

SMALL  
GROUPS  
*online*

REAL.  
HONEST.  
LIFE  
GIVING.

JUST FOR MEN

The background image shows a desert landscape with rolling hills under a hazy sky. In the foreground, the backs of several people are visible; one is wearing a baseball cap, and another is wearing a hat. A camera on a tripod is also visible in the foreground.

# *Welcome to the Journey*

You are here for a reason. That reason is to begin a new way of looking at the world, God, and yourself.

You are here because some part of you recognizes that the way you see these things right now is distorted and unclear. The fog you are walking through is making it very hard to make decisions that move you toward the life you have always wanted: **a life where you experience peace, joy, hope, and love.**

We're not talking about a life that isn't human, where we never experience tragedy, confusion, and pain. We're talking about a life where the grace of a loving Creator pushes through that fog in tangible ways and helps you see hope where there is none and gives you the courage to pursue it.

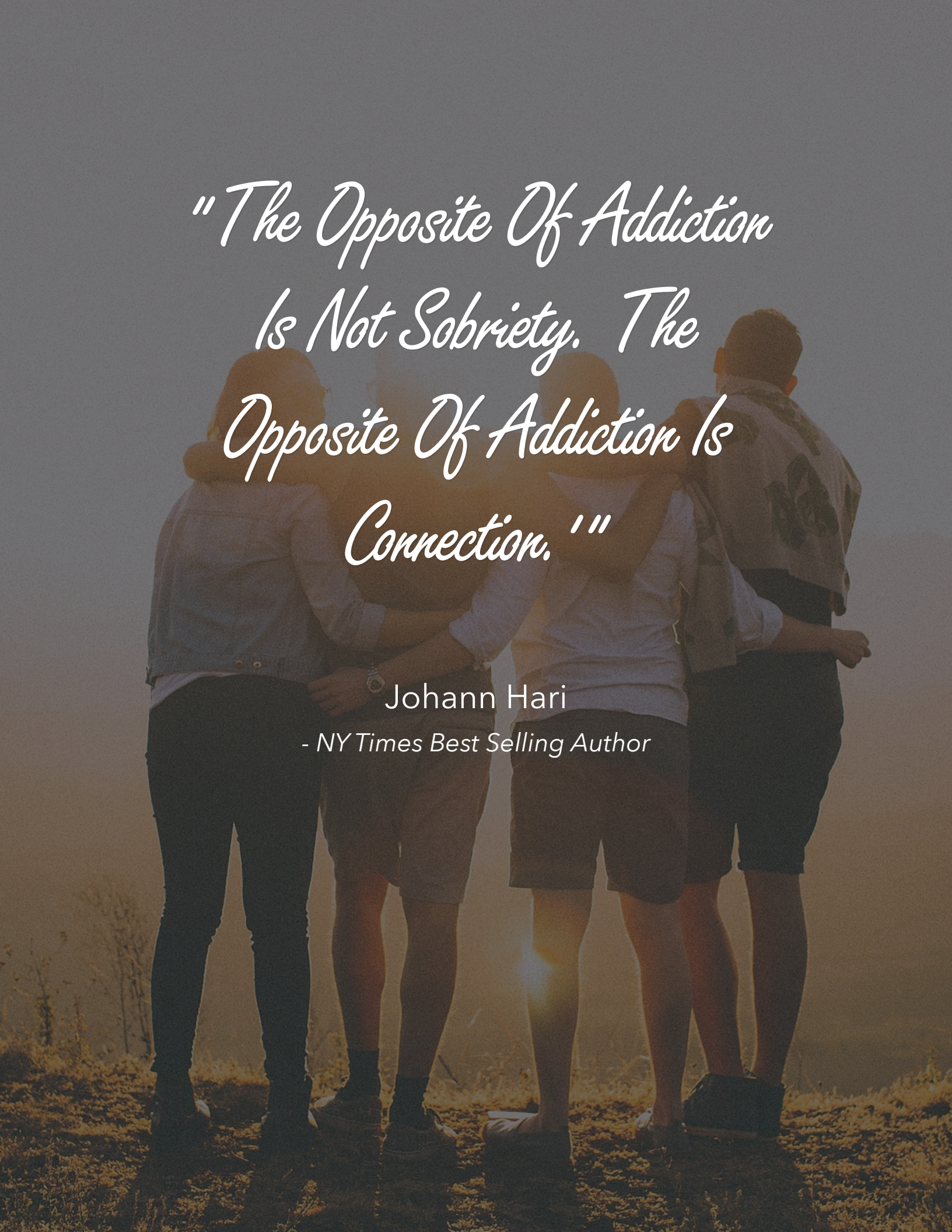
Small Groups Online is designed to connect you to other people who have chosen to pursue a path that leads to the type of life we were meant to live.

*We are not perfect; we are human, and a part of us believes we are loved.*

That is why we have come to the place where we are.

That is why you are here.

**Welcome to Small Groups Online. Welcome to the journey.**



*"The Opposite Of Addiction  
Is Not Sobriety. The  
Opposite Of Addiction Is  
Connection. '"*

Johann Hari  
- NY Times Best Selling Author

# *Things to Note*

In order to participate and make the most of this group, there are a few things that need to be understood and committed to. We will bullet point each one and add an explanation.

- **You will need to commit to being here for 60-90 minutes a week.**

Understand that each week, a part of you will want to log on and join the group, and a part of you will not. The journey through this type of territory often feels and looks more like the 13th mile of a marathon than the triumphant starting gun. So, make that commitment to yourself.

- **Judgment and condemnation of yourself or anyone else are simply not helpful. You will need to learn to listen before you speak and be willing to allow the darkest parts of people to be accepted.**

It is a common experience to want to draw concrete lines and declare certain behaviors "good" and others "bad."

But remember, the goal here isn't for people to present themselves as perfect—it's for each person to have a deeper experience of love, a love that lifts shame and brings clarity to the one experiencing it.

*This is the heart of God.*

And so, in this space, we drop all judgment. There are no "horses" to fall off of. What is helpful is observation and the deeper question of why we do what we do.

- **You will need to bring yourself to the table.**

This doesn't necessarily mean you need to share every time. Sometimes you may, sometimes you may not. But bringing yourself can also mean being willing to do the hard work of observing your own experiences and those of your fellow travelers on the journey.

Simply observing as people share and as the facilitator leads can be incredibly helpful to everyone present and to your own work.

- **Respect the facilitator, but please don't idolize him.**

The group facilitator is on the same road you are on. The difference between you and him is simply that he is further down that road.

He is not perfect and not pure, but he is trained and experienced in walking this road. It is natural to look to leaders as role models, and you can expect that from your facilitators.

They will lead by walking this path themselves, calling you forward, and being honest about their journey.

- **Our goal is to grow in understanding, not just eliminate problematic behaviors.**

Yes, we want to reduce and eventually eliminate our unwanted sexual behaviors. But when we focus solely on behavior modification (i.e., white-knuckling), we miss the point.

*Compulsive and escapist behaviors are symptoms of a deeper issue.*

Unless we address those underlying problems, we'll stay trapped in an endless cycle of white-knuckling and relapse.

That's why, in these groups, we don't just confess and move on, hoping things will be different next time. Instead, we take time to examine our choices, using this safe space to process what happened and why.

By doing so, we gain insight into our emotions and pain—insight that helps us create a plan for real and lasting change.

**Note:** Many of the materials in this meeting pack have been provided by the Faith & Sex Center and taken from Steve Luff's book [Faith and Sex](#). We highly recommend that you buy and read the book, as many of the concepts we use in these groups are deeply explored in it.

**Welcome to the journey.**

# *Group Covenant*

- Our goal is to freely and openly pursue Unconditional Love instead of relying on sexual acting out behaviors, including pornography, sex workers, strip clubs, anonymous sex, etc.
- This is a safe group. We are here to support, love, and nurture without judgment. The group facilitator has the right to redirect conversation at any time he or she feels this rule is being broken.
- Each member has the right to respond to the Meeting Response Sheet or not. Each member has the right to speak without interruption during his or her allotted time to share.
- What is discussed within the group remains within the group.
- Each member may offer encouragement to others in the group, but there will be no “fixing.” Solutions can be unhelpful in this format. We say this with the recognition that some may have helpful things to input into someone’s life and have offered the [Live Free app](#) as a way of interacting on a one-on-one level that can facilitate that.
- Details regarding your past sexual experiences must remain generic so as not to trigger other members.

# Check-In Sheet

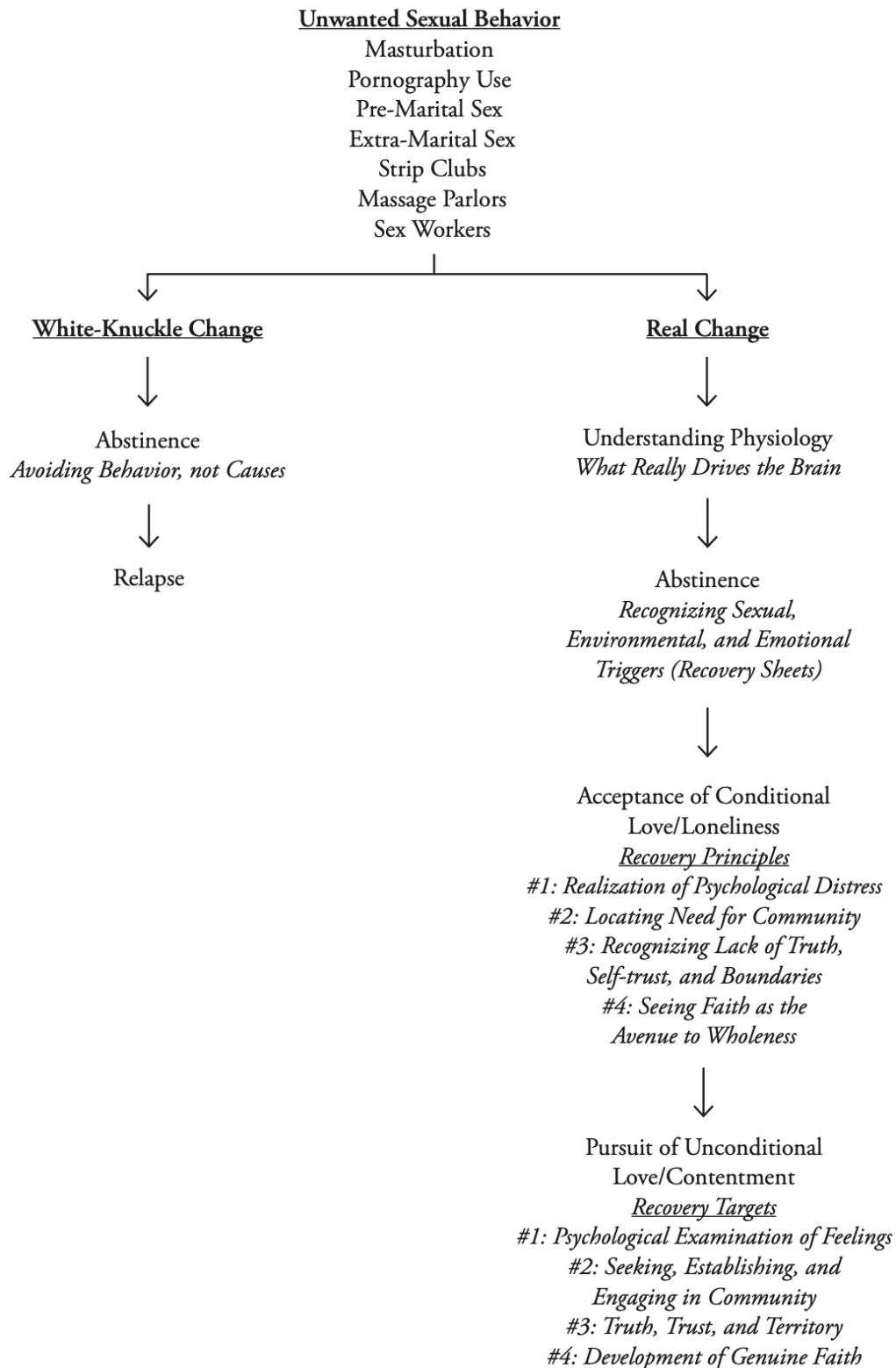
Each person will be given the opportunity to check in. You are not required to speak for extended periods of time, but in order to participate in the group, it is helpful that you at least answer the following questions:

**NOTE: Please be mindful of a couple of things:**

1. Time. There is only so much. As such, please limit your sharing to 10 minutes or less.
2. When you share details about your life, sexually explicit statements can have a negative effect on some. This is not a universal truth, but using phrases like, "I medicated with porn" can convey what is needed without sending minds racing in too many directions.

- 
- The last time I felt the need to act out and/or engage in old escapist patterns of behavior was... *(Describe the situation and what happened without being too detailed.)*
  - I believe my trigger was primarily... *(e.g., sexual, emotional, environmental.)*
  - I think the reason I was triggered was... *(e.g., emotional state, events of the day/moment, past experiences, etc.)*
  - One thing I can do this week to help stay on the real side of change is... *(e.g., talk to someone I trust, adjust my boundaries, check in sooner, seek professional support, practice a coping strategy, etc.)*
  - One thing I did well this week in my recovery was... *(Identify a win, no matter how small.)*
  - One thing you (the group) can be praying for me about is...

# The Recovery Map



The recovery map has been provided by the [Faith & Sex Center](#)  
and taken from Steve Luff's book [Faith and Sex](#).

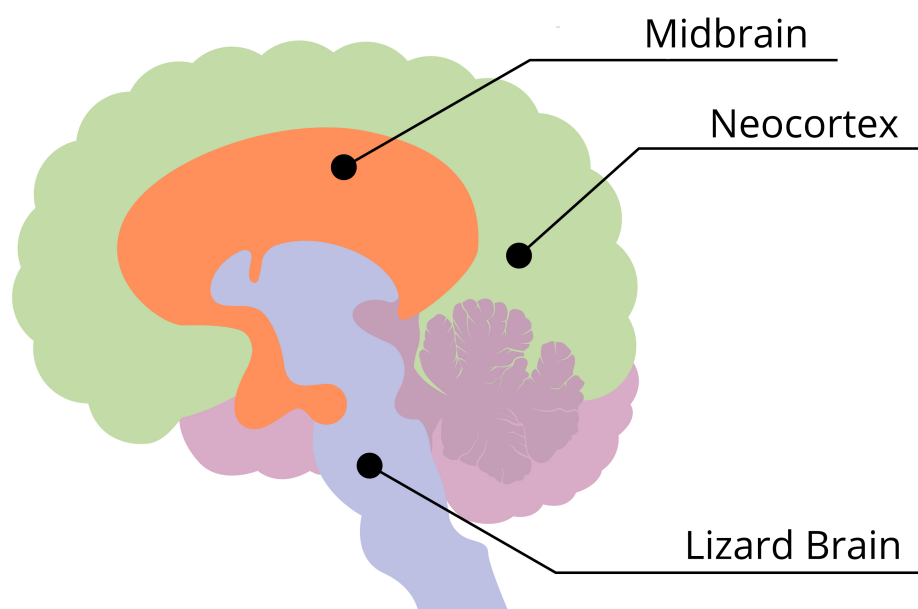
# Understanding Physiology

Recovery from unwanted behavior is less confusing and much quicker if you understand basic aspects of human physiology. When you understand them, at least in part, you can be clearer about what it is you are working on changing and what to expect from the process.

## Here is a quick and concise outline of human physiology as it relates to emotional recovery:

Humans have evolved to survive and reproduce. Key components of survival are the avoidance of dangers and the seeking of safety. Dangers mean death; safety means survival. And when we are safe, we can select mates and reproduce (sex!).

To ensure survival and reproduction, the human brain has developed from the bottom up in "layers," with specific functions for each layer. These layers include:



- **The Brainstem (or "lizard brain"):** This part of the brain is located at the top of our spine and controls very basic functions, such as heart rate, breathing, thirst, hunger, sex drive, and freeze/fight/flight responses to danger.

- **The Midbrain (or "mammal brain"):** This is where our basic emotional circuits are. Emotions give us information about the state of our relationships, as relationships are vital to survival. We feel calm when we are connected to others; we feel anxious or depressed when we feel or perceive disconnection or threat.
- **Neocortex (or "human brain"):** This is our "thinking cap" and is the seat of executive functioning, planning, reason, and logic.

Our brainstem and midbrain, which determine a felt sense of safety or danger in the world, finish developing by about age five.

This felt sense of safety or danger is a product of the conditioning we receive from our caretakers while growing up. If caretakers are present and attentive, we gain a felt sense of safety about the world. If caretakers are abusive or neglectful, we gain a felt sense of danger about the world.

It is this felt sense of danger (trauma) that produces the chronic anxiety and/or depression that acting out with sex, food, drugs, or alcohol helps manage. These behaviors and/or chemicals trigger the reward center in the brain (in the brainstem and midbrain) to release neurochemicals to make us feel good.

The longer we have acted out with behaviors and chemicals to manage negative emotion (through the release of pleasure-causing neurochemicals such as dopamine, norepinephrine, and endorphins), the more accustomed our brain becomes to this neurochemical release.

**This means that:**

- It takes more and more of the behaviors or substances to achieve the same desired effects (tolerance).
- When we stop engaging in the behaviors or using the substances, it will take some time for the brain to feel normal again (withdrawal).

After about 90 days of sobriety from engaging in compulsive behaviors or substance use, the brain begins to re-regulate into more of a normal balance (homeostasis). What this does is lay bare the original condition of the brainstem and midbrain emotional circuits that were conditioned at a young age to anticipate danger (again, trauma).

Healing these brainstem and midbrain emotional circuits is ultimately the goal of the recovering person to achieve sustained mental wellness.

### **How does one target these emotional circuits to achieve mental wellness?**

If it was relationship that caused the problems, it is relationship that will help heal the problems. Through unconditionally loving relationships found in therapy (recovery groups; and, hopefully, healthy family systems and communities like church), these emotional circuits rewire so that the brain experiences a felt sense of safety about the world instead of danger.



# *Understanding Triggers*

Understand that triggers can be powerful forces that push individuals toward unhealthy behaviors, often before they even realize what's happening. In recovery, recognizing and managing triggers is essential for long-term success. While sexual triggers are widely acknowledged in cases of sexual addiction, non-sexual emotional and environmental triggers can be just as influential. Therefore, identifying these triggers and developing strategies to navigate them can make all the difference in maintaining freedom from compulsive, unwanted sexual behaviors.

**Sexual triggers** are sights and sounds that have a direct connection to sexual arousal, whether explicitly or implicitly. These can include pornography, revealing clothing like lingerie or bikinis, certain body types, or even specific fashion choices such as high heels or tight pants. Media that emphasizes sensuality—whether in advertisements, movies, or social media—can also act as a trigger. For example, someone in recovery might struggle after encountering suggestive images while scrolling online or seeing an attractive person dressed in a way that stirs desire.

**Non-sexual emotional triggers** stem from feelings rather than explicit sexual stimuli. Loneliness, stress, rejection, or even boredom can drive someone toward compulsive behaviors as a way to escape discomfort. For instance, an individual who feels unappreciated at work may turn to pornography or other unhealthy behaviors as a means of coping with feelings of inadequacy.

**Non-sexual environmental triggers** are external factors that, while not directly linked to sexual desire, still create conditions that lead to relapse. This might include certain places, routines, or even times of the day that are associated with past behaviors. For example, if someone frequently acted out late at night while alone in their bedroom, simply being in that environment under similar circumstances can serve as a powerful trigger.

# *What is Conditional and Unconditional Love?*

We all come from and belong to different "systems." These systems include families, schools, communities, or even our media-filled society. We all play a part in these systems.

For example, if we look at a family, that family is a system often made up of a mother, a father, brothers, sisters, etc. In that system, we each have a role to play, almost like parts within a machine.

Some people are the oldest and they are expected, for example, always to be responsible. Some people are the youngest and they are expected to move along without making much of a fuss.

Some people are the ones who succeed, while others are the ones who fail. Whatever the role we grew up playing, the rest of the members of our family system expect us to continue playing that role because their roles depend on us remaining in the role they expect us to play.

Whatever the role we grew up playing, the rest of the members of our family system expect us to continue playing that role because their roles depend on us remaining in the role they expect us to play.

What if you no longer want to play the role a given system wants you to play, but you still want to be a part of that system? For instance, what if you have always been considered the dumb one in a system and you no longer want to consider yourself to be dumb? Or what if you are always the responsible one in a system and you no longer want to be responsible?

Well, depending on your ability to individuate from a given system—that is, if you want to be different from, but still remain in relationship—you can often feel anxious. And in your anxiety, you may turn to things that make you feel good in the moment, like porn and sex, so that you don't have to face the hard reality of what the world expects of you.

You feel drawn toward acting out sexually when the world around you triggers you to feel as if it is not OK to be who you are and that to receive love, you need to be someone you aren't.

If conditional love is the cause of your acting out sexually, then the solution to your unwanted sexual behavior is the conversion, or change, of conditional love into unconditional love. In other words, you need to take the conditional love that exists in your life and change it into, or replace it with, unconditional love.

**We accomplish this through acknowledging our four recovery principles, and converting them into our four recovery targets, which are:**

- **Recovery Target #1:** Psychological Examination of Feelings
- **Recovery Target #2:** Seeking, Establishing, and Engaging in Community
- **Recovery Target #3:** Truth, Trust, and Territory (i.e. Truth, Self-Trust, and Boundaries)
- **Recovery Target #4:** Development and Exploration of Genuine Faith

Even if you are a bit confused about what we are talking about here, or if some of it seems fuzzy right now, we are providing you with the four essential targets that you must continue to live out in your life daily.

In working on these four areas, you will be in the process of converting Conditional Love into Unconditional Love. In that process, you will be right at the heart of Real Change Recovery. And with time and practice, the concepts that were once fuzzy will become clearer and more familiar.

# *Recovery Sheet One: Triggers*

## Sexual

1. e.g. Pop-up ads
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Remedy Actions

1. Walk away from computer
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Environmental

1. e.g. Empty house
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Remedy Actions

1. Go on a walk
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Emotional

1. e.g. Rejection
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Remedy Actions

1. Recovery Targets #1, etc.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Notes