



Help for Religious Leaders

Presented by
Dr. Adam Moore, Ph.D., LMFT
Clinical Director
Utah Valley Counseling & Utah Valley Addiction Recovery





Dear Bishop,

You are going to have many married men in your office who are struggling with pornography and other sexual behaviors. You have a great desire to help those men, especially when they become *addicted* to sexual behaviors. May I provide some insight I have gained from working for many years as a therapist with these men and their wives. I believe this will help you do much good as you seek to help people heal.

It's easy to focus all of your energy on helping the husband, because his needs are obvious. However, next to that man is a woman who is struggling immensely. She also has healing needs, and she has a story to tell. In fact, her story will tell you more about her husband's addiction than his story will tell you. I promise. Following are seven keys to helping people heal from the effects of pornography and sexual addiction.

1. Listen to the wife's story and trust what she is saying

Addicts are usually skilled at creating a beautiful and believable façade for others. He will come across as stable, honest, and accountable in your office. Before you accept what he is telling you about himself, listen to his wife's experience. She will tell you whether his story is accurate. She lives with him every day. In all the years I have been a therapist, I do not recall ever working with a wife whose story about her husband's addiction was inaccurate. Trust her story and her instincts. If she feels something is off or wrong, in a majority of cases you can trust that it is.

The husband may come, confessing to you that he has sinned. He may be contrite and want to change. However, almost universally, what he tells you early on is only a small portion of what he has actually done. If his wife shares with you that more is going on, or that she suspects more is going on, please trust her.

2. Involve the wife at every level of the process

Please do not have meetings with the husband alone. His wife already feels blocked out of most areas of her husband's life. You may not realize this, but when you meet with the husband without his wife present, it gives him the incorrect idea that there are some things that are appropriate to keep secret from his wife. Please also know the health of the marriage is dependent upon the husband fully disclosing everything to his wife. If he keeps any secrets from her, the marriage will never fully heal. Please at least give her the option of attending meetings that involve you and her husband.

3. Allow the wife to forgive in her own way and time

Forgiveness is the right and responsibility of the person who has been hurt. I promise you that demanding, requiring, or even requesting that a wife forgive her husband so the couple can "move on" will do much more harm than good. Please let her decide when and how to forgive.





4. Become educated about trauma

Many wives of pornography and sex addicts are experiencing trauma. This is not only because she feels betrayed by his sexual behaviors, but also because of the lies he has told her. An addicted husband will make his wife feel that his relapses into pornography are her fault. This type of behavior can make a wife feel “crazy” or like she is losing her mind. Learn about causes and symptoms of trauma to understand what his wife is experiencing. She will be very grateful to you for your empathy.

5. Deal with the addiction before trying to help the marriage

Too many people believe that sexual addiction is simply a result of a struggling marriage. Please understand that his addiction almost universally pre-dated the marriage. Asking a wife to be emotionally, spiritually, or physically vulnerable with a man who has been lying to her and betraying her trust will cause harm to her and to the marriage. Before the couple can rebuild the relationship, he has to work to rebuild her trust in him by starting and continuing real recovery from his addiction.

It is also very important that you know that I have never once seen a man heavily involved in pornography or other sexual behaviors who simply stopped doing it without serious work on his part. The passage of time and a sincere desire are not substitutes for real work. A man who is addicted, but in recovery, will be able to explain to you in great detail the pain, challenges and labor of his recovery. If he cannot describe to you exactly what he has done to heal and change, he has not done the work and is not in recovery. If he has only desired to change and prayed for help, he has not done his part yet.

6. Let go of responsibility for recovery

Even as a therapist, I have to know that his addiction recovery is not my responsibility. If you feel that you have to solve his addiction and “save” the marriage, you will quickly be in over your head. If you are the only person who knows what is going on in the marriage, the couple will feel isolated from so many other resources that are available to them. Your role is important in both the husband’s and wife’s spiritual development. But you won’t be able to be a therapist, sponsor, support group, and educator. It is too much for one person to manage. Use the resources that are available to you, such as 12-step recovery groups, qualified counselors, and the written materials of the Church and other qualified sources of help.

7. Expand the concept of accountability

It’s easy to focus only on accountability for the pornography use or other sexual acting-out behaviors. Please expand your expectations of accountability with the husband. His wife’s experience will be, by far, the best indicator of how well his recovery is going. Ask her as many questions as you ask him.





Here are some examples of questions you can ask the husband:

- What are your daily recovery routines?
- Which of the 12 steps of recovery are you currently working on?
- Do you have a recovery sponsor and how often are you in contact?
- What changes have you made to protect yourself from relapse?
- What are you doing to help your wife work toward trusting you again?

Here are some examples of questions you can ask his wife:

- Do you notice any differences in your husband's behavior that help you feel safe?
- How does your husband treat you on a daily basis?
- What about your husband's addiction makes you most afraid?
- How are you doing in healing from your trauma?
- What is your husband not telling me that I need to know?

I have found that using these principles to help couples has greatly improved people's trust in me as a counselor and has significantly improved my ability to provide lasting help. I hope you can benefit from what I have learned.

Sincerely,

Adam M. Moore, Ph.D.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

adammmoore.com :: utahvalleycounseling.com :: utahvalleyaddictionrecovery.com

