RECOVERY ACTION PLAN

FOR THE ADDICT

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.

FOR MARRIED GROUP MEMBERS

Your *Recovery Action Plan* will help you identify reasonable and necessary steps to take in response to a relapse. Before joining a Pure Desire group, sexual acting out was a way of medicating pain. Now, as you learn to walk in sobriety, the *Recovery Action Plan* will give you and your spouse a new tool to help transform addictive behaviors and the response to those behaviors in your marriage. A relapse doesn't halt your healing or mean you are back at square one. If handled well, a relapse can be a growing experience that contributes to greater freedom and health.

The goal of a *Recovery Action Plan* 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 way. 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 logical and natural consequences if 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:

01. feel safe and learn to respond, rather than react to the relapse;

02. understand the natural and logical consequences if you chose to act out;

03. stop trying to recover from relapse in an unhealthy way; and

04. rebuild trust and intimacy in your marriage.

Keep in mind: You will 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*, you will combine your *Recovery Action Plan* with theirs. You create a *Recovery Action Plan* up front to provide guardrails and accountability during the initial stage of recovery. However, when your spouse presents their *Recovery Action Plan* to you, that will become the *Recovery Action Plan* for your marriage. If your spouse is not in a Pure Desire group, the *Recovery Action Plan* you create for yourself—with your group—will continue to provide parameters and accountability for you.

FOR SINGLE GROUP MEMBERS

As a single person, you may have little experience or understanding of how your sexual behavior affects others or yourself. It is crucial that you begin to associate your sexual acting out with logical consequences and learn how to develop healthy intimacy as a single person. Single group members should find two individuals to share their *Recovery Action Plan* with so they can be encouraged to follow it when relapse occurs.

A *Recovery Action Plan* for a single person will help them to clearly see which behaviors contribute to a healthy lifestyle and which behaviors detract from those goals. A single person can use this resource to establish sexual health, be proactive with dating boundaries, and learn how to experience intimacy as a single person.

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 specific to navigating 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, then 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 will use the *Recovery Action Plan* designed for singles **and/or** the ***Three Circles Exercise***. You can find the *Three Circles Exercise* on page 188 in the *Seven Pillars of Freedom Workbook*, page 158 in *Unraveled*, 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 ideal.

> *Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed!*
>
> **PROVERBS 15:22 (NIV)**

CONSEQUENCES

A secret life of addiction, without reasonable consequences, can produce heavy amounts of shame. When you can start associating your actions with a specific consequence, it will help you weigh the outcome and whether it's worth the risk. The pain of consequences also creates change in the punishment/reward center of the brain. If your brain begins to connect painful consequences to a relapse, you are less likely to choose that path. Consequences help you own your behavior and take responsibility, rather than withdrawing, blaming, hiding, lying, getting angry, or spiraling down into the depths of shame. All of these behaviors negatively affect the people around you. Consequences will help you respond to your relapse in a constructive, non-emotional way.

Pre-determined consequences, which have been discussed with wise counsel, will reduce the need for the spouse to feel like the rescuer, or the police, 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 VS. LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

NATURAL CONSEQUENCES

A natural consequence occurs as a result of a choice, without anyone imposing it.

- **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.

- 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.

Consequences should be quantifiable. This will allow you to understand the outcome of your choices before acting out. When you know that a relapse is tied to a clear, direct consequence, you will be less likely to listen to excuses or rationalize your behavior. A **measurable** consequence will also reduce the possibility of your spouse reacting out of pain, giving irrational statements, or making empty threats.

Below is a list of *Recovery Action Plan* steps. Remember, you may need to add or remove steps as your situation changes. This must be done **in writing** so each step is clear and non-negotiable.

- **Step 1:** Identify your relapse—the actions you're committing to refrain from. Refer to your *Three Circles Exercise* found on page 188 in the *Seven Pillars of Freedom Workbook*, page 158 in *Unraveled to Freedom Workbook II*, page 282 in the *Betrayal & Beyond Workbook*, and page 78 in *Living Free*. This list should be re-evaluated at least every six months.
- **Step 2:** Determine who you need to share your relapse with, and in what time frame. This typically includes a group member, a mentor or friend, and your spouse, if they are engaged in the recovery process. A good time frame is to share within 24 hours of the relapse. Knowing ahead of time that you have committed to being honest about a relapse within a short time frame will help you combat one of the most common lies on our way to relapse: "No one needs to know."

- **Step 3:** Write out all the **natural** consequences of your relapse. If you are married and your spouse is engaged in recovery with you, share them with your spouse and note if they have any additional natural consequences you may not have considered. A list of examples has been included at the end of these steps.
- **Step 4:** Write out a list of **logical** consequences you are choosing to follow if you relapse. Include in the list action steps you can take to rebuild and maintain trust. If married, your spouse will be the one who shares the behaviors that help to rebuild their trust. A list of examples can be found at the end of these steps.
- **Step 5:** Review your *Escape Plan* or create one by visiting the Pure Desire Tools page at **puredesire.org/tools** and add additional alarms you recognize that led to relapse. Add any necessary steps to handle the downward spiral differently next time.
- **Step 6:** Describe your desired outcome for creating this plan. If you have a clear vision of how this plan will help you in your recovery, 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 for long-term change and freedom.

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 you to come clean right away, consequences should be greater if the relapse isn't disclosed within 24 hours. Again, measurable consequences is the key.

A NOTE ON BROKEN TRUST IN THE RELATIONSHIP

Rebuilding trust and intimacy takes intentionality and time. When trust is broken, it can be a long rebuilding process. It will be important for you 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 your spouse to trust your words or their own instinct. Your spouse must SEE things that will help them start trusting again. Your spouse is learning how to believe behaviors and not just words. Your willingness to do the things necessary for them to feel vulnerable and safe enough to trust again is going to be key to your marital health and reconciliation.

Your spouse is encouraged to identify behaviors or actions that would help them see your sincerity and commitment to the marriage. The *Recovery Action Plan* is meant to give you a clear picture of what your spouse needs in order to process their pain and feel free enough to move forward in intimacy. Essentially, your spouse is giving you a detailed list of things you could do in order to regain trust and re-establish intimacy. Make every effort, then, to follow all the steps of your *Recovery Action Plan*. When you show that you are absolutely committed to following this plan, even without their insistence or pressure, you 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 a **Certified Sexual Addiction Therapist (CSAT)**.

EXAMPLES OF NATURAL CONSEQUENCES WHEN I RELAPSE

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

- I feel shame, which ends up driving my addiction further.
- I am objectifying others.
- I am afraid of being "found out," so I don't act like myself around my friends and family. I keep them at a distance for fear of exposure.
- I am contributing to an industry that is destroying society and families.
- My relationship with God is distant because of the shame I feel.
- I damage intimacy with my spouse by betraying them.
- I am not engaged with my children because my mind is preoccupied.
- I am distracted at work and become unproductive.
- I cause pain and insecurity in my spouse when I act out in my addiction.
- I'm creating patterns that will be damaging in my future relationship/marriage.
- I deepen the destructive pathways in my brain and reinforce a negative behavior.

EXAMPLES OF LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES WHEN I RELAPSE

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

- If flirting or inappropriate behavior with a coworker takes place, I will not travel alone with a coworker of the opposite sex. I will keep my conversations to work topics only. If this relapse continues to occur or if physical boundaries were crossed, then seeking other employment or moving departments will be necessary,
- If I misuse social media, I will delete any triggering person from my contacts and stay off social media for one month. If I find myself repeating this behavior, I will delete my social media accounts indefinitely until I've established six months sobriety in all areas of my addiction.
- If movies are a problem, I will remove my access to movies from my home. I will agree not to rent movies alone or search any movie stores, real or online.
- If I view pornography on my phone, I will block Internet access on my phone for one month. If a relapse occurs on my phone after the month is up, I will remove Internet access until sobriety has been established for a six-month period.
- If I visit a strip club, I will donate $50 to an organization that rescues individuals from the sex-trafficking industry. If I visit any kind of strip club or massage parlor again, the self-imposed fine will double, then triple, and so on. This will remind me of the cost of my actions and that what I do affects others either positively or negatively.
- Reading romance novels triggered a relapse, so I will remove the romance novels from my home and read literature that is good for my personal growth before bed.
- If I crossed physical boundaries (such as kissing or other inappropriate touching), I will immediately schedule a counseling appointment and call my group members.
- Within 24 hours of disclosing the relapse, I will help arrange for my spouse to have time away from the kids to process or meet with another group member.
- I will make an appointment with my counselor, pastor, or group leader for advice and accountability.

- I will fill out a FASTER Scale daily and share it with my spouse.
- I will seek counseling for my addiction and childhood wounds.
- I will abstain from going to massage parlors of any kind.
- I will allow access to any email or social media accounts to my spouse or accountability partner, at any time.
- I will have no phone communication (non-work-related) in any form (phone, text, instant messaging, etc.) with any person of the opposite sex, other than immediate family.
- I will read healing-oriented literature about shame issues, boundaries, addiction, codependency, trauma, betrayal, and restoring trust.
- I will share with our children (age-appropriate conversation) about why I am not sleeping in my bedroom with my spouse.
- I will install pornography-blocking software on all electronic devices.
- If relapse occurred on a non-essential device (tablet, gaming system, etc.), I will lose access to that device for a specified period of time.

SUGGESTED ACTION STEPS IF INFIDELITY HAS OCCURRED:

- I will immediately schedule a counseling appointment and disclose to my spouse, group, and/or pastor.
- I agree to not contact the other person with whom I acted out, accept any contact from them, or respond to any contact from them.
- I will arrange STD testing for my spouse and myself.
- My spouse will need time to process the affair. They may ask me to move out of our home (or stay in another room) for a minimum of _____ months. 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 I am still involved with the individual or have not shown commitment to our marriage, my spouse may seek counseling advice and initiate a separation or divorce proceedings.
- I agree to share with our children (at an age-appropriate level) why I will no longer be living in our home or bedroom.
- I agree to tell our close family, friends, and pastor what has happened, so my spouse doesn't have to be the secret keeper or the one to take on the responsibility of letting our family know what happened.

Every time a relapse occurs, the consequences should be greater than the previous time.

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.