

## **HOW TO DO A WRITTEN FIRST STEP**

*Welcome! It is said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.*

Like all 12-Step programs, SPAA suggests that a newcomer attend as many meetings as possible, and while there, find a sponsor—someone who has already completed their First Step and is willing to guide you through yours. If you would like help finding a sponsor, ask the meeting Secretary.

In Sex and Porn Addicts Anonymous, the First Step is designed to help newcomers launch into their recovery by releasing the burden of secrecy and shame they've been carrying around for most of their lives. This is the first step towards clearing away the wreckage of the past so that we can begin to live happy, joyous and free.

All newcomers begin at Step One. You and your sponsor should determine how you work your 12-Step program. You may do a written First Step inventory and history, which you will read aloud at a group meeting. Alternatively, your sponsor can guide you toward other methods of completing your First Step. In the end, the choice is yours.

For the newcomer who chooses to do a written First Step, this guide is intended to help you with a few simple (though not necessarily easy) strategies.

### **I. TELLING YOUR STORY**

Begin by writing out your sexual history in mostly chronological order.

- What is your earliest childhood memory regarding sex?
- When and how did you first see porn?
- Were there early life experiences that shaped your sexuality or intimacy?
- How was your addiction undetected, cunning and baffling?
- How were you powerless over your acting out behaviors?

① Many people working this Step ask, “How long should this effort take?” There is no one correct answer. Our experience has shown us that it can take days, weeks, or months to complete the written part of Step One. We suggest you take direction from your sponsor and other experienced members of SPAA for support and pacing.

From there, continue to tell your story, focusing on the progressive nature of your addiction. How did it begin to affect your friendships, finances, relationships, family, school, job, self-esteem? Write down everything you can remember; everything you are ashamed of or embarrassed about; things you wouldn't have imagined telling anyone.

① Writing the First Step may be traumatic and/or triggering. If you find yourself triggered and struggling to write, we offer the following suggestions: (i) Keep your predetermined time blocks short; (ii) "Bookend" the time blocks with prayer and phone calls to your sponsor and/or fellow members.

Include any relevant biographical details that may have had an impact on your acting out.

- What was your childhood like?
- Have you experienced any turmoils or traumas that you may have sought to escape through sex or pornography?
- As far as you know, does your family have a history of addiction?

① Just get it all down on paper. If you get stuck or lose motivation, ask yourself: Is there something I am resisting? Seek help from your sponsor or a fellow member who has completed their written First Step in SPAA. You may also find one or more of the following tips helpful: (i) Do not censor yourself or overthink structure, style or grammar at this point; (ii) Use bullet points; (iii) Create a chronological timeline; (iv) Work on your First Step in predetermined time blocks.

As you tell your story, include your edging behaviors in addition to your more overt sexual behaviors. If you are unsure about what constitutes edging, consult your sponsor and read our document, "What Is Edging?".

- What is your earliest memory of edging?
- Which edging behaviors have you engaged in over the course of your sexual history?
- What are your most recent edging behaviors?
- Are you continuing to edge? How so?
- How have your edging behaviors led you to break SPAA's definition of sobriety? How have they been obstacles to your serenity and well-being?
- Are you powerless over edging?

① It has been our experience that once we abstain from edging behaviors altogether, it becomes easier to get sober and stay sober. Identifying and sharing your edging behaviors, what precedes or triggers them, and when and where they happen will be essential to your sobriety and recovery.

## **II. CONSULTING YOUR SPONSOR**

Once you have written your first draft, ask your sponsor to meet with you (ideally in person) to go over it. Your sponsor will provide you with loving, supportive feedback, help you with structure and organization, and ask clarifying questions to encourage you to dig deeper into your story and be as honest as possible about your past actions and experiences.

## **III. REVISING YOUR WORK**

Use your sponsor's support and direction to refine your written work. As in all aspects of our program, if we get stuck, triggered, or lose motivation, we simply ask for help. A sponsor may ask you to remove any details/words that might be best left out or made less specific. For instance, your sponsor may require you to remove any sexually triggering language. Continue to revise until your sponsor agrees you are ready to share your First Step with another member of the group.

## **IV. ASKING FOR A SECOND OPINION**

Work with your sponsor to select another experienced member who will review your First Step. This other member may have additional feedback, which you and your sponsor can discuss incorporating into your final draft. We ask for a second opinion in order to protect the safety of the meeting, and especially of the newcomer.

① How long should a spoken First Step be? Based on experience, we suggest a First Step reading time of 20-35 minutes—approximately 2,500-4,500 words. Here's why: You will share your First Step within an abbreviated SPAA First Step meeting format to give you as much time as possible to share. It also gives fellow members time to share about how your First Step affected them, how they related to your story, and to offer their support and encouragement.

## **V. SHARING YOUR FIRST STEP AT AN SPAA MEETING**

Giving away your First Step to the group may sound daunting, but SPAA is a tightly-knit and fully supportive community, supporting the person who shares their story. After all, many people in the room will have already done a First Step and know the courage required to write and share it. Your sponsor will work with you and your home group's Secretary to find a date that works best for you to read your finished First Step at a group meeting.

In the process of completing our First Step, some of us rushed to tell our committed partners about the secrets we kept from them for so long. Our hearts were in the right place, but we failed to fully consider the impact our revelations might have on our partners. The pain it might cause them. The arguments that might follow. Our instinct to defend ourselves and our acting out behavior. For all these reasons and more, we suggest members discuss with their sponsor about the best strategies for getting honest with their partners—through courage and compassion.

ⓘ Your SPAA written First Step is not intended to be what's known in the therapeutic community as a Full Disclosure Document. Please seek help and advice from your sponsor.

No matter how you feel after reading your First Step, know that your reaction is normal. For example, some fellow members feel immense relief, depressed, or sexually triggered. If you are triggered, reach out to your newfound members—text, call or attend a meeting. Challenges will arise at times on your path to recovery, but we have discovered that we can achieve more than we ever thought possible through the support, strength and hope of our members.

## **VI. SPAA MEMBERS SHARE THEIR OWN FIRST STEP EXPERIENCES:**

**TESTIMONY 1:** "The written First Step is where I began my journey on the road to freedom from shame. Before coming in to this program, I believed I was the worst human being to ever exist. I felt my acting out was so terrible that no one could relate to me. I was determined to take my darkest secrets with me to the grave because the shame and embarrassment I carried were so heavy. But when I read my First Step to the group, I was given only overwhelming support by people who had walked in my shoes and understood my past. Today there is nowhere else I feel more at home than at a meeting. I am able to connect with members because I can share with honesty. To get here, I had to jump a huge mountain of shame. Sharing my First Step gave me the momentum I needed."

**TESTIMONY 2:** "The process of writing and sharing my First Step was an appropriately miraculous start to my journey of recovery. In place of the secrecy and shame demanded by my addiction, I was challenged to be open and honest about my darkest days and most embarrassing moments. I'd previously planned to carry these realities to my grave, an eventuality brought closer under their deadly weight. What a sense of liberation to let go and find acceptance and love—rather than the feared rejection and judgment—from fellows who truly understand! Whereas isolation and self-will kept me from finding solutions and growth, admitting and accepting my powerlessness over my disease, starting with my First Step, was paradoxically empowering. By proclaiming that I can't do this on my own and reaching out for help, I found the solid ground of the fellowship, the 12 steps and my higher power."

**TESTIMONY 3:** "I came to SPAA with 35 years of experience in Alcoholics Anonymous. I thought "I know this stuff, I can do it, I know what the hell is wrong." I fell completely into that trap. My ego told me I have so much recovery time in AA and I know all the shortcuts to stopping my porn addiction. I now have a firm understanding that all the accumulated knowledge of my years in AA will not keep me sober. I had to start all over again at the First Step. I wanted this problem to be simply made up of character defects—nope. It was a First Step issue, and only SPAA hit upon my struggle with edging and sexually acting out. I ask my higher power to take my unwanted sexual thoughts and behavior and replace them with gratitude for living this sober life of SPAA."

**TESTIMONY 4:** "Do not fear plunging into the dark. When I was first writing my First Step, I had concerns about sharing the heavier parts of my story, what I was thinking or doing, out of fear of judgment and criticism. Fortunately, I was encouraged by my sponsor and fellows to share my story for what it is; the good, the bad, and the ugly. That, I think, is what made the experience so powerful for me. Seeing numerous fellows relate to some of my deepest secrets removed all the weight from them; it felt as if I cut loose the heavy stones that were weighing me down for so long. Thus, my piece of advice is to not be afraid to share about the darkness. For once it is exposed to the light of the fellowship, it loses all its power. There is no judgment here, only acceptance and love."

**TESTIMONY 5:** "Preparing my 1st step was like turning on a flashlight before entering a dark room. Better yet, a floodlight. I wanted to see everything in there. Oh I certainly had memories of my childhood, good and bad, but I tended to leave the painful ones tucked away in the dark. Now I had growing within me a willing desire to search through it and expose it. Writing out my First Step was going to help me bring it out into the light. I recognized that I was powerless over sex and pornography and this awareness made it easier for me to complete the task. In addition, when I listened to some of the other 1st step giveaways, I was even more compelled to do so. And when that day arrived and I delivered my story to the group, I was filled with a wonderful sense of release and hope."