

Sexual Integrity - Accountability Partner Guide

This guide is intended for those who are accountability partners for someone dealing with pornography and other habitual sexual sin issues. It should be used to help you in following up with that person in the context of God's grace. Sexual sin is especially shame-producing, and you will need to be both firm and sensitive in helping your brother/sister in this area.

1. Understand the problem. It would be helpful to the person you are a partner for you to understand what he/she is going through. If you yourself have never struggled with sexual sin, it may be particularly difficult for you to understand why this is a problem for that person. You may want to read up on this issue if you need to understand it better. A list of books is at the end of this paper.

2. Understand the person. In addition to understanding something of the pathology of sexual sin, you need to know about the person you are helping. You should have them write up a sexual sin "history" where they describe how they got into it, how long it has been going on, and the kinds of sexual material and activities they have been in to. Encourage them to "go deep" and not leave things out, but have them avoid sordid details. These memories can be painful, and also trigger sinful episodes, so make it clear you are not looking for a pornographic autobiography, but just a full frank disclosure. Go over this paper with your friend, but do not keep it. It's their history, and you would not want to have something in your possession that could be used against them. It might not even be a bad idea to burn it with them after you've gone over it together. After all 1 Cor. 6 says "and such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Also, you might want to check for co-addictions in the person's life - alcohol, gambling, excessive television and video games and so forth can be further expressions of the same spiritual and personal emptiness.

3. Understand the solution. Things like your accountability relationship, porn blockers, accountability software and other external efforts are necessary, but insufficient to produce real change. True spiritual growth in the Lord is the ultimate solution. As Romans 12 says, the only way to not be "conformed to this world" is to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind." This transformation is the goal, not merely the cessation of sin. At its core, sexual sin is a form of idolatry - I am turning to something or someone other than God to provide my needs - and only as we put God in His proper place in our lives do we experience the joy of knowing Him. The grace and love of God is fundamental here, and moralistic solutions are just another form of idolatry, which leaves self on the throne of your life. We must go to Christ and Christ alone as the source of our deliverance and power. Any solution that does not bring us closer to Christ is insufficient.

4. **Get regular time together.** Just asking how it's going when you're standing in a group of people after CT can't possibly foster the kind of openness that is required. You should have a good portion of time alone together so you can go over his/her recent movement, and pray together. Frequent time together will help you keep short accounts, and not allow sin and guilt to move the person away from the Lord. The frequency of your time together should be determined by how new that person's commitment is, but I would suggest weekly at first.

5. **Ask questions.** Sexual sin is hard to talk about. There is the shame and embarrassment of failure, the desire to look good in the eyes of others, and the tendency to minimize what is really going on. You need to look on these things as normal, and understandable, but you don't have to accept indirect, general reporting. Things like "my week's been pretty good" or "I think I've been doing well lately" are likely to be misdirection. Your questions need to be specific enough so that, if a person is going to lie, they are going to have to do so directly. You should make a prior agreement that you are both going to be specific about what's been going on. Things like "How many times? How long? What kind of material?" should be agreed upon as appropriate questions to ask. Also, there are a number of other things you should check up on, listed in the next sections. The question of confidentiality is a tough one to answer in black and white, but you need to be certain that the person feels safe talking to you. Not everything your friend does needs to be talked about with others, though there certainly may be times where they should be encouraged to share with others. It's not your job to confess for them. In the long run, they should be able to widen the circle of accountability, but it's not a requirement, especially in the earlier stages of recovery.

6. **Check up on provisional aspects.** Provisional aspects of recovery are those things we do as a matter of course to build our spiritual lives. Outside of periods of temptation (dealt with next) there should be regular time spent in the Word, prayer, and other means of growth. The person you are helping should be reading good books, especially about the grace of God. Good books on God's grace will be an important part of building "the mind of Christ." Steps taken to build relationships and minister to the needs of others provide a framework for intimacy and accomplishment, for which porn and solo sex have become replacements.

7. **Check up on momentary aspects.** Momentary aspects of recovery are those things we do before, during, and after times of temptation. It's often important to know what was going on in the person's life and thinking just prior to a period of temptation. This can indicate the kind of life and lifestyle situations that trigger temptation. If the person you're helping says something like, "I was angry at my wife" or "I had just spent the pervious four hours watching the 3rd

season of Smallville” you might have an opportunity to talk about relational movement, or better time management. You could suggest better courses of action, but it might be better to ask, “how could you have handled that prior situation differently?” After all, if the brother had resolved his anger problem with his wife, the temptation may never have happened. During the period where temptation to sin had begun, what was the person thinking about? Did they judge their thoughts? Did they count the cost? Did they think about the benefits of their relationship with God? These kinds of questions will remind your friend of the value of living an examined life. We are free in His grace and we have the mind of Christ. We are not animals controlled by our impulses. Encourage them to think about their actions when they are tempted. After a failure in this area, ask them how they thought about God and themselves. Use this time to remind them of the grace of God, and His complete accessibility.

8. Spiritual warfare. We have a real enemy who is powerful, and has built a system that surrounds us at all times to move us from the purity of following Christ. Has the person you’re helping been praying against the devil?

9. Relational growth. Sexual sin is a false intimacy. One of the steps that we need to take is to move into other people’s lives. Has your friend been moving toward others, or back towards isolation? If married, are they moving toward their spouse relationally and sexually? Are there other barriers to relationship that need to be explored?

Conclusion

This list comprises a large number of things you could talk about when you get together. It would not be practical to talk about everything on here every time you get together. You should probably vary your discussion, to address different aspects of spiritual growth, and not always dwell on the same things. It’s important to “widen the battlefield” as David Powlison says. Sexual sin is usually a secondary issue to other things in a person’s development, and if your time together is always focused on managing your friend’s sin life, you won’t provide the level of help that is needed.

This is an important role that you’re playing in another person’s life, and as you work together God will honor your efforts to bring Christ more into focus as the true provider of “everything that we need for life and godliness.” My hope is that this role will be enriching for both of you.

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