



disclosure prep policies & procedures, cont.

empowering exercise of establishing them. While boundaries may change post-Disclosure, it is helpful for the partner to have practice and experience in setting and maintaining effective boundaries before the Disclosure process takes place.

- **Active support system:** Ideally, betrayed partners will have an active support system of therapist, group members, friends, family, pastor, 12-step associates, etc., who can emotionally support them through the highly anxious process of receiving Disclosure. Partners are often triggered back into the symptomatic activation they experienced around discovery, and they typically need significant help and support to regulate themselves and work through the fresh feelings of betrayal and pain that accompany Disclosure.

CONTRAINDICATIONS FOR DISCLOSURE

The following factors contraindicate Disclosure:

- **Evidence of continued lies and secret-keeping:** If there is suspicion or evidence that the addicted individual is making only a partial Disclosure and is withholding secrets or continuing to lie or manipulate the betrayed partner, the Disclosure process should be paused. The addict and his or her therapist should take time to work through these blocks until the addict is able and willing to fully embrace the Disclosure process and be entirely honest with his or her partner.
- **Risk for harm to self or others:** If either the addict or the betrayed partner has suicidal ideation that has not been stabilized and addressed (psychiatric evaluation, suicide threat assessment, 'no suicide' contract, reduction of symptoms), Disclosure must be postponed until that individual is stable enough to weather the anxiety and emotional upheaval inherent in the process. If either client has threatened harm to self or another person (a child, a partner, etc.), Disclosure must be postponed until this threat is addressed and reduced or eliminated.
- **Domestic violence:** If there is any physical domestic violence present in the relationship, Disclosure must be postponed while this issue is addressed and the couple is stabilized. If there is significant emotional and verbal violence in the relationship, proceeding with Disclosure must be evaluated carefully so as to not exacerbate the situation.
- **Sickness, pregnancy, mental illness, etc.:** If either partner is sick, pregnant, or in some other fragile state (diagnosed with a serious illness, dealing with the death of a parent, experiencing a major depressive episode, etc.), Disclosure may need to be postponed until the individual is in a better physical and emotional space. In some cases, however, it may be appropriate for the client to move forward despite these obstacles, but only after consultation with the client's medical and/or psychiatric doctors.
- **If the couple is separating/divorcing:** In most cases, if a couple is not planning to remain together, Disclosure is contraindicated, as the information shared can become fuel for legal and emotional conflicts. In some cases, Disclosure may still be helpful. Careful consideration on a case-by-case basis should be made.
- **If either party intends to use Disclosure for harm:** If either party intends to use the information given or received in Disclosure to harm the other person through legal action, emotional blackmail, sharing the information with inappropriate people, etc., then Disclosure should be postponed until these issues are resolved.

THE THREE-STAGE DISCLOSURE PROCESS

The Disclosure process has three distinct stages:

- Preparing for Disclosure
- Giving and receiving Disclosure
- Self-care, repair, and healing after Disclosure



disclosure prep policies & procedures, cont.

STAGE ONE: PREPARING FOR DISCLOSURE

Preparing the Disclosing Client

The following steps prepare the addicted individual to give Disclosure to his or her betrayed partner.

Step 1: Complete the Disclosure Preparation Worksheets.

These worksheets are included in the Disclosure Prep Notebook. The addict should complete these worksheets prior to beginning work on the Disclosure document. The worksheets help the client identify the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that may be creating blocks to his or her ability to enter into the Disclosure process with full honesty and openness. The worksheets also help the client understand his or her intentions regarding Disclosure, and to identify growth opportunities and desired outcomes.

Step 2: Write a sexual history timeline.

A worksheet for this exercise is included in the Disclosure Prep Notebook. Many addicts will have already completed this exercise as part of their individual therapy, group therapy, or 12-step program work. Whether using what they have already prepared or starting from scratch, the addict should complete a sexual history timeline that begins at birth and works through his or her lifespan in five-year increments. This exercise helps clients develop clarity about their sexual and relational story and some of the dynamics underlying their addictive behaviors.

Step 3: Prepare a draft of the Disclosure document.

Using the Disclosure Preparation Worksheets and sexual history timeline, the addict should write the first draft of his or her Disclosure document. Therapists should encourage clients to include everything they can think of without worrying about whether it should be in the final draft or not. At a later stage of the process, the therapist will work with the client to edit the document as needed. When addicts try to edit as they go, it often causes them to bargain with themselves and talk themselves into omitting things that they are anxious about disclosing.

Writing the Disclosure Document

The following guidelines are used when helping addicts write an appropriate Disclosure document. These guidelines are included in the addict's Disclosure Prep Worksheets.

Information to Include

- Beginning and ending dates of each affair or each period of time that addictive behaviors were active. Examples include:
 - *From June 2016 to August 2017 I had a sexual relationship with Jane from work.*
 - *From July 1999 to October 2017 I used porn and masturbation almost daily.*
- Include frequency of behaviors. Examples include:
 - *I saw Jane every day at work, talked with her by phone daily, and met with her several times a week for sex.*
 - *I would view porn and masturbate for one to two hours most days.*
- Dates and details of last time behaviors occurred. Examples include:
 - *My last contact with Jane was when we texted about ending our relationship in September 2017. My last sexual contact with her was two weeks prior to that, in August 2017.*
 - *My last use of porn was October 3, 2014.*



disclosure prep policies & procedures, cont.

Copy of Disclosure Provided to Betrayed Partner's Therapist

Approximately two weeks prior to the scheduled Disclosure, the betrayed partner's therapist should be given the finalized copy of the Disclosure document. This is done for the following reasons:

- The betrayed partner's therapist needs to be aware of what is going to be disclosed so he or she can assess whether the betrayed partner is adequately prepared for what he or she is about to hear. Depending on the amount and severity of information to be disclosed, sometimes more resourcing and preparation may be needed prior to Disclosure. The therapist is given a copy of the Disclosure document two weeks in advance so that additional therapy appointments to resource the partner can be scheduled if needed.
- The betrayed partner's therapist needs time to absorb the information, ask any clarifying questions, and thoroughly understand the sexual history being disclosed so he or she is not trying to process or clarify information while simultaneously attempting to help and support the betrayed partner. The partner's therapist's focus during Disclosure must be on monitoring, co-regulating, and supporting the partner.

The betrayed partner should be informed that his or her therapist will see the Disclosure document a few days prior to the scheduled Disclosure. Ensuring the partner knows the therapist will see the document in advance (and why that occurs) prevents any sense of secret-keeping on the part of the partner's therapist.

PHASE TWO: GIVING AND RECEIVING DISCLOSURE

The Three-Day Disclosure Process



Disclosure is intentionally spread over a three-day period to allow space and time for the information to be absorbed and processed by the betrayed partner, and to give both the addict and the betrayed partner as much emotional and psychological support as possible.

Many betrayed partners experience emotional overload during the reading of the Disclosure document as new painful information is received. Frequently, they experience varying levels of shock, dissociation, and shut-down, which can result in the partner not hearing all of the Disclosure or having gaps in what is retained. In addition, most partners, during the hours after Disclosure, begin to connect the dots, and find that they want to ask certain questions to clarify what they have heard.

The day between receiving Disclosure and meeting again as a couple gives the betrayed partner an opportunity to regroup, re-stabilize, and begin to make sense of the information provided. The betrayed partner is able to meet with his or her individual therapist and review the Disclosure document in a calm and supportive environment. As the betrayed partner does this and processes the information received, he or she is able to write down questions, knowing these questions can be asked and answered during the couple's session the following day.



disclosure prep policies & procedures, cont.

Creating space in the process helps betrayed partners absorb and process the information they are receiving. Most partners do not have enough clarity in the distressing moments of hearing the Disclosure to know what questions will arise as they process the information. Stretching Disclosure over three days provides a spacious yet structured container in which partners know they can ask and get answers to the questions that arise.

The three-day process also gives both individuals space in which to process the high levels of emotion that accompany Disclosure. At the same time, the therapists can actively support and adjust the process as needed after the Disclosure, when clients are in the most acute distress.

Below is a chart outlining the three-day Disclosure schedule:

DAY ONE (2 HOURS)	
Individual Prep Time (15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Each client works with his or her therapist to recall grounding tools, listening boundaries, and safety elements.
Couple's Disclosure Session (45-60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Addict gives and partner receives Disclosure. ■ Addict and partner ask questions and process information together.
Individual Sessions (30 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Process information and feelings. ■ Identify boundaries needed over next 48 hours. ■ Review and alter self-care plan as needed.
Couple's Session (15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish general boundaries for next 48 hours. ■ Establish communication boundaries around Disclosure content for next 48 hours.
DAY TWO (INDIVIDUAL THERAPY SESSIONS)	
Partner's Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review Disclosure document, process information and feelings. ■ Identify boundaries needed. ■ Review and finalize list of questions to ask in upcoming couple's session.
Addicted Individual's Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Process information and feelings. ■ Work through shame, fear, defensiveness. ■ Prepare to answer questions at the couple's session openly and honestly.
DAY THREE	
Couple's Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partner asks questions and receives answers. ■ Partner expresses feelings and addict receives them. ■ Boundaries are established for moving forward. ■ Plan for ongoing therapeutic support is made.