

Porn-Proofing Your Life to Avoid Sex Addiction Relapse



Not everyone who watches internet pornography is a porn or sex addict. But the highly addictive nature of internet pornography and the harmful effects for those who struggle to break free from a persistent and often escalating habit are very well known to me and to the thousand or so certified sex addiction therapists with whom I share an active listserv.

I have blogged extensively in this column and on my own [website](#) about avoiding porn addiction relapse because this struggle is so common and is of concern to so many of my readers.

Who needs to porn proof their life?

Sex addicts need to stay away from pornography. Most sex addicts have more than one sexual behavior to which they return addictively and with negative consequences.

For some addicts pornography appears to be their primary or only addictive sexual behavior although even they will usually be found to have other ways in which they use sex as a drug such as sexual objectification of people, repeated infidelity or inappropriate sexual behavior at work among others.

For some sex addicts pornography is not their major sexual acting out behavior. They may compulsively return to sexual massage parlors or spend several evenings a week in strip clubs and only use porn as a second choice or adjunct.

The established techniques may not work

Whether the use of internet pornography is a primary or secondary behavior, dipping into pornography can be a bullet train back into full blown relapse. Many sex addicts rely heavily on internet porn blocking software programs and services. These are services that can be installed on all manner of devices to block the use of internet porn on that device such as McAfee Safe Eyes, Net Nanny, CYBERSitter, NetDog and PureSight. Some have ways of monitoring social media and chat rooms as well. There are also [new technologies](#) coming along all the time for sweeping computers and other devices for the presence of pornography.

Many addicts who use these services rely on a sponsor or other person who holds the “password” to the software. Blocking and filtering services are effective for some and not for others and many addicts find ways to get around them.

Another common technique porn addicts use is to give away their computer or give it to a trusted person for safe keeping. But in this day and age it is difficult to lead a completely computer free life. I know one sex addict who did without a computer for several years and did well. When he thought it was safe to have a computer again he promptly relapsed. Another addict in treatment resorted to leaving his computer in his car at night in order to put some distance between himself and his computer hoping in this way to provide enough time for his to think it through and decide not to act out. This is clever but it did not turn out to solve the problem.

Porn proofing yourself and your environment

Here are some ideas about some of the dangers to be aware of in your daily environment, things that make it easier or even a foregone conclusion that you will end up in front of some sexual imagery on a screen.

- Dating sites and friendship or affinity sites may be a lead-in to a pornography binge. You may begin looking at people's ads and pictures thinking you are just looking for some healthy platonic companionship. But this can be "triggering" in that the descriptions and photos on offer may be arousing or may bring about feelings of loneliness or neediness. It is a short step to click on a hook-up site, sex chat room or a porn hub.
- Getting into online fantasies of any kind can be a problem. This one was a surprise to me. I have seen addicts go online to look at cars they cannot possibly afford or boats or some other inanimate object of desire which ends up feeding their addiction. They continue to see the internet as a source of fantasy gratification and in this sense a drug that takes them away from their reality. We all do this from time to time with no ill effects, but living in fantasy is a problem for an addict and this kind of escape can become so regular as to be an obsession and can hinder his or her efforts to live in the real world without using a "drug" to escape. When recovery stalls relapse can be the result.
- Things you did while acting out on the computer. This will be different for everyone but I have seen for example, one addict who chain smoked when he was acting out. His addiction to cigarettes and his addiction to internet porn were "fused", as they say in the *addiction interaction* typology. In attempting to quit porn he thought he could still smoke from time to time, but lo and behold it made him want to use porn. Be aware of this Pavlovian conditioning aspect to your own porn using habits.
- The physical set-up in which you viewed porn can be another cue that is associated with addictive behavior and leads back to relapse. Is your home computer in a particular room or location? Move it. Did you have a favorite chair that you sat in to view porn? And so on. Again these will vary from person to person but the point is to dismantle the whole set up.

Ultimately staying abstinent from a pornography habit will of course involve treatment. It may take 12-step work, a sponsor who supports you and a therapist or support group. And last but not least porn addicts who are serious about changing their lives need to build in contingencies. Make a plan for how you will tighten up your recovery program or seek a higher level of treatment should you fail to stay abstinent with your current program. Knowing that you have a plan in place and that you will stick by it can help make the consequences of porn relapse more real.

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