

ISA Step Study Information Sheet

Thank you for expressing interest in the Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance Step Study! Hopefully the following information will help you decide if it's something you feel ready to explore.

Meeting format:

Step Study meetings are different than typical SAA meetings (or even typical ISA telemeetings). They are often mixed-gender meetings, and are held using the ZOOM video conferencing system.

Participants are highly encouraged to join the meeting using a computer or phone with internet capability and a camera. (If this is not feasible, participants may call in using a phone, but some of the healthy intimacy which develops by seeing each other's faces during sharing will be lost. Plus, some of the presentations are audio-visual, so anyone calling in by phone won't be able to see and might feel left out.)

The Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance (ISA) Step Study is a 6-month tour through the Steps with the focus of recovery from intimacy avoidance. It will be a little like a "class" which meets weekly, but with discussion facilitators instead of "teachers." The facilitators may be SAA members who have previously attended an ISA Step Study, or the participants may take turns facilitating the meetings using the material provided at [https://saatalk.info/us/resources/resource?xresource\[id\]=56](https://saatalk.info/us/resources/resource?xresource[id]=56). Attendees will be given "homework" invitations consisting of reading assignments and questions to answer. Participants will explore the Steps individually during the week, with the help of a sponsor or a co-sponsor, and then share experiences and insights with the group during the weekly meetings. The ISA Step Study groups are usually open for new members to join during the first 3-4 weeks, and then the group is closed to additional participants.

This Step Study moves at a rigorous pace. Participants may wish to spend more time individually on each Step, which is fine. For example, if someone feels they need to spend more time doing additional work on Step 3, they can certainly do that individually -- in addition to continuing to study the other Steps with the group. To gain the maximum benefit from the Step Study, members are encouraged to make every effort to stay current with homework assignments, even if they miss a meeting. (It is recommended that emails be sent out each week with assignments and notes. Suggested email reminders are included in the materials.) Since the weekly meetings are where participants can hear others' shares and practice developing intimacy as a group, even if someone hasn't finished the "homework," it's a great idea to join the meeting anyway. Members who haven't completed the assignments can share about what resonated with them from the others' shares or share about their own journey. Participants will have briefly explored all 12 steps by the end of the Step Study, which should take approximately 25 weeks.

Assignments:

Participants will be invited to make outreach calls, preferably to other Step Study participants, current or past. (In the past 3 phone lists were sent out: men's, women's, and a list for those who accept calls from either). The purpose of these calls is to get to know each other and build – or strengthen – a network of support. This will be an ongoing homework assignment throughout the Step Study.

During the weekly meetings, participants will share the highlights of their experiences and insights gained from reading the assignments and/or answering the questions. There will not be enough time for each person to share all of their answers with the group. So, in addition to weekly outreach calls, after the second meeting, each participant will be invited to call someone and share answers to the assigned questions and/or sharing insights gained from reading the assignments. This "Pair-and-Share Partner" can be the same person throughout the entire Step Study if it works out, or participants may share with different people until they find the right fit. Some of these relationships have turned into co-sponsorship relationships and many are friendships that are continuing long beyond the Step Study.

Starting the 3rd week, the homework assignment will include reading from *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* by Dr. Patrick Carnes. The book is geared towards people already in a relationship who want to experience healthier sexuality. However, the few chapters we'll read as part of the Step Study will help lay the foundation for *anyone* to develop more intimacy (closeness and connection) of any or all types, including intimacy with themselves, with a Higher Power, and with friends and family, as well as with a sexual partner. So, regardless if a person has or wants a romantic partner, they will likely benefit from reading and discussing certain parts of the book. Participants may purchase the book (paper or e-book) or borrow it from a library or friend if they do not have a copy. Also, some recordings have been made of people reading the book aloud. (Please ask Deb in WV or Tom in IA for more information about that.)

Participants from previous ISA Step Studies -- including those who have years of sobriety in this and/or other fellowships -- have reported having a deeper understanding of the principles of the Steps and recovery in general, amazing epiphanies regarding their character strengths and weaknesses, and increased love towards others and themselves, being able to more readily grasp their true value as individuals. The groups start to feel like family, and many have expressed sadness at the conclusion of the meetings. Several have gone through more than one!