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5 Spiritual Plan

While you may know intellectually that God loves you, people who struggle with pornography often emotionally question God's love. Through spiritual direction with a caring priest, you can come to understand that God not only loves you, but also *likes* you, like a best friend. He loves you so much, and he wants to be part of every aspect of your life. This knowledge can be incredibly comforting. You can finally feel safe with God. This can also help you let go of shame and develop a healthy image of God. You will be able to turn to God for help and strength, and truly know that he is present to help and guide you.

6 Education

Through the recovery process, you will receive much education on topics such as addictions, sobriety and recovery, healthy intimacy and sexuality, forgiveness, relationships, Catholic spirituality, virtue, healthy living, etc. This can come from books, DVDs, CDs, podcasts, websites, webinars, and conferences. The more you learn about these topics, the easier recovery will become.



7 Virtue

The ultimate goal of recovery is not just sobriety, it's transformation — becoming the person God created



you to be. It is important to embrace this as your mission. Make a daily commitment to grow in virtues such as faith, hope, love, honesty, transparency, patience, perseverance, courage, etc. This will lead to the transformation of becoming a new creation in Christ. With this,

recovery becomes much easier.



While pornography addiction can be devastating for individuals, couples, and families, it need not ruin one's life. Healing and recovery are possible. The first step is to reach out and ask for help. While shame can make it very difficult to seek help, most who do reach out find countless people who are ready to help. There are many counselors, clergy, life coaches, and support groups who understand the struggle. Instead of feeling judged and condemned, you will experience much love, mercy, and compassion.

If you are struggling with pornography, or have been hurt because of it, I encourage you to seek help. God will be walking with you every step of the way during your recovery journey. He can transform your life and your marriage into something new and beautiful.

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FINDING Freedom

from Pornography



Includes 7-step recovery plan

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Pornography addiction is the fastest growing epidemic in America. Modern neuroscience has shown us that pornography is an addictive substance that can have the same effect on the brain as cocaine. Thanks to the Internet, pornography has become the new “drug of choice” and millions are affected by it.

Studies have shown that 13 percent of all website search engine requests are for sexual content; 10 percent of men admit to being addicted to pornography; 55 percent of married men say they watch porn at least once a month; and 25 percent of married women say they watch porn at least once a month. Therefore, it's of little surprise that pornography plays a significant role in more than 50 percent of all divorces.

There is both a physical and an emotional component to pornography use and addiction. The physical component breaks down differently for men and women. Men are more visually stimulated, usually preferring visual forms of pornography (photos and videos). Women are more relationally stimulated. In addition to visual forms of pornography, women also are attracted to literary pornography (romance novels, blogs, literotica, etc.) and interactive forms (chat rooms, webcams, social media, etc.).

When men and women engage in pornography use, it has a tremendous physical impact on the brain. A series of chemical reactions occur in the brain that provide a tremendous sensation of pleasure. For many, just thinking about pornography or planning to view it can trigger these chemical responses. From this process, the brain becomes physically dependent on the pleasurable chemical effects that pornography provides.

People can also become emotionally addicted to pornography. Sadly, most people today are introduced to pornography during their childhood or early adolescent years. The average age of first exposure to hard-core internet pornography today is eight years old! Many first-time encounters are by accident or because curiosity led to a web search. Although early exposure to pornography may lead individuals to experience the

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physical effects quickly, many also discover that it can be used to escape negative emotions. However, because the effects of pornography are

temporary, one needs to return to it over and over again to keep emotional pain at bay. Repeated use leads to an emotional dependence on it.

In recovery, most people discover that the root causes of pornography use/addiction have nothing to do with sex. Pornography is simply used to escape the negative emotions caused by deep emotional wounds.

Effects on Marriage

When an individual discovers that his or her spouse is using pornography, it can be devastating, especially for wives, who feel deeply hurt and betrayed. For them, their husband's use of pornography is as serious as an extramarital affair: it's adultery. For some women, the betrayal is so serious that they may exhibit symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is called betrayal trauma.

Men can also experience betrayal trauma when wives rely on or become addicted to porn. Any spouse who uses or is addicted to pornography needs to understand how devastating this event is to marriages. Studies have shown that pornography use plays a significant role in more than 50 percent of all marriages.

Recovery

While becoming overly reliant on pornography or discovering your spouse is addicted can be devastating, healing and recovery are possible! People can overcome it. Marriages can be healed and restored. But it does take time, patience, perseverance, and a commitment to doing whatever it takes to recover.

There are many effective recovery programs available to break free from pornography; however, after studying many of them as a counselor and therapist, I have discovered seven common factors that make specific programs highly effective. From this, I developed the Integrity Starts Here! recovery program for Catholics. Here is an overview of the program and how you can personally use it:



1 Honesty, Self-knowledge, and Commitment

First, you must admit to having the problem and be totally committed to recovery. If you are married, you must be honest with your spouse about this problem. You must then identify the triggers that repeatedly lead you back to pornography and use this information to develop effective strategies to avoid pornography. This can help you achieve and maintain healthy sobriety from this dependence.



2 Purifying Your Life

You must get rid of all pornography in your life. Make sure all use of technology is monitored. Work on guarding your eyes and respecting other people. Develop firm boundaries with people, places, things, technology, money, and situations that could lead you back into pornography use.

3 Support and Accountability

Join a 12-step support group for people struggling with pornography use. Through such a group you can find accountability partners to help you remain sober. In these groups you can also find a sponsor who will help you work through the twelve steps. When times are tough and you are tempted to act out, you will have people to turn to for help. In addition to receiving support and accountability from group members, you will do the same for them. This is a team approach. Knowing you are not alone in recovery and that other people truly know and love you can help you succeed in recovery.



4 Counseling

For many people, as explained earlier, pornography use is not the real problem, but rather a symptom. Like the use of many other substances or harmful behaviors, pornography is used to cope with negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, loneliness, boredom, shame, abandonment, etc. These are often fueled by deep emotional wounds. The goal of counseling is to identify and heal the wounds that are fueling these emotions — that is, find the root causes. This in turn can decrease the need to use pornography. This healing not only aids in achieving the first steps toward freedom, it contributes to lasting recovery. Without identifying and resolving the root causes of pornography use, any sobriety is just white-knuckling it, which will eventually lead you back to pornography.