

healthier you

My Nice, Hardworking Husband... My Slightly Troubled Teen... Is He an Alcoholic? A Cybersex Addict? Or Both?

Yes, you read the title correctly. Your husband or teen could be a "Cybersex Addict." While this term may at first sound bizarre, it isn't. In fact, it's frighteningly common.

In the 1990s, newspapers abounded with "Dear-Abby" editorial questions regarding alcoholism such as "My husband couldn't possibly be an alcoholic could he?" (Followed by qualifications such as: "He drinks every day, but only with the boys after work," and "He's never been abusive or mean to me when he's drinking" and "He's hardworking, holds a steady job and brings home a regular paycheck.")

And then the final inquiries: "Am I just being paranoid about this?" "Is it possible that a person could be an alcoholic with a steady job and a loving family?" "Am I blowing things out of proportion?"

Of course, these concerns were legitimate. Upon evaluation, sometimes the problem existed. But, without an evaluation and proper testing, no help could have been offered to the individual and family in pain, and life would continue in a state of painful denial. We now know that someone can have an addiction to alcohol and still be a nice functioning person "on the outside" just like someone can have an addiction to cybersex or sex, and still be a nice functioning person "on the outside."

Just like alcoholism was once a taboo topic that gradually made its way into the light, sexual addiction is following the same course. While the talk of sexual addiction may sound like "something that couldn't happen to me or my family," that couldn't be farther from the truth.

The phenomenon of sexual addiction begins innocently. Early on, viewing pornography and participating in sexually explicit chat rooms are starting points for people who are simply curious about "what's out there" or wishing to escape the pressures of "real life" for just an hour or so. Yet these activities are extremely addictive because they provide an escape into a fantasy world of instant gratification, complete with virtual anonymity, affordability and availability. Plus, chat rooms normalize what would otherwise be considered forbidden behavior. Often, individuals engaging in these activities think, "How could what I'm doing ever become a problem when clearly no one is getting hurt?" Well, that depends.

Partners of sex addicts are often blindsided by the discovery that their spouse prefers cybersex to making love. This discovery is complicated by a complex web of emotions that both partners must work through. There is an enormous amount of pain and confusion.

Family issues surrounding sexual addiction are growing rapidly right now in America, and specifically in Florida. The National Council on Sexual Addiction Compulsivity estimates that 8% of Americans are sex addicts — that equals 21.5 million people. And 71% of people who act out sexually begin by using the internet.

So what actually is sex addiction? According to Patrick J. Carnes, Ph.D., the world's leading authority on sex addiction, "Like an alcoholic unable to stop drinking, sexual addicts are unable to stop their self-destructive sexual behavior. Family breakups, financial disaster, loss of jobs, and risk to life are the painful themes of their stories. Sex addicts come from all walks of life — they may be ministers, physicians, homemakers, cops, firemen, realtors, accountants, dentists, politicians, nurses or executives, to name just a few examples. Much hope nevertheless exists for these addicts and their families."

Most people think that these behaviors only happen at night. Think again. Studies show that

70% of internet pornography traffic occurs during the workday — between the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Are you having marital problems? Here are some warning signs that cybersex may be the culprit:

1. Your sleep patterns have changed—when you get up at night, he's on the computer.
2. He quickly closes web pages when you walk into the room and wants privacy on the computer.
3. There are changes in your sex life. He seems to have lost interest.
4. Responsibilities are neglected.
5. Credit card charges are hidden or unexplained.

Technology and the internet have been epidemically damaging to both adult relationships and to relationship formation among adolescents. Technology is disenfranchising our youth by changing the internal clock of expectation. Teens long for instant gratification and the internet allows for those who "want it now" to actually "get it now," regardless of what "it" may be. The favorite words of an addict are "now" and "more."

The latest teen craze is "SEXTING." This fad consists of teens sending nude and sexually inappropriate photos of themselves to their friends via cell phone. Additionally, teens are using social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace to send photos and sexually inappropriate comments.

Teens are naturally sexual beings and it's their job to test their limits. However, it's your job as a parent to set the limits and re-adjust the limits, age appropriately. When it comes to inappropriate behavior, what starts out for a teenager as exploration can quickly result in unanticipated (and unwanted) consequences that may ruin a teen's current and future life. Remember, while we may see potential danger, a teen caught up in cybersex and/or sexting isn't thinking much before pushing that "send" button.

All parents want peace of mind, but it's worth knowing that your kids are savvy enough to delete recent history of their internet use from their computer. We can teach you many skills to monitor phones and computers. Sound like a lot of work? Absolutely it is! You know your children best. Perhaps your teen doesn't need the strictest of rules. Where is the fine line between trust and discipline? Like most parents, you'll discover the limits you need by trial and error.

You don't have to do this on your own, our therapists/coaches will guide you in identifying that fine line. All of our therapists are Certified Sexual Addiction Therapists (CSATs) and we are currently the only certified providers on the West Coast of Florida. We also do Interventions for Alcohol, Drugs, Food Issues, and Sex Addiction at Abundance of Love and Wealth.

Proper testing and an Initial Evaluation will provide the information to determine the most appropriate type of treatment needed, if any. Don't let these issues destroy your marriage, family and/or finances. Call 941-993-0102 or 941-374-2273. ☎

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