

PRINCIPLE FOUR

***We seek accountability and to build our character
as children of God.***

Growing in Transformation: I Mature in Character

Principle Four is about accountability and about character. In the early days of learning about accountability you may have many mistaken notions of what it means. As addicts, most of us resist the idea of being accountable. We don't like being told what to do. We bristle at the thought of having to check in with someone. When an accountability partner gives or withholds his permission for us to do certain things, we protest that we're being treated like a child. We question why we should submit to another person or allow someone else to control us so tightly.

(Now, be honest: Isn't your reaction fairly similar to what I just described?)

This mindset is what makes most addicts resistant to the idea of accountability. It also represents many of the misconceptions about what it means to be accountable to someone about your recovery.

Assignment One - Accepting Accountability

Let's examine first your need for accountability. You may still believe you can recover on your own. (Or maybe by now you're convinced of the benefit of being in a L.I.F.E. Recovery Group, but that's as far as you want to go.) I feel compelled to speak the truth to you in love: Remember it's your *own* "best thinking" that got you in this mess, right? You thought you could figure it out on your own, that you could avoid the consequences, or that the rules didn't apply to you. These may have been some of the lies you told yourself. (Look back to the work you did in Assignment One of Principle Three.)

Here's what God says: *"Fools think they need no advice, but the wise listen to others"* (Proverbs 12:15, *New Living Bible*). A beginning point of accepting accountability is to recognize our "foolish" status regarding our sexual sins and our ability to change on our own. The wise person listens to the advice of godly men who are further down the road in their journey of living with sexual integrity.

One helpful resource in changing your attitude is the book of Nehemiah, which gives a wonderful description of accountability. A section called "Tying it all Together" at the back of this of this L.I.F.E. Recovery Guide details the teachings from Nehemiah, and I suggest you read it as you work on Principle Four. The book covers a broad spectrum of principles that apply to the process of transformation, but it also contains a blueprint for accountability. The first principle outlined from Nehemiah is especially applicable here: *Accountability begins with humility*. Admit your pride and your powerlessness to achieve lasting change on your own, and take another huge step of surrender. Become teachable.

Next, challenge your negative mindset about accountability. I encourage you to view the concept as a vital tool of recovery, instead of some kind of negative force hovering over you. Like boundaries, accountability provides guidance and protection for your journey. An accountability partner is someone who watches your back, who stays with you on the wall (refer to Nehemiah for an explanation of that phrase), and who walks beside you to steady you if you begin to fall.

This kind of primary accountability partner is called a **sponsor**, which is a term borrowed from the Twelve Step program of AA. This person is the one main guide who directs your program.

It's important to point out that a primary mistake made by recovering men is to have only one accountability partner. You may have tried that approach, and it hasn't fully worked. As an addict, you're too smart and too skillful at deceit to let only one person truly know you. It will take more than that one man to keep you honest and directed in the early days of your recovery. That's why it's so critical that you participate in your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group and allow a *number* of men to know your heart.

But, as AA says, "First things first." In this initial assignment of Principle Four, you have one main job: To find a **sponsor**. Following are some descriptions of a sponsor to help you better understand what I mean.

Sponsors

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV)

These roles of a sponsor should be helpful in your recovery:

_____ A sponsor is someone who will hold you Accountable. With this person you will be able to share all of your past sexual sins, your acting out behaviors, your rituals, and your fantasies. Your sponsor will help you develop a plan for staying sober. If he ever sees you coming close to doing any of your rituals or acting out behaviors, he will directly confront you about them in love.

_____ A sponsor is someone who will give you Encouragement. As you slowly make progress a sponsor will celebrate your success. He'll be your biggest cheerleader.

_____ A sponsor is someone you can talk to and who will Listen. Whenever you feel tempted, lonely, hurt, frightened, sad, or angry, you can call a sponsor to talk things over. Sometimes he will meet with you during such emergencies until the crisis passes.

_____ A sponsor is someone with whom you can Pray. The two of you can seek the Lord's guidance together. You may also share Bible study.

_____ A sponsor is a Model. Ideally, he should be someone who has had at least one year of sobriety from his addictions. His success should serve as an inspiration to you.

_____ A sponsor is a Guide. He'll teach you tools to use in recovery and show you the right path to be successful. He'll go over your L.I.F.E. Recovery Guide assignments as you do them. He can direct your reading outside of the group and may have ideas about therapy or spiritual direction. He is the general of your army.

These descriptions are clearly positive, aren't they? They're appealing, rather than threatening. I think we all have longed for this kind of person in our lives. We can become interested in (and even welcome) an accountability relationship with this kind of sponsor!

Who, then, can serve as your sponsor? It cannot be your spouse, and it cannot be a member of the opposite sex. A sponsor should be someone you can relate to, and preferably someone who is a recovering sex addict with more sobriety than yourself. Some suggestions include:

- a relative
- a friend
- a pastor
- someone in the church
- someone in your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group
- someone with AA or SA experience

Some groups will be so new that there won't be men with lengthy sobriety. Fortunately, sponsors don't always need to be recovering specifically from sexual addiction, which helps combat the lack of recovering men to serve as sponsors. My first sponsor was a man who had 10 years of sobriety from alcohol; he still was extremely helpful because he knew how to model accountability. Some L.I.F.E. Recovery Groups may need to rely on finding sponsors in other places in addition to just within the group itself.

In many ways having a sponsor will be like having a surrogate parent. A sponsor must be tough, wise, and loving. If you were abandoned emotionally, physically, or spiritually by one of your parents, having a sponsor may seem very strange. Addicts, after all, are impaired in terms of intimate relationships. There may be times when you don't like your sponsor, and that's OK. He is like a signpost, showing you the way. There are times that I don't like the speed limit signs on the road when I am in a hurry. There will be times when you don't like what your sponsor is telling you. We love to isolate and not be responsible to or connect genuinely with anyone else. On the other hand, a sponsor may also be a wonderful presence in your life that you've never found before. In the surrogate parent role, a sponsor can help heal some of your wounds from the past.

So just exactly how do you interact with a sponsor? What specifically do you do together? Following is another checklist.

Concrete things you should do with your sponsor:

_____ **Call every day.** (Yes, every single day.) If you're not in the habit of talking with him every day, you won't pick up the phone to call when you're tempted to act out. Ask your sponsor to check on you if you fail to contact him daily. Perhaps you only make a brief check-in to report that you're sober today and doing OK. Other times you'll need to talk more extensively about some situation or struggle you're facing. *Just be sure to make daily contact with your sponsor.* Talking by phone is better than sending an email.

_____ **Share how you're feeling with him.** During each daily phone call or email, report on what you're feeling. Identify whether you're feeling glad, sad, mad, afraid, lonely, hurt, guilty, or ashamed. (You may be feeling one or all or some combination.) It's not your sponsor's job to fix your feelings, but it's good for you to get them out.

_____ **State any lustful thoughts or temptations you've felt during the day.** Remember, bringing the secrets into the light removes their power. As AA says, "We're as sick as our secrets."

_____ **Confess** any boundary violations you've committed or slips you've had.

_____ **Ask for specific accountability** about an area or issue as needed. As an example, you might ask your sponsor to question you about your computer use, or if you've avoided a former acting out partner when there's a possibility you might run into her (or him, if you struggle with same sex issues). Maybe you need to ask for accountability about where you go on your lunch break. You certainly need to be accountable about missing any L.I.F.E. Recovery Group meetings.

_____ **Process any circumstances or situations that are bothering you.** If you've had a fight with your wife or a friend, talk with your sponsor about what you could do differently next time. If you're frustrated with your boss, get your sponsor's input. *Talk about anything that is hindering your serenity.*

_____ **Work through these Principles of recovery.** Share your journal or notebook of the writing assignments in this L.I.F.E. Recovery Guide. Review especially your work in Principle Three – your “searching and fearless moral inventory,” as AA calls it. The best way to do this work with your sponsor is face to face, if possible.

_____ **Celebrate your progress in recovery.** Be accountable about your sobriety date and celebrate milestones such as one week, one month, three months, six months, and a year. Take your sponsor out to lunch or for coffee and express your gratitude for the progress you're making with God's help and his.

Summary of the Roles of Sponsor and Group Member

Useful in identifying, recruiting, and setting expectations with your sponsor:

Sponsor Responsibilities	Group Member Responsibilities
Lovingly confront when needed, including possibly enforcing boundaries and consequences for group member	Submit to authority
Encourage the member with positive affirmations	Receive encouragement
Ensure group member submits a plan for his recovery and a contract about the sponsoring relationship	Prepare a plan of recovery and sign a contract with sponsor (see example)
Listen well (don't try to fix)	Share openly and honestly
Available to group member	Contact sponsor regularly and consistently
Pray with group member and teach to pray more deeply	Pray on the phone and in person with sponsor
Meet physically with the member at least once a week and check the L.I.F.E. Guide assignments	Meet with the sponsor and show the L.I.F.E. Guide assignments
Call the member if he doesn't call by a set time	Call the sponsor by a set time determined by the two of you
Strongly recommend the group member enters counseling if needed	Get a counselor if financially able
Ask the group member to state feelings	State feelings (use a feelings chart if necessary)
Ask if there are any lustful thoughts or temptations	Communicate honestly about the struggles of the day
Monitor the group member's self-care in terms of rest, diet, exercise, and living a balanced life	Practice healthy self-care regarding rest, diet, exercise, and balance between family, work and play

A sponsor can't meet all your needs himself, and he won't be perfect or 100% available.

Only God can be trusted to be totally dependable.

But a sponsor is a vital touchstone of your recovery program.

Journaling Exercise: Accepting Accountability

1. *Is there anyone in your life right now who would be a candidate for a sponsor? List the names of as many possibilities as you can think of. Pray about each one and ask for God's guidance in your selection.*
2. *Write down the date of your next L.I.F.E. Recovery Group meeting. At that time, approach someone about being your sponsor. If you don't know anyone, your group may assign someone who has volunteered to be a temporary sponsor until you find a more permanent one. Don't worry about the temporary status. Just proceed in calling him every day until the next meeting and then try again.*
3. *Write down the name of your sponsor, whether he's temporary or a more permanent choice. If you haven't found one, note again the date of the next meeting and repeat the process of asking for a sponsor. If you're still not successful, broaden your search to something like an AA group, where there is usually more long-term sobriety.*
4. *Complete the Sponsor-Group Member Contract (sample given) to formalize the commitments you and your sponsor are making.*
5. *In your journal, keep a log of the times you've called your sponsor and the times you've met. Keep it separate from your other work so you can access it easily. Refer to this record as a measurement of how well you're doing at staying connected. Report to your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group about your contact with your sponsor.*

The next four pages contain a "Sponsor Contract," which you and your sponsor should complete. The contract also has some sample questions and other criteria to help both of you understand and remain accountable to these commitments.

SPONSOR – GROUP MEMBER CONTRACT

Member Name: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Sponsor Name: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Group Facilitator Name: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Calling Schedule:

_____ Sun	_____ Wed
_____ Mon	_____ Thur
_____ Tues	_____ Fri
	_____ Sat

Format for Daily Contact: ** Details follow for each item*

- **Check Feelings** (share core emotions, not just thoughts)
- **Get Current** (temptations, boundary violations, bothersome thoughts or situations, etc.)
- **Be Accountable** (about top line behaviors and bottom line behaviors – see explanation)
- **Share Bible reading** (or some other devotional or inspirational material)
- **Pray**

Top Line Behaviors:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Bottom Line Behaviors:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Others in My Accountability Circle:

Group Member's Signature and Date

Sponsor's Signature and Date

Explanation of the Items that Make Up Daily Contact with Sponsor

Feelings Check:

There are only eight core feelings: *glad, sad, mad, lonely, hurt, fearful, guilty, and ashamed*. It's also possible to feel *numb*, which would be a ninth category.

Obviously, you'll experience gradations of these feelings, like *ecstatic* at just becoming engaged or *pleased* with the weather (both are variations of glad). You can be feeling *anxious* about an upcoming test or meeting or *terrified* because you've just been diagnosed with cancer (both are nuances of fear). Bottom line, though: all our emotions fall somewhere in one (or more) of these nine broad categories.

Often we share thoughts and describe them as feelings. For example, you might say, "I feel like you're not listening to me." That's a statement of opinion, not a feeling. The feeling would be, "I feel *hurt* when you don't listen to me" or "I feel *lonely* in this relationship and *angry* when you don't stop watching TV to listen to me." See the difference?

Sponsor's Questions:

"How are you feeling now? Have you had any other strong feelings today? What were they?"

When you communicate with your sponsor, include a "feelings check." Simply state your feeling(s) in that moment. If you had a different feeling(s) that dominated the day, share that, too.

Getting Current:

To get current simply means to describe your day, including both the significant events and the bothersome ones. Getting current is providing a "laundry list" of what's happening in your life, especially anything that's eroding your serenity. It also includes disclosing any boundary violations you've committed.

Sponsor's Questions:

"What happened today?"

Is anything bothering you?"

Did you violate any boundaries?"

What are you grateful for today?"

Accountability:

Remember, your sponsor is your main accountability partner. He's the primary person you invite to question you about your recovery program. Your accountability report should cover your *participation* in your "top line" behaviors (explained below) and your *avoidance* of your "bottom line" behaviors (also explained).

Defining Bottom Lines

Twelve Step groups often use the term "bottom line behaviors" to describe conduct you need to avoid, such as these examples:

- objectifying
- viewing pornography or other stimulating material
- flirting or using sexual humor
- controlling self (in the sense of "white knuckling")
- compulsively watching TV
- compulsively shopping, cleaning, or doing any other secondary acting out behavior
- fantasizing
- masturbating
- controlling others
- compulsively eating or gambling
- compulsively exercising
- engaging in sexual sin with others

Defining Top Lines

"Top line behaviors" describe healthy choices you make daily, such as the following:

- eating well
- playing
- exercising/caring for your body
- connecting with safe people
- journaling your activities, thoughts, and feelings
- resting
- praying
- Bible reading or meditating
- practicing gratitude

Sponsor's Questions about Accountability

Did you engage in any medicating behaviors today?
Did you objectify anyone today?
Did you fantasize?
Have you masturbated?
Have you been on any inappropriate Internet sites?
Has there been any provocative behavior? Exhibitionism? Flirting?
How much TV have you watched?
Have you taken care of yourself physically? How much sleep did you get last night?
Are there any specific areas where you need accountability?
Have you fully disclosed everything you need to?

Sexual Abstinence Period

These concepts about being accountable to a sponsor are tools to help you maintain sobriety. Hopefully, by this point in your progression through this *L.I.F.E. Recovery Guide*, you've achieved some length of sobriety from inappropriate sexual behaviors.

Obviously, sexual sobriety begins when you stop acting out sexually. At first glance, this "sobriety" definition seems straightforward. We addicts, though, tend to justify whatever it is we want to do, and we prefer to operate within a wide margin of behaviors we choose to view as not acting out. Being committed to a program of rigorous honesty (as well as being willing to go to any lengths to get well) demands we scrutinize all our actions.

*A healthy recovery program with transformation as the goal requires a total, absolute abstinence period from all sexual activity and intentional sexual thoughts. **Abstinence could be for any period of time, but I recommend at least 90 days.***

Neurochemical Benefits

An abstinence period serves several purposes and has a variety of benefits. First, by abstaining from sexual activity and fantasy, you'll experience a cleansing of your brain chemistry. Just like an alcoholic needs to be sober for a number of days before the alcohol is completely out of his system, the same principle applies to those recovering from sexual addiction. A sexual time-out is a form of detoxification. Remember, we addicts have a constant supply of our "drug," because even fantasies produce chemicals in the brain that cause us to feel pleasure. These chemical reactions are a natural part of life, but sex addicts have used this chemical reaction to medicate and escape their feelings. Stopping all sexual activity and sexualized thoughts allows the brain chemistry to return to normal.

Another benefit of abstinence deals with the addictive characteristic called tolerance. Tolerance means the addict requires more of the addictive agent to achieve the same result. An alcoholic, for example, develops tolerance so that he requires more alcohol to become intoxicated. In similar fashion, you may have built up a tolerance for sexual activity. You may find that you need a greater amount of sexual stimuli than you once did, which has led you into more frequent sexual activity or more dangerous sex. If you're married, this tolerance factor may also have affected your ability to experience sexual pleasure with your wife. The need for more and more may even have created an inability to experience orgasm during marital sex. Being abstinent for a period of time will help to reverse these symptoms. After an abstinence period, you may find that the joy of sex with your spouse may return. If it doesn't, you may need more specialized counseling to unearth the sexual or (more likely) the relationship difficulty.

Correction of False Core Beliefs

An additional reason all addicts need to experience a fairly lengthy period of abstinence is for the purpose of changing your core beliefs. We addicts hold the (unconscious) core belief that sex is our most important need. Based on our history of sexual abuse or on the “false intimacy” we achieved through our sexual liaisons, we concluded that sex or a relationship was the way to get our needs met. Indeed, because we all are “needy” – the result of our abandonment trauma – we discovered sex was our most important need, for it was our best (though false) solution to the pain of our abandoned hearts. A period of abstinence exposes this core belief and gradually reverses it.

A period of abstinence will counteract another false core belief: that sex is equal to love. (Again, our trauma of abuse and abandonment created this lie.) If you’re married, when you abstain from sex and still receive love from your wife, you eventually learn a new definition of love. If you’re single, through abstinence you’ll discover that you can find love from intimate friendships that you couldn’t find in acting out sexually or through unhealthy relationships.

Suggested Boundaries for the Abstinence Period

You should observe specific boundaries during a 90-day timeout period to help you abstain from sexual activity and thought. Following are some suggestions:

- **No Internet use, except when necessary for work or to connect with your sponsor or support group.** If the Internet has been part of your addictive behavior, disconnect and lock up the computer for 90 days. (If your wife or someone else in your household needs Internet access, she can have the key). If the Internet is necessary for your work, discuss with your sponsor ways to avoid temptation. Using a filtered server or one of the accountability reporting programs are two ideas.
- **No alcohol.** Next to sex and relationships, drinking is one of the best ways to alter your mood. Don’t drink.
- **No TV.** You may choose to make an exception for news shows, history or sporting channels, or similar appropriate fare, but avoid soap operas, talk shows, sit-coms, and night-time dramas, which are full of sexual situations and unhealthy relationship examples.
- **Only G-rated movies or videos.** If you go to a family movie arrive after the movie previews.
- **Minimize fantasizing.** Many things can prompt a fantasy, but it’s prudent to avoid those triggers that you know are problematic. As an example, music elicits powerful responses for many of us. If you’re one who’s strongly prompted by

music, only listen to tapes or CDs where you have control over what you hear. Review your list of acceptable music with your sponsor.

- **No reading of personal ads in newspapers or singles' publications.** Cancel any ads you've placed yourself.
- **No one-on-one conversations with women**, even "innocent" ones. You don't have to be rude, but do your best to avoid any personal exchange with women (or men if you have acted out with the same-sex).
- **No objectifying.** Keep your eyes on the road, sidewalk, or whatever is in front of you. Attend to business and "bounce" your eyes away immediately if you see someone that triggers lust. (Another way to describe this suggestion is to avoid "public voyeurism.")
- **Change the routes you normally drive.** If certain roads bring you close to places that are triggers for you (e.g., where an affair partner lives or works) then choose another way to go.
- **Establish a defensive protocol when alone at home for 2 hours or more.** Call your sponsor or an accountability partner before, during, or after extended periods of time alone in order to eliminate the "dead zones" of time when you're not accountable. Report what you'll be doing to stay out of trouble.
- **Connect with your wife or an intimate male friend every day.** Interact specifically each day on more than a superficial level. Share thoughts, feelings, and communicate concerns.

Withdrawal

Just as the alcoholic or drug addict goes through withdrawal when he stops using the drug of choice, the sex addict similarly experiences withdrawal symptoms when he stops acting out. Remember the neurochemical effects of compulsive sexual or relational behavior? The brain reacts when there is no longer that influx of chemicals, and that reaction may be noticeable.

Some addicts report genuine physiological symptoms of withdrawal including headaches, body pains, sleeping and eating difficulties, or gastrointestinal distress. All are stress-related reactions that may come from stopping the medication you've historically used. (These may also be symptoms of depression, which might be an underlying condition.)

It's important to remember that "this, too, will pass," as an AA slogan promises. You won't always feel so miserable physically. (I promise that no body parts will be harmed if you stop acting out. Orgasm is, indeed, optional, not necessary for life.) When you sense that familiar craving to act out, remind yourself that it's temporary and it will pass. Compare the craving

sensations to running up a steep hill. The feelings will intensify and resisting will get harder, but if you choose not to give up and give in, you'll soon be over the crest of the hill and the going will be much easier.

Emotional reactions are another typical part of withdrawal. During abstinence intense feelings may surface - feelings you've kept bottled up for years. One principle of Alcoholics Anonymous is, "You can either drink or deal with your stuff. You can't do both." I believe the same standard applies to the sexual addict. Our sexual and relational behavior has been our way of "dealing with our stuff," and a sexual timeout often raises core issues that have been buried under the obvious symptoms of sexual sin. I predict you'll discover these foundational issues have little or nothing to do with sex. Instead, they probably involve your central woundedness and shame. An abstinence period allows you a chance to recognize and deal with these issues instead of medicating them through acting out.

Sexual Abstinence for the Married Man

For the married sex addict, the issue of sobriety becomes more complicated. Certainly he must abstain from any extra-marital involvements, including those that are "only" emotional affairs. However, I believe it's vital for the married addict to observe the same total abstinence period as his single brothers, including a time-out from sexual activity with his wife. Because of neurochemistry, this abstinence period is important even if your acting out has involved "merely" pornography or masturbation.

Reasons for Marital Abstinence

In addition to the neurochemical benefit, the most obvious advantage of an abstinence contract for the married addict is to take the sexual pressure off the relationship. For many couples, marital sex has been full of conflicts, arguments, and emotional pain. Perhaps you've avoided sex with your wife and have preferred your acting out behaviors to connecting with her. In that case the pressure is from the absence of sex, but it's still pressure. Even if there's been little or no sexual activity in your marriage for a long time, you need to commit to an intentional period of abstinence. *There's a vast difference in deliberately choosing to abstain from sex and in avoiding it because of your addiction.*

Almost all sexual addicts (of either gender) are unable to be "present" during sexual activity, especially with their spouses. Instead of authentically making love with your wife, you likely are lost in fantasy about some other sexual experience, either real or imagined. You pretend you're with another partner or engaging in different sexual practices. You insist on darkening the room or you close your eyes to avoid being in the moment, because your fantasies are more pleasurable than what's happening right now. In effect, you're still having "addict" sex, even though the partner is your wife. Sexual addiction is an intimacy disorder, remember? Taking a break from marital sex gives you the chance to start over in your marriage relationship and learn to be present mentally, emotionally, and spiritually before you add sexual intimacy. Abstinence provides a chance to create *true* intimacy in your

coupleship.

A bonus reason for abstinence is outlined by Paul in the following verse:

“Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Corinthians 7:5)

Abstaining from sexual activity allows a couple to devote themselves to prayer and spiritual renewal. Time spent with God reminds us that our love relationship with God is our most important relationship and deserves first place in our lives.

Wives’ Response

To achieve the desired result in terms of your marriage, abstinence must be a mutual agreement that is very specific in its intent and plan. Never begin an abstinence period without prayerful discussion with your wife. (Getting help from a counselor may also be necessary, especially if your wife hasn’t started to deal with her co-addiction.) In my experience, spouses’ reactions divide into two basic categories:

- **Some spouses welcome a period of sexual abstinence.** Sex has been emotionally painful for years, either because too many demands have been placed on them, or the sexual activity has been unpleasant, or because the addict wasn’t interested in marital sex. Whatever the case, a deliberate period of no sex is a welcome relief. These couples will have to work extra hard to overcome their intimacy disorder and connect on emotional and spiritual levels.
- **Some spouses, however, fear abstinence.** These wives need the assurance of a sexual relationship. They worry that their sexually-addicted husbands will continue to act out if sex isn’t present in their relationship. They may suffer from the belief that if they were more attractive or performed better, their husbands wouldn’t have a problem. Obviously, as addicts, we know this belief isn’t true. Our wives’ looks, sexual willingness, or sexual prowess aren’t related to our sexual sin. For these couples, the abstinence contract teaches them to base their marital relationship on spiritual and emotional intimacy, not sexual.

A married couple should only attempt a period of abstinence if they also have a plan for working on their relationship in other ways. *Almost always, a couple needs to be in marriage counseling.* The intimacy disorder of sexual addiction is simply too deep and distressing for most couples to heal on their own. Issues of pain, betrayal, and mistrust will be paramount. Often other long-standing relationship problems will surface as well, such as finances, parenting, household roles, etc. The wise couple will take their time and address each issue before considering a return to sexual activity, which can mask problems or create a false

sense of resolution.

An addict/co-addict couple should plan specifically for their abstinence period. This blueprint might include a variety of strategies for developing healthy intimacy without relying on sex. Perhaps the couple goes to marriage counseling each week in addition to their individual L.I.F.E. Recovery Groups. Maybe they commit to working through the *L.I.F.E. Recovery Guide for Couples* or a similar resource to aid their healing. A wide range of marriage enrichment materials are available that could significantly bless your marriage. Take advantage of as many as possible during an abstinence period.

The following page provides a sample abstinence contract for a married couple. Note that it has a place for a witnessing couple to sign. Meet with that couple, explain your goal and your plan for working on your relationship, and pray with them before asking them to sign your contract. Use this “sponsoring” couple for support and accountability as you go through the abstinence period.

Marital Sexual Abstinence Contract

We, _____ and _____, agree that we will be sexually abstinent for _____ days beginning on _____.

We also agree that during this time we will do the following activities to increase our emotional and spiritual intimacy:

Husband's Signature

Wife's Signature

We have asked for support and prayer as we undertake this new step to increase the total intimacy in our coupleship. This covenant has been witnessed by a man and a woman who are important to our recovery and relationship:

Man's Signature

Woman's Signature