

PATTERN OF RELAPSE WORKSHEET

MATRIX OF ADDICTION

Stage 1: Catalyst

A catalyst is anything that causes an overreaction to a situation. Often, it is something that causes you to feel shame, blame, or guilt and is pain related. Both successes and failures can be a catalyst and cause you to want to act out because of how the catalyst makes you feel. So, if you flunk a test you might feel tempted to act out. And yet, if you ace the test you might still want to act out. The catalyst isn't to blame, it's how you've wired your brain to cope with stress.

Stage 2: Fantasy

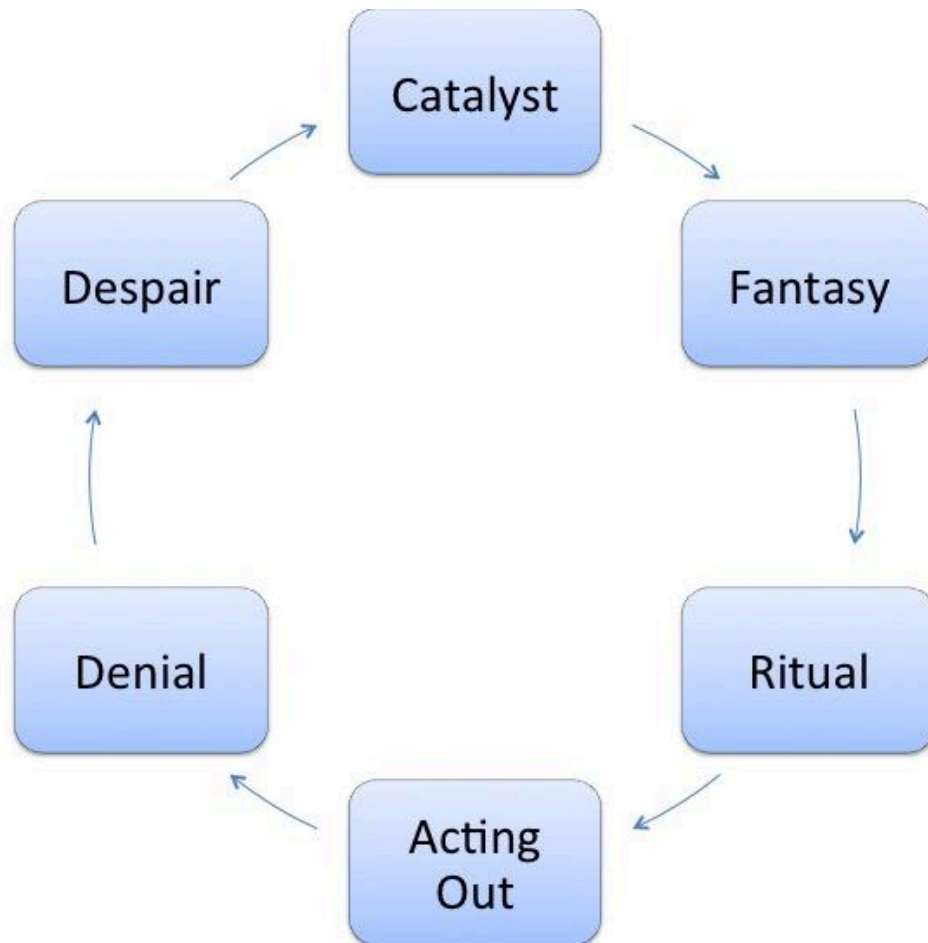
After becoming triggered by a catalyst, you'll notice your fantasy life increasing. Your brain is looking for a way to cope and fantasy is the first step toward acting out. These may or may not be sexual in nature, but you're starting to move away from reality and toward fantasy. You might realize how to circumvent your filter software during this stage. Or you might plan for a time to act out in the future. Confessing your fantasy life quickly is key to avoiding a relapse.

Stage 3: Ritual

This is where your fantasies start to become reality. You might start cruising your favorite social media sites or just jump to your favorite porn site. You might start texting that girl you find attractive or who you know will flirt back with you. This is the stage where you can spend hours in the trance of looking at porn, looking for a greater "high" that will increase excitement, intensity, and arousal. This is the stage that addicts try to prolong in an effort to avoid the pain triggered by the catalyst. You might end up spending hours, and even days, moving through your ritual before acting out.

Stage 4: Acting Out

Many people try to put off this stage for as long as possible. This is the actual sex or orgasm that brings the ritual to completion. After acting out, you find yourself right back where you started, only now you have increased the shame, blame, and guilt that were triggered before. Hopefully, what you are learning is that you act out in order to escape emotional discomfort (stages 2 and 3), not for the actual orgasm. Orgasm is what brings you face to face with reality again.



Stage 5: Denial

How did you end up doing this again? Ever thought something like this after acting out? You're in the middle of the shame; realizing what you've just done again, you'll want to escape it again. If the shame doesn't fuel another ritual, then you'll probably turn to denial and start making promises and justifications for what just happened. *I just have a stronger sex drive than most guys. Nobody needs to know what just happened. I didn't hurt anyone. Connecting with that person online wasn't acting out because we didn't actually touch each other.* Denial is the easiest way to rationalize your behavior and it also protects you from what's coming next.

Stage 6: Despair

This stage is where shame, blame, and guilt return in full force. The enemy takes full advantage of you here and does everything he can to reinforce the lies he has convinced you to believe about yourself and God. You're left facing whatever it was that originally started this crazy cycle and are now feeling more powerless than ever.

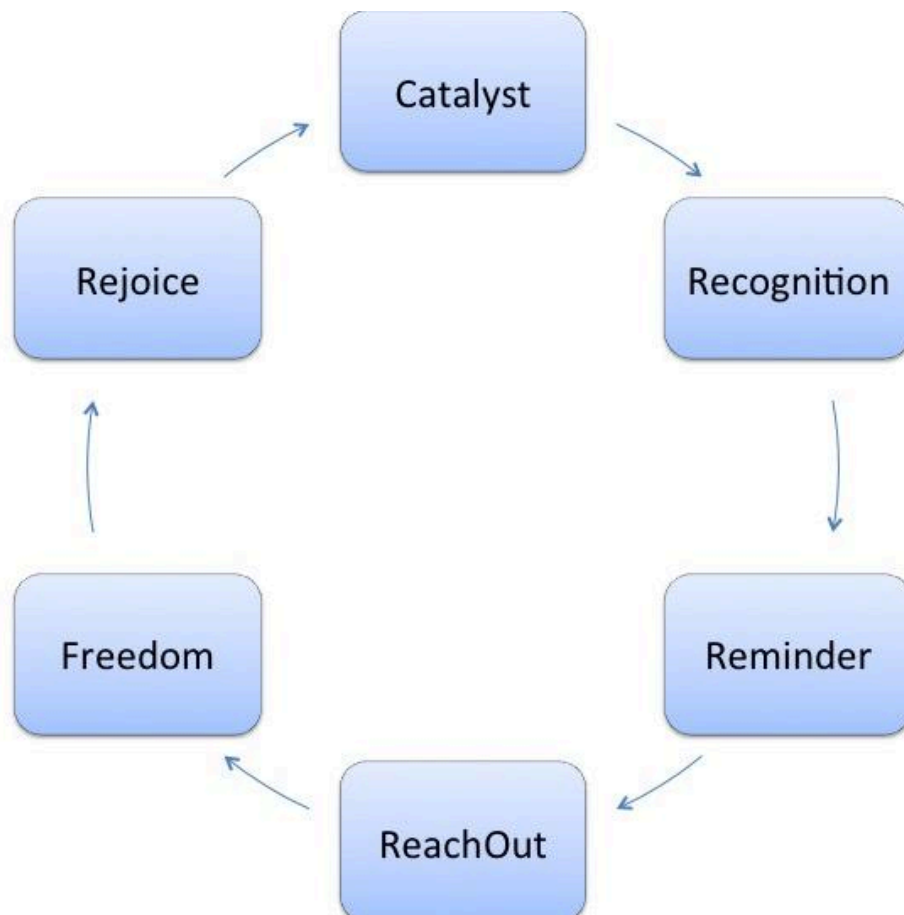
CHANGING THE MATRIX

The easiest way to get off this crazy cycle is to not get on it to begin with. But, this requires knowing what your cycle looks like and how it begins. Once it's started, it's vital you make changes in Stage 1; if you spend much time in Stage 2, your limbic system will begin to take over and you won't be able to stop the cycle. The reality is that you are not powerless to stop this cycle. God has given you everything you need to win this battle. Knowing your matrix will be key to that victory.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

2 PETER 1:3-4 (ESV)

The following is what your matrix will look like if you make changes in Stage 1. Instead of isolating and coping with your pain, this matrix will move you into the light and into relationship with God and others.



Stage 1: Catalyst

This is exactly the same as in the Matrix of Addiction. Pain doesn't go away, but how you respond to it can change.

Stage 2: Recognition

As in most life lessons, awareness is what will make the difference. Instead of moving into fantasy, recognize what the catalyst might be compelling you to do and make a choice to do something different. You might instinctively want to isolate, but now is the time to walk by faith toward God and others.

Stage 3: Reminder

Now that you've moved into the light with your emotional discomfort and are bringing it to God and others, you need a reminder of why it's worth the effort to move to the next stage of Reaching Out. This is where your Personal Promises from God have tremendous power. They remind you of who you really are and why it's worth the work of recovery. Post your Personal Promises all over the place so you can have easy access to them. Put Post-it® Notes around your house. Put a picture that represents a promise as the background on your phone. Keep a list of them in your wallet for easy access.

Stage 4: Reach Out

This is the doozy. You have to actually reach out and call someone. No excuses. Just do it. Reach out or act out. If you don't follow through in this stage, you can actually short-circuit the matrix of change and retreat back into isolation. It's in reaching out to God and others that you find the comfort and companionship your hurting soul needs.

Stage 5: Freedom

When you reach this stage it doesn't mean the pain will be gone. In fact, it might be worse because you won't be medicating it. You'll be processing it and moving through it. However, you'll also be discovering freedom, instead of the death trap of relapse.

Stage 6: Rejoice

This is the fun part! Rejoice in seeing God show up in your life in ways you never thought possible. You get to magnify Him privately by praising Him in your worship and publicly with others sharing how you've seen Him provide for you as you are learning to walk in step with His Spirit. Woo-hoo!

PERSONALIZING THE MATRIX OF ADDICTION

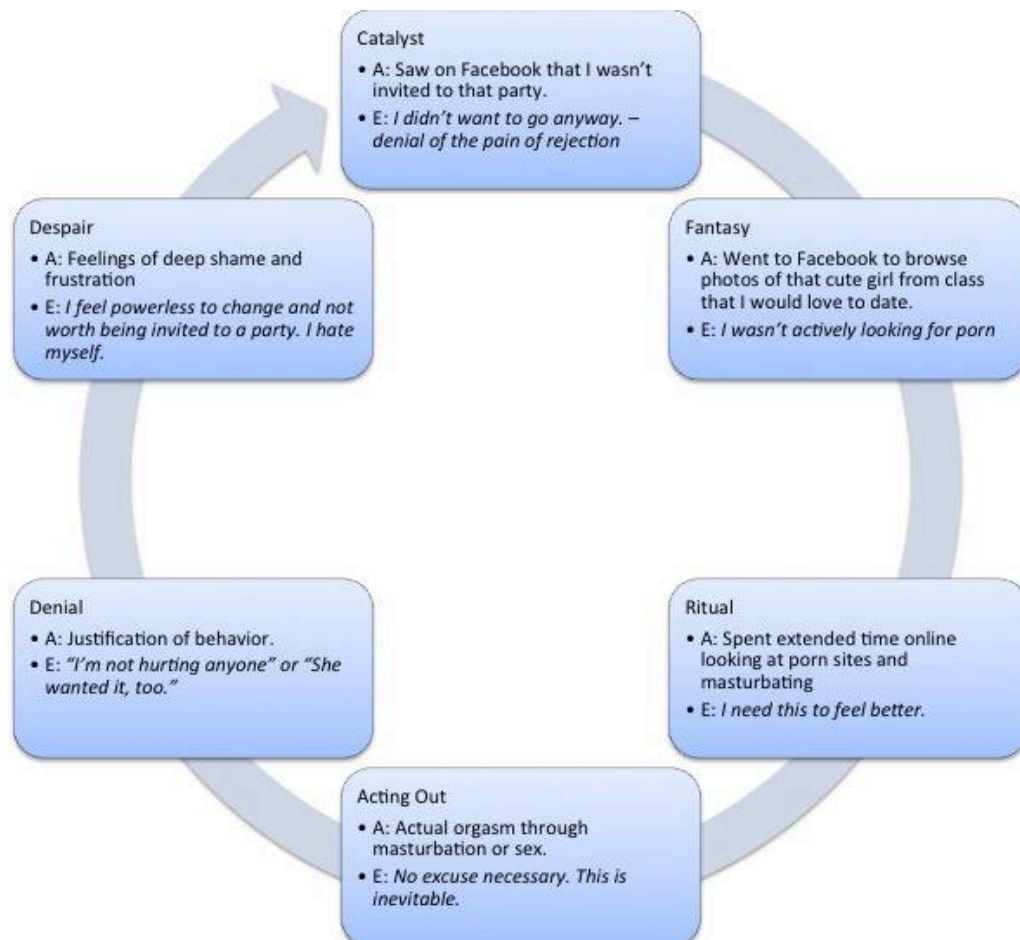
Most of the addictive thoughts that lead to relapse occur at the limbic level. Your prefrontal cortex, or higher reasoning power, is not primarily involved. If it were involved, you would have stopped your behavior long ago because of your commitment to Christ. Instead, you are reacting at an instinctive level. As you work on this, if you draw a blank, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the sequence to you.

Remember: Relapse doesn't just happen; a relapse is always preceded by certain types of thoughts and actions. Relapse is not depicted as a steady downward progression for the simple reason that it doesn't feel that way. If it did, you wouldn't go there. It starts out feeling like something you can handle, and then suddenly becomes out of control. You act out once you get to the point of "no return." This is a limbic decision, so you are frequently unaware that a transition has taken place.

This is why it is so important you draw out a picture of your addiction sequence, so you can understand your thought process prior to relapse. Understanding the sequence will enable you to catch yourself in the future and hopefully bail out or prevent relapse.

TYPICAL MATRIX OF SEXUAL ADDICTION

A=Action | E=Excuse

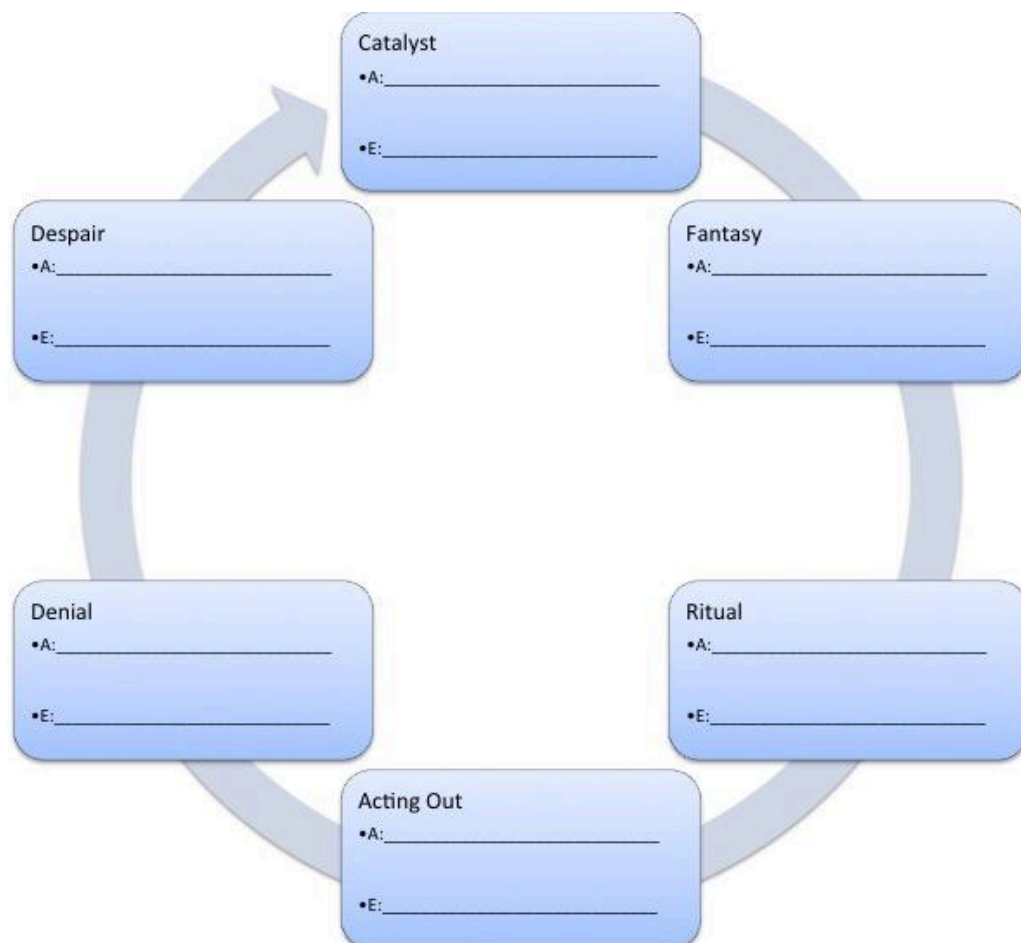


Through this process of becoming self-aware, you'll be able to go to Jesus to experience rest and healing for your soul, rather than avoiding your pain and coping strategies. A typical Matrix of Addiction has been compiled from what many people experience. The critical factor in doing this exercise is to hear what individuals say to themselves along the way. These are excuses we use, the rationalizations we tell ourselves, to feed the addiction. Once we act out, the lies we have told ourselves along the way seem ridiculous, but then it is too late. We have to learn to pick up on the excuses during the process and refute them.

In the space below, describe your Matrix of Addiction or trajectory of relapse. What are your excuses that precede relapse? If you have never taken the time to do this type of exercise, it can really challenge you.

MY MATRIX OF ADDICTION

A=Action | E=Excuse



Let's take it deeper. Think through your last several relapses. What were the preconditions? Identify your moods or things that had or had not occurred in your life prior to your relapse. These may have happened up to a week or more before you hit the trigger that sent you into your Matrix of Addiction.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

If you do this exercise thoughtfully, you will probably discover there are some very common preconditions to your relapses. Your addiction is primarily a process whereby you medicate your pain within. It could be that something in the present reminds you of the pain of something from your past. It could be boredom, loneliness, fear, or a haunting sense of worthlessness, despite all your achievements.

The sequence is almost always triggered by some inner emotional discomfort. Once you have relapsed enough times, your brain changes the way it actually functions. You end up operating on autopilot and it's slowly killing you over and over again. This difficult exercise helps you to finally identify the destructive autopilot switch, so you can begin to turn it off. You have begun to identify your addictive lifestyle.

Identify the following:

1. Are there any common elements that are part of the preconditions? (e.g., Fighting with my boyfriend/girlfriend; stress around final exams.)
2. What is common in your rituals that set you up for relapse? (e.g., Scrolling social media for cute people; mindlessly surfing the web; flirting in class.)
3. What behaviors are your attempts to maintain control? (e.g., Confessing more and pleading with God; working out more; working harder at school.)
4. Stop and look back over what you have written. What are your observations concerning your patterns of relapse?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

MATRIX OF RESTORATION

Now, think back over your most recent victory. See if you can outline how it happened by filling in the Matrix of Restoration.

A=Action

