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# PORN ADDICTION AND TREATMENT

Process addiction and behavioural addiction are interchangeable terms that describe the same thing.

A process addiction is a seemingly overwhelming impulse to participate in a certain behaviour that can have profound negative consequences to you and your loved ones. Just as with substances such as drugs and alcohol, the specific behaviour provides a high that can be intoxicating to the individual and leads to them repeating the behaviour in chase of that particular high. When the average person thinks of addiction they primarily think of physical addiction to a substance, and the risks associated with that. What they may not consider is the potential life changing damages associated with dependence to a behaviour. For instance, consider the gambler who loses possession of the family home, or the sex addict who contracts an STD and gets arrested

in the same night. The impact of a process addiction can be devastating to both the individual and their loved ones.

## PORN ADDICTION

Online porn is free, instantly accessible to anyone with a phone, and never runs out and can be accessed by most of the population. The addict has a potentially inexhaustible supply. There is no bottom of the bottle for someone suffering from porn addiction. What there is instead is the process of chasing a high with ever diminishing returns for the addict. The addict is compelled to keep searching for images and movies that will provide that high. Search terms are expanded, and boundaries are pushed, and the addict’s dependence on this behaviour is strengthened. Due to a lack of existing scientific literature, porn addiction has not yet been classified

in diagnostic manuals such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). This has led to clinicians developing various explanations for the development of porn addiction creating a blurred line as to what is porn addiction.

So what are the indicators someone has developed an addiction to porn? There is a high degree of similarity between the signs and symptoms of chemical dependency and porn addiction, such as similar neurobiological mechanisms and processions through motivation.

## THESE INCLUDE USING PORN IN LARGER QUANTITIES OR OVER LONG PERIODS OF TIME

This can take the form of hours of pushing boundaries while searching for porn that provides an ever increasingly diminishing return. This time-consuming process takes

precedence in the addict's life. Often, this behaviour will take away time even from sleep or exercise.

#### **TRYING TO STOP USING PORN AND NOT BEING ABLE TO**

Promises are made to the self and broken. The addict attempts to put restrictions on their use such as "just one hour" or "just this next video", which are invariably broken. They become preoccupied with accessing porn, planning when they can view it, what they're going to watch, and how to maximise the experience.

#### **USING PORN IN SITUATIONS THAT IMPOSE RISKS**

Porn use is continued outside of the home and takes place at work or in public places, accessed through devices where there is a risk of others discovering it, or being discovered using it by others. Porn use increases to the point where other family members are likely to discover it.

#### **CONTINUING TO USE PORN DESPITE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON WORK OR RELATIONSHIPS**

Further in their addiction, promises to others are broken, and relationships become compromised. Porn use is prioritised over personal and professional relationships and contact with loved ones becomes lost time that the addict could have used to pursue their elusive high.

One of the biggest challenges is overcoming the feeling of shame that they should "just be able to stop". This seeming inability can cause the addict to isolate their feelings of shame preventing them from seeking help. The addict may view their process addiction as a character flaw, an indicator that they are different from everyone else and can't be helped by anyone. If that process addiction is a behaviour that society deems shameful, then it becomes even harder for the addict to break the cycle of addiction. This further results in a diminished self-esteem and sense of self-worth. These barriers further the sense of isolation and hopelessness the addict experiences. Given these overwhelming feelings, it's common that the addict seeks solace and distraction by continuing to use porn.

Another consequence is the damage to existing relationships. Connections with others suffer as the addicts' ability to empathise with others diminishes. Addiction in all its forms leads to a state of isolation,

in fact, isolation is necessary for addiction to thrive.

The addict's loved ones will note a decrease in empathy, but may not know the cause. The addict may still be hiding the extent of their addiction from their family, unless it's exposed to the family accidentally when it becomes unmanageable.

The family, or a partner, may be left with many troubling questions. They may question what is wrong with them that has led to the situation? What has happened that their loved one is so focused on porn to the detriment of everything and everyone else in their life? Loved ones may view the situation in terms of it being a binary choice for the addict. Either the addict chooses porn, or their existing relationships. It's entirely understandable that the family may well be unaware of the compulsion that drives the addict towards porn.

#### **STEPS TOWARD RECOVERY**

The first step in helping the person addicted to porn is helping them come to the realisation that they can be helped. They need to see they're not defined by their addiction, and it's not a reflection of them as a person.

They need to understand that their addiction, in a highly maladaptive way "worked" for them. Addiction to a chemical or behaviour is a coping mechanism that momentarily frees the addict from negative feelings and thoughts. Chasing a high allows the addict to push these unwanted thoughts and feelings to the sidelines, but creates a binary method of coping where the addict is either high or suffering. The addict's previous

ability to endure stress or difficult feelings diminishes to the point where it's non-existent during active addiction.

They need alternative methods of coping with difficult feelings and thoughts, and the addict should be encouraged to allow their loved ones to be part of the journey of recovery. It has already been noted that isolation forms an integral part of addiction. It's thus the case that inclusion is vital to recovery. When both the addict and their partner are ready, they should look at how addiction has affected intimacy in their relationship, and how it can be repaired.

They need help identifying safe and unsafe behaviours, that which may keep them in recovery, and that which may lead them back into active addiction to porn. Part of this process is helping the addict to establish healthy boundaries that protect their recovery. These boundaries may include something as simple as a porn blocker installed on their phone/computer to building in accountability to others into their recovery.

While achieving recovery from porn addiction may be difficult, it's by no means impossible. Just as the mechanisms of process addictions are similar to that of chemical addictions, the path to recovery is built on the same principles. Helping the addict free themselves from shame and isolation, guiding them to see that they're not defined by their addiction, and demonstrating that recovery is possible through connection with others.

