

Getting Started in Sexual Addiction Recovery

This is the third article in a five-part series dealing with the topic of pornography/sexual addiction.

One of the hardest steps for individuals struggling with compulsive and addictive sexual behaviors is admitting they need help. This particular addiction creates heaps of embarrassment and shame, which keeps those who struggle in hiding for years. However, there is no recovery without coming out of hiding.

Most individuals who struggle have tried to quit on their own several times before they finally get help. They promise themselves they'll never give in to the cravings while working harder to double their efforts. Since secrecy is the lifeblood of addiction, true healing is impossible without reaching out to others.

Some individuals are forced out of hiding when their secret behaviors are discovered. Others come forward seeking help. Regardless of the catalyst for change, the decision to stay with long-term recovery ultimately depends on the individual.

Dr. Mark Laaser, author and sexual addiction therapist, asks his clients, "do you want to get well?", when he begins working with them. He teaches that the only way an individual will heal from pornography and sexual addiction is to honestly answer that question in the affirmative on a daily basis.

Once an individual has come out of hiding and commits to doing whatever it takes to get well, they open themselves up to the hopeful and exciting path of long-term healing and recovery. The hope comes from knowing there is a way out of the destructive cycles of addiction. The excitement comes from discovering a new way of experiencing life.

The resources available to those struggling with pornography and sexually addictive behaviors continue to improve. As a result, there is no shortage of good information and help for those who want to heal.

One of the best ways to begin the path of recovery is to seek education on pornography and sexual addiction recovery. I maintain a list of recovery books on my website (www.LifeSTARstgeorge.com/books.php) for individuals who struggle, partners, parents, and clergy. Additionally, the Utah Coalition Against Pornography (www.utahcoalition.org) website provides training and resources from their annual conference.

The work of healing from a pornography and sexual addiction is more than simply quitting problematic behavior. We know that pornography and sexual addiction creates powerful neuronal pathways in the brain that keep the addict locked into

thinking, feeling, and behavioral patterns that are highly resistant to changing. The good news is that these pathways can heal and give way to new healthier pathways.

Once the problematic behaviors are under control, the underlying patterns that created and maintained the addiction can be addressed more effectively.

Although the work of long-term recovery and healing is difficult, I am encouraged by the score of individuals, couples, and families who reach out and begin the process of healing, even though they don't know the way. *Reaching out* instead of *reaching in* creates the best outcomes for everyone involved.

Geoff Steurer is a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice in St. George, UT. He is the director of LifeSTAR of St. George, a 3-phase sexual/pornography addiction treatment program for individuals and couples. Visit www.LifeSTARstgeorge.com or call 435-652-4366 for more information.