

# Recommendations for Church Leaders in Helping Individuals Struggling with Pornography/Sexual Addiction

If an individual confesses that they have an issue with pornography, habitual sexually acting out, or other sexual issues, the following list of ideas may be beneficial to you as you prayerfully consider how to help the individual.

## 1. Get Specific

Often individuals with these types of issues are scared to even admit that they have an issue. As a result, they may simply touch on the issues and not provide much detail. They are carrying a tremendous amount of shame. In helping them to begin the healing process, it is very important to ask them specifically about the nature of what they are struggling with. Asking specific questions and listening carefully helps convey a spirit of compassion that can be the first step in dealing with their shame. It will also provide you with added information you will need to be best guided by the Spirit on how to help the individual.

Some of the questions that you are encouraged to ask include:

- How long have you struggled with these issues?
- When was your first experience with these issues?
- When was the last time that you viewed pornography?
- How often do you view pornography?
- What is the content of the pornography? *Some types of pornography include:*
  - **Softcore pornography** generally depicts naked or partially clothed persons in usually suggestive situations but excludes explicit sexual activity and sexual penetration.
  - **Hardcore pornography** depicts graphic sexual acts and visible penetration. Basically, it shows everything in graphic detail.
  - **Child pornography** is commonly considered pornography involving children or teenagers who are under the age of consent for sexual relations or those over the age of consent pretending to be younger.
  - **Violent, Bondage / BDSM pornography** features performers tied up or constrained, being hurt, domination and submission, sadism and masochism.
  - **Heterosexual Pornography** generally depicts two or more individuals of the opposite sex engaged in sexual activity.
  - **Lesbian or Gay Pornography** generally depicts two or more individuals of the same sex engaged in sexual activity.
- What kinds of phrases do you type into the search function?
- Have you ever experienced same-sex attraction?
- What do you view more of: Still Images (pictures) or movies?
- When was the last time you masturbated?
- How often do you masturbate?
- Have you acted out with another individual? If you have, how often and over what span of time?
- With whom have you shared that you are struggling?
- What have you tried to do in order to overcome this battle?
- What ideas do you have about how you came to struggle with these issues?

## 2. Get Help

Often times, you will find yourself struggling with how to help an individual struggling with addiction. They may continue to relapse. Telling them to “just stop it” is not helpful. They may be looking to you as the person who can “cure” them of this problem. It is important to remember that you don’t have to provide all of the help to this individual by yourself. Consider this analogy-

**First Aid** – There are some individuals who may have only recently started looking at pornography or masturbating. They may feel guilty and decide to discuss this issue with their religious leader. Through the guidance of the religious leader, the individual is able to stop the behavior and experience a change of heart. Often times, this is facilitated by helping the individual set some time specific goals such as attending church meetings, reading the Book of Mormon, stopping the behavior, etc.

**Emergency Room** - There are some individuals who may require greater help than first aid. They continue to relapse or their behaviors are much more serious. They may have been involved in these behaviors for longer periods of time. They may have tried to stop repeatedly and found themselves unable to do so. In these cases, it is recommended that the individual be referred for counseling with a qualified therapist who has experience and training dealing with these issues. Set goals with the individual to follow up with counseling in addition to the other goals that you may establish. In addition to individual counseling, the individual can be recommended to attend the LDS Addiction Support Group.

**Surgery** - There are some individuals who may require even more than individual counseling. They continue to act out despite significant consequences. They may have gotten in trouble at work. Usually their marriages are a disaster. They may have progressed into deeper behaviors. In these cases, they most likely need more intensive treatment including individual and group treatment. Some may even require a short-term inpatient program. Their spouses will likely need support and intensive counseling as well. These individuals are also highly recommended to attend the LDS Addiction Support Group.

### 3. Get Smart

It is recommended that you learn some basic information about addiction. Developing this understanding will help you to help the individual understand, as Paul said, "For [addiction] ... deceived me, and by it, slew me." (Romans 7:11). Helping them understand the nature of addiction also helps them to reduce some of their self-blame, help understand how they have lost their sense of agency, and how to get it back. An excellent resource is [www.combatingpornography.org](http://www.combatingpornography.org).

### 4. Get Quiet

Often times in our attempts to help others who are struggling, we try to tell them what to do. We tell them how to fix their problems. We tell them what they should do. Most of the time, this isn't helpful. One of the most powerful tools in supporting someone is letting them express what they need, what they want, and what they believe, and what they need to do for themselves.

Providing simple prompting statements that will lead to the individual to share more with you will help them uncover the parts of them that they need to work on. You ask a question and then LISTEN.

Some promptings may include:

- How do you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?
- Can you tell me about a time when you felt connected to your Heavenly Father?
- What parts of your life do you want to experience the most change?
- When have you noticed that the temptations and behaviors were less strong or less frequent?
- Imagine that a newspaper reporter wanted to write an article about you in five years. What would you want the reporter to honestly write about you?
- What kinds of relationships have been the most meaningful to you in your life?
- What do you believe would help you get closer to \_\_\_\_\_?
- How has this impacted your life? How has this impacted those you love?
- Have you ever felt like hurting yourself? If so, when was the last time that you felt that way?
- Do you ever have suicidal thoughts or wish that you could cease to exist?

### 5. Get Accountability Measures in Place

Frequently, because a bishop is so busy, they may not follow through very closely with the person who is struggling. Because of the shame involved with this issue, the individual may find ways to avoid having to have contact with you. It is recommended that an accountability agreement be made and kept between the two of you.

After the initial meeting with the individual, it is recommended that you set up a schedule to follow up. There is some give and take in this area, meaning that you don't want to become the babysitter, but you don't want to leave checking in entirely up to the addict either. It is recommended that you both agree on how following up will occur and who will be responsible for setting up the meetings.

When you do meet, try to avoid general questions like "How are you doing?" or "Are you doing okay?" Individuals with addiction have a tendency to sugarcoat, minimize, and gloss over issues. Instead it may be more helpful to ask questions like:

- When was the last time you acted out?
- Has your behavior increased or decreased?
- How would you rate your desire to change?
- What efforts are you putting into place to increase your chances of preventing relapse?

## 6. Get Wise

Parents, church leaders, and those who have stewardship over others sometimes use strategies and interventions that they feel will motivate (or force) the individual to change. Usually these strategies end up causing frustration for both parties and may even reduce the desire on the part of the individual to seek help or change.

Evaluate whether your strategies are improving the situation or making it worse. Is your strategy based on gospel principles? Is it based on the guidelines provided in the Church Handbook? Is there noticeable change occurring in the life of the struggling individual because of the strategies you are employing. If not, you may want to consider a different strategy. Often, through prayer, studying the guidelines and scriptures, and asking yourself how the Savior would work with this particular individual, you will find wise guidance that will be of benefit to the person.

## 7. Get them a Support System

Most individuals who struggle with addiction have walled themselves into isolation and secrecy. They have difficulty reaching out and connecting with others. They fear rejection if anyone “finds out”. Addiction is disease of secrets. You may be one of the very few people with whom the individual has ever disclosed their struggles.

It is not recommended that the individual stand up in a public forum and share their struggles, nor is it recommended that they publically share explicit details of their struggles. However, helping the struggling individual find someone who is trustworthy, loving, and ultimately non-judgmental with whom they can share their story can be incredibly healing and makes their burden easier to bear.

## 8. Encourage them to Pray

We are children of our Heavenly Father and as such are wired to be connected to him. Often that connection is lost or at least severely damaged through addiction. As you work with these individuals you can ask them:

- How often do you pray on your knees?
- How often do you pray out loud?
- How specific are your prayers?
- What gets in the way of praying?
- What would you like your relationship to be like with your Heavenly Father? How do your prayers convey that to Him?
- How effective are your prayers?

You may even want to help the individual list some of the changes that he or she would like to experience in their life and then encourage them to take these desires with them on their knees.

In addition to praying, individuals should also be encouraged to connect with Heavenly Father in other ways. These include studying their scriptures, listening to uplifting music, enjoying Heavenly Father’s creations, writing in their journals, etc.

In therapy, we call these “dailies” or the things that they need to do every day to stay connected with God. It isn’t considered a cure for their struggles, but more often than not, those individuals who start slacking on their dailies also start slipping more quickly into harmful behaviors.

## 9. Give Them a Priesthood Blessing

Most of the time, these individuals do not feel worthy of love or belonging. They often feel that God is angry with them and has rejected them. They often feel that they will never be able to overcome these struggles. They often feel hopeless, alone, and scared. Providing a blessing of healing and love can help the individual find hope that change is possible. It can enlighten their darkened mind and touch their soul. Do not discount the power of a priesthood blessing.