and talked negatively about my ex-spouse to our children. Next time I am hurt by their actions, I will call \_\_\_\_\_ from my group to process my feelings.
- The last time I met with my ex-spouse, to drop off the kids, we got into a verbal fight and called each other names in front of the kids. I will work out a plan with my ex-spouse to meet at a location of a mutual friend or family member's house until we can be around each other without reacting emotionally.

- I stay up late looking at my spouse's social media account to try to figure out what they are doing, but then I am irritable and angry with the children the next day. I will delete my social media account until I've regained stability and have processed my pain.

## ACTION STEPS IF A RESTRAINING ORDER IS NEEDED

Some sexual addictions co-exist with physical violence or threats. Addicts may or may not obey restraining orders. Recognize that you may need to ask the police and the court to enforce your restraining order.

### **I can use some or all of the following strategies to help the enforcement of my restraining order:**

- Call the police if my spouse tries to contact me.
- Change the locks on my home residence.
- Keep my restraining order at \_\_\_\_\_ (safe location) and ALWAYS ON OR NEAR MY PERSON.
- I will give my restraining order to the police department in the communities that I normally visit and the community where I live (including foreign countries that I travel to).
- I will inform my employer, pastor, trusted neighbor, and closest friend that I have a restraining order.
- If my spouse violated the restraining order, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, my accountability partner, and/or advise the court of the violation.
- If the police do not help, I can contact my attorney and file a complaint with the chief of police.
- I can also file a private criminal complaint with the district court in the jurisdiction where the violation occurred or with the district attorney. I can charge my spouse with a violation of the restraining order and all the crimes that they commit in violating the order. I can call my attorney or \_\_\_\_\_ to help me with this.
- I can take a self-protection or self-defense class.

 **Back to the Recovery Action Plan**

## GLOSSARY

**Addictive Behaviors:** Behaviors that are compulsive, causing harm to the individual or others, and persistent despite negative consequences.

**Punishment/Reward Center of the Brain:** Found in the limbic system, where the neurons are highly responsive to dopamine; the reward pathway includes the VTA (ventral tegmental area), the nucleus accumbens, the amygdala, and the prefrontal cortex. This very complex area of the brain is instrumental in the addictive process. When a reward follows a behavior, the behavior is reinforced and more likely to be repeated in the future. When punishment follows a behavior, it is less likely to be repeated in the future.

**Relapse:** Returning to unhealthy, out-of-control behaviors that violate my commitment to change, after an apparent period of recovery.

**Sobriety:** Living life without unhealthy coping behaviors; maintaining healthy behaviors that support my commitment to change, self-control, and connection.

**Three Circles Exercise:** Used to identify behaviors, attitudes, and actions that lead to relapse and the interventions necessary to avoid relapse.

- *The Inner Circle:* Behaviors, attitudes, and actions of which you are addicted and must abstain; they always end in relapse.
- *The Middle Circle:* Behaviors, attitudes, and actions that perpetuate addiction and lead to relapse.
- *The Outer Circle:* Behaviors, attitudes, and actions that help to maintain sobriety and bring peace of mind, meaning, and connection.

**Trauma:** The emotional response to an experience, past or present, that produces physical, physiological, or psychological pain.

 [Back to the Recovery Action Plan](#)