

Sexual Addiction and internet Sexual addiction

Sexual addiction can be just as devastating as any other form of addiction. The addiction can start innocently enough, but within a short period the focus of the addiction begins controlling the actions of the person. The person can become so consumed with the sexual addiction that other facets and dimensions in his or her life begin to wither away. Time is always the first thing to go. Time that one would normally spend with a lover, children, family, hobbies, sports, or business begins to quickly be replaced with the focus of the sexual addiction. For example, a man who, prior to the onset of an Internet sexual addiction, would work an extra job, will soon find himself spending more and more time on the Internet, and less time on the extra job. In another example, a man who does not necessarily have an Internet addiction, but rather a general sexual addiction, may find that he is consumed with sexual thoughts throughout the day, constantly feels the need to masturbate, and will spend large amounts of money in topless bars, massage parlors, escorts, and even street prostitutes.

Just like many addictions, sexual addiction and Internet sexual addiction can create a level of shame and guilt in the person that is very intense. The shame and guilt is usually experienced immediately following each sexual binge, and will grow more and more intense as the addiction progresses. The shame and guilt may become so intense as to provoke feelings and thoughts of suicide.

Again, just like every addiction, sexual addiction and Internet sexual addiction affect the lives of everyone who is close to the individual. A former female client I had been treating would spend nearly 12 hours a day on the Internet, and completely neglected her husband and 2-year-old son. In this example, the woman was not addicted to visual sexual stimulation (like we see with mainly men), but rather emotional sexual stimulation. She had an endless supply of "Internet friends", and would spend all of her time in chat rooms, instant messaging, or on messaging boards. Her husband tried just about everything he knew of to try and alter her behavior, but to no avail. Even when he threatened to leave her and take their son, she appeared to pay little attention. Finally, the husband and her immediate family members performed an "intervention", and she then was able to see how crazy her behavior had become, and agreed to attend counseling. It was still another three months in treatment before she was able to identify herself as an Internet addict.

In my experience, nearly 80% of all of the sexual offenders I assess and treat also have a sexual addiction, as well as other paraphilias. People who have been depressed for a long period of time, who are introverts (shy), and who have poor self-esteem may find that the Internet serves as a sanctuary of sorts. For example, a very shy 22-year-old female, who has had few close friends in her life, and has suffered from a low-grade depression for two years, may start out by probing the Internet and experimenting with his parameters. Soon she may find her way into the chat rooms, and then specific chat rooms. Within a few months, she has had no problem making all new types of friends on the Internet. She

may feel needed and important in this new world, because if she does not enter the chat rooms in a particular night, she will receive numerous emails from her new friends asking if everything is alright. As her self-esteem is apparently rising (however, this is a distorted and due to an unrealistic nature), she spends more time on the Internet. Soon, she may be satisfying almost all of her emotional and physical needs through the Internet. She has her friends; she can build relationships; she can be sexual or engage in cybersex anytime she wishes without the embarrassment. In essence, she can be everything on the Internet that she perceives she is not in real life. The Internet, then, has served as a facade for her, and actually takes her deeper and deeper within herself.

We have seen people who, because of their Internet sexual addiction, have made very poor, destructive, and uncharacteristic decisions. For example, I have treated a number of people who's Internet sexual addiction influenced them to view pornographic material that is not only illegal, but highly destructive, such as child pornography; or who were so engaged in the fantasy realm of the Internet, coupled with their sexual addiction, and made the decision to meet a child or young teenager who they met on the Internet, in real life. The strangest part of this is that many of these individuals were not sexually or physically abused as children, and may have no other history of inappropriate or illegal sexual behavior.

Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Addiction and Internet Sexual Addiction

- Spending progressive amounts of time on the Internet
- Engaging in progressive amounts of sexual behavior
- Sexual behavior begins to affect other areas of the individuals life, such as work, family, hobbies
- Sexual behavior, or Internet behavior, starts influencing your decision making process on a regular basis
- Binge-style of sexual or Internet behavior
- Telling yourself that you should cut down, or stop altogether
- Experiencing guilt and shame following the sexual behavior
- Others who have stated or suggested that you spend too much time on the Internet, or engaging in sexual talk/behavior
- Experiencing money or legal problems because of your Internet use or sexual behavior
- Thoughts of "getting online", or of sexual behavior, seep into your mind when you are not online or engaged in sexual behavior (i.e. work, with family, etc.)
- Telling lies or making excuses for your behavior
- Cruising and frequenting the "red light districts" in your city

If you feel you may have a sexual addiction, or Internet addiction, or know someone that does, please contact us for more information or to receive our consultation services. There are treatments that work well, and people can again lead full and happy lives.