

# LivingIntegrated®

## FIFTEEN PRACTICES FOR LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

### 1

#### FACING REALITY—THE PROBLEM OF COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DISORDER

##### IN THIS PRACTICE:

- Why Change your Approach to Handling (or Avoiding) Reality?
- Technology and the Progression of Sexual Compulsivity
- What is Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder?
- If porn is your only problem, do you have a problem?
- Other Problematic Sexual Behaviors
- Some of the Impacts of Compulsive Sexual Behavior
- First Practice Assignment

Go to [youtu.be/2jviuk31j6E](https://youtu.be/2jviuk31j6E) now and watch the introductory video for this Practice.

Now, having watched the introductory video, I want you to consider something very important. You are worth doing this hard work. Your life matters, your life is important. I really believe this.

##### LEARNING TO FACE REALITY

Why am I making such a big deal of this? Because one of the reasons we misuse our sexuality is we have inadvertently learned sex can be a very effective way of escaping reality.

Now I'm asking you to face reality! For most of us that can be threatening and painful. So why do it? For you. For a better life. For a life you can respect. Because you are worth it.

The work of this First Practice is for you to come to terms with the reality of what you're dealing with. If you've become compulsive in your use of your sexuality, two things are happening simultaneously: you're using sex to handle life; and you're losing your life—bit by bit—even as you think you're living it.

As you get into the Fifteen Practices you might be tempted to think this is too much, you don't need this, or you might even feel scared. These reactions are quite normal. But if you've got a problem that's taken root in your soul, it reinforces itself. You will need help breaking its hold on you and the Fifteen Practices are designed to help you begin the significant work of getting your best life back.

This compulsion—if you don't do whatever it takes to break it and live a different life—will take you places to which you really don't want to go. If you've been compulsively using your sexuality for awhile, you may already see yourself engaging in behaviors that are beyond what you originally experienced. Perhaps they're beginning to create a sense of distress for you.

Most of us who are compulsive have begun to cross some lines in our viewing appetites and behaviors we never thought we'd cross. That's what compulsive sexual behavior does, it takes us to places we never thought we'd go to, places the better part of ourselves doesn't want to go to.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND THE PROGRESSION OF SEXUAL COMPULSIVITY** ---

You live in a terrifically interesting time. Technology and the Internet have radically recalibrated sexual opportunity. Today it's possible to access an enormous variety of sexually explicit material never before available in human history. And because of technology and social media, it's far easier to engage others sexually, either online or in person.

I grew up before the Internet age, and a smaller percentage of us stumbled into compulsive sexual behaviors back then. Why is that? Human beings have always had vulnerability with intimacy issues and especially erotic portrayal of human sexuality. As soon as humans began drawing we drew sexualized portrayals of human interaction. When photography came along we made pictures of the naked human body and of sexual interaction. Now the portrayals we had were much more defined, exact and intoxicating.

However, whether we used crude or artistic depictions or photographic images of people, access to the level of actual sexual experiences that would lead to a lifestyle of compulsive sexuality was not available for most people.

With the development of technology in the twentieth century that has radically changed. Just as with the development of photography, once moving pictures were developed, black and white pornographic films were made and distributed.

By the time I was growing up we had access to high-quality, mass produced and widely available erotic print media (think Playboy and Penthouse, etc.). Films progressed to higher quality pornographic movies shown in adult theatres. And then VHS tapes fueled the growth of compulsive sexual behavior because a person could watch pornography in their own homes and collect a great deal of pornographic material. That accelerated the growth of sexual addiction beyond anything human history had ever seen to that point.

Now the development of virtual reality technology makes pornography and sexual interaction even more intense and captivating, increasing and deepening the hold of compulsive sexual behavior disorder in many people.

So, in the last few decades, the Internet has exploded the availability, access and amount of pornography and with it the number of compulsive strugglers.

Due to changes in society and technology, far more people are struggling with compulsive sexual behaviors and the consequences that come with them. And because of the ongoing changes in variety and access, individuals progress in sexual compulsivity at a much faster pace.

## WHAT IS COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DISORDER?

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What do I mean when I talk about being sexually compulsive, or being a person who has stumbled into compulsive sexual behaviors?

Compulsive sexual behavior is a person's use of sex to alter moods, handle feelings, handle life. What makes it compulsive is that it progresses—it takes root in a person's soul in a way that it self-reinforces its usefulness to us and our need for it. We become dependent on it.

You know you're becoming compulsive when you have difficulty controlling your use of sex, hide your behaviors from others, suffer consequences because of what you do sexually and are behaving contrary to your own best will and desire. Compulsive sexual behavior is progressive, becomes a substitute for healthy relating, takes over your will and is pathological.

People like you and me who've become compulsive in the misuse of our sexuality must recognize that our addiction is taking our lives from us—bit by bit—and usually we aren't registering the changes in our lives. We have a growing loss of our ability to connect within ourselves and with others in healthy ways, but generally we're not noticing it. We're gradually losing our capacity to integrate life well.

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*Why is it so important that you learn how addiction works, instead of just trying to stop the behaviors?*

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On the one hand, it is true that simply learning about addiction will not solve your problem. The Big Book of AA says “...the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge.” For those of us whose addiction is to lust and sexual experiences, the principle is the same. Self-knowledge alone, once we've become compulsive, won't be enough for us to change.

The Big Book goes on to say that those of us who've developed an addictive mind will see “that will power and self-knowledge [will] not help in those strange mental blank spots.”

On the other hand, it is important and helpful for us to understand why wanting to change is not enough. We're up against a set of unseen, unknown dynamics. Understanding how these dynamics work in our addicted minds will help us begin to recognize and avoid the traps of shame and hopelessness, which fuel our compulsive living.

The key is to learn all you can that will equip you to: 1) understand how it is you've become and

continue to be compulsive sexually; 2) recognize how addiction is reinforcing itself in your thinking and behaving; and 3) discover ways you can dismantle the hold addiction has on you.

## THE PROBLEM OF PORNOGRAPHY

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Because today so many of us with compulsive sexual struggles began with Internet porn use, let's take a few moments to ask what goes on when we use porn.

Whether your struggle is with porn or with other sexual behaviors, the dynamics are the same: attraction-hook-progression-loss.

If your predominant or sole sexual activity is using porn and masturbating, you'll occasionally wonder if you're really doing anything bad. You're not doing anything with other people, so maybe this is no big deal, right? One of the lies we might tell ourselves is that when we use porn, we're really not hurting anyone. But that's simply not true. You are hurting yourself. And others.

There are three important issues for you to consider when you're a regular porn user and you've become compulsive.

**FIRST,** when you and I compulsively use porn, we're developing an attachment to an expression of erotic sexuality that is artificial and one-sided.

We are wired for connection with others, and our sexuality is one way for us to both express love and receive love in an intentional, committed relationship. Porn bypasses all that, giving us a one-sided piece of the experience (arousal, climax) and leaving us empty and alone afterwards.

**SECOND,** it's really important for you to think about what's actually happening to the people who appear in porn. If it's professionally produced, there is substantial information of how the folks in these scenes are being abused in the process. Drugs, stis, entrapment, pain, degradation and some grievous personal losses are standard aspects of porn actors' lives. In using porn, you're taking advantage of the suffering of others. You may not like reading that (I don't like writing it) but it's true.

Even with amateur porn, these are folks who are giving away their own personal sexuality and personhood. You and I consume their image and use their sexuality for our arousal. That is not what their sexuality was intended for. Whether or not the persons putting their sexuality on display recognize their own value, you and I should. When you and I are looking at porn, we're violating the sacredness of others.

**THIRD,** once you've become compulsive, you need more and you need different to achieve arousal. This means that the more and longer you use porn, viewing the same porn won't arouse you as much because this is really about stimulation. So to get the same buzz, you'll need more pornographic material and different content.

And here's an important dynamic to be aware of: since you'll need more and different to become aroused, you'll cross lines and boundaries towards extremes in your porn appetite. Your arousal

template will change and expand, sometimes in very disturbing ways. The breaking of taboos becomes a very real experience and a threat to your well-being. And for most of us, sooner or later we reach that place where porn is simply not enough. We have to have touch, tangible experience. We keep changing our boundaries.

Again, whether your struggle is with porn or with other sexual behaviors, the dynamics are the same: attraction-hook-progression-loss.

So if you're compulsively using your sexuality to handle life, you are losing your life—bit by bit—even as you're living it.

## THE PROBLEM OF OTHER SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

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For many of us—especially those of us who have grown up in the Internet and high-tech era—viewing porn and masturbating has been our primary if not exclusive way of engaging in sexually compulsive behavior. Viewing pornography is actually a form of voyeurism.

There are many other ways to misuse our sexuality compulsively. Just a few examples:

- Using *fantasies* based on real or imagined sexual encounters with others to arouse ourselves
- *Seducing* partners in a way that our arousal is based on conquest rather than genuine connection
- *Anonymous* sexual encounters
- Attracting the sexual attention of others by *exhibiting* ourselves and being aroused by their reactions
- *Paying* for sexual services from others

This is not an exhaustive list but is meant to illustrate that there are many different ways our use of sexuality can become compulsive.

How does compulsively misusing our sexuality affect us?

## SOME OF THE IMPACTS OF COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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*This compulsion may let you take a break now and then, but it never really lets you go.*

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There may be times when you're able to stop these troubling behaviors for a bit. Especially when life gives you an interruption, like a vacation, new job, relationship, any sort of break in routine.

I often said I could stop. And I did stop. It was staying stopped that was my problem.

Sometimes you'll white knuckle it for a bit and a voice in your head will tell you the problem's gone away. That's not how this compulsion works. It does not go away. It may seem to disappear for a time, but if you've truly become compulsive, this behavior will come back when you're stressed, bored, distressed or out-of-balance. It always does.

*This compulsion harms your relationships with others.* You may have noticed you hide your behaviors from others. There's an inherent shame in the kind of appetite for sexual stimulation we have. It's selfish. As our appetites progress, we will hide where they're taking us.

Are you hiding your behaviors? Are you struggling with shame? This will only get worse until you do whatever it takes to break this pattern and live a different life.

*This compulsion harms your sense of who you are.* Humans are wired for connection. We thrive in healthy relationships. Using our sexuality compulsively is really more about you and your gratification than it is about your life-giving, reciprocating bond with another person. It's inherently self-centered and that will affect your sense of who you are and your purpose in life.

*This compulsion will create deep inner conflict with your spirituality.* Let's say you're a spiritual person. You might even have an established, growing spirituality. Even so, you can still get caught up in a lifestyle of dependency on sex.

Compulsively misusing sex to handle life is selfish, self-centered, unbalanced and creates cravings it will never ultimately resolve. And no matter how you might define a truly spiritual life, at its core a spiritual life flows from a spirit of humility and gratitude and is respectful of others. Compulsive sexuality conflicts with healthy spirituality.

Now I realize that last paragraph could possibly cause you to feel shame. That is never my intent. I'm addressing the impacts of compulsive sexuality. If you're struggling with compulsive sexual behaviors, there are reasons why. All humans have struggles of one sort or another. All of us have flaws. There is no shame in that. The question is, what do you want to do about it?

*This compulsion will deepen your sense of personal shame.* Guilt is the reality that you have done something wrong. Shame is the sense that there is something wrong with you.

Guilt can be quite useful to you; it helps you recognize truth about your life. But shame is toxic to you; it lies to you about who you are. The very way compulsive sexual behavior increases your need for more and different erotic stimulation and isolates you from others makes you more vulnerable to this idea that something is wrong with you.

Again, *guilt is the reality that you have done something wrong. Shame is the sense that there is something wrong with you.* Shame—the idea that you don't have what it takes to live a life worth living—is a lie.

We have a natural vulnerability to erotic sexuality. It's a wonderful thing, sexuality. When we participate in it in life-giving, healthy, balanced ways, our sexuality reflects and nurtures the best part of us.

But when we fall into patterns of misusing our sexuality, it has a disintegrating impact on our souls. We feel ashamed and that shame corrodes our spirituality. *We're losing our lives—bit by bit—even as we think we're living them.*

## ASSIGNMENT FOR ENGAGING THE FIRST PRACTICE – FACE THE REALITY OF YOUR SITUATION

*Work at the pace that is best for you, either one assignment a day or whatever pace fits your schedule and keeps you moving forward.*

1. Re-read the written material above—there's a lot there! Think it over. Write down in a journal what speaks to you and what questions come up. This is important because it will help you actually integrate what you're learning and exploring in these Practices. Some of us don't like to write, but we need to engage this material with our feelings and our bodies, not just our eyes and brains.
2. Think back over your sexual history. Do you see a progression? If you do, try and imagine where that progression might take you if you don't interrupt it. Again, this is something to note, to write down.
3. Consider the time you've spent looking at pornography, masturbating, distracting yourself and hunting for the next sexual experience, whatever it is. Now think about when your life is over: do you want to look back and see that you spent hours that turned into days that turned into years of your life on behaviors that only took from you and never benefited you or others? Again, write down what you're thinking.
4. Go to <http://www.fightthenewdrug.org> and take a good look at “Dive Deeper” and the three-part documentary on brain science and personal stories called “*Brain, Heart, World.*” Each of the parts runs about thirty minutes so this will take some time to view and digest. The emphasis of Fight the New Drug is on pornography. However, I find that the brain, relationship and cultural dynamics discussed regarding porn consumption apply to those of us struggling with other expressions of compulsive sexual behavior disorder. *[Note: there is no charge, but I believe the FTND folks ask you to register using your email address. The FTND website operates with fairly high level production values and they update it regularly. This three-part doc may float around on their site in years to come but it's worth looking for, as is all the other material they offer.]*
5. Now ask yourself the following questions and record your answers in your journal:
  - What have I learned about how porn and compulsive sex works in the brain?
  - Do I recognize the progression of *attraction-hook-progression-loss* in my own sexual life?
  - What kind of sexual life am I willing to settle for?
  - Do I think I have a problem that will take my life from me bit by bit unless I take steps to genuinely change my trajectory?

## TWO BIBLE TEXTS FOR MEDITATING ON LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

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“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Psalm 139:23,24

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

## PRAYER

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Prayer is a conversation with God over matters that concern you both.

There are many ways to pray for finding our way and living the life we're called to live. Developing your own way of praying is an important part of a healthy spirituality. Here is a suggested prayer you can use to engage your Creator in this most essential conversation.

*My Creator, please help me. Help me to be honest with myself.  
Help me to be open to the Truth. Help me to see my life as it really is.  
And help me to realize you are here with me and you will help me.  
Amen.*

In the next Practice, we will begin learning how this compulsion works. We'll see how it is pathological. That is, it will take your life from you. That's what it does. Usually not dramatically, though sometimes that happens. With most of us, it takes our lives slowly, giving us enough of a reward that we become conditioned and dependent. But it steals life from us until nothing is left.

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## CONGRATULATIONS

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You've taken a huge first step towards a different and better way of living. Don't be surprised if you find resistance in your soul towards this work. It's important work and a lot is at stake. You've made a good beginning, now keep going!

