**Support Groups for Compulsions**

Community support groups for compulsions is probably one of the most important recovery tools out there. A “sexual compulsion,” specifically, is a subjectively needed sexual behavior or action that is not only difficult to resist, but [in this context] also releases a dopamine surge in the brain that "compels" a person to repeat the behavior in an effort to sustain the rewarding effects that gets produced. On the negative side, compulsive sexual behavior has the potential to create feelings of isolation, low self-worth, shame, and even recurring bouts of denial. Getting “connected” or “plugged in” to additional [help](https://www.thecenterforgrowth.com/tips/asking-for-help) (outside of family and therapy) serves to mitigate these symptoms that often lead to relapse if not acknowledged or addressed. The problem; people don’t want to find one.

In my many years of treating clients with substance or behavioral compulsions, one of the most common complaints is protesting against the participation of support groups, especially Twelve Step meetings. For reasons such as:

* “wanting to do it on my own,”
* “I do not like the religious talk at those meetings,”
* “ I am a private person and do not need this as long as I cut back or stop the behavior”

Lets not forget some of the more sophisticated reasons for not going to meetings; no time, no transportation, too many family obligations (i.e. child care) which further adds to the scaffolding of the many reasons for people not wanting to invest their time in support groups for compulsions.

There is a belief that if one could stop engaging in the compulsive behavior “on their own” that they would have already. For the extra time it takes to invest in a community support group for compulsions, can be challenged with the statement, “you found the time for the problem, so why do you think you have no time for the solution?” All this to say that there are now many more options out there for community support groups.

**Let’s Talk about 12 Step Meetings!**

This self-help tip is not designed to sway people away from Twelve Step meetings, but is meant to educate the person(s) suffering from behavioral or substance compulsions, that there are other options out there too. Plus, there are also different *versions* of Twelve Step meetings where one can find a group that more specifically can meet their needs. For example, did you know that for sexual compulsions, there is [Sexaholics Anonymous (SA)](https://www.sa.org/), [Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA)](https://saa-recovery.org), [Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA)](https://slaafws.org/meetings/), [Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA)](https://sca-recovery.org/WP/) and [Porn Addicts Anonymous (PAA)](https://pornaddictsanonymous.org/). There are several other Twelve Step meetings for other compulsions that are too many to list here, but you get the idea that these support groups for compulsions are plentiful.

**What if I do not like the idea of 12 Step meetings**

Community (and online) support groups for compulsions serve many purposes in strengthening a person’s commitment to their own recovery and healing. Whether you are attending a 12 Step group (a support group that is based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous) or not, the following list outlines some of the advantages to getting involved in support groups for compulsions (of any kind).

* *Reduces feelings of shame and isolation*. This is one of the most important reasons to attend. Although there may be a part of you that is resistant to talking about the compulsion in front of others, that is what is necessary to combat stubborn feelings of shame and not feel like you are the only one with the problem.
* *Instills hope*. The despair that results from engaging in the same unhealthy behavior repeatedly can lead to feelings of depression and a lack of motivation that paradoxically can compel the person to act out more on their compulsion by not going to support groups rather than thinking all the answers to feeling better just lies within themselves. The support groups also expose the person to hearing positive stories of recovery, triumph, and a stronger value for not acting out on the compulsive behavior that the person may not be aware of without attending support groups.
* *Allows for new, supportive friendships to develop*. Some of you may be thinking, “I have plenty of friends,” but how many of you have friends that you can open up to about shameful things that you have felt or done? The good news is that any friend you make through one of these groups, will know how you feel first-hand without any judgment or criticism because they have been through the same thing themselves.
* *Helps to build trust with your family*. If the person has a supportive partner or family, that is great! However, there is usually some level of mistrust that gets created by the acting out compulsion based on mistruths that were told, stories that were minimized, and staggered disclosures of what actually was occurring. By attending support groups, the partner and family member can feel reassured that the person with the compulsion is getting some kind of help or support. The mere attendance of going to a support group provides a measure of how serious the person with the compulsion is about changing their lifestyle to one that is more in sync with the partner’s values; a desire that most partners want especially if they were lied to or betrayed in some kind of way.
* *Reduces* [*denial*](https://www.thecenterforgrowth.com/tips/denial-of-problematic-compulsive-behavior). It is easy to convince ourselves of anything, especially if it involves a compulsive behavior that serves as a coping mechanism for managing life stresses or dealing with difficult emotions. I sometimes say to clients “it is the same brain [yours] that told you not to act out as it was that helped them rationalize that acting out was okay.” Therefore the person needs to “borrow” the thinking of another person to be sure they do not repeat the same patterns. Hearing the different stories at support groups and/or talking with other people who have “been there, done that” allows for valuable input in helping to stay focused on the goal of recovery. Without change, it is easy to return to old, familiar ways of coping.

**What other community support groups for compulsions are there besides 12 Step meetings?**

* [*SMART Recovery Meetings*](https://smartrecovery.org/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA-ty8BhA_EiwAkyoa34dGogGhGeqB1mXZ2xQ9jnBuJUuYkRM0EQXUxzhR9-s8Ajo2Ry1PfxoCr9kQAvD_BwE) *(Self-Management and Recovery Training)-* This is another community support group for where people who struggle with addictive behaviors (substances as well as process addictions like sex) can go in order to build a network of support. Although primarily attended by folks that have substance use disorders, all are welcomed. The main thrust of this group is on cognitive behavioral and motivational enhancement techniques designed to help addicts feel empowered in taking charge of their own recovery process. Some advantages to this group are that it’s “stigma-free,” while also lacking any known spiritual tenets (Higher Power). This also emphasizes the importance of community support in helping others to recover. Rather than adhering to the 12 Steps, this group emphasizes recovery tools like disputing irrational beliefs, making cost/benefit analyses, and even some parts work where the addiction is conceptualized as a “part” rather than a “disease.”
* [*Celebrate Recovery*](https://celebraterecovery.com/)*-* This is a church-based, Christian support group that follows after a worship service. It is open to anyone who struggles with addiction. One of their main premises is H.E.A.R.T. which stands for hurt, exhausted, angry, resentful, and tense. The group also functions as a support network outside of their regular meetings. This group has a more religious theme to it compared to other, traditional 12 Step meetings.
* [*Refuge Recovery*](https://www.refugerecovery.org/)*-* These recovery meetings are based on Buddhist principles and practices. Awakening (Buddha), telling the truth (Dharma), and community (Sangha) are the three main premises of this group. In addition, they have a concept called the “fourth truths;” addiction creates suffering, the cause of addiction is repetitive cravings, recovery is possible, and the path to recovery is available. Some of the meetings include a 20 minute meditation. *Dharma Meetings* are a subset of this group that also allows for addicts to share about sex, love, and lust issues.

**Professionally run support groups for compulsions**

If you are the kind of person that prefers structure and safe, professional space run by a therapist, then a professionally run support group is for you. We offer a support group such as this at The Center for Growth in both an [in-person and virtual format](https://thecenterforgrowth.com/support-groups/sex-compulsion-support-group). Right now, the only support groups we have are for male-identifed sex and love addicts. The main premise of this support group is for like-minded men to come together and support one another in their journey to sustain on-going sexual sobriety. The is a structured format with a professional therapist present, but the groups are mainly self-run in terms of the topics presented and the feedback offered. These support groups differ from a “therapy group” (which we also offer for the same population) in that the main emphasis is on helping one another cope with their various sexual compulsions. The therapy group is more treatment focused with a deeper, clinical approach to help people “change” rather than just cope.

It has been well documented that group therapy and support groups for compulsions are a prime modality for treating sexual compulsions for all the reasons listed above. The ideal treatment plan for addicts in early recovery are to attend individual sessions, group/couple’s therapy, and a community support group for a well-rounded treatment experience and higher likelihood of recovery success. If you would like to speak further about this article or set up attendance in our support and/or therapy groups, please reach out to Rick Snyderman, LPC, CADC, CSAT, NCC 267-428-2608 for more information. You can also schedule an appointment online at [Richard (Rick) Snyderman, LPC, CADC,… | Counseling | Therapy (thecenterforgrowth.com)](https://www.thecenterforgrowth.com/therapists/rick-snyderman-lpc-cadc-csat-ncc)