

## Defining Abstinence, Risk Factors, and Healthy Options Three Circles of Sex Addicts Anonymous

Sex addiction is a disease affecting the mind, body, and spirit. It is progressive, with the behavior and its consequences usually becoming more severe over time. We experience it as compulsion, which is an urge that is stronger than our will to resist, and as obsession, which is a mental preoccupation with sexual behavior and fantasies.

In Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA), we have come to call our addictive sexual behavior acting out. SAA does not have a universal definition of abstinence.

Since different addicts suffer from different behaviors, and since our sexuality is experienced in so many different ways, it is necessary that SAA members define for themselves, with the help of their sponsors or others in recovery, which of their sexual behaviors they consider to be “acting out”

**When we look at particular sexual behaviors, it is helpful to ask ourselves a few questions:**

1. Do we find ourselves repeating behaviors that we don't want to do?
2. Does doing them make us want to do something that we know is harmful to ourselves or others?
3. Do they violate the rights of others or go against their will or permission?
4. Do we find ourselves engaging in these behaviors in times of anxiety or stress, or when dealing with unpleasant situations or emotions?
5. Are there emotional causes or consequences of our behaviors?
6. Do we notice unpleasant feelings such as anger, shame, or depression, before we do them?
7. Do we feel shameful, depressed, remorseful, or lonely afterwards?
8. Are there other negative consequences, potential or actual?
9. Do we feel uncomfortable with the amount of time or money we spend on these behaviors?
10. Do we risk our health, relationships, families, or jobs?

To help us define out sexual sobriety, many of us use a tool developed within SAA called **The Three Circles**. We draw three concentric circles, consisting of inner, middle, and outer circle.

In the **inner circle**, we put the sexual behaviors we want to abstain from, the ones we consider 'acting out'. These are the behaviors that we identify as addictive, harmful, or unacceptable to us.

In the **middle circle**, we put behaviors that may lead to acting out, or that we are unsure about.

In the **outer circle** we put healthy behaviors that enhance our life and our recovery.

Other terms in this exercise are as follows:

Acting Out Behaviors = Inner Circle = Bottom Lines

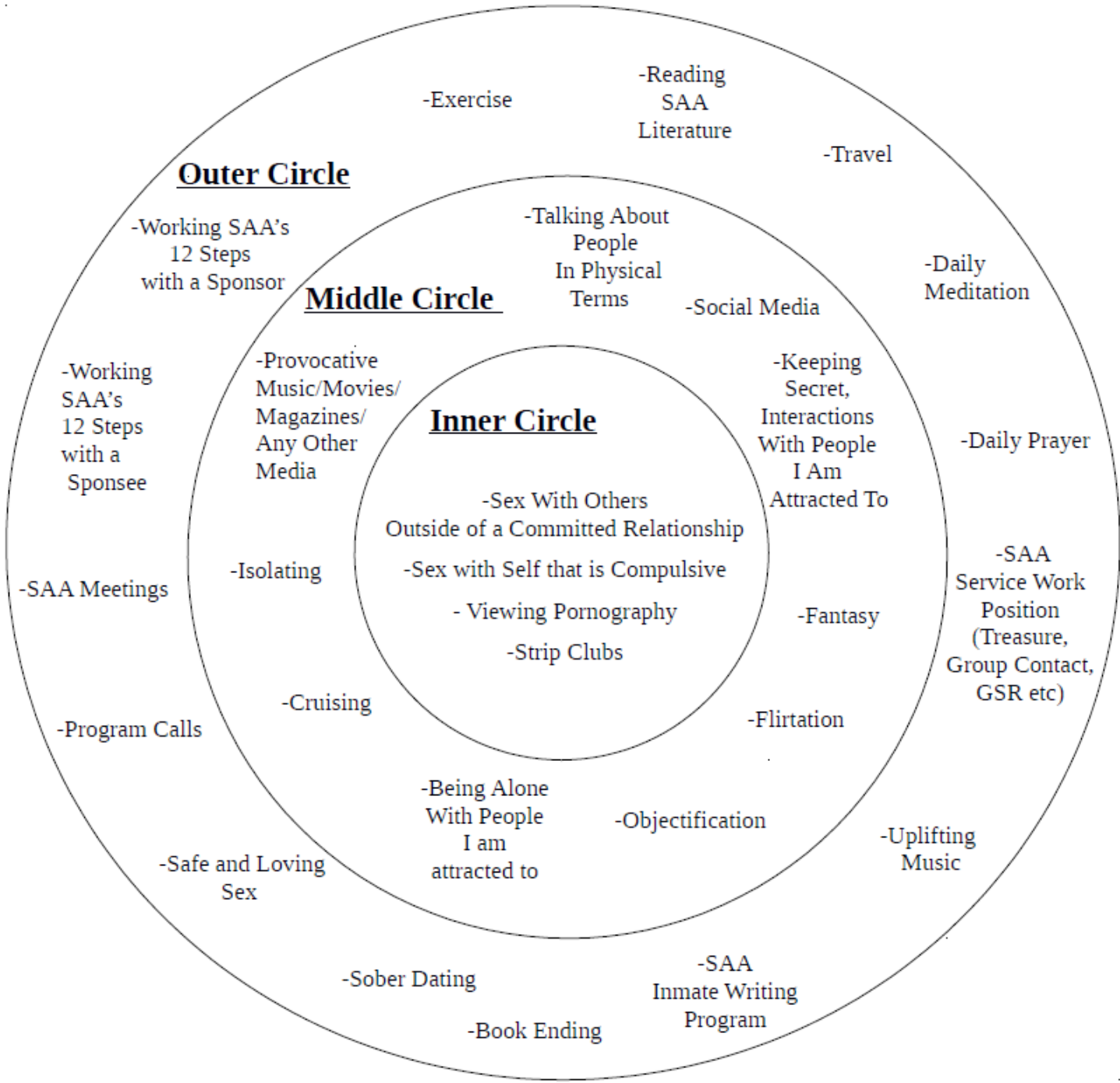
Risky Behaviors = Middle Circle = Midlines

Healthy Behaviors = Outer Circle = Top Lines

**See also:** <https://saa-recovery.org/literature/three-circles-defining-sexual-sobriety-in-saa/>

### Three Circles

(Example)



My Three Circles

