

# 5 STEPS

## TO FREEDOM FROM PORN

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# INTRODUCTION

**YOU'RE HERE. AGAIN.** Struggling with porn can feel like a never-ending cycle. We find ourselves slipping back into the stuff we promised ourselves, or others, we would never go back to again. And for a time, we did better. We cleaned up, deleted the browser history, and reaffirmed a commitment to ourselves: "That was the last time." This lasted for a while, but then something caught our attention. Maybe an attractive new co-worker, or someone at school. Maybe an advertisement or banner ad. Maybe a notification or a reminder of past slip-ups popped up on our phone or laptop.

For a time, we fought the idea, but found that the more we fought it, the stronger our desire to go back there "one last time."

Yet, so many of us—millions and millions—have found that all of our resolve and good intentions didn't prevent the next slip-up. Or the next. The "one last time" led to another and another.

**AND SO HERE YOU ARE. AGAIN.**

Could this time really be any different? We think so.

At Pure Desire, we have seen thousands and thousands of men and women walk the path to freedom—not just a "white-knuckle-it-try-harder" freedom, but a real transformation of heart, mind, and desire. While the entire process of becoming fully and finally free can't be condensed into five steps, every journey has a starting point. We believe THIS is your starting point. As author Andy Stanley points out, "Direction, not intention, determines destination."[1] These steps will propel your life in a direction that leads to lasting freedom!

The five steps outlined in this process are far more than just "good ideas" or "something else to try." These represent a vetted, researched, and demonstrated pathway to lasting change. While some of this might sound similar to your old attempts, these steps will provide brand new insights. These new things may challenge you; they might be steps you know you've needed to take for months—maybe years—but never have. They might even make you feel a little uncomfortable or overwhelmed.

**BUT HERE YOU ARE. AGAIN.**

Could this be the last time? Yes, it can! And we're here to help you along the way.

So what can you do—TODAY—to break free from a pattern of pornography use or any other unwanted sexual behavior? Read on and let this new journey begin!



[1] Stanley, A. (2008). *The Principle of the Path: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.




# SHUT THE DOOR

That's right, we said it. Shut the door. Now is the time to go big or go home. In the past, what we typically thought had to be "bigger" in our lives was our resolve or our commitment to stop.

**THE TRUTH IS, THOUGH, WE SIMPLY CANNOT WANT CHANGE BAD ENOUGH TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.**

What needs to grow bigger is our response; our actions. What this step asks of us—those of us who struggle with unwanted sexual behavior—is to slam the door to our biggest threat.

What is our biggest threat?

Our biggest threat is the primary way(s) we have accessed pornographic materials in the last 6-12 months. We probably know what it is without thinking about it: our phone; our computer; our gaming device; our TV; the bookstore; the bathroom; the hotel room.

This list could go on and on but it likely includes our biggest threat already!

What do we need to do?

**GET RID OF IT.**

Or, at least, significantly alter how and when we use it. The truth is that no matter how powerful or firm our resolve is to change, if our old outlet is still available, just as easily accessed as before, **we will act out again.** We will do this, not because we are bad or stupid (you're not), but because our brain knows the way and *wants* to go back.

Yes, our brain *wants* to go back.

Why is this? Simply put, at its most basic level, our brain is powerfully driven by a

punishment and reward system.[2] Our brain does what feels good and avoids what feels bad. The actions or behaviors that feel good get "coded" into our brain so that we get more of it! This basic system is **amoral**—meaning, it does not judge right or wrong, good or bad. At this level, our brain only knows pleasure (good!) and pain (bad!). Our brain has attached itself—our longings and desires—to the portal we use to see porn. As long as it's easily available to us, **we will be battling *our own brain* to say no.**

Good news: our brain can change! But this takes time, and it also takes a clean slate of being sober from the activity that created the good feeling.

So, for right now, we need to deal **decisively** with our greatest temptation. Not just use it a little less or "be smarter" with it, but instead, take a decisive action.

For example, we may need to:

**cancel the cable or internet (or both).**

**delete the browsers and apps on our phone.**

**get rid of all data.**

**get rid of our smartphone.**

**only use our computer in a public place.**

**give our gaming system or tablet away.**

You get the picture.

What we are attempting to do is make a radical life-change that is as difficult, if not more difficult, than overcoming a drug or alcohol addiction. Rarely, if ever, will a significant change like this result from insignificant measures. Trying harder won't be enough. We must make a deep, deep change in order for this to work. As The *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous says*, "Half measures availed us nothing."[3]

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[2] Halber, D. (2018). *Motivation: Why You Do The Things You Do*. Retrieved from https://www.brainfacts.org/thinking-sensing-and-behaving/learning-and-memory/2018/motivation-why-you-do-the-things-you-do-082818

[3] W., B. & Alcoholics Anonymous (1939). *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book*. New York, NY: Works Publishing Company. 59.

Whatever steps we take need to happen ASAP. Our resolve only weakens over time and we will convince ourselves, again, that we don't really need to take radical steps. If last time wasn't the last time, this time probably won't be either! Unless we do things very, very differently.

The good news is that this change doesn't have to be permanent. We recommend keeping this change in place until you are able to reach a minimum of six months of sobriety without any porn.

## TAKE ACTION: SHUT THE FRONT DOOR

**01.** List ALL devices, locations, and methods you have used to access pornography in the last six months:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**02.** From the list above, which one is your *greatest threat*?

_____

_____

**03.** What decisive step(s) do you need to take to remove/severely limit your access to this threat?

_____

_____

**04.** By what date and time are you committed to completing this action?

Date: _____ Time: _____

What obstacles or roadblocks do you anticipate facing in this decision, and what is your plan to address them?

_____

_____

_____






# CLOSE LOOPHOLES

Now that the "biggie" is being dealt with, we need to consider all of the other ways we are tempted to act out or return to porn. We may have already thought of and listed some of these in STEP 1's *Take Action* section. Typically, as we move toward this level of life-altering change, most of us will discover that we aren't entirely committed to the process. Yes, we want to stop the pain, shame, or regret; but as we begin to take decisive action against our old pattern, we may discover small areas of resistance.

Let's call these "hold-outs." These are things we cling to because they make us feel good. And we've spent a long time convincing ourselves—and others, too—they aren't that big of a deal. We believe we can hold onto these small "gray areas" and keep them under control.

Some common examples of these loopholes are social media accounts (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter), romantic or semi-erotic novels or comic books, old DVDs ("I just watch it for the action") or magazines, or paid streaming platforms.

> "THE TIME TO REPAIR THE SAILS OF OUR SHIP IS WHILE THE BOAT IS SAFE AT HARBOR..."

Because these items aren't overtly sexual or pornographic in nature, we convince ourselves we can handle the temptation they might bring. The person who holds onto these loopholes, though, is like

someone on a diet living above a bakery. The sight and smell of donuts, croissants, and eclairs contain no calories! But how successful will this person be if they have a long history of over-indulgence on these delicacies? Even if they had cleaned all the fatty, sugary carbs out of their apartment, we would still suspect that the sights and smells would draw them back in eventually. So it is with us as we seek to **permanently** break free from the grip of porn.

We have to get honest with ourselves about these loopholes. One way to do this is to take some time by ourselves and ask this hypothetical question: "If I really wanted to see nudity or soft-core pornography this week without anyone knowing, where would I go?" Some of our old "entry-level" outlets will begin to surface as we think through our day, our routine, and our environment. Now is the time to clean house and close all the loopholes that can trip us up. This honest self-assessment of our environment will be tough, but it is well worth the result that getting honest can produce.

We may need to delete browser histories, get rid of questionable magazines or books, toss out DVDs, delete social media accounts, have a spouse or friend change passwords on devices, unsubscribe from email lists, catalogues, and health apps, or even change our email address all together! These are the types of areas where we are tempted to believe we won't go there again. And, maybe 95% of the




time we would be right. But we didn't end up stuck in this place because of the 95% of the time we do things right.

We are here because in this **5%** our resolve to change doesn't matter. The 5% of times when we feel alone, worthless, or just don't care. The days where our vision for good fades and our desire to just feel better escalates; these are the danger zones. In these moments, the old sirens of pleasure and escape will sing loudly to us all.

We need to deal with these loopholes right now so that when we feel the need to escape, we can make healthy choices. The time to repair the sails of our ship is while the boat is safe at harbor, not in the middle of the storm! If we wait to deal with these old outlets when we are in the middle of our temptation, we are unlikely to be successful. But if we take action now, we can put ourselves in a stronger position to maintain our victory and freedom.

# TAKE ACTION: CLOSING THE LOOPHOLES

**01.** Fill out the following chart for as many "loopholes" as necessary:

| LOOPHOLE: | ACTION NEEDED: | HELP REQUIRED: | COMPLETED BY: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Example: Twitter | Delete the app from all devices. | Have Scott (friend) lock my phone from adding apps without permission. | Tonight! Will talk to Scott Friday. |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**02.** Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any loopholes you might be missing or not wanting to deal with. Ask for His help to leave no stone unturned!

**03.** If any additional loopholes surface over the next few weeks, come back to this chart and add them.



# 3

# GO ON THE OFFENSE

As we begin to deal honestly and ruthlessly with the outlets we have used to pursue porn, now is the time to develop *proactive* practices. Simply avoiding unhealthy behavior won't get us very far. It's an easy and necessary place to start, but if this is all we do, we are essentially trying one more "STOP IT!" approach.

This is like stamping one giant NO on our life. And know what? Our brain doesn't like no. We like YES! So in this journey of freedom, we need to have a clear picture of *both*—where we can't go *and* where we can go instead. This is where we want to introduce the Relapse Prevention Tool, or more simply, "The Three Circles."[4]

As previously mentioned, a time will come—whether today, tomorrow, next week or a month from now—when we really don't feel like doing the right thing. So we need to be proactive about building new, healthy disciplines. In order to do this, we will need to develop a greater awareness of our pattern into porn. Many of us wrongly assume that these slip-ups just "happen," when in reality, our compulsive use of porn or masturbation is usually preceded by other steps in the wrong direction.

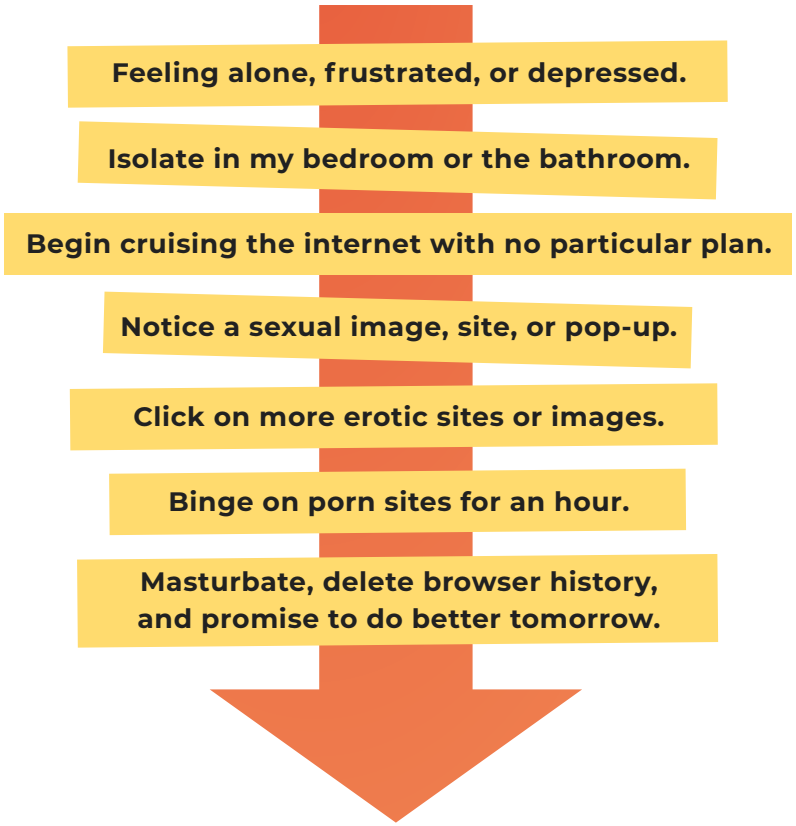
In many ways, we are like a freight train leaving the station. When the engine fires up and the wheels first begin to creak down the track, we are largely unaware of what's happening. As the train picks up speed and momentum, however, we reach a moment of realization that

[4] Roberts, T. (2015). *Seven Pillars of Freedom Workbook* (4th ed.). Gresham, OR: Pure Desire Ministries International. 149-153.

relapse is imminent! We may attempt to stop, but just like a moving freight train, stopping the momentum is very difficult. The key to victory is recognizing where the engine first gets ignited and making better choices early in the process.

So what does this pattern look like? Here as an example of one person's pattern of acting out. Notice how, with each new level they reach, the imminent threat of relapsing increases.

## PERSONAL PATTERN OF RELAPSE



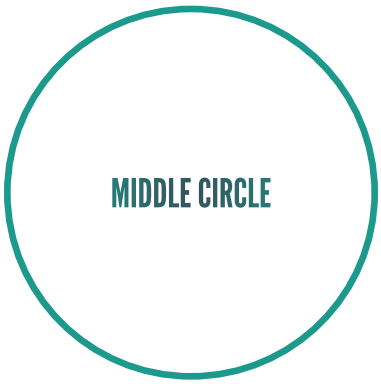

This pattern may sound familiar. Even if this is not our pattern, the goal is to identify our personal pattern and start making changes in our behavior early. Most of us begin "fighting" our pattern once we get to level 5 or 6. But what if we began to recognize our pattern and started taking strategic steps at level 1 or 2? We may not realize it now, but this shift in focus—fighting when the engine first gets started—is a true game-changer.

In the *Take Action* section, begin to sketch out your personal pattern of relapse and devise strategies to change course early in the cycle.

Once you have identified this pattern, begin filling out your Relapse Prevention or Three Circles Tool. This plan has three parts (circles) that construct a full picture of health.



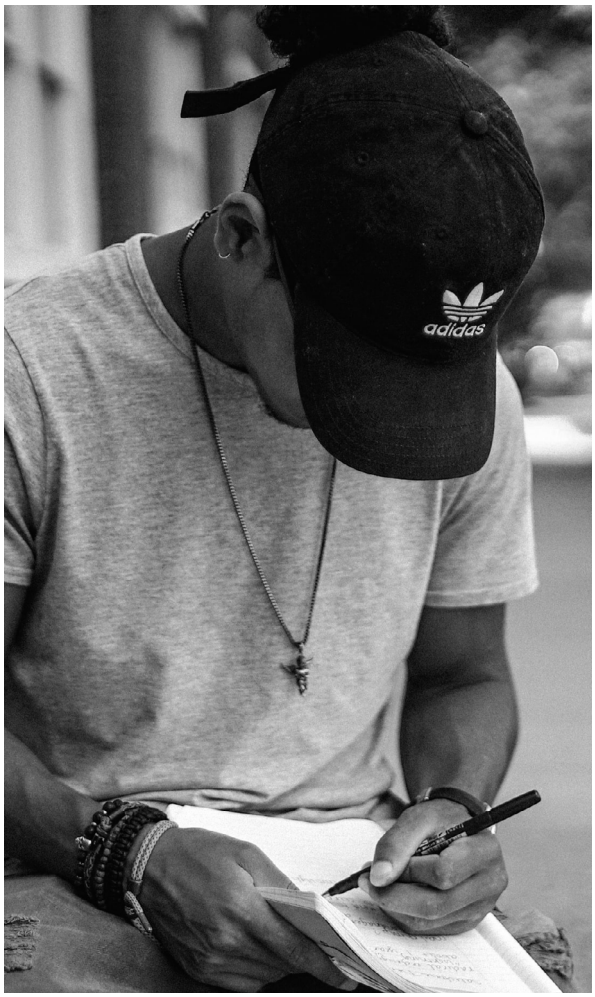

The **inner circle**, or center, represents a crash. What are the behaviors and actions that you are committing to stop and never do again? Write them down. Be concise and clear about what is "off limits" for you. This list might include pornography, masturbation, sex outside of marriage, visiting adult shops, or strip clubs—anything that has been part of your negative pattern.

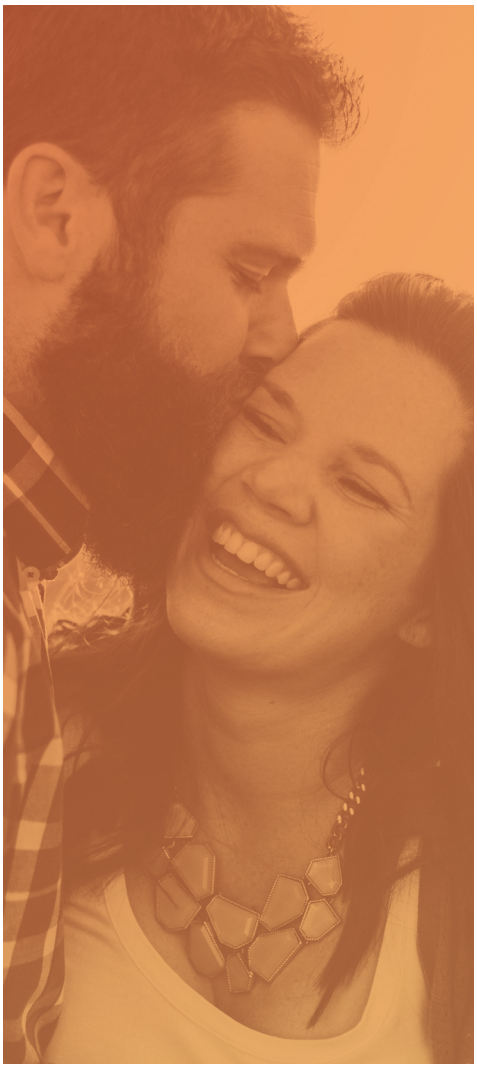



The **middle circle** represents all of the guardrails you need to put in place in order to avoid another crash. If you think about our highway system, guardrails are put in places on the road to keep you from a destructive crash and not at the bottom of the ravine.

This is what we want to do—create barriers that keep us further back from the cliff of our old patterns.

Identifying your specific path to relapse is helpful here. What environments cause you trouble? What are your danger zones? Specifically, you need these guardrails around the times of day, or days of the week, when you have been most likely to struggle.





FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE THREE CIRCLES TOOL, CHECK OUT THESE PD PODCAST EPISODES:

**Episode 008 - 3 Circles (Relapse Prevention Tool)**

**Episode 156 - Recovery Tools: 3 Circles**

OR THIS PD BLOG:

**Tools For Healing: The Three Circles**

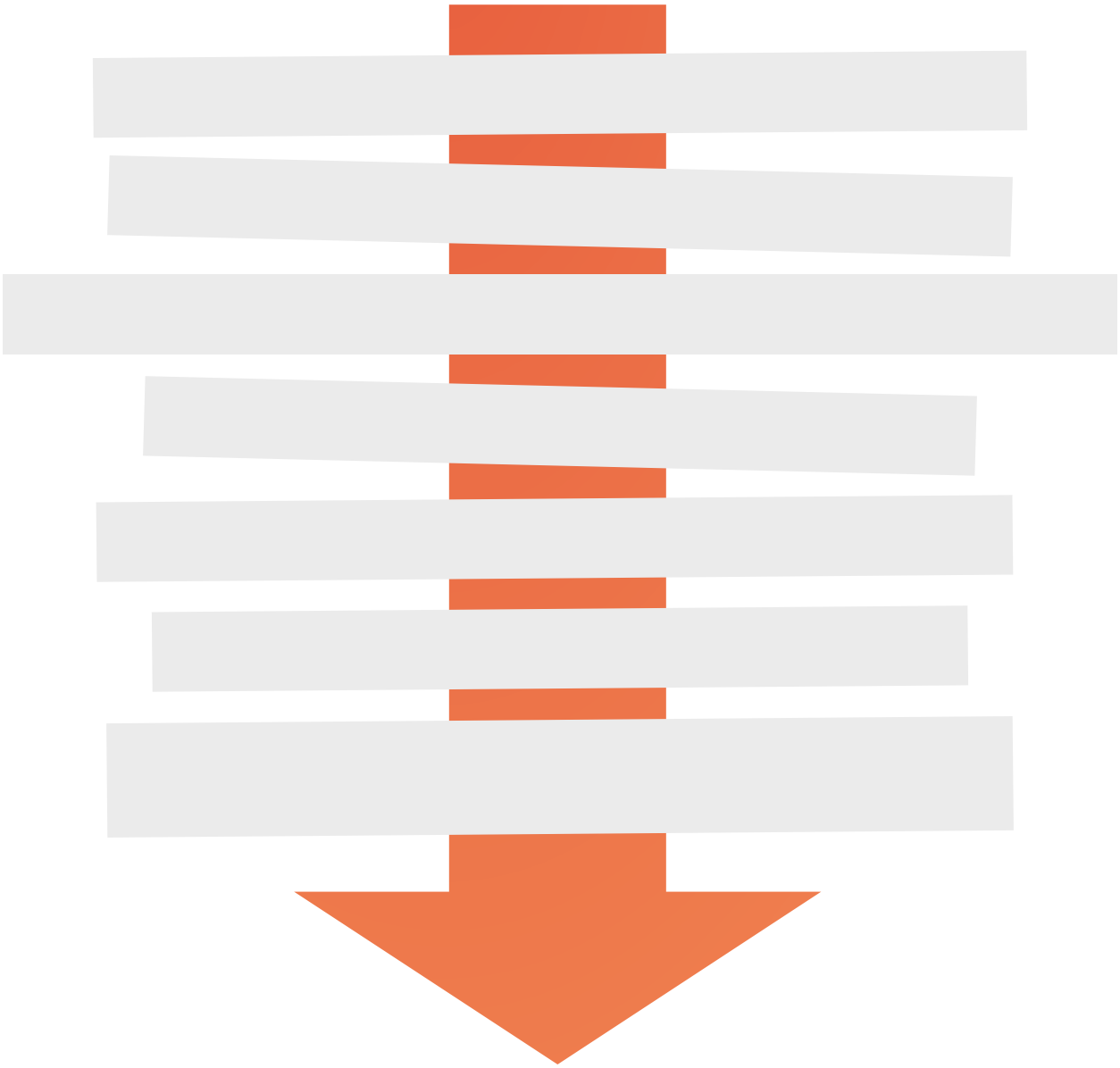
For many people in recovery, the evenings are a difficult time. What practices do you need in place to be healthy at night? Going to bed earlier or getting off ALL electronics a minimum of 30 minutes before bed are common practices for individuals living in freedom. Are the weekends or business trips your downfall? A guardrail here might be to not watch TV or use the internet while alone. The sooner you recognize your old pattern kicking into gear, and can divert that pattern to something healthy, the more likely you are to win the battle with consistency.




The **outer circle** represents the YES in your life. These are all the healthy things you can do to stay focused on the road to recovery. Most addicts and those who struggle with porn have very poor habits of self-care. But caring for your heart, body, and mind are what creates lasting change and freedom. You should have just as many healthy actions listed in your outer circle as you do guardrails in your middle circle. Also, these actions need to cover all aspects of your life—physical, relational, mental, and spiritual. Some examples of outer circle activities are getting 7-8 hours of sleep, exercising four times a week, reading the Bible each day, attending a weekly group, connecting weekly with a mentor or friend, or serving my spouse each day. The more we engage in outer circle activities, the less likely we will be to veer toward relapse.

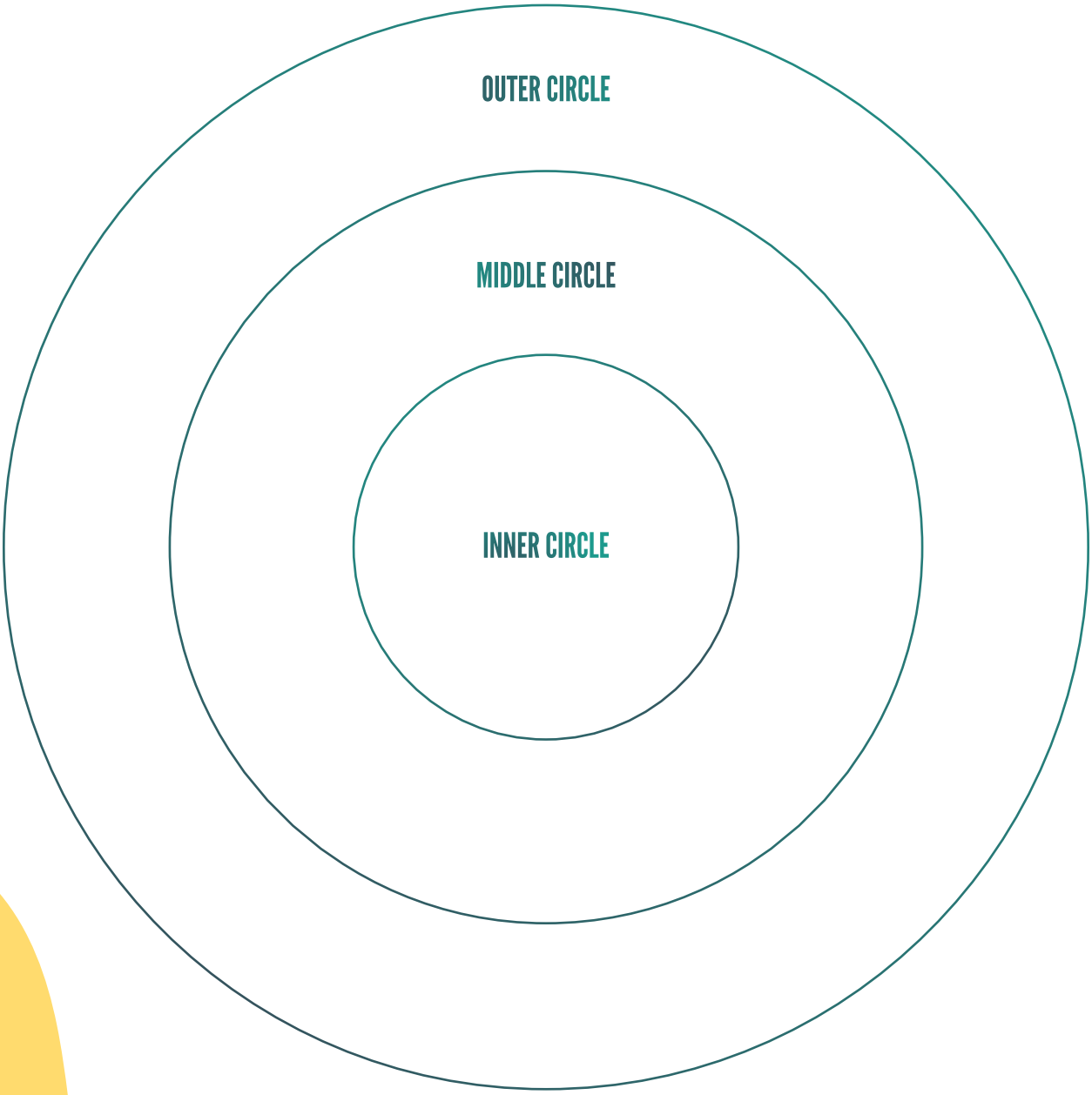
# TAKE ACTION: PERSONAL PATTERN OF RELAPSE AND RELAPSE PREVENTION TOOL

**01.** Identify your most common pattern of relapse by filling in the following levels:



**02.** Where do you need to begin fighting the battle earlier? Mark the level(s) where you will begin to take proactive steps of change.

**03.** Fill out the Relapse Prevention Tool (Three Circles) with your commitments surrounding a crash (inner circle), guardrails (middle circle), and healthy habits (outer circle).






# DISCOVER TRUE ACCOUNTABILITY

Dealing with our negative behavior on our own isn't enough. The first three steps invited us into a process of behavior change that can truly set us in a new direction. But if this is all we do, long-term freedom is unlikely. We will need support on this journey, and that support can only happen when someone knows what we really struggle with AND what our plans are to change. This is the value of accountability. Accountability invites another person into our life who can help us see and overcome our blind spots.

Many of us feel like we've tried accountability before. We were honest with someone and gave them permission to check in and ask us how we were doing with our purity. But most of us found two things to be true: the person holding us accountable didn't follow through and, even if they did, our behavior didn't change. We were still stuck in our old pattern.

This is why we must turn accountability around. The truth is, most of us have been doing accountability backward. By asking someone else to "check in" on us and "hold us accountable," we have essentially given someone else responsibility for our change. We don't need them "to check in on us from time to time." We're not a hospital patient. We are in training. This is our recovery and we need to take responsibility for our actions. We can't put a burden on them that is ours to carry.



An accountability partner can help us carry this burden, but we must be willing to shoulder our own backpack of responsibility for change. Rather than having someone else be responsible to check on us, we must take this responsibility and commit to regular honesty with them. We take the initiative and ownership of our recovery.

So who can we be honest and open with about our progress on a regular, ongoing basis? Bottom line: this person can't be our spouse.

> **A GOOD ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER WILL LIKELY BE SOMEONE WE ALREADY KNOW AND TRUST.**

Sometimes, we want this person to be our spouse because they already know our struggle and it seems safe to tell them and no one else. The drawback of this arrangement is that it puts our spouse in the role of parent or police officer—where they are expected to monitor or investigate our behaviors. They begin looking over our shoulder to correct us when we start to stray. This is not a healthy role for a co-equal in our marriage. Plus, if our spouse is our primary accountability partner, we can be tempted to color the truth or withhold certain information that might hurt them or make them angry.

A good accountability partner will likely be someone we already know and trust. Perhaps this could be a friend, pastor, or mentor who knows some of the truth of our story. This should be someone of the same gender. God places people like this in our path when we need them most. So if we can't think of someone, pray and ask God to reveal who this person might be in our life!

As we develop accountability with them, we need to go beyond a "performance-based" accountability. Performance-based accountability is when someone only asks, "Did you relapse this week?" This minimizes the whole recovery process down to pass or fail. Did you perform well and avoid relapse or did you perform poorly and mess up again? This question may be *part* of the process, but it isn't the *whole* process.

We recommend a tool called the Commitment to Change.[5] The Commitment to Change provides a thoughtful process to identify what change needs to happen, what's stopping us from making this change, and what *specifically* we will do about this change.

[5] Ibid. 17.




Our Commitment to Change can be different each week as we grow, develop, and face new challenges in our recovery. For example, rather than a basic commitment to "not view porn," our commitment could be more specific: "not be on any computer or device after 9:00 p.m." This is a tangible, practical step we can take to avoid our old pattern. Our Commitment to Change will often connect to our Relapse Prevention Tool (Three Circles) from STEP 3.

## TAKE ACTION: TRUE ACCOUNTABILITY

**01.** Who comes to mind as an accountability partner for you?

- Take a minute right now to reach out to a potential accountability partner and ask them to meet up soon to talk. We will meet on this time and date:

**02.** Answer the following questions for your weekly Commitment to Change:

- What area do I need to change or what challenge am I facing this week?
- What will it cost me if I don't change?
- What will it cost me if I do change? What fear will I have to face?
- What is my specific (measurable) plan regarding this commitment to change?
- What are the details of my accountability this week—what questions can my accountability partner ask me?

**03.** Make a plan for a consistent day and time of the week to connect with your accountability partner.

**04.** Add accountability software to all of your devices, and then invite your accountability partner to be on these plans. (**Click here for a list of recommended accountability apps.**)

# 5

# PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

As we follow steps 1-4, we are beginning to see some real progress and growth in our life. The behavior pattern that shipwrecked us before is beginning to change! As encouraging as this is, it can also leave us with a false sense of security. We may begin to believe that we have this whole process down and are now "good to go."

The reality is that lasting behavioral change also requires lasting changes in our brain and in our relationships. Experts in brain research have determined that this level of change can be a 2-5 year process.[6] What does this mean for us? We need to stay on the lookout for our old behavior patterns longer than we would assume.



We are all human beings. As human beings, we are all susceptible to whims, emotional swings, and impulsive behaviors. We've established how the plans we put in place aren't for the 95% of the time when we feel like making the right choices. Our plans are most needed

[6] Carnes, P. & Adams, K. (2002). *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge. 14-18.

for the 5% of the time when we don't. Nearly every person breaking free from porn will experience a strong desire to return to old behaviors. Sometimes this happens at the very brink of great breakthrough, as the enemy seeks to keep us trapped.

This is why we so desperately need to have an Escape Plan for emergencies. An Escape Plan is a **predetermined plan of action** that defines the *specific, clear, and realistic steps* we can take in case of an imminent relapse.

## SPECIFIC:

Actions that are definable and concrete. "Turn off my computer" is specific; whereas, "Stop what I am doing" is too general.

## CLEAR:

No gray areas or doubts about what to do. "Get up and leave the room I am in" is clear; whereas, "Disengage" is too vague.

## REALISTIC:

This is a step that I can fully execute by myself in nearly any given situation. "Call a group member" is a realistic step. "Meet with a counselor" is not, since a counselor may not have any openings or it might be the middle of the night!

Many of us remember learning, as a kid, how to respond if our clothes ever caught on fire: *"Stop, drop, and roll."* Now these are directions that are specific, clear, and realistic! Even though it's unlikely any of us know anyone whose clothes ever caught on fire, we know the drill.

The more concise and clear our steps are in the Escape Plan, the more likely we are to remember them—and execute them—when needed most!

Once we have developed an Escape Plan, this should be communicated to our mentor or accountability partner. Having someone else who knows our plan reinforces its importance

and our commitment to it. Also, we should take some time at least once a week to **practice** these steps! (Think: Stop, drop, and roll in elementary school.) Our brain works well off of "muscle memory." The more we repeat an action, the more "automatic" the action becomes.

An example of an Escape Plan might be something like this:[7]



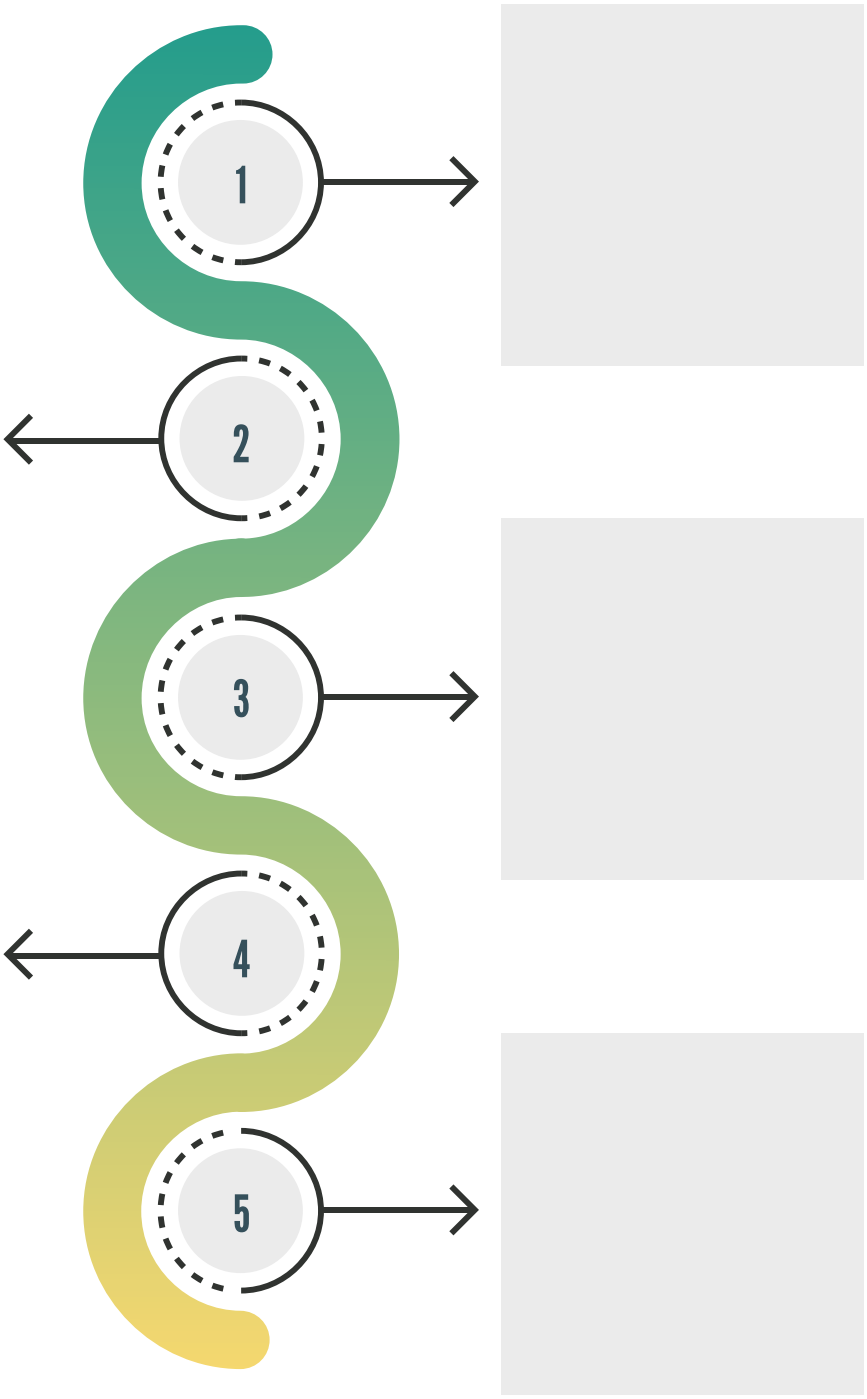

These four steps could be easily practiced in a couple of minutes time. If we practiced two or three times a week for a month, we would be more likely to execute this plan when we need it most.

For a complete explanation of the Escape Plan, and for more ideas to accompany this plan, visit the **Pure Desire Free Tools** page.

[7] Stein, T. (2013). *Thought for the Week: Muscle Memory*. Retrieved from https://willowtreesantarosa.com/muscle-memory.

# TAKE ACTION: ESCAPE PLAN

My Personal Escape Plan:




Who I will tell about my plan: _____

# CONCLUSION



If you have taken these five steps, then you are well on your way to recovery. This can become your new normal, and if you continue in it, will lead you to lasting change. This really can be the last time.

One dynamic of change we've found to be true is that change doesn't happen in a vacuum. We don't change alone. Isolation and secrecy were the pathway into the struggle, but honesty and community are the way out!

If you have begun weekly accountability with a mentor or friend, this is a huge step! In addition to this relationship, we recommend a group of people who are walking this same road with you.

When we surround ourselves with others who are seeking to make the same, long-term change, our healing goes to the next level!

At Pure Desire Ministries, we believe in the power of a safe, confidential small group for your healing. Unlike a 12-Step group where members might drop in and out, and attend when they want, a Pure Desire Group is a committed, intentional process that typically takes between 9-10 months to complete. If you have begun to find traction in this area, a Pure Desire group will help make that traction permanent.

**You can find a group two ways:**

**Find a group** near you. We have over 800 locations where groups meet. Find one near you, reach out, and connect with them. These groups are FREE and volunteer led.

Join an **online group**. We have online groups meeting all days and different times of the week. These are subscription based groups and led by Certified Pure Desire Leaders.

For more information, visit **puredesire.org/getting-started** to take your next step.

Thanks for taking this journey with us. We are praying with you and for you. We are here to help!

Do you have questions or want more information? Email us at **info@puredesire.org**.

**Here you are. Again.**

**But this time, it's different.**

**This time, you're not alone.**

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