

THE THREE CIRCLES

The Three Circles helps teens identify: the unhealthy behaviors they want to stop; the behaviors that lead back to their unhealthy behaviors; and the behaviors that lead to health. In many ways, The Three Circles becomes a roadmap for healing. When it comes to changing behavior, we often presume the sequence of transformation is:¹

changed feelings = changed thinking = changed behavior

However, when developing a mindset for healing from compulsive and addictive behaviors, the practical truth is the reverse:

changed behavior = changed thinking = changed feelings

Even when we realize change is needed, we tend to focus more on the behaviors we don't want to do, rather than focusing on the behaviors that will keep us healthy. Using The Three Circles is a great way for us to evaluate the full extent of our behaviors: recognizing the behaviors that keep us stuck in our addiction, the behaviors that serve as boundaries or guardrails to protect us, and the behaviors that continue to move us toward health.²

The Three Circles includes the following elements.

INNER CIRCLE

The inner circle includes the behaviors that reinforce our addictive patterns. These are actions, not ideas or intent. The inner circle indicates behaviors that constitute a relapse or violation of our sobriety. For many of us who struggle with porn or compulsive sexual behaviors, this could include:

Anonymous hookups	Dating during the first year of recovery
Online sex	Sex with boyfriend/girlfriend
Pornography use	Getting drunk or using drugs
Masturbation	Cutting
Binge eating	Self-inflicting pain
Uncontrolled anger or rage	Sexting or sending nude pictures

¹ Roberts, D. (2010). *Pure Desire for Women: Eight Pillars to Freedom from love addiction and sexual issues*. Workbook 1. Gresham, OR: Pure Desire Ministries International. 127.

² Carnes, P. (2001). *Facing the Shadow: Starting Sexual and Relationship Recovery* (3rd ed.). Carefree, AZ: Gentle Path Press.

Remember: these are bottom-line behaviors—they do not support our goals and purpose. If we engage in these behaviors, we are not living in health.

MIDDLE CIRCLE

The middle circle includes the behaviors that lead to relapse—the behaviors that we know will take us back to our center circle. Our middle circle behaviors are the warning signs, triggers, or concerning issues that indicate we are headed for trouble. We cannot underestimate our middle circle behaviors. They are more than a temptation. This could include:

Spending too much time on social media
Boredom
Flirting
Lack of self-care
Fantasy
Staying too busy—not saying “no”
Isolating
Ignoring feelings
Distracted from priorities
Too much TV
Using food to cope
Not making time for God

Being home alone in the evening
Watching movies with sex scenes or romance
Sleeping with my phone in my bedroom
Not making or staying within my budget
Shopping online
Delays in paying the bills
Drinking alcohol or using drugs
Lying, blaming, rationalizing, justifying, and minimizing the desire to act out
Video games and Anime

OUTER CIRCLE

The outer circle includes the behaviors that keep us sexually and relationally healthy. To stay on the path toward lifelong healing, our outer circle behaviors are the most important. This is where life happens. Outer circle behaviors are about self-care and should be specific. This could include:

Taking time for family
Learning to set boundaries
Healthy eating
Spending time with friends
Becoming more emotionally aware
Exercising regularly
Keeping commitments to group/church
Having your own interests/hobbies

Developing relationships with positive role models
Spending time with God
Being present
Getting 7-9 hours of sleep each night
Being honest with yourself and others
Practicing daily self-care



In the space provided, evaluate what you need to include in your personal Three Circles.

My inner circle needs to include:

My middle circle needs to include:

My outer circle needs to include:

Fill in the following blank Three Circles diagram based on your evaluation of your personal needs.

