

Maintaining Early Recovery From Sexual Addiction By Preventing Relapse

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

For those who are trying to regain control over their lives by establishing recovery from sexual addiction, there are many tips you can use to interrupt the momentum of addiction. The first steps in early recovery are to cease the acting out. This usually entails identifying the problematic behavior that you know that you need to abstain from. Many sex addicts in early recovery still have a lack of insight into the pervasiveness of their illness and still believe that the “most problematic” behaviors are “the problem”. In order to plow through more of the ego defenses, that serve to minimize personal insight, ask your significant others to tell you how they feel about your behavior--not just your obvious sexual behavior, but your relationship, emotional, spiritual, and productivity behavior. What you hear may surprise you.

Similarly, many people in early recovery believe that the significant people in their lives have no clue as to their addiction. This is often not the case. As you consider who you want to discuss your recovery with, think about who among the people you love and respect, would make a good “accountability partner”. An accountability partner is one that you ask to be available to assist you with maintaining honesty, with making appropriate decisions, and with being responsible, consistent, and reliable in your recovery activities. An accountability partner should also be available to you.

An accountability partner is a piece of overall structure that you set up for yourself. Much of the time when people relapse, whether in a behavioral addiction or a chemical dependency, they have been in a relapse process for some amount of time before using the chemical/compulsive behavior. They have made decisions along the way that has set them up for relapse. They have let down their boundaries, gone to slippery places, visited slippery people, and engaged in slippery activities.

For sexual addiction, avoidance of the “slipperies” could involve these activities listed below. Add more items to this list that you know make you more vulnerable to relapse.

- Not telling others where you are going/what you will be doing.
- Having money/other resources needed to acquire services or materials needed for acting out.
- Dishonesty, with an attitude of “it’s nobody else’s business...”
- Justifying going to slippery places (i.e., strip club, massage parlor, video store, certain websites, etc.), or interacting with slippery people (i.e., old Facebook sexting pals, old sexual partners, etc.).
- Return to pornography use.
- Hanging onto to “props” or ritual items.
- Letting up on attendance/participation in recovery activities.
- Loss of routine or structure.
- Lack of replacing the compulsive behavior with healthy living skills.

Remember that relapse is a return to old thinking, old feelings, and old behavior. If you find that you are exhibiting some of these “slipperies”, you may be in the relapse

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process. To turn it around, go back to doing the things you were doing when you were firmly in recovery. Increase those activities and add more time, intensity, or effort to your recovery. Relapse is possible, predictable, and completely preventable.

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