



Self Absorbed Chaos

Model of Pornography & Sexual Addiction*



Connecting With God & Others

Model of Sexual Addiction Recovery*



1. Is using pornography a problem?

The choice to use pornography is more than a moral judgment:

“Pornography is neither harmless nor helpful. It is a mood-altering, belief-changing, relationship-damaging, addiction-forming, socially-harmful, spiritually-deadening, life-crippling practice, through which one practices the ways of the adversary.”

—Jill C. Manning, PhD

Three stages lead to sexual addiction: 1) Unhealthy sexual behaviors provide self-centered pleasures; 2) Such behaviors are chosen to alter moods and emotions. Shame, emotional withdrawal and self-absorption escalate and life becomes unmanageable; 3) Efforts to stop such “acting out” are unsuccessful—in spite of negative consequences or a sincere desire to quit.

For those who are caught in this vortex of a *behavioral addiction*, escape seems impossible. Serious relationship challenges emerge, faith in God is questioned, and life-threatening consequences may follow.

2. Is recovery possible?

If the one caught in this trap desires—and follows—the path of recovery, *recovery is possible!* God’s grace is sufficient for all who honestly and humbly seek it.

3. How does one recover?

One must freely choose for himself or herself to step onto the path of recovery from sexual addiction—and *stay on it*. That path is narrow and may seem steep at times, so a long-term commitment is vital. Without a firm resolve to “do whatever it takes,” discouragement may set in during setbacks, and sadly, a return to illicit sexual behaviors will likely follow.

To *step on* the path of recovery, the most basic requirements are a willingness to surrender to God’s will, and courage to be totally honest, accountable and humble.

To *stay on* the path of recovery, help from others is essential. This includes: 1) Seeking spiritual guidance; 2) Working with a qualified therapist; 3) Working the 12 Steps, and 4) Educating themselves.

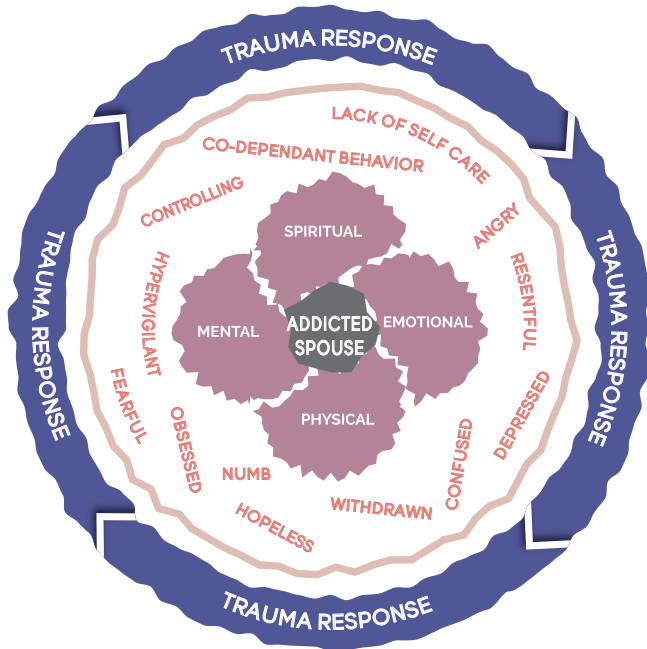
**Faith + Grace + Action =
Recovery from Sexual Addiction**

4. What does recovery look like?

Recovery is both *observed* and *felt*. Besides being free from sexual “acting out” behaviors, it is characterized by honesty, humility and accountability, and a willingness to serve God and others.

Spouse Betrayal Trauma—and Healing

Model of Spouse Betrayal & Trauma*



Model of Spouse Healing & Recovery*



5. How does pornography affect the spouse?

A pornography or sexual addict is self-absorbed and thus has little or no emotional connection with others. Living with—or having lived with—such an addict brings feelings of confusion and fear into a spouse’s life. These women feel emotionally isolated and doubt their own personal worth. In fact, many characteristics of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) are present in such spouses. This is called *betrayal trauma*. They often take extreme measures to outwardly appear perfectly in control—yet inside they really feel out of control, “crazy” and unloved.

Most of these women sensed that something was not right in their relationship. But when they questioned their husband they were assured with comments such as “Everything is OK,” or with anger and resentment for even asking.

For a time the betrayed spouse may have felt pacified, but soon became preoccupied with thoughts such as: *Why won’t he even talk to me? Maybe if I were more sexual or changed my body, then he would love me. I can fix this for him.* Conversely, they may have thought: *He’s ruining my life and our family. I feel bitter, angry and afraid.* Or they may have minimized it: *It’s not that important. That’s just the way men are.*

Eventually the betrayed spouse realized that it was all about the lies. In despair, they didn’t know whether they could trust any aspect of their relationship. Something had to change. Yet they may not have known where to go for support and wise guidance.

6. How does the spouse heal from betrayal trauma?

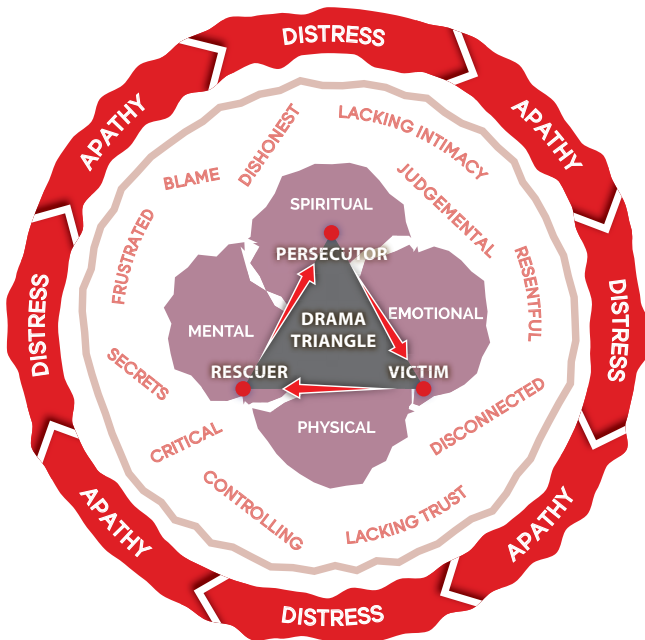
To *step on* the path of healing, traumatized spouses need to embrace these truths: 1) They are not the cause of the addiction nor can they fix or change their addicted spouse—he is making his own decisions; 2) They have been deeply injured by the deceit, disrespect and anger in their relationship; 3) Only with God’s help can they themselves truly heal and thrive.

To *stay on* the path of healing and recovery, help from others is indispensable. This includes: 1) Seeking spiritual guidance; 2) Working with a qualified therapist; 3) Working the 12 Steps—alongside support from 12-Step groups for spouses, and 4) Educating themselves about the addiction and trauma and their effects on the family.

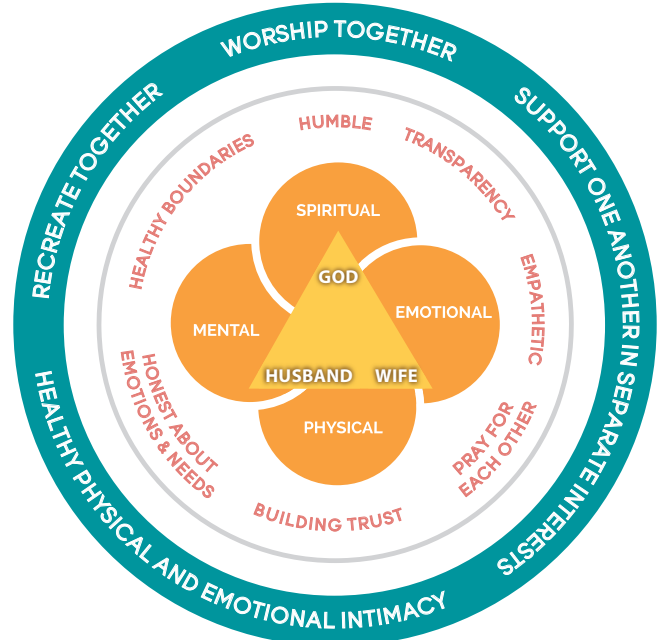
Some may argue that all of this effort is unnecessary—after all it is *his* problem. *If he would just stop, then everything would be OK.* But it is not that simple. If betrayed spouses do not recover from their own trauma, they may continue to live out an emotionally paralyzed life with fear always at the doorstep.

But with consistent effort, time and the grace of God, such spouses can and will heal. That is the miracle! They learn how to choose to live a healthy lifestyle, which includes self-care and honesty about their emotions and needs. They also learn how to set healthy boundaries based on safety, love, and respect for themselves and others. Such actions connect them more closely with God and they become more available for honest and loving relationships.

Model of the Distressed Marriage*



Model of Recovering the Distressed Marriage*



7. How does pornography use affect the marriage?

Pornography use often leads to sexual addiction, then betrayal trauma, and negatively impacts the marriage on several levels. Early on, a critical disconnection takes place between a husband and wife—even if both parties are not aware of the illicit sexual behaviors. Bitter seeds of dishonesty, disrespect and selfishness are sown and grow unchecked.

At the center of the distressed marital relationship we see the Drama Triangle. Ironically, both partners often take turns playing out the roles of *rescuer*, *persecutor* and *victim*. There may even be seasons of relative calm. Such calm, however, is usually based on apathy toward one another and projects a false sense of well being.

But we know that fear, resentment and anger eventually return. For self-preservation and a measure of safety many couples resort to living parallel lives—a kind of virtual divorce. They can be disconnected in nearly every meaningful way: emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. Too many stop striving for a synergistic relationship and accept apathy and dysfunction as their new way of life. Divorce often seems to be the only way out.

8. Can the distressed marriage be saved?

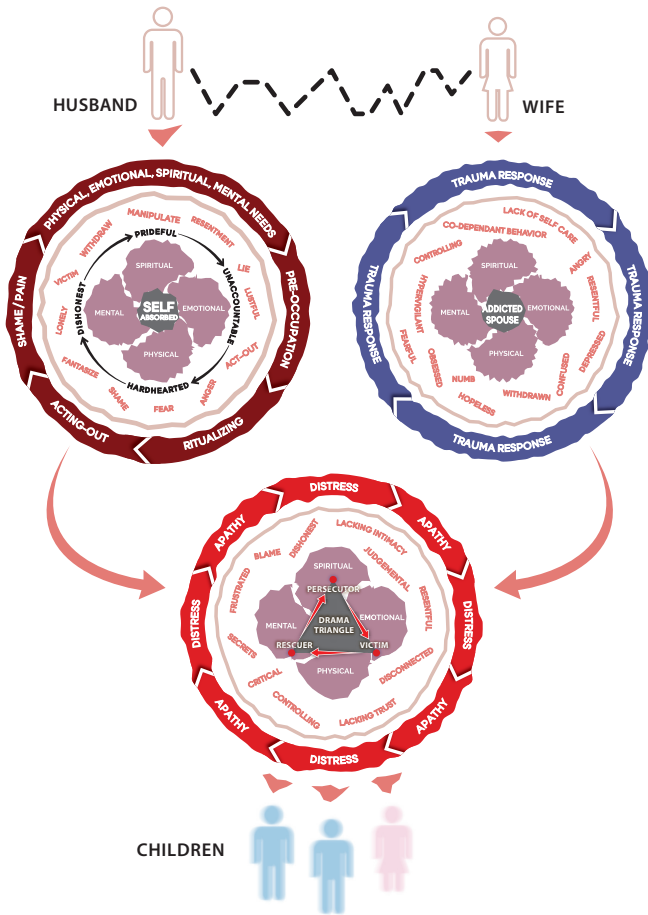
A marriage is made up of two individuals—two separate entities; the marriage itself constitutes a third entity. The marriage damaged by sexual addiction and betrayal trauma may need to be put on “the back burner” for a season while the husband and wife each begin their own recovery.

Healing the marriage comes next, and is a natural outgrowth if both partners are pursuing their individual path of recovery. Additionally, sacred trust that has eroded over time must be rebuilt over time.

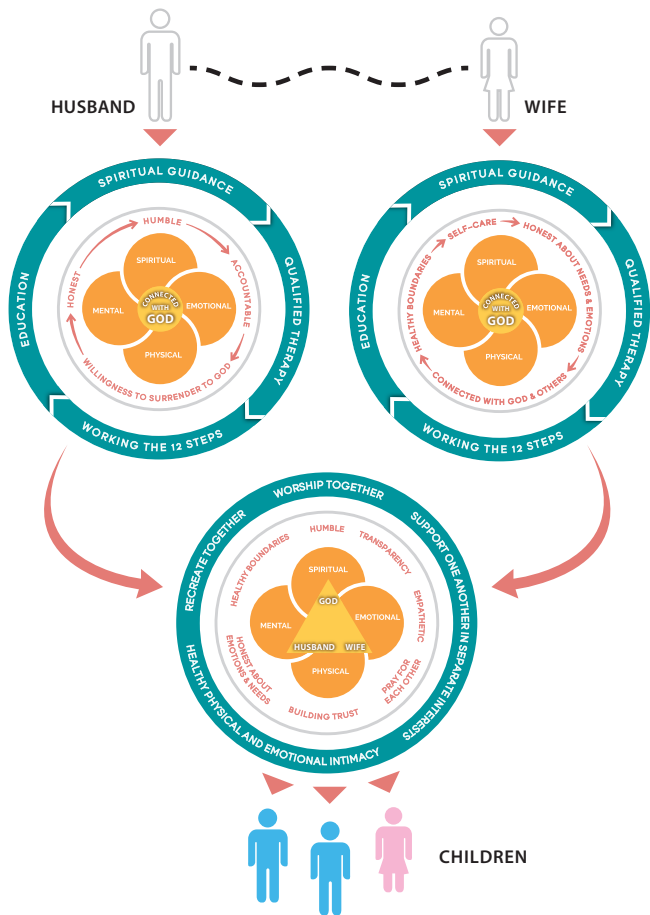
The distressed marriage can indeed be saved! It even has the potential to thrive when its foundation includes a shared connection with God, total honesty, appropriate boundaries and healthy intimacy. Healthy parents who continue to strive to strengthen their marriage are then prepared to teach their children—by example—how to live a balanced life full of joy and peace.

* **Explanation of the Circular Models:** The 4 petals within each model represents an individual—or a marriage—as a physical, emotional, spiritual and mental being or entity. The center of the circle indicates the *primary* focus of the heart. The white area enveloping the 4 petals represents a person’s thoughts, behaviors and emotions. And the outermost circle represents actions, outreach and responses.

Model of the Unhealthy Family



Model of the Healthy Family



9. How is the family impacted?

Try as they may, unhealthy parents cannot shield children from the collateral damage of addiction and betrayal trauma. This idea has been reaffirmed after two decades of research by The American Academy of Pediatrics who issued a landmark warning that toxic stress can harm children for life. “You can modify behavior later, but you can’t rewire disrupted brain circuits,” says Jack P. Shonkoff, a Harvard pediatrician who has been a leader in this field.

Even though they might not know why, children in such families are emotionally distanced from the addicted parent and grow up without that vital sense of belonging and safety. A lack of positive affirmations and encouragement stunts their potential. Their loyalty to the family may waver as they turn outside the family to fulfill their needs and wants.

Unsurprisingly, without healthy family anchors children tend to become confused or ambivalent about the line between right and wrong and their relationship with God. Other important values and life skills remain underdeveloped and their chances for happiness diminish.

10. How do healthy parents fortify children?

Even if not for themselves at first, addicted or traumatized spouses would do well to seek healing and recovery for the sake of their children. Good fruit (happy and well-adjusted children) comes from a good tree (emotionally healthy parents).

Since children are not born with a clear sense of self, they discover it—and it is molded—through the influence of those who are most important to them. Children come to trust their parents’ values and their love; then feeling personally secure, blossom and mature.

Parents who are unified by their shared relationship with God encourage each child to nurture that relationship. Children become more confident in their understanding of what is right and wrong, kind and mean-spirited, selfish and selfless, respectful and disrespectful.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

—Frederick Douglass