

## Healing the Trauma for Partners Confronting Sex Addiction



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Excerpted Material from Deceived and Intimate Treason

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*I was only married a few years, and am in my early forties today. I entered the marriage an attractive and bright woman... within four years I can't lift my head off of the pillow, I have lost 35 pounds in the past few months, I cry every moment I am awake. I feel as if I am going to die.*

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## Sex Addiction

Sex addiction is a progressive intimacy disorder whereby a person engages in a pattern of sexual thoughts or behaviors that are destructive and they feel they are unable to stop.

As with mind and mood altering substances and drug addiction, for those struggling with sex addiction, sex offers a quick mood change, while the user loses control over his or her increasingly compulsive behavior.

Like those with other forms of addictions, sex addicts construct their lives around the need for their drug: **sex**

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### Viewing pornography has been associated with:

- A decrease in interest in relationship sexual intimacy
- An increase in egocentric sexual practices aimed at personal pleasure and with little regard to the pleasure of the engaging partner
- An increase in the belief that sexual satisfaction can be obtained without affection or emotional attachment
- An increase in the belief that relationships are sexually confining
- A decrease of interest in monogamy and child rearing
- Greater dissatisfaction with their partner's physical appearance, sexual performance and sexual curiosity
- Greater number of requests for sexual practices that partners find objectionable or demeaning

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Betrayed partners consistently report that it is not the cheating itself or any specific acts that cause them the deepest pain, it's the lying, denial of their own reality, and the inability to maintain a trusting relationship.

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**Gaslighting:**  
a form of mental abuse in which false information is presented with the intent of making a victim doubt his/her own memory, perception and sanity.

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## Denial

- The pornography doesn't really bother me, it's only pictures.
- If I were more attractive he would not be doing this.
- He can't help it if other women throw themselves at him.
- Work must be his problem; if he would just change jobs then things would be different.
- If we move he will stop this behavior.

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## Rationalization

- Men will be men
- He is an honest person; he would not lie to me
- The lipstick on his collar got there when a coworker asked him to dance. He didn't want to be rude and say no.
- He's not really staring at women; he's just interested in watching people.
- He's not flirting, that's just his nature; he's a very friendly guy
- We took vows before God. He would not break his vows.
- It doesn't hurt to look at pictures (porn). At least he is not having an affair
- He told me the long distance calls were not his. The phone company just have made a mistake
- It's okay if he gives her a Christmas gift – she does work for him
- I bet the babysitter called these phone sex numbers when she was here

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## Common Reactions

- Persistently asking questions of your partner
- Searching for proof, that is, checking his/her cell phone, web history, GPS tracking
- Uncontrollable episodes of anger and rage
- Seeking revenge by telling entire family, certain friends, having own affair
- Deliberately spending money to antagonize him/her
- Willing to do anything sexually
- Punishing him/her with silence
- Secretly reading his/her recovery writings
- Sculpting self to be the perfect object of his/her sexual desire, that is, extreme dieting, cosmetic surgery, etc.
- Bingeing on food
- Self-harm, such as banging head, cutting, burning, etc.
- Compulsively watching TV or being Online
- Sleeping extremely long hours, or throughout the day
- Avoiding any discussion about what you now know
- Talking incessantly
- Continual crying
- Fearful to bring up what you both know
- Ruminating, obsessive thinking about what you picture or fantasize he/she did, what it looked like, who the partners were, and/or about revenge

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### Typical Symptoms of Repeatedly Betrayed Partners

- Obsessive preoccupation
- Hypervigilance and paranoia
- All manner of anxiety
- Disturbance in eating and sleeping patterns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression
- Forms of self medication
- Difficulty achieving sustained emotional balance
- Intrusive memories
- Shame and embarrassment
- A sense of inadequacy
- Seething resentment and outright rage

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### Level of Trauma influenced by:

- Length of time of deception
- Gaslighting/covert emotional abuse
- Type of acting-out
- Public exposure/embarrassment
- Impact on children
- Impact on finances
- Impact on health
- Previous trauma history

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### Stabilization

- They need to be heard and validated- they need to Tell Their Story
- They need to develop skills in emotional regulation

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## Benefits of Mindfulness Practices

- Reduced rumination
- Stress reduction
- Boosts working memory
- Focus
- Less emotional reactivity
- More cognitive flexibility
- Relationship satisfaction
- Health benefits such as:
  - increased immune functioning
  - reduced psychological distress
  - increased information processing speed

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## Typical Pattern of Telling

- Deny everything
- Tell what you think you can get away with
- Get confronted and tell a bit more
- Deny more

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The word **disclosure** is a therapeutic term that describes a structured conversation mediated by a professional counselor who provides both physical and emotional safety, wherein the addict shares (discloses) the extent of his or her sexual acting out behavior.

While it is emotionally painful, when it's done in this manner it offers support to both.

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### Suggested generalities to be shared in disclosure are:

- In what type of behavior was he engaged? Was the acting-out behavior extramarital affairs, prostitution, pornography, voyeurism, masturbation, fetishes, etc.?
- How long has he been acting out?
- Is there a possibility that either of you is at risk of sexually transmitted diseases; will the acting-out behavior affect your health?
- Have the family finances been impacted? How has the money been acquired and how much has been spent to engage in the behavior?
- Are there any legal issues? That includes the possibility of other children, legally binding arrangements with others, i.e. owning property with a mistress, outstanding warrants, pending court action.
- Did he engage in any behaviors with friends, family or other individuals known to you?

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### Prerequisites

- Addict demonstrating commitment to stop all acting out behavior
- Addict needs foundation in recovery
- Partner needs understanding of sex addiction, behavior not about the partner
- Boundaries for discussion agreed upon
- Both parties able to demonstrate emotional regulation
- Partner has established support
- Support is available to both before, during and after disclosures

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### Stabilization

- They need to be heard and validated
- They need emotional regulation
- They need an educational framework
- They need to know the reality of the situation
- They need assistance in problem solving immediate crisis situations

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- Boundaries will not determine their partner's behavior, but will indicate what is important to them
- Setting healthy boundaries indicates one does not have to settle for the behavior of somebody in active addiction
- Healthy boundaries reflect self-worth and reflect action versus reaction

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- Examples of Possible Non-Negotiable Boundaries**
- No sex outside of our relationship
  - Maintain your aftercare for a specified period of time
  - Financial assets are to be in my name
  - Certain family members are to be told
  - No Internet access without filtering software
  - Computer moved to central location
  - No pornography
  - No watching TV after a certain time
  - No money spent over certain amount without mutual awareness and agreement
  - No out of town business trips for a certain period
- Always best worked through with a therapist.

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Regardless of past threats, to leave or stay is a decision you want to make from a position of inner strength versus emotional overload interfering with the ability to clearly think through the situation.

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## Therapeutic Separation

1. Together you and your partner agree to a separation for a specific length of time. This is best facilitated by a therapist or counselor.
2. You will come back together to renegotiate the terms of the relationship at the end of that time.
3. Each of you has a specific plan about what and how you will be addressing various issues during this separation period.
4. You make decisions as to what type and amount of contact you will have during the separation and what specific financial and parenting responsibilities are maintained.

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## Cheap Forgiveness

An act that deepens the denial process by promoting an illusion of closeness when nothing has changed, has been faced or resolved.

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## How Can I Forgive You?

*“Cheap forgiveness is when you try to preserve the relationship at any cost, including sacrificing your integrity and safety. Silencing your anguish and indignation only silences your heart and soul. On the surface you may act like nothing is wrong, but inside you’re bleeding out.”*

Janis Spring

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*Recovery is a journey of honoring and respecting one's self.*

*It is moving from immobilization or reactivity to a life of hope, greater esteem and greater choices.*

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