



Frequently Asked Questions on Formal Disclosure A Guideline for Spouses or Partners of Sex Addicts

Disclosure is a difficult process for the recovering sex addict and certainly a stressful and traumatic time for the spouse or partner of the addict. The process leading up to presenting a formal disclosure is a strenuous journey that takes time and requires intense focus, preparation and therapy for the recovering addict, as well as focused support for the wounded spouse or partner. This is a process of depth and accountability where the addict must work hard in presenting a truthful timeline and history of their sexual acting out behaviors.

However, this process extends far beyond simply cataloging behaviors. Ultimately the recovering addict takes ownership of the secrets, lies and actions that have hurt their significant other and their relationship. This information is delivered in a safe therapy setting where the addict will read his disclosure letter and timeline in a clinical non-blaming manner taking full ownership of his or her actions.

While difficult, formal disclosure can also provide a new foundation on which the spouse can finally stand. Post disclosure, many spouses have reported feeling as if they finally have all the missing pieces, and have the full picture of what they were dealing with for the first time. Many spouses share that while difficult, it is incredibly healing to realize that they were not simply “creating scenarios in my head” or “losing my mind trying to figure out what was happening” or “playing guessing games with my partner” when the acting out was happening in their relationship.

Additionally, formal disclosure often provides a new place to begin rebuilding trust as the spouse can make a fully informed decision based in truth vs. deception and pain. This can be a new and healthy season that unfolds over time for many relationships.

While formal disclosure is challenging, there are many positives that come out of a disclosure session. Still, it can be very difficult to listen to the addict reviewing his or her acting out behavior – even if he or she has already disclosed this to you before. Because of this, it is imperative that the spouse or partner has a support system in place and healthy pre and post-disclosure steps that feels safe for that spouse.

Our goal is to facilitate a safe process that supports you in your healing journey. As we approach the Formal Disclosure session, please take some time to review the following frequently asked questions. You will most likely have other questions after this review. We welcome the opportunity to process with you.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of a Formal Disclosure session?

This is an opportunity for your spouse or significant to directly and truthfully disclose the history of his or her sexual acting out behavior since the inception of your relationship. This is prepared by your spouse who works closely with his or her own therapist. You have a right to full disclosure in order to make an informed decision on your next steps in your marriage or relationship.

What is Formal Disclosure?

The disclosure is a time line of all acting out behaviors since the inception of the relationship (as described in the partner's prep sheet). Once prepared, the disclosure is read directly to you by your spouse or significant other within a clinical setting as directed by their therapist often with your therapist present as well. The information on his or her sexually acting out behaviors is delivered in a straightforward truthful manner where your spouse or significant other takes ownership of his or her behavior with no excuses, reasons, blaming, minimizing, explanations, apologies, or deception.

What can I expect to learn during Formal Disclosure meeting?

The frequency of acting out behaviors during the course of your relationship, the types of acting out behaviors, the place(s) where the behaviors occurred (home, motels, strip clubs, car, office, etc.), the materials or technology involved (magazines, DVD's, Internet, etc.), the approximate money spent on the behaviors, the approximate amount of time spent on the behaviors, the approximate number of times the client was dishonest about his acting out.

Who leads the disclosure session?

The therapist of your addicted spouse or partner will lead the disclosure session in a very safe and structured way. It is advisable that your therapist be in attendance as well if possible.

Will this be a therapy session for me or a couples session for us?

While your feelings about therapy and your comfort level will be respected and honored, this is not a couples session or individual session for you.

Who will be in the Formal Disclosure meeting?

The recovering client's therapist, the spouse or significant other, the recovering client, and the partner's therapist if possible.

How long does Formal Disclosure take?

Approximately 2-3 hours

Where is the session held?

Typically in the recovering sexual addict's therapist office

How much detail is disclosed?

Disclosures are most helpful to the partner (and sex addict) when they cover all the acting out behaviors, the specific time frame (or if the addict cannot recall due to number of years, an approximate time frame) of the behaviors, the specific or approximate frequency, all money spent, and the deception around the behavior. Specific details of body parts, specific details of sexual encounters, etc. are not in the spouses best interest and do not support her/his process of healing.

I feel a mixture of anger, fear and anxiety regarding Formal Disclosure – is this normal?

Yes, it is a normal part of the process. Your feelings are valid and important. A post-disclosure therapy session directly after FD to process with your own therapist is highly recommended. And your therapist will work with you prior to Formal Disclosure as well as helping you with your post disclosure healing.

Do I have any control over what I do or do not want to hear?

Yes. You have a right to decide what you want included or omitted in the disclosure. You will fill out your partners pre-FD prep worksheet to let your therapist know what details you would prefer not to hear, what questions you have, and to work closely with your therapist in completing materials prior to disclosure. This will then go to the recovering addict's therapist who will use your requests and boundaries while helping your spouse or partner prepare his or her disclosure.

How do I know that my spouse/partner is being completely honest with me?

While there is no absolute guarantee that your spouse is being 100% truthful, disclosure is not scheduled until the client has done at least the first steps of therapy and recovery,

has broken through his or her denial, and is ready to fully disclose. The therapist monitors this process carefully before scheduling a disclosure. This often takes time depending on the individual. On occasion, a polygraph test can be administered if agreed upon by the spouse and the client if the spouse's trust has been so damaged by years of staggered disclosure and deception.

Is this a guarantee that he will never “act out” again?

No, this is not a guarantee. Sexual addiction recovery, like any addiction, is a life long process and a commitment to recovery and change. There may be slips in the future, there may be a relapse – and there is no ‘crystal ball’ to determine if and when this may occur. No therapist can make a promise about future acting out choices.

Will I get a copy of disclosure?

While you will not receive a copy of the disclosure, your therapist will receive a copy and will go over any questions you may have in a post-disclosure clarification session.

What if questions come up as a result of disclosure?

You will have an opportunity to ask and have these questions answered directly after disclosure or at a couple's post-disclosure clarification session should you require this.

Are there any rules I need to be aware of?

Yes, these are the general “rules” around disclosure:

1. Have a CSAT therapist that you are working with
2. Have a support group that you are connected to
3. Arrive on time
4. Drive separately from your partner or spouse
5. If you feel you need a friend or family member to drive you, please set this up prior to the session
6. No interrupting each other or the therapist(s)
7. Respect the therapist's lead and facilitation
8. No verbal, emotional or physical violence
9. Request a time out if needed. Or request that the FD stop if you are overwhelmed.
10. No cursing, blaming or shaming
11. Arrive sober

12. Do not use the disclosure information against the recovering addict in court, with children, family, friends, or co-workers, or in the media
13. Do not record or video the disclosure
14. Have a safe place and support system to process after disclosure
15. Read the material before hand as directed by your therapist
16. Complete your partners prep work before hand

Are there circumstances when Formal Disclosure may not be advisable?

Yes, Formal Disclosure is not appropriate when:

- Spouse/Partner is profoundly mentally ill
- Spouse/Partner is dealing with a health emergency
- Spouse/Partner has a history of violence toward recovering Sex Addict
- Domestic Violence present
- Spouse/Partner has threatened to use Formal Disclosure against Sex Addict
- Spouse/Partner has threatened to divorce or take children
- Spouse/Partner or recovering addict are suicidal or homicidal
- Will pose a significant health risk to recovering Sex Addict (as noted in a medical note from doctor)
- Spouse/Partner is on death bed
- Spouse/Partner refuses to seek therapy
- Sex Addict is not in treatment

Are there resources available to support my process of understanding and healing?

Yes, these are all outlined in your partners prep worksheets and information.

Do you recommend any books on this?

- Dr. Stephanie Carnes, “Mending a Shattered Heart” We recommend that take the next 2-3 weeks to read this book, especially the chapter on disclosure;
- “Disclosing Secrets” by Claudia Black
- “Facing Heartbreak: Steps to Recovery of Partners of Sex Addicts” by Carnes, Lee, Rodriquez.

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