

# Our Addiction -Defining Abstinence -The Three Circles

## Summary

“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 SAA, we have come to call our addictive sexual behavior acting out.”

“Sex Addicts Anonymous does not have a universal definition of abstinence.”

“It is not sex in and of itself that causes us problems, but the addiction to certain behaviors. In SAA we will better be able to determine what behavior is addictive and what is healthy.”

“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””

“We carefully consider which sexual behaviors we feel powerless to stop, and which sexual acts lead to feelings of demoralization or other negative consequences. These are the addictive behaviors from which we seek to abstain. We also consider which sexual behaviors are acceptable to us, or even experienced with a sense of gratitude and enjoyment.”

“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.”

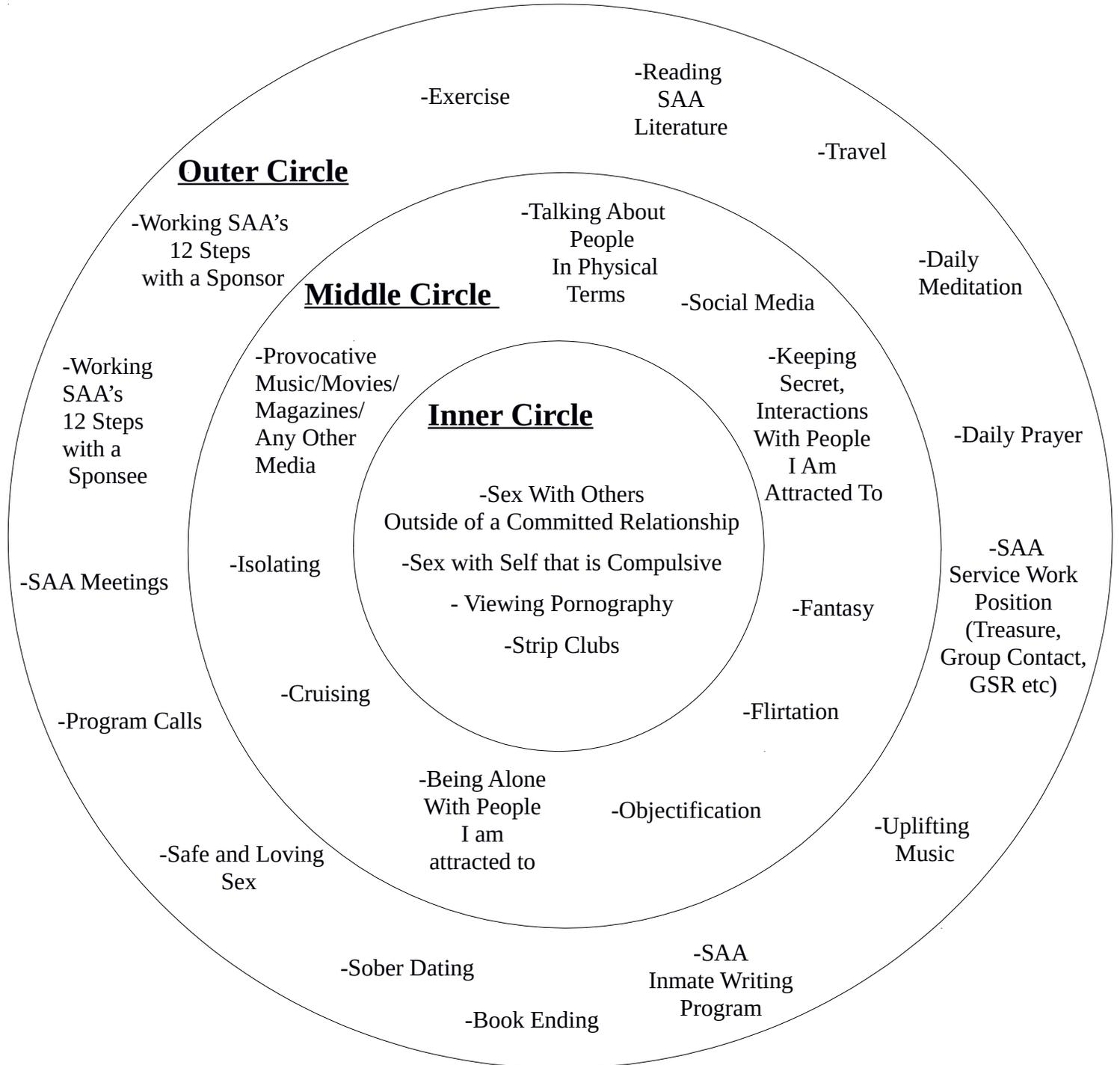
*(Three Circles Worksheet)*

“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.”

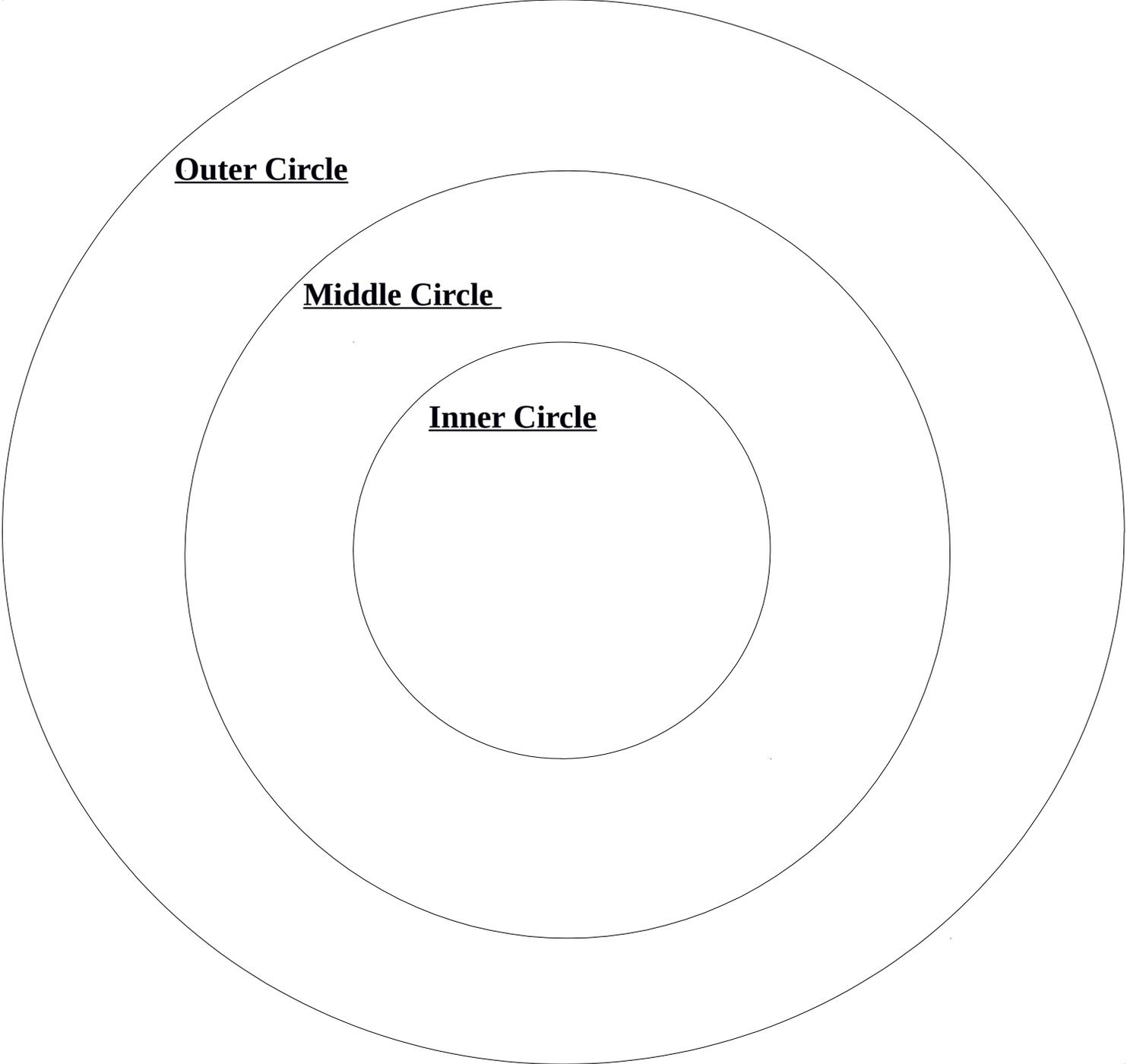
*(Three Circles Worksheet)*

# Three Circles Worksheet (Example)

**Suggestions:** Fill out this worksheet one circle at a time. *Sex Addicts Anonymous* suggests that, "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."



# Three Circles Worksheet



**Outer Circle**

**Middle Circle**

**Inner Circle**