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Step 1 Acceptance

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The principle of the first step in the 12 steps is acceptance. I need to accept three things about myself in my addiction (cybersex): I was powerless to stop addictive behavior, my life was unmanageable, and the consequences of my behavior on myself and others.

In addition to my programs "big book" Sex Addicts Anonymous, two books that helped me frame my 1st step were Carnes A Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps and Darren Littlejohn's Twelve Step Buddhist. Both use the principle of acceptance as the metaphor for the first step.

Without acceptance of the reality of my addictive behavior there is no serious hope for recovery. I need to see my behavior for what it is. The illusion of my life as an addict is what keeps me imprisoned in a state not much different from a maximum security prison. I am not free to act in ways that are beneficial to me or others, because my addiction's needs are paramount. I am incapable of acting in my own interests or others when I am under the control of my addiction. My addiction is my prison walls and guards. Until I can see the walls that surround me and the guard who holds the keys outside the door, I have no hope of being free (recovery).

First I must look honestly at my addict's behavior. Littlejohn has an exercise that uses the inner child methodology to address two inner children within: the addict and the sufferer. I ask the addict about its role in our lives. Why does it act the way it does? What are the consequences of its actions? What would happen to the self without it? I found my addict to be very focused on protecting me from pain and emotion. It was unaware that its actions had negative consequences either for me or for others. It really did not think about anything else then getting its needs met which was escape from pain, stress and emotion.

The sufferer's job was to experience the pain in my life. It saw its role in religious terms (suffering Christ?). It both suffered the pain and emotion that addict wanted to distract me from, but also it suffered the depression, guilt, and self hatred of the acting out behavior of my addiction. The addict only listens to my sufferer when it identifies strong negative feelings. The addict refuses to see its own role in harming me or others.

The process of addressing my inner addict and sufferer, helped to clarify how oblivious I was to my own denial of my needs as well as how my behavior harmed others. When the sufferer identified a painful emotion or situation, my addict would take over and divert my attention into acting out behavior. This addictive behavior first was powerful and I had a difficult time disengaging from the behavior. The powerlessness to stop did real harm to me, my family, my work and to others I with whom I acted out. This inability to stop acting out caused my life in all these areas to spiral out of control.

The affects on my family were a distancing between myself and my wife and son. My time and attention was on my addiction and not on them. I pulled away emotionally and physically. My work suffered as I brought my acting out behavior to work. My partners were codependent with me in our addiction. I helped to keep them imprisoned. Finally, I harmed myself. I was depressed, guilt ridden, low self worth due to my deceitfulness (work and marriage).

Another very helpful set of exercises in the 12-step Buddhist, is meditations on acceptance and compassion towards self. In addition to accepting my powerlessness in addiction, unmanageability of my life, and the harm done to myself and others. I need to have compassion for myself in that condition. I feel what it is like to be powerless, the pain of the unmanageability and its consequences on me and others. Then I say "what if" I could be free from the suffering of my addiction. Then "I want" to be free from the suffering of my addiction. Finally "I will" be free from the suffering of my addiction. These affirmations helped me find compassion for myself as an addict.

Another meditation focused on being accepting of my life "as it is" To be present with my life now. So much of my addiction is escaping my present feelings. To truly accept the reality of my behavior, I need to learn to live in the present with whatever I am feeling right now. Life "as it is" is all I have. To try to escape is hopeless and leads to suffering for myself and others. My only hope, is to learn to love myself right here in this body, in this moment, with all that I am right now: "As it is."