

Phoning a Friend

We get by with a little help from our friends, as the song goes. We tried to stop sexually acting out on our own. We told ourselves we could pull ourselves up from our bootstraps, but — spoiler alert — we didn't have much luck.

We're not ashamed to admit we need help from a power greater than ourselves. Scroll through the contacts on our phones, and you'll find dozens of lifelines: fellow members we can call whenever we feel the urge to act out.

The idea is pretty simple. Instead of inappropriately flirting with someone or pulling up a porn site, we phone a friend. Call, text — either will do.

Take it from members with years of sobriety, reaching out for help really works. It's like an off-ramp on the road to sexually acting out. It veers us away from the wrong course, at least for the time being.

What's more, talking with someone who shares and understands our struggle gets us thinking about our addiction. The steep price we have paid for sexually acting out. The impact our actions might have on other people. By the end of the call, we often shake our heads: "What the hell were we thinking?"

Phoning a friend breaks our habit of acting out *impulsively*, without taking into account the damage we'll wreck on our relationships, our committed partners, and lives as a whole.

Talking to members also boosts our recovery. We swap tips about methods for staying sober as though we're swapping recipes for the perfect cake: from web blockers to meditation techniques. There's no easier way to avoid making mistakes than by listening to the solutions others have found.

The first thing to do is get some numbers. If you haven't already, ask a member for their number before or after a meeting. We know this might be uncomfortable. After years of isolating with sex and porn, some of us were a bit like someone who'd lived in the wild — we preferred to be isolated. With a little courage, we learned to open up and let others in. To our surprise, most members actually *wanted* to get to know us.

The next time you feel the urge to act out, call a member instead. Try not to wait too long. "The urge" is sort of like having a fly problem in your house; it won't get rid of itself, it'll only grow worse. The sooner we phone a friend, the sooner we get relief.

Of course, some of us cringed at the thought of calling a stranger out of the blue — even though in reality they were just like us. We struggled to reach out for help and to be vulnerable. After all, we'd emotionally withdrawn from other people because of our shame about this addiction for years.

We invented all kinds of excuses not to call. We didn't want to disrupt the other person, we told ourselves. Didn't want to be a burden. Alternatively: we'll call later when we're a little less busy — on the list went. We have countless reasons not to reach out, but only one reason to do so: we can't do this alone.

We discovered that if a member is busy, they simply won't pick up — no reason to feel like a burden. Many of us are glad when a member's name pops up on our phones. They help break us out of our emotional isolation and remind us that we'll always have friends, no matter how far down the scale we have gone.

As we called our fellow members, week after week, something unexpected and miraculous happened. We developed some of the closest and most supportive relationships we have ever known. How many people do you know whom you can tell your deepest secrets... and be accepted?

And it's not just a one-way street (to stick with the driving metaphor). Every time we call a member, they don't just help us, we help *them*. To open up, stay connected with the program, and help each other stay sober. We're all on the journey of recovery together, and we can make it. One step, and one call at a time.