

Three Circles Plan

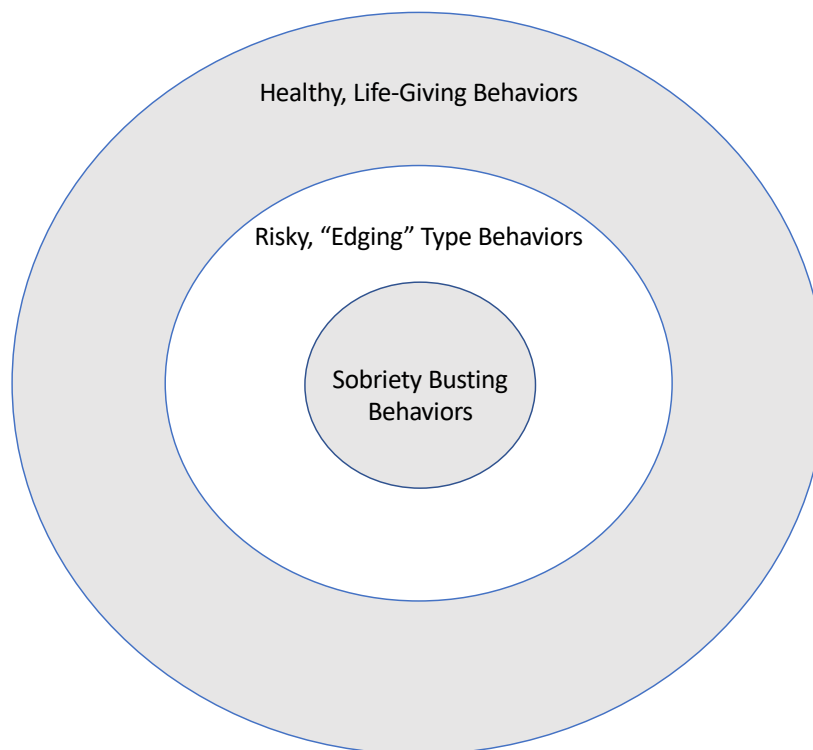
Even very early in the recovery process, it is essential clearly identify what you are wanting to avoid as well as what is helpful and good for you. One tool that many in different schools of recovery have found helpful is the “Three Circle Plan.”

Step One of this plan is an exercise using three concentric circles. The innermost circle are your acting out behaviors that you have identified as your core sobriety behaviors. I.e. if I do any of these things, then I will acknowledge that I have lost my sobriety and also need to start my “day count” over.

The next circle consists of things that, while I don’t consider “sobriety busters,” I know they are wrong, and/or have me on a dangerous path towards relapse. These could include things such as staying up too late, mindlessly channel surfing on your television, or exploring sports or news sites, social media, click bait, etc.

The outermost circle are the good and healthy things I do. I.e. Keeping my six dailies, exercise, walks with my wife, playing games with my children, working in my recovery materials, going to counseling, journaling, etc.

Take some time now to create your own personal “Three Circles Worksheet” by drawing three circles on a large piece of paper and then writing your own examples in the circles. Identify as many specifics as you can but recognize this is a dynamic document that you will come back to often and especially when writing your “Personal Recovery Plan.” (In chapter 8)



If you know you struggle with multiple areas of compulsivity, you can also certainly add those items in your inner circles. Many, however, will find it helpful to do a separate plan for each struggle. I.e. one for sexual acting out, one for gambling, one for alcohol, one for spending, etc.

Step two of your “Three Circles Plan” is to create an action plan of what you will do if you participate in any behaviors you listed in either of the inner circles. In other words what is my plan if I recognize I have done something from my “Risky, Edging Behavior” circle. What are the specific steps I will take in regards to with whom I will share, when I will share and what I will do to learn how to not repeat that specific behavior. You will need a separate plan for your inner most circle that will require stronger actions. (Chapter 8 of the personal plan will be helpful here.)

Once you are done with your plan--both steps, share it with your sponsor and your counselor and ask them to help you see other specifics you may have missed. Once you have received their input and made your own adjustments, share it with your wife as she will likely have insights into you and your areas of struggles that even your sponsor and counselor will not have. (FYI many couples will need a couples’ session with Darrell or another counselor for this discussion)

Please note, it is important in this process that your plan remain YOUR plan. What that means is your sponsor, counselor and even your wife will have helpful input, however, they are consultants for you. It must remain your plan. Otherwise, if you put things in your plan out of appeasement, you will either give yourself unspoken permission to cheat on those aspects or you will resent the person who suggested them which will lead to other issues.

Many will find this to be a difficult conversation with their wife. I.e. if she believes you need to have “Reading Sports Websites” in your second circle because there are often inappropriate ads, pictures, etc. but you believe you can read articles about your favorite teams without going down those rabbit holes, then you will be in a quandary. “Do I put that in my plan so that she feels better or do I risk having a fight with her because I don’t include it?”

Our suggestion would be keep your plan as “Your Plan,” however, do another list of things you are willing to give up, (at least for the time being) not because you believe you have to in order to stay safe, but because you understand these things bring up a lot of fear for her. This will allow you to serve her in love by giving up certain activities as a consideration. Voluntarily giving things up that scare her will be helpful in building trust and showing that you are committed to loving her as Christ loved the church. When you chose to voluntarily give them up out of love, you will be much less likely to move into resentment than if you see them as unnecessary boundaries imposed by her. The chart on the next page will be helpful in seeing this distinction clearly.

What I need to give up for my sanity and sobriety sake	What I'm willing to give up in order to help her feel safer and to begin building trust