

Sex Addiction Facts, Fiction, And Treatment

The Truth About Sex Addiction - What It Is

Sex addiction is an unhealthy coping mechanism where sex is used like a drug to numb out overwhelming emotions. It is NOT a characterological or a moral disorder, it's an escape when one doesn't know how to manage their tough emotions – generally, because no one taught them.

The seeds for sex addiction are generally sown in childhood, particularly in households with abuse, chaos, or rigid rules – as is the case in a lot of religious homes – where children aren't allowed to show negative emotions. So when a child feels lonely, invisible, insignificant, not good enough, etc. they do whatever they can to try and escape those feelings.

With sex addiction, the child discovers how anything sexual can help them escape otherwise inescapable feelings – even thinking about anything sexual can produce the drug that makes them feel good. And when this happens repeatedly, the brain rewires itself to create an autopilot response. Once established, that mechanism can stay quiet for months, years, even decades, until the next time the individual feels similar emotions; and when that happens, the brain hijacks them automatically.

Myths About Sex Addiction - What It Isn't

SA is about quantity – i.e., if someone wants it a lot, they must be an addict. In fact, if someone has a high sex drive and a healthy way of taking care of it, sex hasn't become a compulsion for them, they can stop having sex whenever they want, and their sex life isn't impacting other areas of their life, then no, it doesn't classify as SA.

Sex offenders are sex addicts. Sex offenders are very different from sex addicts – they're into paraphilias, they can be sociopathic without remorse, or have an antisocial personality, but they don't have the compulsive component which defines addiction; yet, many people use the two terms synonymously.

Promiscuous people are sex addicts. While sex addicts can be promiscuous, not all promiscuous people are sex addicts – this is akin to, all poodles are dogs, but not all dogs are poodles. The reason: many promiscuous people were sexually abused as children, which made them feel debased and devalued, and assuming that their sole worth's tied into sex; so when they grew up, they ended up using it as coinage to obtain love, acceptance, popularity, validation, and so on. As such, most of them are focused on performance not pleasure, and in fact may not even enjoy sex.

Someone who's cheating is a sex addict. Unless someone is a serial cheater, or has multiple affairs simultaneously, they're not necessarily a sex addict; but it seems to be the biggest area of confusion. And an affair is a choice, whereas with sex addiction, like any other addiction, it's a compulsion where a person can't quit even though they want to – the very definition of addiction.

Sex Addicts are bad people! Dr. Carnes, the leader in the field, who coined the expression Sex Addiction, who's done more research than anyone else on the subject matter, and who developed a remarkable treatment program clearly states that that's not the case.

Sex Addiction is about an unquenchable thirst for sex. *Sex Addiction isn't about sex any more than an eating disorder is about food.* What both food and sex have in common is the needs they can fulfill, above and beyond their primary purposes of sustenance and perpetuation of the species. Try to think of sex as food, so you can understand this a bit better. An emotional eater will eat when stressed, lonely, unhappy, and possibly bored, among other things. And even as they eat their way through their emotions, they know it's not a good way to cope, but they can't help themselves, and often feel a sense of guilt & self-loathing right after indulging.

Can Sex Addiction be Treated?

Absolutely, but you have to ensure that you work with a professional who's trained in treating Sex Addiction – regular therapists, general addiction therapists, and infidelity therapists may not follow a program that's been shown to work. And both parties – the addict as well as the partner – need to do recovery work to fully heal and move forward.

First Seven Recovery Tasks for Each Party

	ADDICT From Facing the Shadow	PARTNER From Facing Heartache
1	Breaking through denial.	Coping with trauma of discovery/disclosure.
2	Understanding addiction.	Managing crisis.
3	Surrendering.	Developing a plan for support & self- care.
4	Limiting damage.	Understanding nature of addiction.
5	Establishing sobriety.	Dealing with emotional aftershock.
6	Maintaining physical integrity.	Communicating effectively about addiction.
7	Getting involved in a culture of support.	Creating a Recovery Plan.

Self-Care is important in general, for both parties. At a basic level, this means that when you're stressed out, HALT:

H – If you're **Hungry**, eat.

A – If you're **Angry**, deal with it in healthy ways.

L – If you're feeling **Lonely**, reach out to someone.

T – If you're feeling **Tired**, get some rest.

Bottom line, no matter how dismantled one's life may become, and how unfixable it may seem, if both parties really want to salvage their relationship, a specialized therapist can help them get to a better place than ever!

As a sex addiction therapist, one of my driving forces that allows me to work through painful, traumatic situations is the happy endings when both parties are truly committed!