

LivingIntegrated®

FIFTEEN PRACTICES FOR LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

2 LEARN HOW ADDICTION WORKS

IN THIS PRACTICE:

- What is Addiction?
- Two Important Definitions
- How Does Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder Work?
- How Do I Know if My Struggle is with CSBD?
- Second Practice Assignment

Go to <https://youtu.be/beR9wjLiM-c> now and watch the introductory video for this Practice.

We live in an addiction-prone culture. Life is complex and challenging. More challenging for some than for others, but challenging for everyone. And many of us are not well-prepared or well-situated to handle the stress and distress of life.

Further, many of us come from family systems that teach us to deny responsibility or escape reality. And finally, many studies are discovering genetic links that suggest some of us more susceptible to becoming addicts.

As we saw in Practice One, changes in society and technology are causing far more people to struggle 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.

Addiction is a big topic and this Practice is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment. But it's useful to understand some of the basic elements of addiction and how it works.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Addiction comes in multiple flavors, but can be divided into two basic categories: *substance and process*.

Substance addiction is by far what most people think of when we talk about addiction: alcohol and drugs.

Process addictions are behavioral addictions and some have a difficult time recognizing that these behaviors (food, sex, shopping, work, gambling and others) are as self-soothing and dissociative as substances. But they are and they result in many of the same problematic consequences.

In the most general terms, addiction may be recognized by these elements:

- *Preoccupation*—a person has come to so depend on a substance or behavior as their way of coping with life that they become obsessed with maintaining access to their drug of choice
- *Loss of control*—either feeling guilty, ashamed or recognizing things are getting out of control they try to cut back their use of their addictive element only to find themselves returning to it
- *Consequences*—the negatives begin to build, such as falling behind at school or work, friends or family questioning choices, financial concerns, time loss, missing responsibilities, physical symptoms, loss of concentration, legal issues, and general loss of interest in normal life and more; most importantly, in spite of these and other consequences, they keep going back.

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ADDICTION MEDICINE DEFINITION

The most recent (2019) definition of addiction adopted by the ASAM board of directors reads this way:

Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.

Prevention efforts and treatment approaches for addiction are generally as successful as those for other chronic diseases. (asam.org)

Now regarding compulsive sexuality, there are a few voices in the psychological community that dismiss the concept of sexual addiction or compulsive sexual behavior. This definition includes an important phrase, "...or engage in behaviors that become compulsive...."

A couple of generations ago many voices dismissed alcoholism as a disease and saw it as simply a sign of personal weakness, character flaw or moral failing. Now we know better.

So what about compulsive sexual behavior disorder. Is anyone recognizing it officially?

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION RECOGNIZES COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DISORDER

In June of 2018, the World Health Organization, in their update of their International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) under the category of "Impulse Control Disorders" gave us this significant entry:

Compulsive sexual behaviour disorder is characterized by a persistent pattern of failure to control intense, repetitive sexual impulses or urges resulting in repetitive sexual behaviour.

Symptoms may include repetitive sexual activities becoming a central focus of the person's life to the point of neglecting health and personal care or other interests, activities and responsibilities; numerous unsuccessful efforts to significantly reduce repetitive sexual behaviour; and continued repetitive sexual behaviour despite adverse consequences or deriving little or no satisfaction from it.

The pattern of failure to control intense, sexual impulses or urges and resulting repetitive sexual behaviour is manifested over an extended period of time (e.g., 6 months or more), and causes marked distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Distress that is entirely related to moral judgments and disapproval about sexual impulses, urges, or behaviours is not sufficient to meet this requirement.

Note that the definition recognizes the repetitive and persistent nature of compulsive sex.

It mentions the symptoms of neglecting healthy life activities and responsibilities, efforts to reduce the behavior unsuccessfully and continuing in the behavior despite adverse consequences.

Finally, in identifying the marked distress and significant impairment that results from compulsive sexual behavior, the definition points out that feeling guilty or ashamed because of the moral issues involved in the behaviors and the disapproval of others is not what triggers this condition. It is the conflict within the individual that results in such debilitating distress.

SO HOW DOES COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DISORDER WORK?

There are several models of the addictive cycle that are very helpful for explaining how this disorder works. Dr. Robert Weiss has a very good one in his very useful book, which I highly recommend, *Sex Addiction 101* (Health Communications, 2015, pp14-19).

Dr. Patrick Carnes developed one of the earliest and most useful diagrams and descriptions of the addiction cycle in two of his earlier works, *Out of the Shadows* (3rd ed. Hazelden 2001, pp14-32) and *Contrary to Love* (Hazelden, 1989, pp 61-73). All of Carnes' work is highly recommended reading.

I describe Carnes' model of the Addiction Cycle in *Ashamed No More*. Reading that portion is part of the assignment for this practice.

Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder coopts the reward center of our brains. All sorts of things can make us feel good (activating our neuro-reward center) and many of them are natural and healthy. Erotic sexual expression is one of them.

Sexuality is a normal part of healthy human experience. But like many other things, it can be used in ways that obtain the reward without the other normal elements: relationship, intent to please another, relational commitment, normal pacing, give-and-take, you get the idea. Learning to get some of the reward of sexual activity without engaging the healthy relational process becomes a way of avoiding difficult emotions, boredom or life stressors.

Some of us did not get what we needed growing up, like learning how to self-regulate our feelings in healthy ways. Others of us may have a genetic predisposition that makes us more vulnerable to compulsive escape. And still others of us were highjacked somewhere along the way (think trauma or external interventions like internet porn introduced at a formative, vulnerable and malleable stage).

And for still others it may be a combination of all of the above that has led us to handle life by compulsively using our sexuality in pseudo-rewarding yet ultimately damaging ways.

So we find ourselves in a repetitive, self-reinforcing and debilitating pattern of making our way through our days. The consequences of this way of living reinforce selfishness, shame and isolation while burying us in the unspoken but pervasive conviction that we don't have what it takes to live a calm, coherent and competent life.

This is compulsive sexual behavior disorder.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY STRUGGLE IS WITH CSBD? ---

There are a number of different assessments for determining if what you're struggling with is compulsive sexual behavior disorder, some of them quite detailed and others fairly simple.

In the assignments section I'll put the link to an online assessment that is easily accessible, competent and free called the Sex Addiction Screening Test (SAST).

Another way to assess your situation is to thoughtfully read over the ten signs of sexual compulsivity identified by Dr. Patrick Carnes (*Don't Call It Love*, Bantam, 1991, pp 11-28):

1. *A pattern of out-of-control behavior*
2. *Severe consequences due to sexual behavior*
3. *Inability to stop despite adverse consequences*
4. *Persistent pursuit of self-destructive or high-risk behavior*
5. *Ongoing desire or effort to limit sexual behavior*
6. *Sexual obsession and fantasy as a primary coping strategy*
7. *Increasing amounts of sexual experience because the current level of activity is no longer sufficient*
8. *Severe mood changes around sexual activity*
9. *Inordinate amounts of time spent in obtaining sex, being sexual, or recovering from sexual experience*
10. *Neglect of important social, occupational, or recreational activities because of sexual behavior*

Look these over carefully. If you see one or more of these signs in your life, look for patterns that have developed in your life over time.

It's vitally important that you understand we are not saying sex is our enemy. Healthy sexuality is a gift. Our problem arises when the continual misuse of our sexuality becomes our primary source of self-soothing, self-nurture or simply getting through life.

“

Healthy sexuality is a gift.

”

Are you using your sexuality to make life manageable and at the same time finding your life increasingly unmanageable? That's what compulsive sexual behavior disorder does.

ASSIGNMENT FOR ENGAGING THE SECOND PRACTICE – LEARN HOW ADDICTION WORKS

Again, as we said in Practice One, 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. Go to sexhelp.com click on the “Education” tab and then “FACQS” and read both “What is sexual addiction?” and “What behavior patterns indicate that sex addiction may be present?”
2. Read in *Ashamed No More: A Pastor's Journey Through Sex Addiction* (T. C. Ryan), pp 59-65, “The Cycle of Addiction,” “Neurochemistry and Crazy Living,” and “But Why Can't I Change?”
3. Go to YouTube and find a sixteen-minute video, “The Great Porn Experiment” by Gary Wilson, TEDxGlasgow. This was recorded in 2012 and I think it's held up fairly well. A lot more research has gone on in the years since, but Gary does a good job of explaining the issues. Keep in mind he's discussing porn consumption, but the dynamics apply to compulsive sexual behavior in general:
[youtube.com/watch?v=wSF82AwSDiU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSF82AwSDiU)
4. Go to YouTube and watch “The Science of Porn”. This three-minute animated video was developed in 2013 and the same comments I made about Gary's video (above apply here: [youtube.com/watch?v=1Ya67aLaaCc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ya67aLaaCc))
5. Go to yourbrainonporn.com and search for the article “Toss Your Textbooks: Docs Redefine Sexual Behavior Addictions”. This is a valuable couple of pages and links and will reward you for all the time you put into it.
6. Now think about these questions and record your answers in your journal:
 - What have I discovered about sexual addiction and how it works?
 - How does this material help me understand my affliction?
 - Am I tempted to use this teaching material as an excuse for my behavior (“I can't help it, my brain's altered”)? Or does this material help motivate me to deal with my compulsive behavior (I'm not alone and I don't have to live this way)?
 - Does this material help me understand I have to take serious steps to restore healthy function to my brain and my sexual life?

7. For a good online assessment, go to sexhelp.com, click on “Am I a Sex Addict?” and scroll down to Online Assessments Tools and take the Sex Addiction Screening Test (SAST); it’s free and anonymous. By the way, there is a terrific amount of information on this website. Bookmark it and use it.

TWO BIBLE TEXTS FOR MEDITATING ON LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

“Now many saw [Jesus and his disciples leave in a boat for a desolate place] and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Mark 6:32-34

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”

Romans 7:21-25

PRAYER

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—however works for you—to engage your Creator in this most essential conversation.

My God, you have made me in your image. Give me understanding and wisdom to see my life as it really is. Help me to appreciate how precious and wonderful my mind is. Help me to see how addiction has damaged me. Give me desire and energy to recover my mind for healthy living. Amen.

IN THE NEXT PRACTICE,

we will do an honest self-evaluation. It’s a very useful practice for coming to terms with reality.

