

“What do I do when I have a loved one who admits they struggle with pornography?” This is a difficult question that is becoming more and more common. We cannot normalize the viewing of porn but due to the stigmatization that is associated with pornography, it is often a difficult subject to discuss when there are issues. It is a sin that is often done in private and that leads to great shame when it must be addressed and discussed.

It is important to understand that there are different degrees of porn consumption and not every situation can be addressed the same. Some people fall into occasional compulsive or obsessive consumption while in other cases it turns into an extreme addiction. No case of porn consumption is acceptable, but the more extreme cases need different treatment and will likely need the help of professional counselors. However, all cases require compassion, support and most importantly prayer for deliverance from this temptation.

The dangers that are related to pornography are many – it can lead to the destruction of our families and most importantly to the hardening of our hearts and our eternal destruction! The many dangers to our family and society can be found in numerous articles online. Yet with all these dangers, for many of us our evil nature is still inclined to fall into this sin, even in our reformed communities. Even if we have never fallen into this actual sin of pornography, God can show us how evil our human nature is and then we ourselves are the greatest of sinners.

Helping the individual

Other than prayer, the first thing we can do is listen. Since the act comes with implied shame and judgement, it is important that we do not impose more shame and judgement on them as that could cause someone struggling with pornography to withdraw from sources of help. If you respond with openness, it is more likely that they will open up to you in the future. Usually people who consume porn feel remorse themselves and know that it is wrong. For them to open up to someone else can help them with their struggle and help to hold them accountable.

Oftentimes, we may experience anger, negativity and perhaps even repulsion against the acts when we hear about it. But it is not helpful to express these feelings initially. They can be discussed after allowing the person who is struggling to open up. It is not healthy to repress these feelings, but if they are spoken right away, the person who is struggling with porn may withdraw further. If we understand the addictive nature of pornography then we may try to sympathize with our loved one.

Try to show support – not for the compulsion, but for the striving against the compulsion. For adults this involves accountability programs such as Covenant Eyes and filters as well as honest and open conversations. Let your loved one know that they are not alone, and if they ever are feeling this compulsion, that they can talk to you. Ask them what you can do to help, as they know the times and places that they struggle with it the most. As with any compulsion or addiction (porn, alcohol, drugs, etc.), the individual who is struggling needs to be helping initiate the recovery. Encourage them that they are not the only one who struggles with this and that they do have hope to get past it.

While it is important to support them, it is also important to be honest with them. After you have had time to process and discuss the issue in detail, it is important to be honest with your feelings. You cannot continue to enable the destructive behavior, so it is important to tell them how their actions negatively impact them and their family. It does not help to shelter them from the consequences of their actions, but whenever you are discussing this, try to find the right time and keep as much emotion out of it as possible. It is also important to recognize signs of falling back into these compulsions. To recognize this, you need to know the individual, but examples of signs can include: becoming evasive

when talking about it, lashing out, suddenly being gone more, or being agitated or short tempered after being alone. Try to maintain communication and discuss in advance what you need to do if you suspect they are in trouble again based on some of the signs.

Remember that many people's struggle with porn is compulsive and reactionary. After it has been addressed with a family member, they may bury the compulsion for a period of time. However, when they have a trigger such as stress at work, an argument with a spouse, or any other trigger, they may fall into their old habits again. Therefore, it is important to have multiple levels of support; this could include a spouse, a family member, a friend, or a professional. It is important that the members of this support network can help each other so that if, for example, the one struggling has an argument with a spouse, the spouse can have someone else check in with them.

Helping their spouse and family

It is common that a spouse may feel inadequate if their partner has been consuming porn. Spouses and family members feel that they should be good enough for their loved ones and a revelation like this may likely feel like a betrayal of their trust. It is important that they do not blame themselves because porn consumption usually has very little to do with satisfying a need for intimacy. They need to remember that this is their spouse's personal problem and not their own. If we may know of our own sinful inclinations, then we may be able to sympathise with the inclinations of others.

It is very possible that a spouse or family members may feel betrayal, anxiety, depression, and a loss of trust. This can lead to severe emotional pain for them. Therefore, they need to be able to confide in someone as well - either a professional or a trusted family member or friend. This is not to shame the one who is struggling with porn, because that is destructive; but for help for their own mental and emotional state. If they intend to help and support a spouse, child or parent who is struggling, then they must get the emotional help for themselves so they are in a position to help their own loved one.

Try to encourage the spouse or family member. Most likely they do not have personal fault in the issues in their spouse/family member's struggles. It is not healthy for them to try to find out why their family member consumes porn and to try to incorporate that into their intimate life. There is not a nicotine gum equivalent to try to replace the desire for porn consumption. Therefore, efforts to lose weight, dress differently or change routines are not healthy or necessary to help their loved one. However, when there are other issues unrelated to the issue of porn that can be improved, it may be beneficial to encourage them to make changes as a strong family bond will help them in the future. For example, if the family lives a lifestyle where one of the spouses is often gone from home, help to discuss scenarios where that can be improved. If there are issues in the marriage before this, do not hesitate to encourage seeking marital advice to strengthen their marital bonds. But most importantly, try to encourage the loved ones that they do not take it personally and that it is not their fault.

Discuss the broken trust - the feeling of betrayal can break the intimate trust but also emotional and spiritual ties that may be in a family. Oftentimes, spouses can be their closest confidant when discussing emotional and spiritual concerns and issues. Therefore, if a spouse has hidden their porn consumption and suddenly their husband/wife becomes aware of it, then any previous intimate trust that was built by sharing vulnerabilities in everyday and spiritual life may also come crashing down. It may take a long time to build that trust again so it is important that there are other supports to help these family members to rebuild that trust and to have another confidant.

For a loved one, building up trust again can be a very difficult process. Part of the process will be to forgive their family member, which may be the most difficult part. It is important to know that forgiveness does not condone the offense or pretend that it never occurred, but it means that they will

not hold the offense against their loved one. Reconciliation is helped when a secret sin is brought to light; therefore, if a grudge is held, further falling into sin might be kept secret rather than addressed with support.

Helping yourself

Perhaps you yourself suffer with this compulsion to sin but you have never discussed it with anyone else and it has remained a "hidden sin". Remember however, that nothing is hidden in the sight of God. Also understand that even if your family members are not aware of this at the moment, it is affecting you and your family indirectly. Consuming pornography is not a form of natural love and it will negatively affect any relationship that you may have. There are many articles online about the harmful effects of pornography in everyday life.

Every day, our prayer must be, "lead us not into temptation". This is not to be pious in ourselves but when we can understand something of our true miserable nature, then we need that true spiritual prayer to be kept from such sin day after day. We read of David prior to his fall into sin with Bathsheba that he tarried in Jerusalem while he sent his army into war with the Ammonites. Then in the evening he arose from his bed and while walking on his roof top he fell into that temptation. Is this not an example of when we are not busy with our labors and duties that it is easier to fall into temptation? When we see how far this child of God fell, should not we have all the more reason to pray continually that we may be kept from temptation? May this not be just a repetition before our meals but a true supplication of the Lord.

For yourself, you may know that the struggle has ups and downs. You may have developed an escape where if you want to get around your internet filters and your accountability programs that you can. Therefore, you may be despondent as to how you may ever truly leave this sin. The first practical step is to arm yourself with as many everyday defenses as you can. Remove opportunities for temptation and if you know of ways that you can subvert a filter, try to find a backup that will remove that opportunity. As well, try to find accountability partners to help you in your times of temptation. It may not be an easy thing to open up to someone about but this can be extremely helpful. Try to find someone understanding, supportive and trustworthy to confide in; someone that will hold you accountable and strongly encourage you to try to separate yourself from this addiction. But above all, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). Be as Job, who made a covenant with his eyes that he would not look upon a maid. Beg for the grace of God, that the armour of God may be your protection. Then the inward filter of the fear of the Lord may help keep us from this as well as numerous other sins.