

Write Your Impact Letter

Directions: Now that you've learned new tools to communicate, the final step is to effectively communicate your pain to the addict. Using what you've learned in this chapter, practice writing an impact letter to your partner. This letter details how the addiction has affected you. Since the letter is meant to be comprehensive, it can be lengthy if you like.

To get the most benefit from this exercise, begin with the following general directions:

- Be specific and offer personal examples of your experiences.
- Be willing to describe your feelings—no matter how painful.
- Though your impact letter is an expression of your pain, avoid blaming, shaming, or berating the addict.
- Since writing the letter can be a highly emotional experience, do this exercise with a therapist present.
- Please review the final draft of your letter with your therapist, support group, or sponsor before sharing it with the addict.
- You may want to share the letter in a therapy session if that feels like a safe support to you, or if the addict has a tendency to use rage and abandonment to control.

With these points in mind, review the following suggestions and questions. In your letter, include as many elements as you can at this time. If it helps, answer the questions on a separate piece of paper to help get you started.

1. *Describe how the discovery and disclosure process affected you.* How did you feel when you discovered the information? How did this affect your emotional stability? Was it a traumatic event for you? Share specific incidences that were particularly difficult.
2. *Identify ways that the addict was intentionally deceptive and manipulative.* Describe specific examples of crazy-making behavior. How do you feel about them? Did this behavior lead you to doubt yourself?

3. *Describe your thoughts and feelings about the addict's sexual behaviors.* When you discovered what he or she was doing—for example, seeing prostitutes, having sex with someone in your bed, exhibiting himself or herself—what feelings came up for you? Is there a particular behavior that is troubling for you? What has it been like for you to learn about this aspect of your partner's sexuality?
4. *Describe any fears you have about others judging you or the addict.* Many partners feel shame and embarrassment about the addict's behavior. Now that you know about this behavior, do you feel worthless at times or not good enough? Share those feelings with the addict now. When you think about people who know about the addiction or who might find out, what thoughts come to mind?
5. *Describe how your partner's sex addiction affected your sexuality.* How has this changed your sexual relationship with the addict? How about your individual sexuality? Do you have concerns about your body or your sexual functioning? Do you feel obligated to be sexual with the addict? Has this impaired your sexual functioning?
6. *Describe how your knowledge of sex addiction affects your ability to trust in this relationship.* What promises or vows that the addict made to you have now been broken? How do you feel about trusting the addict going forward? Do you feel that trust can be restored? If so, what will you need in order to learn to trust again?
7. *State what you will do to continue to take care of yourself.* List important boundaries you have set so you can reaffirm them with the addict.
8. *Close by acknowledging this letter will likely be hard for your partner to handle.* Encourage your partner to share this letter with supportive people and to talk about any questions it raises. Let them know the letter's purpose was to share your feelings at this time. Thank them for reading or hearing the letter and omit endearing closings such as *Love, Amy*. Just signing your name is appropriate.