

# Sex Addiction

"Like an alcoholic unable to stop drinking, sexual addicts are unable to stop their self-destructive sexual behavior. Family breakups, financial disaster, loss of jobs, and risk to life are the painful themes of their stories. Sex addicts come from all walks of life - they may be ministers, physicians, homemakers, factory workers, salespersons, secretaries, clerks, accountants, therapists, dentists, politicians, or executives, to name just a few examples. Most were abused as children - sexually, physically, and/or emotionally. The majority grew up in families in which addiction already flourished, including alcoholism, compulsive eating, and compulsive gambling. Most grapple with other addictions as well, but they find sex addiction the most difficult to stop. Much hope nevertheless exists for these addicts and their families. Sex addicts have shown an ability to transform a life of self-destruction into a life of self-care, a life in chaos and despair into one of confidence and peace."

- Patrick J. Carnes, Ph.D.

Author of "Out of the Shadows," 1992

## What is Sexual Addiction?

Sexual addiction is defined as any sexually-related, compulsive behavior which interferes with normal living and causes severe stress on family, friends, loved ones, and one's work environment.

No single behavior pattern defines sexual addiction. These behaviors, when they have taken control of addicts' lives and become unmanageable, include: compulsive masturbation, compulsive heterosexual and homosexual relationships, pornography, prostitution, exhibitionism, voyeurism, indecent phone calls, child molesting, incest, rape and violence. Even the healthiest forms of human sexual expression can turn into self-defeating behaviors.

Sex addicts engage in distorted thinking, often rationalizing and justifying their behavior and blaming others for problems. They generally deny they have a problem and make excuses for their actions. Sexual addiction also is associated with risk-taking. A person with a sex addiction engages in various forms of sexual activity, despite the potential for negative and/or dangerous consequences. In addition to damaging the addict's relationships and interfering with his or her work and social life, a sexual addiction also puts the person at risk for emotional and physical injury.

For some people, the sex addiction progresses to involve illegal activities, such as exhibitionism (exposing oneself in public), making obscene phone calls, or molestation. However, it should be noted that sex addicts do not necessarily become sex offenders.

Behaviors associated with sexual addiction include:

fCompulsive masturbation (self-stimulation)

fMultiple affairs (extra-marital affairs)

fMultiple or anonymous sexual partners and/or one-night stands

fConsistent use of pornography

fUnsafe sex

fPhone or computer sex (cybersex)

fProstitution or use of prostitutes

fExhibitionism

fObsessive dating through personal ads

fVoyeurism (watching others) and/or stalking

fSexual harassment

fMolestation/rape

Generally, a person with a sex addiction gains little satisfaction from the sexual activity and forms no emotional bond with his or her sex partners. In addition, the problem of sex addiction often leads to feelings of guilt and shame. A sex addict also feels a lack of control over the behavior, despite negative consequences (financial, health, social, and emotional).

How is sexual addiction treated?

Most sex addicts live in denial of their addiction, and treating an addiction is dependent on the person accepting and admitting that he or she has a problem. In many cases, it takes a significant event—such as the loss of a job, the break-up of a marriage, an arrest, or health crisis—to force the addict to admit to his or her problem.

Treatment of sexual addiction focuses on controlling the addictive behavior and helping the person develop a healthy sexuality. Treatment includes education about healthy sexuality, individual counseling, Group counseling specifically designed for sexual deviancy and addiction and marital and/or family therapy. In some cases, medications used to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder may be used to curb the compulsive nature of the sex addiction.

AAR Counseling Services provides integrated treatment for individuals suffering from sexual addiction/compulsivity (including Internet addiction), sexual deviancy, or the effects of abuse and trauma. These individuals may also be chemically dependent and/or have coexisting psychiatric diagnoses. Compulsive behaviors, post-traumatic symptoms, or unresolved sexual trauma are often the cause of relapse in individuals who have completed traditional treatment programs. The AAR staff has many years of experience and in-depth training in sexual addictions and sexual deviancy behaviors.

Therapeutic approaches include Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), experiential therapies, psycho-educational presentations, psychopharmacological interventions, family systems theory, and integrative therapies are used as therapeutic tools to help clients discover personal emotional truths concerning fear, trust, honesty, and dependency. All AAR groups focus on assisting clients in separating their identities from their symptoms. Treatment plans are individualized. The MAKING CHOICES Group is designed to provide therapy for individuals with issues of sexual addiction/compulsivity, co-sexual addiction, and sex and love addiction. Clients in group setting are encouraged to be supportive of one another in constructive ways.

AAR Clinical team is compassionate, and attention is given to assisting clients in developing compassion for themselves and others. Our clinical team approach assists clients in the development of functional thinking processes and coping mechanisms.

If you or a loved one is experiencing any of these symptoms, help is a phone call away. Call today 1-800-289-7102.