

The Good and the Bad About Sexual Addict 12 Step Programs

The Good

One of the main benefits of the 12 step meetings I found was the feeling of “I’m not alone or the only one with this problem.” This was quite a relief to me as not many people are open about whether they have these problems or not.

The other benefit I found was the act of confession. Without going into too much detail everyone gets their turn to uncover their secrets. This feels great because part of what fuels addiction is secrecy. It was quite a relief and felt like I was getting a heavy weight off my shoulders.

I found people very willing to befriend and help me in the denominational group. I felt like I always had someone to talk to who would know exactly what I was going through.

The final benefit I got from these meetings was accountability. I knew if I made a mistake I would have to report it to the group the next time I went in. They had these colored chips that were given to people for abstaining for certain lengths of time, the minimum chip being a one month chip.

The Bad

The number one negative thing I found with these meetings was the labels. Every meeting begins with every person stating their name and then stating they are an addict. For example, “My name is Joe and I am a porn addict.” First of all, this just didn’t feel right to say in front of all those people. Second of all, yes I may be struggling with porn but repeating that phrase certainly doesn’t give me hope of being something better. I agree with admitting problems but not labeling myself as a porn addict every meeting. This just doesn’t help my identity or self-esteem.

This is not a Scriptural approach. Scripture says that we can be transformed and become a new creation. We cannot do this by being “ a dog returning to its vomit.” When we continually reflect on our sins, continually describe ourselves as being controlled by sin we are tempted to return to the sin and never really get healed. I need to define myself as a child of God NOT define ourselves by our sins.

The second thing was the confession. Though it felt good to get it all out, it also felt bad telling that many people about something private that was in no way injurious to them personally. I am under the belief that confession should only be unto those who have been harmed. Besides, some of these meetings were coed and that just felt even more weird.

Again Scripture is clear. The paradigm is to tell as few people as possible and only for the purpose healthy reconciliation.

The third problem was some people were giving too much detail when it was their turn to confess. I found this to be a trigger for addiction rather than helpful. In the beginning of the meeting people are told not to be too descriptive but inevitably people slip up.

Sometimes addicts will bring up details for their own enjoyment. This creates for them another porno event. So great now you have revisited porn and have something else to fantasize about.

The last thing I had difficulty with was there seemed to be no exit strategy. It seemed to me that I was almost expected to attend these meetings for an undefined amount of time if I expected to remain sober. There was one guy, while being a great strength to the group, who was sober for almost two years I think and was still attending these meetings. However, while I was attending, he had a relapse. I couldn't help but wonder if his continual attendance, despite his success, had caused this relapse. I believe that when a person gets to a point where they are sober and confident for say a couple months then they need to move on and live their life instead of continually dwelling on the worry that they may slip up again.

Additionally these groups are lead by lay persons who have had the same problems as you. It is not true that only those who have experienced a problem can really understand it. What is true is that those who have experienced it are giving direction from their own opinions, prejudices and hurt. Much of this is not truly helpful.

Potential Pitfalls

Overwhelming:

It can be helpful to be in the presence of someone else's emotions, but sometimes it can be too much. When you're feeling vulnerable yourself, you might not be in a good place to experience another person's anger, sadness, regret, guilt, etc.

Discouraging:

It is common for people to attend support groups looking for guidance, hope, and reassurance. Those early on in their grief especially may be looking for evidence that things get easier. Attending a group with this expectation may lead to feelings of hopelessness when others in the group, especially those further along are still expressing pain, frustration, and negativity.

Therapeutic Expectations:

It's important to remember that support groups are not the same as therapy. Although group leaders are sometimes mental health professionals, often they are not. It's important to check your expectations, if you are looking for a more formal therapeutic approach you may want to consider talking to a counselor.

Incorrect Information/Bad Advice:

If it happens at the grocery store, why wouldn't it happen in a group where *everyone* is in pain? Although you'll see that there is benefit in the wisdom of others, there can also be a lot of bad information about what is normal, what to expect, and how to cope.

Judgment:

I think most people attend support groups with the expectation that it will be a safe, judgment free zone. In reality, even amongst people with similar types of losses, there can be a lot of negativity, insensitivity, judgment, and comparing.

Negative comments and judgments can be especially damaging when there isn't a strong leader to make sure the comments are addressed.

People:

This sounds really harsh, but sometimes all it takes is one person to derail an entire group. The monopolizer, the know-it-all, the interrupter, the inconsiderate, and the excessively negative person can easily reduce a groups chances of every being seen as a safe, open, non-judgmental, supportive and constructive environment. Unfortunately all I have to say about this is that it happens and it can take extreme tact to work around certain personality types.

Culture:

Lastly, it does happen from time to time that a support group takes on a certain identity or chooses to identify with certain beliefs. New members may feel subtle pressure to identify with ways of thinking such as, "*ours is the worst kind of loss*", "*life will never be normal*", or "*no one else understands.*" Although there is benefit in having a group to identify with, be careful that you are not adopting outlooks that keep you stuck or cause you to close yourself off from people outside the group.

Conclusion

I would have to conclude that groups of addicts really only perpetuate the addiction not heal it. What is need is an educated and experience Christian Counselor.