

Addicted

to

SEX

Understanding and Managing
Sex Addiction

Barry K. Selman

Barry K. Selman

Sex Addiction

Understanding and Managing



"If by reading this you realize that you may be suffering from sexual addiction, know that there is help at hand."

Barry K. Selman, LCSW



Addicted To Sex Understanding and Managing Sex Addiction

Addiction. It runs through the very fiber of our culture. For some it's alcohol, for others it's material possessions or simply looking good. For a growing number of men and women an addiction to sex has become an all-consuming pathological behavior. Addiction in all its forms can have a devastating effect on a person's sense of self and their relationships with others.

If you or someone you know is suffering from sexual addiction, you are not alone. A conservative estimate in the United States at the moment says that sexual addiction affects 3% to 5% of the population. However, the Mayo Clinic (which specializes in treating sexual addiction) has recently provided an estimate that states that sexual addiction could affect as much as 6% of America's population.

If you think you are suffering from sexual addiction, it is important to know the point at which your sexual activities go from being healthy sexual explorations to destructive, compulsive behavior. Outlined below is a definition of sex addiction, the symptoms that you could be suffering from and also some real life examples that you may be able to relate to.

If by reading this you realize that you may be suffering from sexual addiction, know that there is help at hand. To help you to feel more comfortable about the treatment available for sex addiction, here is a brief overview of how sex addiction therapy will help release you from your compulsive behavior.

What is sexual addiction?

If you have been searching the Internet or have seen a professional therapist, you may have found that there is a bit of confusion surrounding a diagnosis for sexual addiction.

This confusion is largely due to the fact that there are certain medical boards in America who are still refusing to recognize sexual addiction as a clinical disorder. Additionally, the recent media hype surrounding celebrity sex addicts has colored people's perceptions of sexual addiction.

However, rest assured that there is almost irrevocable evidence and growing support amongst the psychiatric community to suggest that sexual addiction is a very real, very problematic disorder. And, research tells us that it is on the increase in society.

From my many years as a clinical psychotherapist, I have come to firmly believe that sexual addiction is a diagnosable disorder that affects many members of our



“From my many years as a clinical psychotherapist, I have come to firmly believe that sexual addiction is a diagnosable disorder that affects many members of our society.”

Barry K. Selman, LCSW

society. It is not just the ailment of the morally depraved or socially dysfunctional. Sexual addiction can affect otherwise upstanding members of society -- just like you and me.

To recognize a problem, you must first understand it. Let's take a look at how we can define sexual addiction.

Addiction is defined as having an aspect of compulsion. Compulsion therefore, is an irresistible urge to act

or behave in a certain way -- typically against one's conscious mind. Additionally, addiction becomes an all-consuming obsession, both mentally and physically.

Extrapolating that to sexual addiction brings us to a definition of compulsive sexual behavior paired with an obsessive preoccupation with sexual thoughts.

engage in sexual activity. It occupies their thoughts, and begins to consume them. Over time, sexual acts take up much of the addict's life, and often the activities needed to reach sexual fulfillment increase in intensity and frequency.

It is when a sex addict disregards negative consequences and takes bigger risks to fulfill their sexual desires that their behaviors are often to the detriment of the addict themselves, and those around them.



A Consuming Addiction

People suffering from sexual addiction feel the need to constantly engage in sexual activity. It occupies their thoughts, and begins to consume them.

Sex Addiction defined

One supporter of sex addiction, The National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity, defines sex addiction as “engaging in persistent and escalating patterns of sexual behavior acted out despite increasing negative consequences to self and others”.

Really, what this is saying is that people suffering from sexual addiction feel the need to constantly

Are You A Sex Addict?

There are some common behaviors that tend to rule the life of a sex addict. You may not find yourself suffering from all of the behaviors mentioned below, but what is important to think about is whether your sexual actions are impacting your life in a negative way.

Compulsive sexual acts do not necessarily involve physical consummation of sexual activity. It may involve the viewing of pornography, visiting strips clubs or merely fantasizing regularly about sexual acts.

A clear delineation must be made between a sex addict and a sex offender. They are not one and the same! It is also important to understand that not all sex addicts display deviant behavior recognized to be illegal.

In a disorder commonly associated with men, it is also important to note that sexual addiction affects women too. While the occurrence of sex addiction may be less in women, the problem is no less significant and treatment should be sought

Within the definition from the National Counsel on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity, there are some

“Over time, sexual acts take up much of the addict’s life, and often the activities needed to reach sexual fulfillment increase in intensity and frequency.”

fundamental elements that underlie addiction, including sexual addiction. These are compulsive acts, mental obsessions, and risk taking behaviors. While that's all good in theory, let's take a look at some of the recognizable ways that sex addicts behave to help you understand if you may be suffering from the addiction.

“In a disorder commonly associated with men, it is also important to note that sexual addiction affects women too.”





Sexual voyeurism tends to manifest itself in sex addicts through the excessive viewing of adult erotica, online or DVD pornography, visiting strip clubs, and hiring prostitutes to act out fantasies. It is admittedly a very fine line in our sexually charged culture to differentiate between the sexual images that are legitimized through advertising, television and the like, and those that are actively sought out for regular sexual gratification. As a sex addict, you might find yourself seeking out sexual images very frequently -- as often as 3-5 times per week.

Engaging in phone sex is also another common behavior of the sex addict. Phone sex has the potential to spiral out of control when it starts to be used to fill a void in your life. For many people, phone sex consumes hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars each year.

Consummation of the sex act with prostitutes or serial infidelity with unknown sexual partners represents a high-risk behavior in sex addicts. Not only are you exposing yourself to sexually transmitted diseases, but you are also (in the instance of prostitution) running the risk of lawful intervention and arrest.

“While most adults will have engaged in at least some of the above behaviors over their lifetime, these sexual behaviors become a problem when they interfere with work life, social activities, and the physical and sexual stability of a partnership.”

Barry K. Selman, LCSW

Symptoms of sex addiction

Compulsive masturbation is a common physical expression of sexual addiction. While it is entirely normal for a sexually aware person to masturbate on a regular basis, there is a point where it becomes a compulsion. Typically, a sex addict will masturbate 2-3 times per day, and often more. This can progress to the point where you might elect to miss social engagements, or are late to work because of your desire to masturbate.

While most adults will have engaged in at least some of the above behaviors over their lifetime, these sexual behaviors become a problem when they interfere with work life, social activities, and the physical and sexual stability of a partnership. Also, if the behaviors start to affect you financially (for example, you are spending more than your earned income on the sexual activity) you must consider admitting that you have a problem and seek help in the form of sex therapy and/or contacting sex addicts anonymous.



Sex Addiction in real life

Without compromising anonymity (as anonymity, confidentiality, and trust are the cornerstones of my profession) I'd like to share three examples of sexual addiction.

Bill

Bill is 43 years old. He's married with two children. When he was in the Army he enjoyed the services of a prostitute on three occasions. About 10 years ago he started masturbating to online pornography. About five years ago, it started excelling, with Bill spending more and more time on the Internet. He starts leaving work early because he can't wait to masturbate and begins locking the door to his home office. His wife becomes more suspicious and irritable and the deception of the addiction begins to erode their relationship.

Matthew

Matthew spends \$600 a day on phone sex. He's a professional with a great job. He's tried dating but is constantly sexually frustrated. He needs the stimulation of someone talking dirty to ejaculate.

Robert

Robert spends thousands on lap dances at strip clubs each month. He has an erotic experience from it and likes that there is no responsibility of a relationship. Every week he questions why he needs the lap dances and vows to stop. But, next week he's back. He's in a marriage with an angry, critical, controlling wife while what he really needs is to be loved, listened to, respected, and appreciated.

These three clients have benefited from sex addiction therapy and are taking small steps toward recovery each day.

“Personal sex addiction therapy allows for the holistic restoration of the mind, body and soul connection, which seems to be broken in the addicted person.”

Barry K. Selman, LCSW

“Sometimes, addiction occurs when a person looks to fill a void that may be left by an unsupportive or abusive childhood, the death of a loved one, or any other situation or trauma that has left them feeling empty and confused.”

Barry K. Selman, LCSW





Sexual Addiction Therapy an overview

Therapy can be a daunting experience for many people. The thought of sharing your innermost thoughts and desires with another person can be terrifying. However, when you find a therapist with whom you feel comfortable and who you can learn to trust, you will find it easier to open up to them and begin your recovery process.

As in any psychological treatment, the most important aspect to sex addiction therapy is the relationship between you and your therapist. It is absolutely vital that you feel like you are in a supportive, non-judgmental relationship that is based on a common understanding of your difficulties. This will ultimately help you to fully address your addiction and smooth out the path to recovery.

The fact that you are reading this book is a great step toward recovery.

It may sound somewhat simple-minded, but admitting you have a problem is the first step on the road to freedom from addiction.

When you embark on sex addiction therapy, your therapist will often explore any issues that may have initiated your sexual addiction. Sometimes, addiction occurs when a person looks to fill a void that may be left by an unsupportive or abusive childhood, the death of a loved one, or any other situation or trauma that has left them feeling empty and confused. It is important to understand the root cause of the problem before working toward a solution.

Sex addiction can often leave you feeling guilty, desperate, and alone. You feel as if the only way to feel better about yourself is to keep seeking out sexual gratification. The

key to treating the addiction is to break the cycle of gratification, elation, and deflation. Doing this will help you to stop acting out your cravings and to begin to experience a sense of peace and tranquility.

To address individual psychological issues, sex addiction therapy is a beneficial complementary treatment to a 12-step program. Individual therapy will take you on a personalized walk through the healing process. Personal sex addiction therapy allows for the holistic restoration of the mind, body and soul connection, which seems to be broken in the addicted person. Sex addiction therapy can be conducted in a small group setting, or as a one-on-one personal counseling session. You should speak to your therapist as to the setting in which you feel most comfortable.

If you believe that you may have a sex addiction problem and are looking to discover a path to recovery, help is just a phone call away. Sex addiction counselor Barry K. Selman, LCSW offers one-on-one sex addiction therapy in the greater Raleigh NC area, and works with clients via telephone therapy throughout the United States. For more information, visit www.barrykselman.com.