



Developing Male Relationships: Mentors & Buddies

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Boys and men by nature are filled with a desire for adventure! As you find adventure in the company of other men, you will find your life becomes energized. Recovery becomes enjoyable when you find the healing and association you've been aching for. The spirit of AIM comes from a combination of male bonding in an adventure setting. We encourage you to read any of the books listed at the end of this packet to get a sense of the spirit of the weekend. We also assume that you are familiar with some of the basics of ssa as outlined by a variety of authors at the end of this packet.

If you have been struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions, you have no doubt been reading books and listening to men who have recovered, who talk about the importance of finding "healing male relationships." As you read and listen to the information, you may also find that these types of relationships can be challenging to develop. You may have experienced discouragement as you have attempted to find mentors to be there for you. You may have felt awkward as you've searched for buddies to play and spend time with you. You may also have grown tired of longing for deeper male connection, and determined that you would just give up. Perhaps you have even experienced a sense of despair over the lack of bonding and emotional intimacy with men.

Although it is true that these deeper male relationships are critical for recovery, we recognize the difficulty that many experience in attempting to develop these connections. We believe that many have given up on recovery due to this challenge. This packet describes one man's journey away from same-sex attraction, and his personal experiences in developing healthy male relationships. We hope the ideas and stories shared will help you in your efforts.

The AIM weekend is specifically intended to assist those who experience unwanted same-sex attraction in three ways:

- 1) Establish a mentor or buddy relationship. Each participant brings to the adventure a mentor who does NOT experience ssa (same sex attraction).
- 2) Develop strength and overcome fear surrounding masculine activity and association.
- 3) Bond with other men in healthy, non-sexual ways which foster a masculine gender identity.

We realize that for many men the hardest part of the weekend comes BEFORE you ever arrive. Asking a man to come and support you can be awkward and frightening. However, leaving isolation and shame is a liberating opportunity. It allows you to connect more deeply with another man. You don't need to hide or wear a mask to feel good about yourself!

Your fear may tell you to hide and stay safe. You may hear messages that say things like: "No one would ever love you the way you are"... or ..."You're just not good enough"...or..."You can't trust others to meet your needs"... or ..."Don't depend on

others to be there for you.” These messages or others that are similar will only maintain your isolation and prevent you from the bonding you need for recovery.

We encourage you to take the risk. You need to unleash your desire for adventure! As you find it within the company of other men, your life will become energized. You will find what you’ve been aching for. Don’t give up. We hope to see you on the mountain!

Testimonial of Mark Allen

I was born into a home where love and concern were found for me and all members of my family. I was brought up in a religious home where moral values were taught and practiced. While we had problems, I do not think they were any more serious than any other family. I can now look back and understand some of the events that led to my ssa issues. This has helped me formulate a plan of action to heal and overcome the wounds of my past.

Beginning in early adolescence I knew I struggled with ssa. Throughout high school I hid most of ssa feelings and tried to fit into the mold of friends and acquaintances I had. I dated and even had a steady girlfriend in high school. I had many friends throughout my teen years and was considered a likeable guy. Unfortunately, my self-perception was different from that of my friends and family. I thought of myself as ugly, physically unfit, and effeminate.

When I returned to my home at the age of twenty one, I fell into the addictive cycle of porn. During college I continued to struggle with porn and other addictive behaviors. I tried to lead a normal life, hoping someday I would find the answers that would free me from the burden of ssa. I even met with counselors at the University I attended. I was convinced if I could just break away from porn then my attraction to men would shift. The therapists I met with weren’t much help and even discouraged me further from finding the truth. I told my religious leader and was told to keep hope and pray.

Upon returning home from college, I decided to either find answers or I was going to experiment with a gay lifestyle. Within a month, I was put in touch with a therapist who did reparative therapy. He was very knowledgeable about ssa and gave me answers I had been searching for years to find. Prayers were answered and the darkness that surrounded me was lifted by a new light and hope.

Shortly after discovering the reasons why I had developed ssa, I began to build a support network of mentors. I currently have many male friends who know of the ssa symptom and who have helped me through difficult times. I told these men in the early stages of my recovery, and they are a major reason why I am so far along in such a short amount of time. Some of my male friends have never experienced ssa. They know nothing of my condition, but provide me with the support I need to get planted into the world of manhood. I also receive support from parents, religious leaders, fellow

journeymen, and my wife. I thank God for working in my life and giving me hope when I thought it wasn't possible. The road has been long and arduous, but I now have a wonderful support network and a very supportive wife to help me on my continued journey.

When I first told others about ssa, I thought the toughest part of my journey was over. However, I soon realized that the toughest part of the journey was just beginning. It has been a rocky hill of joys and sorrows and I can only thank God and those in my life for helping me get to where I am today.

Below are some lessons I learned on my path to telling my mentors. I explain who I told, why I told them, and some of the struggles they have helped me with on my journey. These experiences are taken from my personal situation.

Who did I tell?

1. I needed to heal with my peers. I told men who I looked up to as the "ideal" man.
2. The men I told had been long time friends. I knew most of them for many years before telling them, although my relationship with most of them was not authentic.
3. I told men who already had characteristics of patience, love, acceptance, and compassion. (Most of my peers joked about "Gays." However, hearts were changed and their understanding increased as I shared with them the truth).
4. I told men who held my similar moral view on the practice of homosexuality, and men who had similar religious beliefs. (It's hard to get help from some one who thinks homosexuality in general is an okay, alternative lifestyle)
5. There are some men I did not invite into my circle because they could not offer any value. (This was a different feeling than being afraid to tell).
6. I told men who were stable in my life. Men who would be around for many years. (Some men have moved since telling them, but we stay in touch and they continue to be a support).
7. I told men who I feared the most would reject me. This helped me overcome my fears and experience true acceptance.
8. I told men with whom I had a need that they could help me with. (i.e., learning sports, stopping porn, practicing authenticity, manly hobbies, a supportive hug).

How did I tell?

1. I made a list of potential mentors
2. I prayed for help in choosing a mentor, and that God would lead me to those men I could heal with
3. Once I prayed, I let God answer my pray. Impressions of names came at different times throughout the day (sometimes several days), usually when I

- was relaxed. (In the shower, at bedtime, reading scriptures, listening to spiritual music).
4. When I knew who to tell, I prepared by informing them beforehand of a problem I was facing and needed help with. I asked if I could come over and discuss it with them. (This was done in a phone call most of the time).
 5. I came over prepared with books, an action plan, and my progress. They were more comfortable, once they knew I had an action plan and was executing it. It also took some of the burden off of the, "What can I do for this man? I don't know how to help him?" fears some of them may have had.
 6. I prayed for help in telling my mentor. I prayed that my potential mentor's heart would be softened and his understanding increased.
 7. I told my mentor in a quiet place away from noise and distractions of the world. (I turned off cell phones and shut doors).
 8. Prior to our discussions, I prayed with my potential mentor in the room.
 9. I did not "beat around the bush."
 10. I quickly and briefly discussed emotional issues which had created the ssa. (ssa is not the problem, it is a symptom of unmet emotional needs and wounds).
 11. I had an idea of what I needed from this man and laid out a plan with him that same day.
 12. I had a book ready to give them. (e.g., Healing Homosexuality, Coming Out Straight, Desires in Conflict, You Don't Have to Be Gay).

Ongoing Conflicts Within Myself

1. Defensive detachment- I continued to detach from one man in my group for quite some time. He had read and understood the concepts of defensive detachment and let me work on it with him. It was emotionally painful to go through it with him. We were both drained emotionally, but it was worth our friendship.
2. The "Emotional Well" problem- In the beginning of my process I had only one man to rely on to help meet my needs. My bucket of male experiences, relationships and emotional male needs was empty. I needed to fill it up, and I drained the "emotional and mental well" of my one mentor. He was tired and so was I. I suggest having a plan to get your needs met in many ways.
3. Acceptance- I had to learn to "cherish" what a man COULD give me, and let the rest go. Sometimes I felt so needy that I would overwhelm my buddy. I had to let go of criticism and stop expecting him to be everything and give everything that I needed. Everyone has something different to offer in a relationship. I learned to accept that and stop the negativity I felt when one man couldn't do it all.
4. Building a List- My counselor gave me great advice. Build a network of many different types of men (mentors and buddies). The "18" team members rule. Don't emotionally restrict yourself. This leads to disappointment.

5. Loneliness- I realized I need to have someone who could be an “emergency contact” for me. Sometimes I got overwhelmed with all the work and time it takes to find real healing and to change.

Journal Entries

JOURNAL: My perceptions of telling a mentor

“I thought surely I was creating an enemy in telling someone about the horror of my true self. I didn’t think I would or could be loved for who I truly was. I always created the scene in my head of telling someone I struggled with ssa and watching them freak out and never speak with me again, calling me horrible names and feeling more miserable about myself. I imagined everyone I knew laughing at me and calling me names, my family kicking me out of their lives. It was a horrible picture I had created, wrongfully so, but it was my reality. It was a sin on my part, for thinking everyone was like that. For thinking [God’s] love was not to be found, I was sinning.”

JOURNAL: My initial experience

“We said a prayer and then I started to talk. I had barely started talking when I started bawling uncontrollably. Jake came to my side, and put his arm around me. Can I speak of the comfort and peace that filled my heart in those few moments? I got up the courage to say the words “same sex attraction”. Then I cried some more. His hand was still on my back comforting me. He hadn’t rejected me; in fact I knew right then that God loved me enough to send people like Jake. I then related the story of my life to Jake. I explained the symptoms I knew of and told him of the challenges I had faced. We cried some more, both of us. We both felt the love of our God. We worked out a simple plan and Jake was eager to help. I asked him if I could call him everyday to check in. I asked him for help with sports, especially basketball. He was enthused by the whole idea. I left his house feeling a joy I had never experienced in my entire life. I came home, wept on my bed and said a prayer of gratitude for what had just happened. I knew I was going to be all right.”

JOURNAL: Ongoing experiences

“I continued this process with Craig and others. The same spirit that filled the room at Jake's house filled our hearts as we shared together our struggles. Craig took the initiative and helped me organize a team of solid men who could support me. He helped me get on a softball league, organize a schedule for checking in, and helping me deal with wrong perceptions I created. He's continued to give me strength. I've learned so much from each man I've told. They have shared with me their struggles and now I can help them with their struggles. I feel like a real man, like a man with real issues who has the support of other men. These men know my “ugliest and darkest secrets”, yet they continue to love me. Mercy is such a wonderful gift.”

JOURNAL: Closing thoughts

“There was time in my life, when I thought I'd never tell anyone of experiencing SSA. I never imagined it would turn out as well as it has. For me, it was the ultimate sign of true acceptance from other men. It was a big risk, and there were some men who would not have reacted as well as those I chose, however, the risk was worth taking. Healing began to increase as I opened up and asked for help from others. There have been tough times, but looking back it has been worth the effort.”

(The ideas expressed in testimonial are those of Mark and his journey. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Mark at markalle@gmail.com).

“ADVENTURE & BONDING”
Books which reflect the spirit of AIM

- “Wild at Heart,” by John Eldredge
- “Touching Spirit Bear,” by ben Mikaelson
- “Sign of the Beaver,” by Elizabeth George Speare
- “My Side of the Mountain,” by Jean Craighead George
- “The Other Side of the Mountain,” by Jean Craighead George
- “Little Men,” by Louisa May Alcott
- “Mysterious Island,” by Jules Verne
- “Pawn of Prophecy,” by David Eddings
- “Prince Caspian,” by C.S. Lewis
- “Kidnapped,” by Robert Louis Stevenson

“Learning the Basics of SSA”

It is assumed that AIM participants understand the basic concepts of recovery found in the following books (Mentors/Buddies will learn many of these concepts during the adventure weekend):

- “You Don’t Have to Be Gay,” by Jeff Konrad
- “Coming Out Straight,” by Richard Cohen
- “Gay Children, Straight Parents – A Plan for Family Healing,” by Richard Cohen
- “Homosexuality – Symptoms & Free Agency,” by Scott & Kae Andersen
- “A Parents Guide to Preventing Homosexuality,” by Joe Nicolosi
- “Healing Homosexuality – Testimonies of Change,” CD program by Floyd Godfrey
- “Growth Into Manhood,” by Alan Medinger
- “Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality,” by Joe Nicolosi
- “Healing Homosexuality – Case Studies,” by Joe Nicolosi
- “Homosexual No More,” by William Consiglio
- “Homosexuality – A New Christian Ethic,” by Elizabeth Moberly
- “Desires in Conflict,” by Joe Dallas
- “The Battle for Normality,” by Van Den Aardwig
- “MANS & Gender Wholeness,” by David Matheson
- “Journey Out of Homosexuality,” CD program by Rich Wyler
- Journey Into Manhood, experiential weekend by People Can Change