OSPA

obsessive skin pickers anonymous

The Behavior Lists Pamphlet

Defining Abstinence in Obsessive Skin Pickers Anonymous

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About The Behavior Lists

The tool of the Behavior Lists helps us begin our recovery by defining our abstinence. In Obsessive Skin Pickers Anonymous, abstinence is a term used to describe an amount of time away from our skin-picking behaviors. We abstain from these behaviors, rather than quitting all contact with our skin.

For many of us, skin picking is such a major part of our lives that when people tell us to "just stop picking," we don't understand what that means. The Behavior Lists are designed to give us clarity about our skin-picking disease. They outline our skin-picking behaviors, the behaviors that lead us to skin picking, and the behaviors we can turn to for a new way of life.

The Behavior Lists are sorted into three groups: Qualifying, Dangerous, and Recovery Behaviors. Qualifying Behaviors define our abstinence. We abstain from all the behaviors on this list. Dangerous Behaviors increase our awareness. We bring awareness to the time we spend in these behaviors, as they may put our abstinence at risk. Recovery Behaviors support the life we want to live. We become more active in these behaviors, as they bring us closer to our Higher Power, ourselves, and others.

Through the process of creating the Behavior Lists, we develop guidelines for both our abstinence and our growth in recovery.

The Qualifying Behaviors List

We start our Qualifying Behaviors List by writing down the skin-picking behaviors that brought us to OSPA. These are the ones that are addictive, make us feel hopeless, and no matter how hard we try, we just can't stop. In essence, they "qualify" us for the Obsessive Skin Pickers Anonymous program.

Our skin-picking behaviors can take many different forms, such as extracting blemishes, biting cuticles, pulling hairs, or aggressively scratching or cleaning parts of our bodies to the point of bleeding. They may involve picking other people's bodies or our pets. Sometimes they are related to a particular action, like picking while watching television or scrolling online. We can look for patterns in how we are picking and where we are doing it, such as picking dry skin while riding in a car. Our list might also include ways we tried to "fix" the problems we created by skin picking, such as interfering with wounds while they are healing.

For our Qualifying Behaviors List, we consider every way that we have picked, whether it happened years ago or is something we are currently trying to quit. This helps us take a thorough look at all of our skin-picking behaviors. Although we might not believe abstinence from a specific behavior is possible, we write it down anyway.

Even our thoughts can become part of our addiction. When we replay a picking episode on purpose because it felt "successful," we are placing ourselves in a state of euphoric recall. We may also drift into fantasy about the next time we will pick. In between, we are often deeply obsessed with the condition of our skin. We find ourselves "scanning" our bodies by checking repeatedly with our eyes or fingers. These behaviors, in all of their forms, can go on our Qualifying Behaviors List too.

Making this list can feel embarrassing or discouraging. We had always hoped that if we could just try harder, we could control our skin picking, or if we could just "figure it out," we could stop on our own. When we recognize our powerlessness over our skin-picking behaviors, we open the door to a new solution. We make room for our Higher Power to come in.

This act of surrender creates a willingness within us. It allows us to consider that there may be more to our skin-picking than just our Qualifying Behaviors. We are now ready to acknowledge the Dangerous Behaviors that take us there.

The Dangerous Behaviors List

We start our Dangerous Behaviors List by writing down the behaviors that may lead to our Qualifying Behaviors. These are the ones we find ourselves doing in the minutes, hours, or days before we pick. Although they might not be addictive on their own, they can be "dangerous" by moving us toward our Qualifying Behaviors and putting our abstinence at risk.

Our Dangerous Behaviors List may include behaviors that are essential, such as visiting with friends or family, driving to and from work, or getting ready for bed. We might be able to change certain aspects of these behaviors, but we want to keep them in our lives. For example, if we pick in the bathroom, we can't just stop going to the bathroom.

This list gives us the ability to live our lives while gently reminding us to be careful. It also relieves us of the pressure to be perfect, which is often part of our skin-picking disease. When we notice Dangerous Behaviors, we can pause, connect, and refocus. This moves us away from thinking about abstinence as all or nothing and helps us take a more balanced point of view.

Some Dangerous Behaviors may feel very close to our Qualifying Behaviors because they can quickly lead to skin picking. These include body- or skin-related appointments, personal grooming, or looking in the mirror. We can highlight these behaviors to remind ourselves that they sit right on the boundary of abstinence. This alerts us to become more aware around the time we spend doing them. We can also reach out to others for additional support before, during, or after engaging in these behaviors.

We may find ourselves in situations that bring up strong emotions. For example, we might notice anxiety before a social gathering, grief from the loss of a loved one or pet, or excitement about a new partner or promotion. While these aren't behaviors in the usual sense, the events and

feelings they bring up can go on our Dangerous Behaviors List too. We might also include states of being, such as discomfort, uncertainty, or stress. Even negative self-talk or thoughts like "what's the use?" can fuel our addiction. We can't stop being human, but we can find a new way through these experiences without picking.

This simple realization gives us a new perspective. It shows us that we need new ways to meet the many experiences of life. We are now ready to build our Recovery Behaviors, which will bring us the care and comfort we truly seek.

The Recovery Behaviors List

We start our Recovery Behaviors List by writing down the behaviors that encourage us to be our best selves. These are the ones that contribute to our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Whether they are new to our lives or behaviors we once enjoyed, they enable us to "recover" a lost connection with ourselves.

The first place to look for Recovery Behaviors is in the actions we take to strengthen our OSPA program of recovery. These include attending meetings, calling other OSPA members, working with a sponsor, and connecting to our Higher Power. We may also find Recovery Behaviors in giving back to OSPA through acts of service. There are many ways we can help others by sharing our time, our talents, and our experience, strength, and hope.

We may discover Recovery Behaviors by doing the opposite of our Dangerous Behaviors, or by identifying small changes we can make. For example, if "showering in the morning" is a Dangerous Behavior, the Recovery Behavior could be "showering in the evening." Another option could be "bookending showers," by checking in with a sponsor or another OSPA member before and after.

Sometimes we might feel resistant to our Recovery Behaviors. After all, we have struggled to care for our minds and bodies in a healthy way. Writing down behaviors on this list does not mean we have to do all of them daily. We might have certain Recovery Behaviors that we do weekly, monthly, or only on special occasions. We can also select Recovery Behaviors by the time of day, type of activity, or even at random. The most important thing to remember is that any action in these behaviors, big or small, makes a difference.

Our Recovery Behaviors give us a chance to revisit the things we've always wanted to do but couldn't because of our skin picking. We may try out new hobbies, enroll in a class, or explore past hopes and dreams. Recovery Behaviors can be simple, such as a few seconds of focused breathing, or they can be social, such as spending time with our family, friends, or pets. They may include routines, such as regular meals, that provide a sense of stability. They might also include casual outings, such as walks in nature, that cultivate a feeling of peace.

This new way of living offers us a different kind of freedom. It opens our hearts and minds to a source of strength greater than ourselves. We are also reminded of how to enjoy life and have fun.

Creating The Behavior Lists

The questions in the Behavior Lists Workbook can be used to uncover our Qualifying, Dangerous, and Recovery Behaviors. They are not meant to be critical or shaming; rather, they show us how the disease of skin picking has affected our lives. When we answer them thoroughly and with rigorous honesty, our behaviors reveal themselves in many different ways.

It is important that we stay in close contact with a sponsor and other OSPA members while we identify and define our Behavior Lists. Looking at our behaviors can feel overwhelming, and this way, we aren't facing our addiction alone. We can ask for and receive support.

A sponsor is an OSPA member who has completed their Behavior Lists and has experience with the gift of abstinence. They can listen to our answers, guide us on which list to place our behaviors, and ask further questions as needed. A sponsor can also ensure our Qualifying Behaviors are detailed enough so that we understand our abstinence, but not so graphic that we trigger ourselves or others when we read them. Sometimes, reading the Behavior Lists out loud or discussing them with others can keep the behaviors at the front of our minds. This may help us recognize in a given moment which list we are in and, if needed, take a recovery-oriented action.

When creating our Behavior Lists, the word "intentional" can be added to any behaviors that seem automatic. This is especially useful for muscle memory behaviors, such as scanning, and thought behaviors, such as euphoric recall. Long-term abstinence from these behaviors can take repeated practice and time. When we take this approach, our recovery is not treated as black and white. For example, "intentional scanning" might be a Qualifying Behavior when, after becoming aware, we continue on purpose. Likewise, "unintentional scanning" might be a Dangerous Behavior when, after becoming aware, we reach for a Recovery Behavior to help us pause and redirect.

After completing our Behavior Lists, and as we continue in our recovery, we may gain new insights about our behaviors. We can always add, update, or move them to a different list. Before making changes—especially to our Qualifying Behaviors—we reach out to a sponsor, other OSPA members, and our Higher Power. Our experience has shown that if we do this work alone, we may be too hard on ourselves or overlook patterns that others can see.

Conclusion

The tool of the Behavior Lists is an essential part of our OSPA journey. It gives us a foundation for our skin-picking abstinence and starts us on a path to a new way of living. To continue this way of recovery, we seek abstinence plus spiritual growth. We gain this by working the Obsessive Skin Pickers Anonymous program as a whole: the Tools, the Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions of OSPA. Through these continued practices, we connect to our Higher Power and receive freedom from the disease of obsessive skin picking.