

This short article is adapted from material New Creation Ministries uses to train leaders. If you work with individuals or groups struggling with sexual brokenness you may find this information helpful. If you are a struggler or the spouse of a struggler you may find some practical guidance here for yourself. If you are in any of these categories it is strongly advised that you do not treat this information as mere data to add to your “recovery knowledge.” It is crucial that you apply it conscientiously to your life with the help of wise counsel.
-R.W.

The Nitty-Gritty of Accountability

We know that accountability is important but what does it look like? Where is it applied? And how? Is it your job to hold your client accountable or to help them find someone who will?

As long as we counsel with someone there will always be an accountability element to our work with them. But our ultimate goal is to move them into accountability relationships outside of the counseling office or group setting. When we succeed at “converting” someone to a life-long practice of accountability with others in the body of Christ we have accomplished a tremendous thing.

We have helped them embrace biblical Christianity (versus the isolated nobody-is-gonna-tell-me-what-to-do, free agent Christianity so prevalent in our culture). We have given them a safety net that (if used properly) will protect them from a thousand disasters in the future. And we’ve won them over to the relational lifestyle which is the core of what God made us for.

So what are some of the areas the sexually and relationally broken need to be accountable to make changes in? As you look at this list it may appear to be a guide to behavior modification. In one sense it is. We are commanded to put off the “old self” and put on the “new self” (Eph 4:22-28).

After Paul says this he gives us tangible ways to walk it out. He says we must resist our inborn tendency to lie to each other and force ourselves to speak only the truth. He says we have to work through our anger in a timely way and not just ‘blow up’ or ‘clam up.’ Regarding our career he says if we’ve been lazy, avoidant or tried to take shortcuts it needs to stop. We need to get real jobs and stop trying to game the system.

Those who are trapped in relational and sexual bondages must also make tangible changes. The list below spells out some of those changes. Over our long history working with a variety of people these are some of the things we’ve found to be crucial in their healing journey.

Sex/Love addicts need to be accountable to:	Same-sex strugglers need to be accountable to:	Spouses need to be accountable to:
Install safeguards, filters or reporting software on all digital devices that have been used to access pornography.	✓	
		Only check husband's* digital devices as needed (and directed by a counselor) and to immediately stop all compulsive searches, snooping or spying.
		Grieve everything they've lost as a result of their husband's addiction. While avoiding the dual extremes of premature forgiveness/"smoothing everything over" or remaining stuck in the unhealthy anger/"making him pay" phase.
Effectively block, cancel or discontinue any TV or cable service used to access pornography.	✓	
Get rid of or destroy any remaining pornography in their possession (in home, office, car or digital devices).	✓	
Get rid of or destroy anything still in their possession that was received from an affair partner.	✓	
Not have contact with a former affair partner or engage in questionable contact with someone new (whether in person or through digital media).	✓	

* We realize that either spouse can be inserted here (since men can just as likely be the spouse of a female sex addict or same-sex struggler). But for ease of reading we will stick with the feminine pronoun for spouse.

Sex/Love addicts need to be accountable to:	Same-sex strugglers need to be accountable to:	Spouses need to be accountable to:
		Not engage in contact with former boyfriends or questionable opposite sex relationships with claims of “It’s different for me,” “It’s strictly platonic,” or “I’ve known them for years” (through any means personal or digital) if it creates valid concern for the husband or sets up a double standard.
Significantly reduce in not altogether eliminate all Facebook, Instagram, Twitter accounts, etc. (if they’ve been problematic in the past or still concern the spouse today).	✓	
		Make necessary changes to their internet presence/digital usage if it creates undo marital tension, takes precedence over spouse, kids or creates a double standard.
Exercise wisdom and discipline regarding all interactions with the opposite sex. No lunches, dinners, drinks, traveling, etc. without the wife’s express knowledge and permission.	Exercise wisdom and discipline regarding all interactions with the same sex. No lunches, dinners, drinks, traveling, etc. without the wife’s express knowledge and permission.	
Exercise wisdom and have permission from spouse regarding hugging, touching, praying with, doing ministry activities with or spending time with the opposite sex.	Exercise wisdom and have permission from spouse regarding hugging, touching, praying with, doing ministry activities with or spending time with men.	Only share details of husband’s struggle (in the beginning) with those who can provide direct support or have a genuine need to know.
Follow through on any spiritual disciplines, counseling, group involvement, reading or medical advice that benefits their recovery.	✓	✓
Grow in self-care: healthy diet, exercise, adequate sleep, asking for what they need, having boundaries against mistreatment, etc.	✓	✓
Get tested for HIV and all sexually transmitted infections (STI’s) if there has been person-to-person contact or if the wife requests it.	✓	Abstain from sex with husband until she gets negative STI results from him (If there has been sexual contact outside the marriage or she requests such testing). This period of abstinence usually lasts six months.

Sex/Love addicts need to be accountable to:	Same-sex strugglers need to be accountable to:	Spouses need to be accountable to:
Abstain from all sexual engagement (with wife, self or anyone else) for ninety days if it is deemed necessary by a counselor for the purpose of breaking a neuro-chemical addiction.	✓	
		Cooperate with a ninety day abstinence agreement if recommended by a knowledgeable counselor. This would benefit her husband and their over-all intimacy in the future.
Learn about their sexual acting out ritual (especially its beginning phases). And find alternate ways to cope with it that are healthy.	Learn about their sexual acting out ritual (especially its beginning phases). And find alternate ways to cope with it that are healthy.	Learn about their emotional and relational acting out ritual (especially its beginning phases). And find alternate ways to cope with it that are healthy.
Learn about the root issues <i>beneath</i> their rituals and find healing for those areas of pain.	✓	✓
Seek God and wise counsel to uncover hidden strongholds of rebellion, entitlement, self-hate, etc. that lurk within their rituals as well (Ps 139:23-24).	✓	✓
Make a full disclosure* of their acting out history to their spouse. (Guidance by a skilled, experienced counselor is crucial.)	✓	
		Get the pertinent facts about their spouse's behavior but not allow those facts to become an obsession or weapon she uses to torment, shame or punish the offending spouse for months or years to come.

* This disclosure needs to answer all of the major questions (not to ration out the information in a piecemeal fashion). Gradual disclosure is like cutting off the dog's tail one inch at a time. We recommend full disclosure but we don't recommend unlimited disclosure. Some spouses believe they must know the smallest detail, every thought and each temptation the offending spouse has ever had (or will have) or they won't be able to regain trust. **WARNING:** This is a recipe for disaster! It is imperative that this disclosure be facilitated by a leader or counselor experienced in such disclosures.

Sex/Love addicts need to be accountable to:	Same-sex strugglers need to be accountable to:	Spouses need to be accountable to:
	Begin confronting their defensive detachment from the same-sex parent, same-sex peers, peer activities and gender identification.	
	Begin confronting their <i>over-identification</i> with the opposite-sex parent, opposite sex peers and stereotypical opposite-sex behaviors.	
Confront a <i>passive</i> orientation to life based in ignorance, fear, shame or refusal to face responsibility.	✓	✓
Confront a controlling orientation to life based in fear, arrogance, refusal to love or refusal to grant dignity to others.	✓	✓
Continue repenting of all misogyny or misandry.	✓	✓
	Begin confronting their hatred of behaviors, interests, careers and lifestyles of same-gendered people thought to be “below” them.	
Confront perfectionism in themselves; helping them to see it as the fear, fraud and arrogance that it is.	✓	✓
Throw off any false, worldly identity (such as “pervert,” “deviant,” “child molestor”) and only identify themselves as Christ does.	Throw off any false, worldly identity (such as “gay,” “trans,” etc.) and only identify themselves as Christ does.	Throw off any false, worldly identity (such as “powerless,” “victim,” “ugly,” “damaged goods”) and only identify themselves as Christ does.

In the beginning we hold the client accountable regarding their thoughts, behaviors and relationships. But as soon as possible we must hand that responsibility back to them and their newly forming accountability system. In time our job should become holding them accountable to their accountability system.

It is human nature for us to let accountability like this begin slipping in our lives. If we are leaders working with individuals or groups we have to inquire from time to time about:

- Who their accountability people are (are they the kind of people who will hold them to healthy boundaries, relationships and choices? Or will they ask general questions or no questions at all?)
- How often do they touch bases with their team? Daily? Weekly? A couple of times a month?
- Do they call, text, email or meet in person? (At least one face-to-face meeting per week is important.)
- Do they have only one accountability person? What happens when that person doesn't return calls/texts? When they are out of town? If they are only helpful in one small area of recovery?
- Do those in their accountability network "beat them up" or confront them directly and respectfully? Do they offer them real grace and the love of God or empty platitudes like "nobody's perfect" and "we're only human?"
- Do they realize they will need accountability the rest of their lives because their sinful nature will always want to sin (Gal 5:17)?
- Do they realize they will need to be accountable for deeper (and more crucial issues) once they stop their obvious sexual or codependent behaviors? (Such as: Are they hearing and obeying God's voice? How are they slipping back into self-sufficiency? Are they actively pursuing intimacy in their marriage? Are they practicing self-care?)

Lastly, if you are holding someone accountable are you living an accountable life yourself? If you aren't it's only a matter of time before you fall (1 Cor 10:12) and that won't do you or the people you mentor any good. Not only that, you are demonstrating zero integrity. And finally, you will not stay sharp in your ministry to others unless you are telling on yourself and being bold about sharing struggles and temptations with someone you trust.