

The 3 circles - setting boundaries

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The three circles is a simple tool we use to define our sobriety for ourselves - to define what a healthy sexuality for ourselves can mean.

We think through all our behaviours and organise them according to whether they are addictive (inner circle), healthy (outer circle) or somewhere in between (middle circle). It's not always easy to tell if something should be in the inner circle or not. Typically, inner circle behaviors are those that:

1. You can't stop when you want to
2. You keep secret
3. Would have negative consequences in your life if revealed
4. You use to numb yourself from difficult feelings
5. Lack any real intimacy or respect

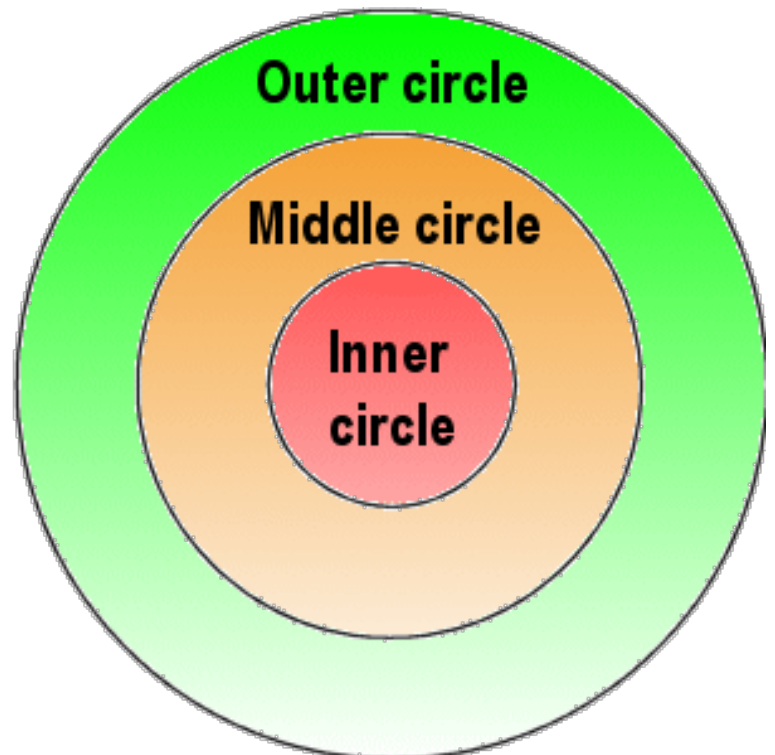
Why don't you try it for yourself? List specific behaviors and categorize them as follows:

Inner circle - Compulsive sexual behaviors from which we choose to abstain completely.

Middle circle - Behaviors, which are much less destructive and weaker in intensity. They cause us much less of a problem but tend to lead us back to the inner circle. You can also put behaviors about which you are unsure in this category.

Outer circle - Things we do which enhance our lives and our recovery, that keep us engaged with others and with reality rather than isolated and in a fantasy world.

Remember, your circles will change as you learn more about your behaviors during your recovery.



An example

Inner circle

Anonymous sex

Pornography (internet, magazines, dvds, videos)

Written erotica

Infidelity (including kissing & touching)

Middle circle

Using the internet

Drinking alcohol

Masturbation by self

Outer circle

Sexual intimacy with partner

Meeting friends

Attending meetings

Spending time with partner

Playing football