

UNDERSTANDING THE ADDICTION PATTERN

Anyone can become addicted to pornography. The powerful nature of pornography creates a hormonal and emotional response. Sexual images and related sexual desires are stored in the memory. For many, these images and desires are very difficult to discard. Repetitive use of pornography literally changes the chemical patterns of the brain.

“Pornography in all its forms is especially dangerous and addictive. What may begin as a curious indulgence can become a destructive habit that takes control of your life. It can lead you to sexual transgression and even criminal behavior. Pornography is a poison that weakens your self-control, changes the way you see others, causes you to lose the guidance of the Spirit and can even affect your ability to have a normal relationship with your future spouse.” (For the Strength of Youth Fulfilling our Duty to God, By The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Pg. 17-19, 2001)

Those who develop a pornography habit often follow a similar pattern to those found in other addictions. The characteristics of pornography addiction may include four phases: Initial pleasure, Escalation, Desensitization, and Severe Acting Out.

Initial pleasure. The intense pleasure hormones of the body are activated when a person experiences pornography. The repetitious association of these powerful hormones with pornography begins the addiction process. The habit becomes worse when masturbation is added to the use of pornography. During this early phase users may experience guilt. If they act on their feelings of remorse and change their behavior, then the use of pornography can end. However, if they continue using, the habit becomes stronger and the spiritual aspects of their life decline.

Escalation. Progressively users become unsatisfied, so they seek more graphic and deviant material to satisfy their craving. As the addiction deepens the user takes more risks to obtain sexually explicit material. During this phase they may push their spouse or partner toward bizarre and deviant sexual activities. As the problem escalates they may turn outside the marriage to other sexual behavior.

Desensitization. What was once shocking and revolting become commonplace and acceptable. Repetitive use of pornography dulls the conscience and weakens resistance. The sexual activity depicted in pictures or movies, regardless of how antisocial or deviant, becomes desirable. Another symptom of desensitization is the justification of their involvement. They may think “everyone does it” and “it doesn’t hurt anyone.” They lie and minimize their problem to those they love and even to those persons trying to help.

Severe acting out. A fourth element that can occur in addiction is the increased tendency to act out the sexual behaviors observed in pornography, such as: compulsive promiscuity, exhibitionism, group sex, voyeurism, frequenting massage services, having sex with minor children, rape, and inflicting pain on themselves or a partner during sexual relations. In the last phase most users realize they have a serious habit and feel helpless to control it.