



*It's not your fault
the one you love
uses porn*



One woman's story...

“ . . . my husband began using porn as a teenager. What was once an adolescent hobby became the ‘other woman’ in our marriage. At first it was our intimacy that suffered. Then, his pastime grew into an addiction which then started to include more serious forms of ‘adultery.’ He was going to strip bars and sleeping with prostitutes. He was often late, with poor excuses. I noticed our money disappearing and never suspected he was spending nearly \$500 a week to feed his addiction.

“ . . . me? I felt responsible, ugly, ashamed, alone and hopeless. Why would he look at another woman unless I wasn't pretty or sexy enough? Friends rejected my idea that his porn use was ruining our relationship. They told me to be sexier, more sexually responsive and available so that he wouldn't look elsewhere. I tried all these things only to find they didn't work. I ended up feeling like a failure, as a wife and a lover. Now I know it wasn't me.

Why they are using porn

Out of curiosity, males (and increasingly females) are naturally drawn to pornography. Pornography is an aid to masturbation, which provides sexual gratification without intimacy. But people don't use pornography just because it's sexually stimulating.

Other reasons are...

- Pornography provides relief from pain often caused by childhood neglect, abuse, family dysfunction or some childhood trauma
- Poor coping mechanisms - masturbation is a stress reducer
- Fantasy involved in porn/masturbation provides escape from reality
- Society conditioning that being actively sexual is the social "norm"
- False understanding of intimate relationships; relationship with porn carries no risk of rejection
- Fear of intimacy
- Fear of rejection
- Need for validation



Whatever you're feeling is OK

When you've identified the problem, a natural period of denial sets in to block the initial devastation. After the shock wears off, you probably feel...

Inadequate, deceived, isolated, rejected, angry, responsible, shameful, betrayed, loss of relationship, sadness, desperation, confusion, severe disappointment, fear of being alone

Move beyond denial to coping...

You are not alone. The National Coalition's Victim Assistance office fields an average of 20 calls per week from spouses of porn/sex addicts.

The important thing to remember is not to be an enabler. By letting the behavior continue, you condone the porn use and help it grow.

Try these steps...

- Do not ignore his/her behavior
- Be on the lookout for signs and symptoms
- Do not downplay the signs or rationalize
- Do not tolerate abusive behavior
- Do not cover for him/her with bosses and friends

Approaching the person you love...

It is necessary for you to communicate an acknowledgement of the problem, how you feel about it and what you want him/her to do in order to begin the recovery process.

A primary fear for this person is that if you really knew him/her, you would reject them and leave. These fears keep him/her from addressing the underlying problem.

Be aware of the person's self image and what he/she is feeling. Dr. Patrick Carnes shares core beliefs of the porn user/addict:

“I am basically a bad, unworthy person...”
Fears abandonment because abandonment means being unwanted. The conclusion becomes that being unwanted means unworthy and bad.

“No one would love me as I am...”
Fears rejection and avoids intimacy to protect himself/herself. Does not believe in unconditional love.



Don't

- Accept blame/responsibility. It's not your fault.
- Criticize or accuse using "you" statements:
 - “You're sick”
 - “You are irresponsible and unreliable”
- Keep silent or secret; you enable that way
- Protect him/her by accepting responsibility for recovery and your relationship
- Present vague suspicions or premature conclusions like: “You're a sex addict/porn addict, aren't you?”
This increases defensiveness and leads to more deception/secretcy
- Stage an interrogation

Do

- Avoid taking responsibility for his/her behavior
- Assure confidentiality
- Use “I” or “we” statements:
 - “I'm confused about our sex life...”
 - “We're drifting apart...”
 - “I worry about you when you're late...”
- Talk about signs focusing on behaviors and observations and your reaction to them: “I've noticed...and this makes me feel...”
- Be honest and caring
- Listen and have an open mind
- Let him/her speak and vent
- Reassure that you love him/her but want them to seek help

The person's reactions

Initial reactions will range from denial and anger to blame/guilt and hurt. May try to play down your concerns or completely ignore you. Use this time to determine stance on his/her porn use.

Position will likely be one of these three...

Lawlessness

Has no sense of a problem:

“I know pornography is wrong, I don't care that it's wrong, I want to use it.”

Feels honesty makes his/her behavior OK.

The honest approach of this stance is hopeful.

Minimization

Makes the problem smaller than it is, owning a percentage of the problem but denies its magnitude with rationalization:

“It's not as bad as you think. It's a hobby.”

They value an image of goodness rather than having qualities that make them good.

Confession

A confessor is a broken person who has given up trying to be good. He/she admits porn use has caused harm:

“My human relationships have suffered because of my life of porn, fantasy and self-gratification.”

This person wants to recover and needs your help.

Taking action

The most vital ingredient for recovery is to seek counseling (see p. 8), both as a couple and individually. For successful recovery, set guidelines from which to build a healthy relationship. These “boundaries” are set by you. Soliciting the advice of a counselor beforehand and during recovery will help you better understand yourself and the relationship.

These boundaries are not to punish or control, but to help you establish acceptable behavior within the relationship. Stick with them even when he/she becomes angry or challenges your boundaries.

Setting boundaries

- Now that you are aware, you are in control of the situation.
- Do not agree to work on the relationship if he/she won't.
- Make sure he/she knows the consequences of crossing your boundaries. For instance, if he/she stays out late you will not cover for them with their boss.
- Stop rescuing him/her, enabling him/her – that perpetuates the problem.
- Avoid withdrawing from the relationship as an act of revenge. It is OK to stop trusting for now, but forgiveness should be your goal.
- Do not give in to his/her sexual demands. You have the right to refuse sex, but not to manipulate.
- Do not cover for him/her or make excuses.

Benefits of counseling

You should seek counseling as soon as possible. A counselor will be your ally. They will listen, provide a comfortable and safe atmosphere, bring objectivity to your problem, validate your feelings and give guidance. Furthermore, counseling accelerates the recovery process.

Couples therapy along with individual counseling is ideal. However, your counselor should be different from the counselor you see together and the counselor he/she sees. It is not your responsibility to find a counselor for him/her... remember, you are not responsible for his/her recovery (see p. 5).

He/she will most likely resist the idea of counseling. Seek it yourself whether he/she agrees or not.

Counseling helps you...

- Resolve personal/individual issues
- Understand him/her better
- Set boundaries comfortable for you
- Learn when to take responsibility
- Work toward your goal



Finding a good counselor ...

Full recovery depends on feeling comfortable and safe to share your innermost thoughts and feelings. A good counselor lets you do this. Don't let a bad counseling experience deter you from therapy. Find a good match.

Look for...

- A degreed counselor or social worker
- Someone who specializes in sex addiction/abuse and has experience with your issue, family issues and codependency
- References for other counselors so you have a choice

Note: there are Christian counselors who specialize in these areas.

Getting started ...

The National Coalition provides a Victim's HelpLine designed specifically for people like you and your loved one. Call 1(800) 583-2964 for help in finding appropriate resources for your needs.

Keep in mind

- Behavior change and character change are two different things: you want his/her character to change in order to affect his/her behavior.
- You have the right to feel anger or any other emotion. Allow yourself to feel in order to heal.
- Do not use him/her by withholding sex, embarrassing him in front of others, having an affair, threatening to leave and take the kids as a punishment.
- You are vulnerable. Do not give in to the temptation of letting him/her off the hook for the sake of staying together.
- Pornography use is often only one piece of the puzzle - there may be other forms of compulsive sexual behavior.
- Obtain a medical exam for yourself. You may be at risk for a sexually transmitted disease.
- Be thoughtful and careful about what and how to communicate to your children.
- There is hope!



About leaving...

You always have the option to leave the relationship. Porn use can escalate to porn and/or sex addiction. If gone untreated, you risk...

- Emotional abandonment or neglect
- Physical and/or sexual abuse
- Contracting sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS
- Your children's physical safety and psychological health
- Financial loss

Persevere ...

Don't give up. Recovery takes time. Don't expect too much too soon, from yourself or from him/her. Concentrate on personal and spiritual development. Nurturing yourself and taking care of you is your number one priority.





One woman's story continued . . .

“ . . . when we got help I found out his pornography use began before our marriage, as far back as his youth. Not only was it not my fault - it had nothing to do with me at all. After much counseling, we both understand he entered our marriage thinking I would cure all his sex problems. No wonder he was so disappointed and angry.

“ . . . and we're still together. We are living proof that a pornography or sex addiction does not have to mean the end of your relationship.”

Signs that he/she's using porn

They are sometimes blatant, like physical evidence, and other times continue for years before you're suspicious. Porn use is almost always part of a larger problem. A combination of the following symptoms may indicate regular porn use...

- Noticeable decrease or increase interest in sex with you
- Presses sexual practices that make you uncomfortable
- Neglects your sexual, physical and emotional needs
- Neglects responsibilities involving kids, finances, job
- Lack of intimacy in physical contact and conversation
- Sexual isolation, excessive masturbation
- Argumentative, defensive, disagreeable
- Goes out of his way to look at other men/women

Signs it has escalated to live porn, or a possible sex/porn addiction

- Unexplained absences
- Unusual possessions, i.e. porn, clothes, receipts, sexual paraphernalia
- Financial issues - some spend \$300-500 per week on live porn
- Sex life is rigid, dispassionate, quick, detached - shortened foreplay and premature ejaculation
- Promiscuity
- Violent/aggressive behavior - rape or sexual violence
- Insatiable appetite for sex
- Obsessed with male/female body parts

Sources

An Affair of the Mind, Laurie Hall. Focus on the Family, Colorado, 1996.

Lonely All the Time, Dr. Ralph Earle and Dr. Gregory Crow. The Philip Lief Group, Inc., New York, 1989.

Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction, Dr. Patrick Carnes. Minnesota, 1992.

Setting Boundaries with an Addicted Spouse (workshop), Dr. John Townsend. National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, Ohio, 1997

When Sex Becomes an Addiction, Dr. Stephen Arterburn. Focus on the Family, Colorado, 1994



NATIONAL COALITION
FOR THE PROTECTION OF
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Protecting Children & Families from the Harms of Pornography

**NATIONAL COALITION
FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES
800 Compton Road, Suite 9224
Cincinnati, OH 45231
513-521-6227 Fax 513-521-6337
HelpLine 1-800-583-2964
www.nationalcoalition.org**

The National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families
is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan, nonprofit organization.

© National Coalition for the
Protection of Children & Families, 1998.