

SSA Abstinence

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What does Abstinence look like in MAA/SSA? That is the million dollar question and a topic debated over the years.

Alcoholics, drug addicts, and compulsive eaters have something that can be completely removed from their lives, a solid line which will clearly show when it has been crossed - if the substance is used, abstinence has ended.

Abstinence in MAA/SSA is not as obvious but there are some definitive signs that tell if we are living in recovery (aka abstinent).

- Risen from the depths of addiction, we are experiencing emancipation, joy, community and sanity.
- We are living wholeheartedly
- We are practicing good self care and we do not turn our backs on ourselves.
- We are mindful - making choices that support our needs, for example choosing to eat something healthy rather than junk food, choosing an activity that supports our recovery, like going to a meeting or reaching out to a recovery friend rather than doing something mindless.
- We're open to new ideas and willing to try new things.
- We may feel a pull to engage in the old self sabotaging behavior but we catch ourselves and make a change.
- We are free from detrimental behaviors we use to **create avoidance**.
We crave the avoidance of our lives like an alcoholic craves a drink.
Some of our avoidance behaviors include compulsive use of: food, shopping, illness, work, gambling, TV, game playing, excess technology, exercise, clutter, over-spending and debt. Other avoidance behaviors include codependence, care-taking, self-abuse, self-denial, sleeping too much or too little, extreme religiosity, under earning and addiction to alcohol, drugs, nicotine and caffeine.

One of the founding principles of AA is that any life run on self-will can't be a success because we are almost always in collision with something or somebody. Though we believe our motives are good, the reality is that we are trying to run the show. We believe that if people would do as we wished the show would be great and life would be wonderful. In our desperation to control we use different strategies - sometimes being kind, considerate, patient, generous even modest and self-sacrificing. At other times, we may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest.

What happens? The show doesn't come off very well. We might begin to think life doesn't treat us right. So we exert ourselves, becoming more demanding or gracious. Still the play does not work. Admitting we may be *somewhat* at fault, we are *sure* other people are more to blame.

What is the root of our trouble? We are being controlling.

What is the solution? We need to surrender our will to a Higher Will. A Higher Will expresses itself differently to each of us and may evolve over time. As our recovery evolves, we increasingly experience peace of mind and improved relationships with ourselves and others.

On page 266 of the book *When Misery is Company*, the author gives a description of abstinence. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Mindfully choosing to recover from misery addiction by choosing to respond to habitual self sabotage with recovery related actions.
- Recovery related actions can include attending a meeting, contacting another member, reading, writing, listening to music, walking and reaching out to our Higher Power as we understand It.
- The challenge is that self-sabotage behavior is not always obvious to us. We may need to reach out to our recovery community for guidance and support.

One of our long term members relates the following experience with recovery from food addiction. She says "I discovered that when I did the defined abstinence of no refined sugar or white flower, weighed and measured portions 3 times a day, I was a model of physical recovery for 5 years.

I was perfectly abstinent as defined. Was I happy, joyous and free? Nope.

After observing my recovery attempts in OA & CODA for many years, I came to the conclusion that one of my misery vehicles is the ***need to control my recovery*** including checking constantly, "Am I better today? Am I abstinent? Did I have any slippery thoughts?" Often done in the guise of my 10th step, I realized that I was grading myself on how well I was doing.

Control is as destructive as abuse of food, drugs or alcohol.

Abstinence from misery/self-sabotage is being comfortable with myself, being open to experiencing pleasure and willingness to practice of good self care. To me, defining MAA abstinence is like trying to define what love is, what God is, what art is. I know it when I see it.

The following writing was found the SSA Program Essentials writing.

Thinking we want to review it to see what, if anything, should be integrated with this article.

SSA/MAA Abstinence

Abstinence means refraining from the activity or substance to which we are addicted. For the compulsive SSA/MAA this may include abstinence from many different behaviors including but not limited to overworking, over exercising, excessive computer time, excessive game playing, too much or too little sleep, excessive self sacrificing and caretaking, excessive gambling, excessive cleaning, excessive television, compulsive eating, compulsive shopping, compulsive sexual activity.

We also want to consider abstinence from behaviours/substances that make up our self sabotage addiction including but not limited to: lateness, breaking promises, not showing up, acting on assumptions rather than validated facts, not expressing our needs, chasing people away who can help us, not acting when action is needed, expecting others to read our minds, not taking helpful medications or dietary supplements as prescribed, sacrificing ourselves for others, not practicing good self care.

Like most addictions, the SSA/MAA addiction is insidious. Just when life is starting to feel better, we may find ourselves abandoning the positive action we have made or to returning to our old habits simply because they are familiar. We find this to be one of the core behaviors of our addiction. Regular, consistent support and working the first three steps daily can give us a solid foundation but ***to truly recover, we'll need to change*** - and that is where working the 12 Steps with a sponsor come in. For more information about a helpful daily practice, see page 196 in the When Misery is Company book.