

Don't Underestimate Your Middle Circle Behaviors

So often times when men or women attend 12 step meetings or therapy they are instructed to do the three circle exercise. The three circle process involves drawing 3 circles that represent 3 types of behaviors in an addict's life.

The outer circle represents healthy behaviors, the middle circle represents behaviors that may lead an addict to pursue addictive behaviors and the inner circle represents behaviors that are absolutely "deal breakers" and would be full on addictive behaviors and would put an addict back into a slip or relapse. Most addicts know to stay away from inner circle behaviors like pornography, affairs, voyeurism, prostitution because they know it will lead to relapse but often times a sex addict will be in denial of how damaging the middle circle behaviors are and they forget that if they engage in the slippery slope behaviors it will often times open the floodgates for the deal breaking behaviors.

There can be a lot of denial with middle circle behaviors because addicts believe that they can engage in some behaviors that are not good for them yet stay away from "real addictive behaviors." This is a misnomer as invariably, the addict who dabbles in unhealthy behaviors will eventually be drawn to serious addictive relapse or slips. An example of this would be a man who believes that he can look at swimsuit models and not eventually move into hard-core pornography. Or a woman who believes that she can sext or text man and keep her addiction in written form as opposed to move into encounters where sexual activity occur.

These behaviors that one engages in our oftentimes considered denial behaviors. The addict does not recognize nor realize that those behaviors will move him into the actual sexual addiction behaviors that have destroyed his life. The addict fools himself into believing that his middle circle behaviors will not trigger behaviors will take him to the next level.

Some addicts want to believe that they can put substance abuse into their middle circle behaviors. Addicts that use substances like crack, alcohol or sex to "light up" the reward center produce chemicals that create pleasurable feelings. Addicts fool themselves and look for ways to stay in a heightened state of denial so that they can engage in behaviors that will keep the reward center in the brain active and medicate themselves and yet tell themselves that these middle circle behaviors are not really that bad. What we know about addiction is that substance abuse that has been used in conjunction with sex fuses together and that it is imperative to stop both behaviors and keep them in the inner circle as "deal breaker" behaviors. When an addict engages in substance abuse....he will eventually trigger the need to act out sexually.

Working with addicts entails getting them to recognize how important it is for them to value their middle circle behaviors and to create measures that absolutely insulate them from participating in them. Initially sex addicts in recovery understand that these middle circle behaviors are the gateway to moving them into full-blown relapse behavior. As time wanes and the addict begins to miss his addiction he will begin to flirt with behaviors that will absolutely promote his addiction. Although these behaviors seem insignificant, they will actually start an addict back on the journey towards relapse. I worked with a woman who refused to throw away a lipstick that she only used when she was ready to pursue sexual activity. She thought I was ridiculous to expect her to give up the lip stick. When she was in a heightened state of sobriety she realize that this red lipstick represented her acting out behaviors. She was unable to let go of the lipstick almost as if it was a transitional object that kept here attached to her old behaviors.

Men who put filters on their phone and yet find ways to objectify women in bathing suits (usually put in the

middle circle) are fooling themselves and are in a heightened state of denial and are one slip away from starting the cycle again.

Don't underestimate your middle circle behaviors. Talk with your sponsor and your 12 step group about grieving the loss of these behaviors and finding supports to prevent them from occurring in your everyday life. If you choose to ignore these middle circle behaviors you will likely not be able to stay in good solid recovery. Eliminating these middle circle behaviors are essential to staying clean, sober and recovered.