

SEXUAL ADDICTION: FROM DENIAL TO RECOVERY

Roger L. Johnson, MA, Th.M. and Paul Meier, M.D.

How to recognize sexual addiction

LOSS OF CONTROL: a clear, evident behavior that you do more than you intend, or want. A person may think I will just look at this magazine for 5 minutes, or I will only look at this website for 10 minutes at the most. Step one in twelve step programs states, "We admit we were powerless and our lives have become unmanageable."

COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR: a pattern of out-of-control behavior over time, a pattern of loss-of-control. It's like not learning from the experience. We all make mistakes but, typically, we don't repeat the behavior. This is not true of the addict — he/she repeats these things over and over and over again.

EFFORTS TO STOP: repeated, specific efforts to stop the behavior, which fail. Knowledge in itself is not enough; knowing does not stop the sexual addict. This is the real pain of the addictive process — people violate their own value system and are unable to stop the behavior.

LOSS OF TIME: significant amounts of time lost during and/or recovering from the behavior. In other words, you suddenly find that there are whole weeks gone. I hear people say, "There's a decade gone in my life." Patients have expressed it in drawings that show two clocks —one is real time and then there is the "addict" time.

PREOCCUPATION: obsessing about or because of the behavior. A lot of people think that sexual addiction is all about voyeurism, but the fact of the matter is it is not just the behavior—it is thinking about the behavior. It is the obsession of being preoccupied with doing it. Preoccupation becomes a means of escape.

INABILITY TO FULLFILL OBLIGATIONS: behavior that interferes with work, school, family, and friends.

Examples: Not completing that report at work because you are on the net viewing pornographic websites, or not being able to pay the electric bill this month because all the funds have been spent at topless bars.

CONTINUENCE: failure to stop the behavior even though you are having problems because of it. These may be social, legal, financial, work related. Addicts can know that their addiction will destroy their lives but they continue anyway. One of the most severe signs of addiction is seeing and really knowing how much the addiction is costing you but continuing the behavior.

ESCALATION: the need to make the behavior more intense, more frequent, and often more risky. Many addicts use risk as an escalator in their behavior, whether it's drugs, gambling, food, or sex—doing more of what they're doing or doing new and different things they haven't done before. Escalation manifests itself in many different ways.

LOSSES: losing, limiting, or sacrificing valued parts of life, such as relationships, work and family. In other words, when you take those things that you value the most (those things that define you) and set them on the back shelf, you know you have a problem.

WITHDRAWAL: stopping behavior causes considerable distress, anxiety, restlessness, irritability, and physical discomfort. For example, we see in cocaine addicts and sex addicts a different type of withdrawal. It's 21 days long and involves a high degree of restlessness, an inability to sleep, being very easily triggered into anger, and a high degree of reactivity. Addictions soothe a person, and when the body doesn't have something to calm it down, the addict has a real problem.
(Adapted from Patrick Carnes by permission)

What to do about it

Break denial today—tell somebody.

Contact a recovery group.

Find a prayer partner.

See a therapist for individual counseling or attend a Day Treatment Program. (In three weeks, our clients generally accomplish what would have taken them six months of individual outpatient therapy).

Assess the two main causes: a) shame and b) lack of connectedness. Meditate on God's grace and find people who love you for who you are, without enabling your addiction.

Mark Twain once said that we are all like the moon; in the sense that we show people only our bright side that is reflecting the sun and that we don't share our dark side with anybody. But in James 5:16 and many other places in Scripture, we are called as Christians to find at least a few people who we can share all our secrets with and who will share theirs with us. This way we can hold each up in prayer. By revealing our dark side and finding people who love us in spite of what they see, helps us to avoid the temptation to run back to an addiction.

Meditate on Scripture daily, because knowing the truth about ourselves and about God is what sets us free. Scripture meditation is one of the best ways to become more insightful about our own depraved tendencies.

There is great benefit to you personally if you give up your sexual addiction and replace it with genuine love and intimacy. Sexual addiction leads you to see members of the opposite sex as objects rather than people.

Loving and being loved by people who see the "dark side of our moon" is true gold. Sexual fantasies from pornography are "fools' gold" and only bring pleasure for a moment.

For more information about Meier Clinics, call toll free 888-7CLINIC (888-725-4642)
or visit us at www.meierclinics.org.

