

LivingIntegrated®

FOUR TASKS FOR GETTING YOUR LIFE BACK

TASK FOUR: DEVELOPING SUPPORT FOR HEALTHY LIVING

As you've worked through the first three tasks for getting your life back:

- you've explored what's been going on in your head;
- done an inventory of your life; and
- identified the habits you want to replace.

Now that you've done all this work, good for you! This is not easy. In fact, as I said before, I think anyone who is trying to do what you are is courageous. It takes desire, commitment and self-surrender.

For the ongoing work and satisfaction of living a life you will feel good about, you will want to support these efforts. This is the work of Task Four.

I'm going to suggest to you four components of workable, ongoing support for healthy living. All of us need support, never more so than when we're trying to redirect our lives when we've stumbled into sexual habits that bother us. Developing these four areas of support will significantly increase your ability to sustain the changes you are making.

This is not an exhaustive list, to be sure. It's meant to get you started with the most basic, and I think important, elements of support. As you continue your path of personal growth, you will want to discover and add other components to your own personal culture of support.

BOUNDARIES

Healthy, appropriate boundaries are absolutely essential to live life well. Don't think of boundaries as negative things (keeping you from something that is good) but as positive guides that keep you participating in what is truly good and avoiding those things which will unnecessarily hurt and cost you.

Regarding sexuality, the way to determine the boundaries you want to develop is to be honest with yourself about the sexuality you want to have. What is a way of behaving sexually you feel good about? What are sexual behaviors you respect?

Further, what do you truly feel your sexuality is for? Is it for you? For your pleasure or entertainment? Or is it for a different purpose, for connecting with someone else?

Finally, are sexual urges and behaviors something you really don't think you can control? Maybe it's a struggle you think you just shouldn't have to worry about.

When our sexuality becomes integrated with a healthy spirituality, we begin to think in terms of relationship rather than isolation, honesty rather than deception, openness rather than hiding, giving rather than taking.

After thinking about these things, actually make a list. What are the sexual behaviors you feel good about participating in? What are the sexual behaviors that cause you to feel guilty or ashamed?

You then want to create a boundary for yourself. The good behaviors on the inside of a circle, the harmful ones outside it. Target the inside behaviors. This is where you want to live.



Boundaries give us specific definition of where we want to be and where we don't.

There's another area for which you will need to set boundaries: how much time you spend looking at screens. It's not directly connected to our sexuality, but it makes a big impact on healthy thinking. Screen time has skyrocketed for all of us and it's not healthy.

Think back or do a quick log on how much time you are looking at screens: monitors, laptops, flat screens, phone screens. It's not good for your eyes and it's not good for your brain.

Reign in your screen use by putting some healthy boundaries around it. Replace screen time with healthier activities and you'll see a difference in how you are able to think and manage your life.

SAFEGUARDS

You need support tools that will reinforce your boundaries.

Let's say a problematic behavior for you is viewing online pornography. Then a helpful safeguard for you will be installing a software monitoring or filtering program on each of your viewing devices.

For some of us, monitoring software is helpful. It sends a report of all our browsing history to safe, caring individuals who are supporting us in our goals. (These people are part of the community of support, the fourth element of support.)

The fact that our viewing patterns are known to others helps support our boundaries. It's not about shame, it's about being known, being accountable in supportive relationships.

For others of us it is more helpful to use a filtering device, which utilizes technology to create boundaries for our online viewing so as to support our self-designed boundaries.

It's increasingly easier to find helpful software today, whether you desire monitoring, filtering or both. Some good programs are [Covenant Eyes](#), [X3Watch](#), [Accountable2You](#), [Integrity Online](#), [Qustodio](#), and others. Today we have more options. Google them and evaluate what program and cost best fits you.

I use Covenant Eyes. This has been really helpful for me. Now, I am an addict, and hopefully you are not. But having monitoring reports of my online viewing sent to my three friends has supported me well in living the life I want to live.

If your habitual problems are behaviors other than viewing porn, then what safeguards can you develop? You want to develop healthy and safe ways for your behaviors to be exercised in light and community, rather than shadows and isolation.

You want to change the patterns, people and places that have been the access to the behaviors you want to break.

NURTURING YOUR MIND

In Task Three we talked about replacing bad habits with new habits, and feeding your mind is a really important new habit to cultivate.

Intellectual laziness can make us more vulnerable to porn and other sexual behaviors. When it comes to thinking, too often we coast. We go on autopilot. We respond to unsought stimulations. We become intellectually lazy, letting the dynamics of sexual attraction provide interest and energy. We become reactive consumers rather than proactive producers. We become dull and selfish. Further, we ignore the possible consequences of our choices. We focus on the possible rewards and forget the guilt, shame and other costs we've experienced in the past.

A helpful antidote to lazy minds and reactive thinking is to stimulate our brains by reading healthy, nurturing material and engaging in mutually stimulating relationships.

Maybe you're not a reader. Don't make it too hard on yourself. But don't be too easy on yourself, either. So instead of tackling books, read good blogs. Utilize the Internet for healthy, life-giving purposes. A starter is the blog we have on the LivingIntegrated website.

Another source to reinforce healthy thinking is recovery podcasts. There are many, many blogs and podcasts today, some of them really good. Look for fellow travelers in healthy spirituality and sexuality who are writing about their experiences.

And occasionally read a book. Choose good and helpful ones and make yourself do it. Why? You are feeding your mind, stimulating your God-given capacity to grow and think and re-train your brain. We have a recommended reading list on the LivingIntegrated website.

If you haven't read it already, you'll want to start with *Ashamed No More: A Pastor's Journey through Sex Addiction* (InterVarsity Press, 2012).

COMMUNITY

Though many of us are natural loners—especially guys—we are created to be social creatures.

We actually need genuine connection to thrive. So, whether it is someone you know or someone you've yet to meet, someone in physical proximity or at a distance (even online), cultivate some intentional friendships.

Talk about all the things going on in your life. Talk with them about all the things going on in their life. Talk about your feelings. Talk with them about what you're trying to change and how it's going.

Keep at it. Develop connections. Get out of your head and be part of others' lives and let them be part of yours. It's especially helpful and strategically useful to develop friendships with people who are struggling with the same thing you are and trying to achieve the freedom you are working towards.

I know this is not simple. You will have to visit groups or go online, which can be terribly distracting and takes time and energy. But if you will work for it, you can develop the support community you need.

ABOUT ONLINE COMMUNITY

While it is always better, I think, to develop strategic friendships with folks in geographical proximity, you can use the Internet for good here, especially if you're finding it difficult to cultivate like-minded friendships where you live.

Some very helpful options are being developed in this day. Check out the virtual meetings at [samsonociety.org](https://www.samsonociety.org), or [rtribe.org](https://www.rtribe.org). There are many other vehicles available today. Keep going until you find one that works really well for you.

And when you do find an online community that works really well for you, would you please let me know what it is? I'm always interested in finding more tools that work for others.

SUMMARY ACTION STEPS

- Watch the companion video for Task Four: <https://youtu.be/CW3Wif5WM3g>
- Develop a picture of what you would like your healthy sexual behavior to look like.
- Now determine specific sexual thoughts and actions that fit that picture; drawing a circle put these thoughts and actions in the center.
- What is inside the circle is your healthy sexual template; place all your other thoughts and behaviors outside the circle; this circle is the boundary of health you want to keep.
- Monitor your screen time and replace it with other activities.
- Identify and deploy safeguards that will help you keep the boundary you've developed.
- Develop a routine of reading informative and supportive material.
- Make connections with others and commit to developing your community of support.

A FEW BIBLE TEXTS FOR THINKING ABOUT SUPPORT

“Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.”

Psalm 119:1-5

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you,
you also are to love one another.”

John 13:34

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit
of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so
fulfill the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6:1-2

PRAYER

Prayer is a conversation with your Father in Heaven over matters that concern you and him.

*Our Father, all who live belong to you and all
who belong to you are part of your family.
Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters.
Help me today to grow in supporting and being supported
by the family of those You have given to me.
Amen.*

