**Do I Have a Sex Addiction?**

**It has been my experience that most people say, "No". However, if there are more than one or multiple times in which inappropriate actions or thoughts that seem to appear, one can assume there is a problem. It may be hidden for periods of time but nevertheless are as damaging as those that reoccur often.**

**Some experts have tried to present levels on addictions, which might include:**

**Curiosity Stage
Experimental Stage
Regular Use Stage
Habitual Stage
Addictive Stage**

**However, it has been my experience that any level of inappropriate sexual behavior has no part in any marriage or ministry. Any and all inappropriate sexual behaviors not addressed or dealt with immediately will lead into further damage and destruction.**

**Due to the nature of satisfying self, it is difficult, next to impossible for one to stop inappropriate sexual behavior on their own. The act will usually be exposed when one is "caught" in the fault by another person. Then and only then, is the person forced to deal with it. This process usually involves multiple people. Professional help is extremely recommended.**

**For the sake of this outline, I am trying to outline what a sexual addiction is and interventions that must be done in order to start the restoration process. Also, as a guideline, I am addressing sexting as the addiction, which is a form of adultery. Pornography and other sexual acts may also be considered by this outline.**

**Definition of Sexual Addiction:**

**Sex addiction** is any compulsive, sexually motivated behavior that is acted out despite the negative consequences. It is also known as sexual compulsion or sexual dependency. Estimates suggest between 12 to 30 million Americans experience some kind of sexual compulsion.

Sex addiction can interfere with one’s social life, physical health, and emotional well-being. It generally does not improve until the person receives treatment.

Individuals with sex addiction can have different views on their behavior. Some people may be aware that their sexual compulsions are an issue yet feel unable to control it. They might make repeated attempts to reduce their sexual dependency but fail to make progress. Others may try to rationalize their actions. They may deny they have a sex addiction even when their behavior causes the loss of intimate [relationships](https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/relationships), family, or friends. Others may be more extraverts to hide their hidden behaviors.

**What Causes Sex Addiction?**

There is no one trait known to cause sex addiction. However, research does point to several contributing factors.

**Mood**

Sexual compulsions may be a way to cope with emotional pain or [stress](https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/stress). In one 1997 study, 96% of participants said specific moods triggered their sexual compulsions. The most common triggers were:

* [Sadness](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/sadness) and depression (67%).
* [Happiness](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/happiness) (54%).
* [Loneliness](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/loneliness) (46%).

**Brain Chemistry**

Research suggests people with sex addiction may have neurochemical differences in their brain’s reward center. Chemicals released during sex, such as [dopamine](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/dopamine) and [oxytocin](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/oxytocin), may create a "high" similar to that obtained from the use of drugs or alcohol. A person may develop an addiction to this pleasure, requiring more sex to get the same feeling.

**Hormones**

Androgen is a sex [hormone](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/hormone) that affects [libido](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/libido). When the body makes too much androgen, it may increase a person’s risk of sex addiction.

**History of abuse**

Some report a history of abuse causing the sexual addiction. But no matter the reason for this issue to occur may lie in the fact that a need is not being met.

 **The Issue of Inappropriate Texting (Sexting)**

**Sexting Defined:** Inappropriate texting to another person which includes flirting, inappropriate language or sexually graphic photographs or messages to another person. This may include provocative audio clips, suggestive selfies, or videos.

It is an incentive to start a relationship with another person outside of a normal relationship or marriage. It can be used to express one’s sexuality or fantasies. One who initiates such behaviors will increase texting to perfection to obtain one’s goals and desires. One will usually achieve a goal of sexual arousal, excitement, and adventure within the confines of not physically being there with this person but fanaticizes from a distance. If one is sexting with a minor, they can be placed on a Sex Offender Registry and face possible jail time.

Sexting is considered a form of cheating, as typically betrays the trust and intimacy within a committed relationship. In my opinion, it is simply a sexual affair with someone else outside of a marriage or normal relationship. The offender will often not feel sorry for what they have done but may express being sorry for being caught. Usually, sexting is just the tip of the iceberg with other underlying issues of pornography, sexual abuse, etc.

Sexting may impact one’s daily functioning with overwhelming thoughts of sending and receiving more messages. It will always negatively impact any marriage or normal relationship. It is often referred to as a “secret affair”.

**Phase 1 (Before and after sexting has been discovered)**

**Stop sexting anyone outside of your marriage immediately.** The damage may already be done, but the road to recovery begins by shutting down communication with the person. Tell them firmly that you want to respect your spouse and recommit to your marriage.

* Tell them something like “I’m uncomfortable with how far this has gone and want to respect my spouse. This needs to stop.” or “I can’t do this to my spouse anymore. This is over.”
* If you continue texting or sexting this person, your emotional and sexual detachment from your spouse will keep growing regardless of how you feel about your marriage.
* Delete or block their number if you don’t have a valid, non-sexual reason to speak with this person.
* Throw away or destroy any/all pictures, gifts, and other items that connected you to this person.

**Acknowledge the impact that your betrayal had on your partner.** Trying to explain or justify yourself will not make them feel any better. Own up to what you did and validate what your spouse is feeling. Staying open and receptive to each other's feelings is crucial for healing your marriage.

* Your spouse probably feels betrayed by the sexting and will naturally have a negative reaction. Let them express their feelings openly.
* Validate their feelings with phrases like “I understand why you’re angry,” “I know that I’ve upset you,” or “You have a right to feel this way.”

**Offer your spouse a genuine apology.** Even if you felt a justification for the sexting, you still must apologize for the pain and sadness it caused your partner. It’s likely they’ll stay angry or skeptical for a while, so be prepared to apologize multiple times. End each apology by reassuring them you want to stay together and fix your marriage. An apology might go like this:

* “I’m sorry I ever sent those messages, and I’m sorry that I hurt you. I want to stay with you and fix our marriage.”
* “I can’t apologize enough for what I did. I wish I had never texted them, and I’m sorry for the pain and anger I’ve caused you. I’m committed to working through this and staying with you.”
* “I understand why you’re still upset. I just want to say again that I’m sorry and wish none of this had ever happened. I’m sorry that you feel so bad because of what I did. Please know that I’m dedicated to fixing this and getting your trust back.”

**Answer your spouse’s questions about the sexting honestly.** Rebuilding trust begins by putting everything out in the open. They will probably want to know the nitty gritty details of your sexting, like how often you texted, if you sent or received any nude photos, or when it all began.

* Answer all these questions openly, even though it might make you feel uncomfortable or ashamed to fess up.
* Your spouse may want to see your phone and read the messages themselves. Let them do this or offer to show them the messages yourself as a gesture of good faith.

**Be completely open about your whereabouts and activities going forward.** You will need to put a lot of effort into being transparent to rebuild your security and get back your spouse’s pre-sexting trust. Tell them where you’re going when you leave the house, who you’re on the phone with, or who you’ve texted or direct messaging that day until they begin to feel more comfortable.

* Show your phone to your partner if they ask to check it.
* Stick to the boundaries your spouse sets for you until you mutually agree to return to your pre-sexting habits. These might be things like no texting past a certain time at night or deleting social media or messaging apps.

**Check in with your spouse frequently to keep communication open.** Talk about how they feel and try to understand their perspective. This keeps the focus on what’s going on for them and not on what you’ve done wrong. They might feel angry longer than you expect, so avoid arguments about whether they should still feel upset or not. Check in with questions like:

* “Hey, you seem kind of upset. What’s bothering you?”
* “How are we doing today?”
* “What are you feeling today? Is there anything you want to talk about?”

**Heal with the goal of forgiving yourself.** It’s common to feel anxiety, guilt, shame, regret, confusion, or embarrassment after breaking your vows of honesty, loyalty, and respect. Show yourself compassion and forgive your mistakes so you can move on with your life and be a supportive partner while your marriage heals.

* Living in a constant state of shame, guilt, or punishment won’t restore the trust and happiness in your marriage. Self-forgiveness is just as much for your spouse’s wellbeing as it is for you.

**Phase 2 (If your partner finds out before you have had a chance to tell them)**

**Be assertive and confront your partner directly about their sexting.** Ask them what’s going on and be open about where you’re coming from. Spying for more information or plotting to catch them in the act doesn’t help repair broken trust and usually ends poorly for relationships.

* Be honest and transparent about how you found out, what you know, and what you feel. It’s possible to move on as a couple, but you will need to stay assertive.
* Confront them by saying “I saw your text messages when you left your phone on the kitchen table. Is there something you want to tell me?” or “I know what you’ve been texting about with Lauren. Let’s hash it out, now.”

**Tell your partner how their sexting made you feel.** Talk about yourself and your experience instead of what your partner did wrong to open the conversation. It’s hard to stay calm during talks like these but try to express your feelings and ask questions from a place of curiosity and openness. Insults and accusations might push your partner into a defensive position.

* Wait until you’re in a good headspace to have this talk. You’ll solve the problem more effectively when you’re feeling calm rather than angry or upset.
* Open with something like, “I feel very uncomfortable about your relationship with Robert. Let’s talk.” or “I’m feeling incredibly upset and hurt. I want to understand why this happened. Can we talk?”

**Clarify your boundaries around sexting other people with your spouse.** In some marriages, partners can’t even text friends of the opposite sex but in others, they’re allowed to sleep with other people. Tell your partner where you draw the line to help them understand how big of a crisis this is for you and what they’ll have to do to regain your trust.

* Set parameters for how you want your spouse to behave going forward. Tell them what you need to feel comfortable and heal as you work through this.
* If your boundaries were clear before, then this might be a major violation of trust. If they were unclear or nonexistent, know your feelings are still valid and treat this as an opportunity to create boundaries together.

**Make sure your spouse ends things with the other person.** Request that they delete or block their number and ask to check their phone from time to time to keep them honest and accountable. This is the first and most important step your partner can take to win back your trust.

* If your partner can’t or won’t meet this expectation, it might be a sign of a deeper issue in the marriage. Consider their willingness to respect your boundaries when you’re deciding whether to stay together, forgive them, or move on.
* Try asking your partner to install a blocking or tracking app that will monitor their phone activity and contacts.

**Take care of yourself while you process your initial reactions and emotions.** Pain, sadness, grief and anger are normal emotions to experience when you experience a betrayal. The grief that follows can leave you feeling unbalanced, and it may take a long time to recover. Remind yourself to sleep, eat, and do things that make you feel good. Some productive self-care might include:

* Seeking counseling or therapy to cope with the stress.
* Spending time with family and friends without your spouse.
* Sticking to a stress-relieving exercise routine like jogging or sport.

**Work towards forgiveness to empower yourself to move forward.** Forgiving someone is not about the other person, but about freeing yourself to pursue new opportunities, grow while facing the pain of betrayal, and explore new depths of your relationship. It’s a very difficult and slow process, so take your time and show yourself compassion as you work through it.

* It’s ultimately up to you to decide how to feel and move forward. Stay open about your evolving feelings with your partner through the healing process.
* Forgiveness is hard to achieve in this context for most people. Know that your spouse is suffering as well, and the best path forward is to work together.

**Don’t forget to check in with your spouse frequently to keep communication open. (found in Phase 1)** Most offenders do not check back with their spouse, often becoming frustrated that their spouse is not coming around or not being affectionate. ***NOTE:*** it is not up to your spouse to change, 100% of the responsibility is on your shoulders. Since you caused the infidelity, broken trust, and hurt, it is up to you to try to restore and check in to let your spouse know you are interested in them as a “person” again, to find ways (yourself) to rebuild trust.

* “Hey, you seem kind of upset. What’s bothering you?”
* “How are we doing today?”
* “What are you feeling today? Is there anything you want to talk about?”

**Phase 3 (Restoration and rebuilding trust)**

**Make a plan with your partner to build better communication.** Healthy communication is key to building and maintaining a healthy, intimate relationship. Get in the regular habit of expressing your feelings towards each other, identifying triggers that lead to escalations or arguments, and deciding how to address stalemates to reduce tension and find solutions.

* Use “I” statements to share your feelings without accusing or projecting onto your spouse. For example, “I am angry at myself!” or “I am not sure what you want.” Or from a spouse’s response, “I am still angry!”, “How can I trust you anymore?” “How can I or we rebuild trust with all the lies?”
* Try disconnecting digitally when you need to communicate. Turn off your phones, computers, and TVs so you’re present with each other.

**See a marriage counselor to work through your trauma and reestablish trust.** Counseling teaches you the life and relationship skills you need to deal with difficult situations in a helpful way. See a counselor or therapist as soon as you can after the sexting affair before the problem becomes too great.

* It’s very difficult to have these issues on your own. A counselor will help you navigate your conversations so both partners feel heard and validated.
* If your partner won’t commit to marriage counseling, individual sessions can still be very beneficial to your own coping and healing.

**Work together to figure out the core issue that led to the sexting.** Both partners need to be completely open and honest about their feelings towards each other, themselves, and their marriage to identify what led to the sexting. If the core problem is not resolved, your struggle will be dragged out longer and another sexting incident could happen in the future.

* A partner might have a texting affair for reasons like low self-esteem, body image issues, sexual dysfunction within the marriage, or acting out a fantasy relationship.
* Ask each other questions like, “How did this happen? What led to this sexting? What can we learn about our relationship? How did you feel when you sexted them?”
* Try labeling the sexting as “our” incident. This shifts the emphasis from blame to curiosity and insight.
* Focus on the emotional content of the sexting (“Did you think of me while you were sexting?”) rather than specific details of the affair (“How many times a day did you text them?”).

**Commit to staying together and healing your marriage.** It’s important for both partners, and especially the partner who sexted, to express why they want to stay married since there’s a lot of doubt, insecurity, and distrust. Invest time into reconnecting and getting to know each other again.

* Try starting a new activity together like joint workouts or an art class. This will shift your focus from the sexting incident, and you’ll get to experience something new with your partner.
* Set achievable goals for yourselves as a couple to help you stay connected. For example, you could make a goal to check in with each other every day before work for 2 months.

**The Reality of Sexual Addiction Recovery**

**Reality of Re-Offending Again.** Most people do not understand how difficult recover is with this addiction. The on-going rate that many people quote is between 5%-10%, which can mean 90%-95% of people re-offend again. While this is not a scientifically proven rate, it is what is believed to be accepted.

**How long does it take for someone to recover from a sexual addition?** While the timeline for each person may vary, the entire process may take 2-5 years to recover. Most offenders become impatient during this process and give up.

**What the Recovery Process Entails:** Again, the circumstances vary from person to person, so the actual recovery process may differ between different people. In most cases, however, sex addicts go through six distinct stages on the road to recovery. These are:

* Development, which typically takes up to two years.
* Crisis or decision, which takes anywhere from a single day to three months.
* Shock, which takes from six to eight months.
* Grief, which lasts up to six months.
* Repair, which takes from 18 to 36 months.
* Growth, which lasts at least two years.

**Dysfunctional Behavior vs. Healthy Godly Behavior**

 **Dysfunctional Behavior:**

Lying, deceiving, and continuing down a path of emotional adultery with another person outside of marriage and expect things to continue well. Some adults want their "cake and eat it too" mentality and believe they are smart enough to cover all evidence/emotions without being detected.

This arrogant and self-centered behavior is dysfunctional and is an abomination in the sight of God. No matter how much we pray, attend church, or read the Bible, our actions and lifestyle must line up to the word of God.

God will never bless or approve such behavior. Look at the example of King David. Three points that is worth mentioning:

* David's behavior and actions did not stop with just viewing or lusting. His actions continue to grow. If one does not stop texting, it may lead to sexting, and then onto other forms of physical actions.
* David's sin took him much further than he ever thought it would take him. From looking (lusting) to murder (Bethsheba's husband) to David's son dying.
* His sin was exposed. The prophet Nathan told David that three things would happen because of his sin. It grew much larger outside of just "looking". He said, 1. His household would never be the same. 2. He would suffer public shame for his private sin. 3. His son would die.

Absolute Truth: Dysfunctional behaviors/actions must be stopped in the early stages or worse things will happen.

**Healthy Godly Behavior:**

We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God at different times of our lives. When we stumble and fall, it is dysfunctional to think we should stay there and continue doing the same thing. Even the Prodigal Son realized he had to get out of the pig pen. When we fall, we must be quick to "get up" and start our walk back to righteousness.

Healthy Godly Behavior is a lifestyle that is pleasing to everyone, God, your spouse, your family and friends. There is nothing healthy and Godly about hidden behaviors and sin.

Be quick to restore life, health, and fullness back into your relationship and life. Please follow the different phases I have listed above. Seek help in maintaining and learning a healthier lifestyle. You will be glad you have done this. -