

The Kick-Start Recovery Programme

Welcome to the Kick Start Recovery Programme - a free resource that can help you to overcome your sex or porn addiction. Sex addiction is a serious problem that can devastate your life if you don't get the help you need. But unfortunately there is still very little professional help, especially in Europe and around the UK and what there is, is often too expensive for many people to afford. It is my sincere hope that this resource will go some way to fill that gap and be the first of many free resources.

This programme has been designed to help the growing number of people with sex addiction get fast, free help. It is based on many years of experience of treating sex addiction both as an individual psychotherapist and also through my Hall Recovery Course treatment groups that run in various locations around the UK. Unfortunately I know that this won't be the solution for everyone and many people may need additional help. Everyone has to find their own way to recovery, so if this doesn't work for you, please don't despair and don't stop seeking the help you need.

It's really important to me that this programme is genuinely useful to you and that's why I asked you to complete the totally anonymous questionnaire before downloading this programme. This will help me to gain a better understanding of the problem of sex addiction. I would also like to ask you to spend 5 minutes at the end of the programme to let me know if the programme was useful. Again, let me stress that this is completely anonymous.

From my professional experience, I know that some people can completely overcome their addiction, with minimal 'expert' help. If you're motivated to stop and your addiction is either recent or relatively mild, then this programme may be all you need. However, if you've been struggling with sex addiction for many years and you suspect that your problem is deep rooted, what this programme will do for you is highlight the areas where you need to get additional support.

Whatever your situation, please know that you can overcome sex addiction. For some people the road to recovery is a long and difficult one – but it's one that is more than worth the effort. So why not start today?

Paula Hall

About this programme

This programme is carefully structured to cover the 3 key tasks of recovery

1. **Face It**
2. **Understand It**
3. **Fight It**

In the **Face It** part of the programme you will find self evaluation tools to confirm if you have sex addiction and questionnaires to help you assess how severe your problem is. You'll also find exercises that will help you face up to the damaging consequences your behaviour has already had on your life, and consider how much worse it might get if you don't stop. You will probably find this the most difficult and painful part of the programme - but it will also give you the essential motivation to change.

The **Understand It** section is where you'll find information on sex addiction. How it gets started and also how it continues. There are also exercises to help you identify and understand your triggers and the lies your head tells you each time you act out, even though you've decided you really don't want to. You'll also get the chance to analyse what the real function of your addiction is. In other words, what is it that drives you to continue in spite of your own better judgement and what your hidden fears might be about stopping.

In the final section of this programme, you'll learn how to **Fight It**. Here you'll be asked to set your sexual boundaries and make a firm decision and commitment to the kind of sex life you want to enjoy. You'll find relapse prevention strategies that you can start using immediately as well as some thoughts and ideas for moving on.

Right at the end you'll find some useful resources that can help you in your recovery. There's a recommended reading list and also links to free online and offline support groups who can help you to stay stopped. You'll also find details of how to find local therapists in your area that specialise in sex addiction and information about the Hall Recovery Course on which this material is based.

Advice for getting the most out of this programme

You need to work through each of these tasks in turn, so please start at the beginning and work through to the end. Although it might be tempting to try and complete the programme as quickly as possible, make sure you allow enough time to fully consider your answers to each exercise. And enough time between exercises to let what you've learnt sink in. Hopefully you'll only do this programme once, so make sure you give yourself the time you deserve.

You might find it helpful to go through this resource with a counsellor or a 12 step sponsor – someone who can help you consider your responses and work through the exercises. Someone who can help you to be really honest with yourself and support you in your recovery.

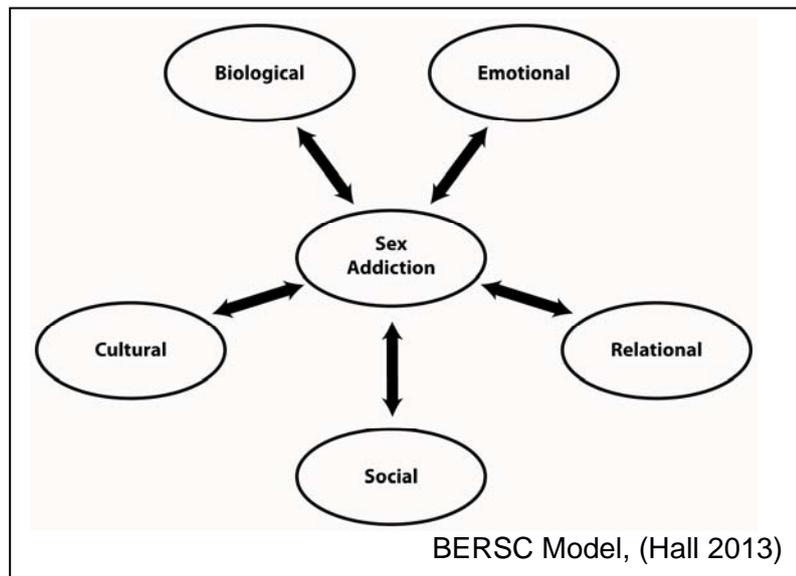
Introduction

Sex addiction is a term that's used to describe any kind of sexual behaviour that feels out of control. For many the behaviour becomes a way of managing painful feelings and difficulties in life, but unfortunately it always end up creating more problems than it solves. There are lots of different types of sexual behaviour that people can become 'addicted' to. The most common is pornography but other common ones include cyber or phone sex, multiple sexual relationships and visiting sex workers. In many respects, the type of behaviour is irrelevant – it's the impact on your life and the fact that you can't stop, even though you want to, that makes it an addiction.

Most people have tried to give up or cut down on their addiction many times but that's difficult to do if you don't understand what's driving it. Sex drive is only part of the story, and although arousal is obviously part of the pleasure, most people know there's much more to it than just that.

In my book, *Understanding & Treating Sex Addiction*, I use the BERSC model (as shown) to explain how sex addiction is driven by many different factors. In part it's **biological** - what's happening in our brains, and also **emotional** – how we feel about ourselves and how good we are at managing emotions.

It's also about **relationships** - how well we feel connected to friends, family and loved ones and also our **social** and **cultural** environment. Sex has never been easier to get hold of than it is in our techno-driven 21st century, and some cultures such as a work environment or peer group may make it even easier or even encourage behaviours that we don't really want to do.



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The most important thing to know about sex addiction is that it is real. It's not you going mad or you being a bad person. It's a health issue that affects and infects every part of who we are. It most definitely is not a moral issue that's dictated by sex hating prudes trying to tell you that porn or promiscuity is wrong. Only you can decide if you're a sex addict. Only you know if your behaviour contradicts your values and your goals in life. Only you know if it's out of control. And only you can decide if you want to stop. If you do, the first thing you need to do is **FACE IT**.

Task 1 - Face It

Am I an addict?

The first step in overcoming any problem is accepting the fact that you have one. Many of the clients who come to me don't know if they're struggling with an addiction to sexual behaviours or if they just need to get a grip. This first questionnaire is one that I use that helps people make a decision for themselves on whether or not their problem really does fall under the label of 'sex addiction'. If you've already done an exercise like this, then feel free to skip this and move on to the next section.

Take time to read the following statements and tick the ones that are true for you. Ticking more than 5 of these would indicate that you have a problem with sex addiction

1. Does your sexual behaviour have a negative impact on other areas of your life such as relationships, work, finances, health, professional status?
2. Does your sexual behaviour contradict your personal values and potentially limit your goals in life?
3. Have you tried to limit your sexual behaviour or stop it all together, but failed?
4. Are you more tempted to engage in sexual behaviour when you're experiencing difficult feelings such as stress, anxiety, anger, depression, sadness or loneliness?
5. Are you secretive about your sexual behaviours and fearful of being discovered?
6. Do you feel dependent on your sexual behaviour and struggle to feel fulfilled with any alternative?
7. Have you noticed that you need more and more stimuli or risk in order to achieve the same level of arousal and excitement?
8. Do you find yourself struggling to concentrate on other areas of your life because of thoughts and feelings about your sexual behaviour?
9. Have you ever thought that there might be more that you would be doing with your life right now if you weren't so driven by your sexual pursuits?
10. Do you feel as if your sexual behaviour is out of your control?
11. Do you currently, or have you in the past, struggled with any other addictions, compulsive behaviours or eating disorders? Such as drug, alcohol addiction, compulsive gambling, gaming, work or exercise, collecting?
12. Has anyone in your family currently, or in the past, struggled with any addictions, compulsive behaviours or eating disorders such as those listed above?

What started my addiction?

There are many reasons why someone might become an addict and additional reasons why someone might become addicted to sex, rather than, or as well as, a substance such as alcohol or drugs or another process addiction like gambling.

A common denominator in all addictions is opportunity. If a drug isn't available, you can't get addicted to it. That might sound like common sense, but when you bear in mind how easily accessible sex is nowadays and how much more accepting society is about sexual experimentation and pornography, it's easy to understand why more and more people are struggling with sex addiction. That's not to say that we should go back to the days when sex was only allowed between married couples when they wanted a baby, but like alcohol, nicotine, gambling and illegal drugs – there is still much more to be done to provide education on how addictive sexual behaviours can be.

For some people, the only reason they became addicted to sex was because it was there. And because they didn't know they could get addicted to it - this is particularly true of internet pornography. For others there are additional problems, often in childhood, that have pre-disposed them to habitually turn to sex for emotional comfort. Most commonly these are issues to do with attachment or trauma. Attachment refers to how comfortable we are with being close to others and trusting them. Trauma refers to incidences of abuse, assault, significant loss or witnessing a traumatic event whether that was as a child or an adult. For those with attachment issues in their childhood, they may have learnt that it's safer to turn to *something* in times of trouble rather than to *someone*. After all, unlike people, porn never lets you down. And someone with a history of trauma may be unconsciously using their addiction to soothe the physical as well as the emotional fall out.

The following 3 questionnaires will help you decide which category you fall into, or rather, which categories have been most influential.

Opportunity induced addiction

1. Did you have access to pornography from what you would describe as an 'early age'?
2. Did you experience encouragement or influence to be sexually active, either with others or through masturbation from parents or mentors?
3. Has internet access and broadband significantly increased your unwanted sexual behaviours?
4. Did you have easy and regular access to sexual partners, sex workers or other sexual activities, for example because of where you lived or worked, through travel or through a particular work culture?
5. Have you had the financial resources to pay for your sexual behaviours?
6. Has it been easy for you to keep your sexual behaviours hidden from others?

Attachment induced addiction

1. Were you separated from your parents or any other key people in your life when you were growing up. For example, through adoption, fostering, bereavement, divorce/separation?
2. Did you experience any significant periods of separation from your family, for example through hospitalisation, a parent working away or attending boarding school?
3. Did you experience regular threats of separation, abandonment or rejection as a child?
4. Did you experience impaired parenting, for example as a result of family illness, alcoholism, imprisonment, domestic abuse or poverty?
5. Did you experience neglectful parenting, for example receiving little or no attention, affection or affirmation?
6. Did you and your family move home more often than you would perceive as 'average'?

Trauma induced addiction

1. Did you experience any form of physical abuse in childhood, for example, excessive physical punishment from your parents, carers, teachers, siblings or peers?
2. Did you experience any ongoing emotional abuse in childhood, for example aggression, threats, name calling or bullying?
3. Did you experience any sexual abuse in childhood, for example, being touched inappropriately or being made to touch someone else inappropriately, or being made to touch yourself sexually and being watched or being forced to watch someone else being sexual or forced to watch sexually explicit material?
4. Were you ever physically or sexually assaulted?
5. Were there ever any incidents of domestic violence in your home?
6. Did you experience any traumatic losses in your childhood or adolescence, for example bereavement, sudden disability or illness of someone close to you?
7. Have you at any time in your life witnessed disturbing scenes of violence, brutality or suffering or felt fearful for your safety

If you have ticked any of the boxes in the attachment or trauma sections then this would indicate that your addiction is probably linked to unresolved issues in this area. We talk about this more in Task 2 but this might be something that you'd benefit getting additional help with, especially if it's causing problems in other areas of your life. .

Facing the impact of sex addiction

Sex and pornography addiction are often not a problem when it's secret. Or at least, the problems the behaviour causes may be easier to pass off as something else or minimise. For example, problems getting an erection and ejaculating, both common consequences of porn addiction, might not be a problem if you're single. And if you're in a relationship, maybe you can pass it off as stress or tiredness. Unfortunately the secrecy and hiddenness of sex addiction makes it easy to ignore the problems it causes, at least for a while, but as many of my clients will testify, the problems just get bigger and bigger and when the truth gets out, the consequences can be catastrophic. Not just to you and your self esteem, but to those you love too.

There are 2 questionnaires below. The first asks you to rate the risks you're taking with your addiction when you're able to keep it hidden, and the second challenges you to examine the consequences of your addiction, if, or perhaps when, it becomes known.

What is the risk of the following happening if you are <u>not</u> found out:- <i>(with 1 being low and 10 being high)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Hurting people you love										
Not developing a relationship										
Spending less time with people you love such as a partner, family and friends										
Spending less time on health and fitness, hobbies and personal growth										
Wasting money										
Compromising your work or career										
Catching an STI										
Developing a sexual dysfunction, such as difficulties getting an erection, reaching orgasm or going off sex with a partner										
Damaging your self esteem										

<i>What is the risk of the following happening if you <u>are</u> found out:- (with 1 being low and 10 being high)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Hurting people you love										
Losing your partner										
Having less contact with your children or other family members										
Losing friends										
Losing your home										
Losing your job										
Reducing your disposable income										
Damaging your self esteem										
Wanting to end your life										

Looking back at your answers to these two questions – how does this make you feel? How do you feel emotionally – scared? upset? embarrassed? ashamed? stupid? guilty? And how do you feel physically – sick? knotted up? tearful? tense? The actual and potential consequences of sex addiction are huge and never worth the momentary buzz you get from acting out.

Some people have found it helpful to make a note of the feelings this exercise evokes somewhere where they'll see it whenever they're tempted to act out. For example on a post-it note stuck to the computer screen or typed into their phone or written onto the back of a business card to be kept in their wallet. Next time you want to act out, dig out these feelings and ask yourself if it's worth it.

Before we move onto Task 2 there's one other question I'd like to ask you. How does your current behaviour fit with your values and the life you want to lead? Most people value honesty, integrity, respect and love. Most aim to live a life that is honest, respectful and loving where they feel confident and loved. How does your behaviour fit with that? Does it help you to lead the life you want? Does it honour you and the values you hold most dear? If it doesn't then commit again today to stopping – for good.

Task 2 - Understand It

Congratulations you've completed Task 1 – the toughest part of this programme. By now you should be much more aware of the extent of your problem and feel increased motivated to overcome it. The next step is to understand it – not just understand sex addiction generally, but understand *your* sex addiction.

The function of sex addiction

Sex addiction, like all addictions, serves a function above and beyond the obvious. An alcoholic doesn't drink just because they're thirsty or because they love the sensation of getting drunk. An alcoholic also drinks because it helps him or her escape difficult emotions and falsely create positive ones. We all know that alcohol can be used to 'drown your sorrows' and also to give you 'Dutch courage'. These are examples of escaping a negative and creating a positive. Sex addiction is the same.

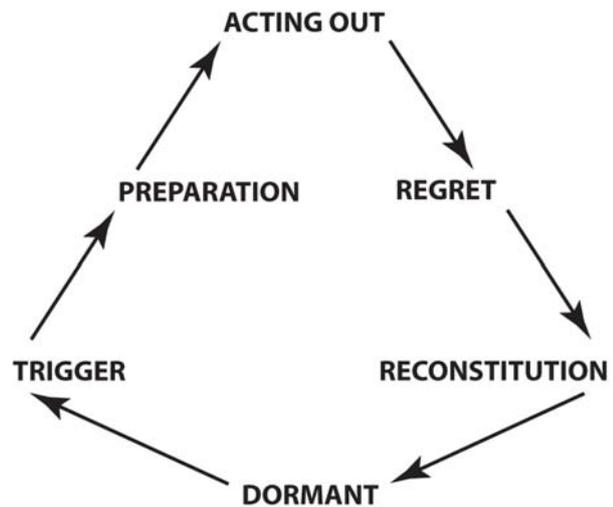
Have a look at the list below and tick the boxes that are relevant to you.

My sexual behaviours help me escape feeling:	<i>(tick)</i>	My sexual behaviours help me to feel:	<i>(tick)</i>
Lonely		Powerful	
Isolated		Affirmed	
Angry		Wanted	
Frustrated		Valued	
Nervous		Desired	
Vulnerable		Cared For	
Powerless		Calm	
Bored		Relaxed	
Depressed or Sad		Invigorated	
Anxious or Stressed		Independent	
Unloved		In Control	

Completing this exercise will have helped you begin to identify the emotional function of your addiction. If you didn't tick anything in the first column, ie if you don't think you have any difficult or painful emotions, it may be that your sexual addiction is so effective that you've managed to numb them all. Needless to say, this is not a good thing because in place of these emotions you will undoubtedly be forced to live with regret and shame. In Task 3 we'll look at how you can let go of regret and shame and manage other difficult emotions more healthily – and also how you can get the positive emotions without having to act out. But first you need to understand how these unmet needs and unresolved issues drive you to act out.

Below is what's known as the Cycle of Addiction. The principle of the cycle is that once you get on, you can't control it. All addicts find themselves on a cycle and the key to stopping it, is recognising your personal cycle and getting off. You can find a lot more information about this in my book, *Understanding & Recognising Sex Addiction*, but in brief it's in the **Dormant** stage at the bottom where the function of your addiction lives.

The function encompasses a combination of unmet needs and unresolved issues that your addiction unconsciously fulfils. The next stage is when you hit a **Trigger** – something that makes you think about acting out. After the trigger there's a period of **Preparation** when you'll be making excuses to yourself and justifying why you're going to act out. Then you'll **Act Out** – whether that's looking at porn or visiting a sex worker or sleeping with someone or whatever it is. After that you'll feel **Regret** and tell yourself you're not going to do it again and during the



Reconstitution phase you'll be covering your tracks and putting into place the relapse prevention strategies that so far have failed you. The horrible thing about the cycle of addiction is that it becomes so predictable. Many people with an addiction describe it as the merry go round that they can't escape. The good news is that you can. You can't control the cycle itself, but you can get off it by recognising your unmet needs and identifying your triggers.

Identifying your Triggers

Triggers come in all shapes and sizes. Some are unavoidable and in your face and others can hit you like a steam train when you're completely unaware. Broadly speaking there are two types – emotional triggers and environmental. In other words, things that are going on inside of you, and things that are happening on the outside. Triggers are often linked to the unmet needs in the dormant phase. For example, if you discovered in the last exercise that one of the things you get from acting out is a way of avoiding feeling lonely and enjoying a feeling of being affirmed and wanted, chances are that being rejected by a friend or partner or finding yourself alone and bored is likely to be a trigger. Similarly if you use your porn addiction as a way of soothing anger or anxiety, a frustrating day at work may be one of your triggers or being nervous about an upcoming job interview. Once you've identified your triggers you can begin to take control over them by either avoiding them or developing strategies to manage and fight them.

Next you'll find 3 sets of questions that are split into the 3 categories of Opportunity induced, Trauma induced and Attachment induced addiction. Take your time to work through each list and tick all the ones that are relevant to you.

Opportunity related triggers

These are the triggers that are most likely to occur for each category of addiction and relate to lifestyle and general emotional management. Tick as many as appropriate and use the space provided to add any others that you might think of.

Environmental

- Empty house
- Unprotected internet
- Having time on your hands
- Having money in your pocket
- Being abroad
- Being in cities or certain places
- Being away from home
- Seeing an attractive person
- Being flattered or flirted with
- Being with certain people
- When using alcohol or drugs

Emotional

- Feeling bored
- Feeling stressed
- Feeling angry
- Feeling sorry for yourself
- Feeling ill or tired
- Feeling unfulfilled
- Feeling entitled
- Feeling ashamed
- Feeling sexually aroused

Other _____

Attachment related triggers

These triggers relate to feelings generated in relationship to others. Tick as many as appropriate.

- Getting into an argument with a loved one
- Feeling overwhelmed by responsibility and/or duty
- Feeling trapped by another's needs
- Feeling unable to confront a loved one
- Feeling unable to communicate your needs and/or views
- Not having enough time for yourself
- Feeling rejected
- Feeling lonely
- Feeling left out
- Feeling unvalued
- Feeling attacked and/or defensive

Other _____

Trauma related triggers

These triggers connect to how external stresses and anxieties are managed. Tick as many as appropriate.

- When life is particularly stressful
- When life feels out of control
- When life feels empty and meaningless
- Feeling fearful
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling anxious
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling empty or dead inside
- Feeling agitated and restless
- When you feel vulnerable
- When you feel you must be strong or fight
- When your body feels tense
- When your body feels numb

Other _____

If you've struggled to complete this exercise or if you're worried that you might have forgotten some things, take a few minutes now to think back over the last few times you've acted out. Let yourself go back in time and remember what else was going on in your life around then? What was happening the day before? The hour before? Where had you been? Who had you spoken to? What were you feeling? Learning to recognise triggers takes time and unfortunately it often takes a few relapses before key emotional and environmental influences can be pinpointed.

The next step in the Understanding task is to do an honest appraisal of what's going on in your head after you've been triggered. Again, picture the scene. Something's just triggered you and you want to act out. You want to look at porn or visit a sex worker or go online and start looking for someone to have sex with or start looking around your place of work for a possible new sex partner. Like many you may have two arguing voices in your head, such as an angel on one shoulder saying "don't do it, you'll regret it, this isn't right for you" – and a devil on the other giving you reasons to go ahead anyway. Identifying that voice is crucial for stopping it. What does your devil say? How does it twist your thinking to enable you to act out? How does it screw with your brain so effectively that you go against what you believe in and what you want? These demonic strategies (I don't mean that literally!) are also known as cognitive distortions. Take a look at the next exercise and see if anything is familiar.

Recognising cognitive distortions

Below is a list of the common cognitive distortions that allow the addiction cycle to continue. Read the examples and then write down the thinking pattern that you most commonly use.

1. Rationalisation - this is when you make excuses for your behaviour using logic and reason. For example – *“acting out is ok because I haven't done it for ages which proves it isn't an addiction”* or *“it's not possible to masturbate without pornography”*

2. Justification - when you use excuses to defend your behaviour. For example, *“I can't help it when I'm drunk”* or *“no-one could resist acting out when it's handed to them on a plate”*

3. Minimisation - this is a thinking strategy for not taking full responsibility for your behaviour or staying in denial. For example, *“I'll only be online for 10 minutes”* or *“it's not as bad as....”*

4. Magnifying – this is the opposite of minimisation so rather than making light of something, an event or circumstance that is relatively unimportant is given greater status. For example, *“I have had an absolutely horrendous day and I am so stressed that I can not cope so I need to act out”* or *“my partner has ridiculed and abused me and therefore it’s ok for me to soothe how I feel”*.
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5. Blame – this is when someone else is blamed for your behaviour. For example, *“if my wife was more into sex I wouldn’t need to do this”* or *“if my work was more fulfilling I wouldn’t act out”*
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6. Entitlement – this kind of thinking often comes either from grandiosity or from self pity and is when you find reasons to tell yourself you deserve to act out. For example *“I need to act out because I didn’t have much sexual experience when I was younger”* or *“I work extremely hard to support my family and deserve the occasional treat”*
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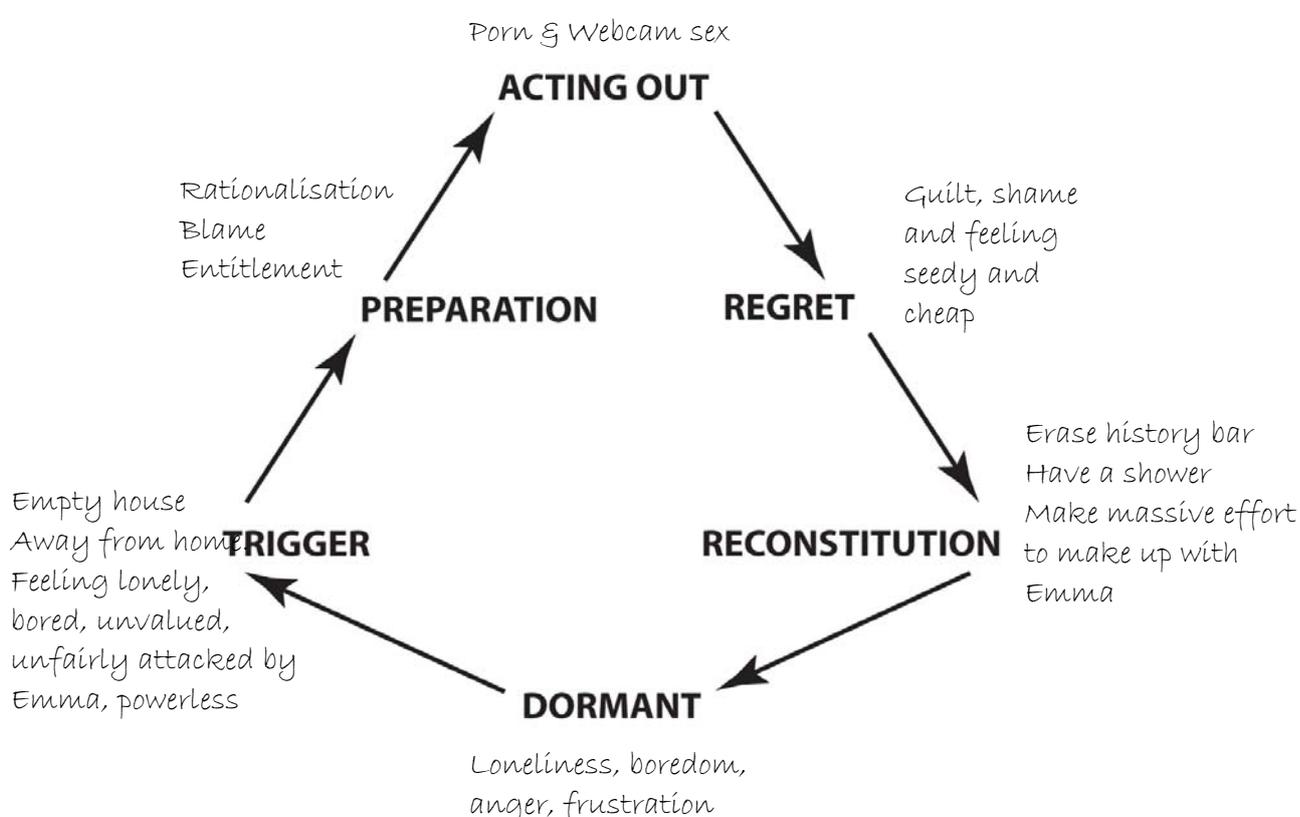
7. Normalisation – this is like generalisation and makes acting out seem commonplace. For example, *“all men look at pornography”* or *“it’s instinctive to want to sleep with a beautiful woman”*.
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8. Denial - this is perhaps the most common cognitive distortion and simply involves blocking out reality. For example, *“if my partner never finds out there will be no problem”* or *“there is nothing wrong with acting out”*.
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9. Helplessness – this can be a particularly powerful cognitive distortion, especially for those with low self esteem. For example: *I can’t help acting out, I have never had any will power”* or *“I can’t help it, I’m a sex addict”*
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By the time you've completed this exercise you should understand more about your individual cycle of addiction. Hopefully you'll have recognised in Task 1 some of the reasons in the **Dormant** phase of why you act out. You hit a **Trigger**, or perhaps a series of triggers and then your cognitive distortion kicks in and you make the necessary **Preparations to Act Out**. There's no exercise here to get you identifying what happens in the **Regret** and **Reconstitution** phases as most people are bitterly aware of the pain of guilt and shame and the desperate attempts to get back to 'normal' again, but you could go back to the consequences list on page 7 if you want some help in identifying these. The problem is though that until you've addressed those underlying issues and worked out how to better manage your emotions you can't get back to 'normal' – you just go back into the **Dormant** phase until a **Trigger** comes and sets you round the cycle all over again.

Before you move on to Task 3 you might find it helpful to summarise what you've learnt so far by writing it out onto your own personalised cycle of addiction. Below is an example.



And so we come to the end of Task 2. You've faced the fact that you've got sex addiction and you understand it a lot better than you did. However it may be that during the process of trying to understand your addiction more, you've actually found yourself with more questions rather than less. For example, maybe it doesn't make sense to you that loneliness is such a big trigger when you generally view yourself as a confident and independent person. Or perhaps there are things that happened in your childhood that you think are part of the problem that haven't been fully explored. Every individual is unique and consequently it's impossible to give complete and thorough answers in a resource like this. If you need more help, please do get a copy of my book, *Understanding & Treating Sex Addiction*, which has a lot more information or come on one of the Hall Recovery Courses. You'll find details of these and other resources on the last page.

Task 3 - Fight It

Are you ready to fight? Are ready to really, really fight your addiction? And are you ready to keep on fighting until you win? Completing the following exercises and sticking to a relapse prevention regime will definitely help you win the fight - but it's going to take self determination and commitment – especially if you've been struggling with addiction for a long time. Getting into recovery is not the tough bit – staying there is. But you can do it - if you want it badly enough.

This first exercise is one that you might manage to complete in just a few minutes or you might need to take a few days to think about it. It's an exercise to help you think about how the key areas of your life will be when you've beaten your addiciton.

My life without sex addiction

My relationship with my partner, or prospective partner, will be better because:-

My relationship with my children will be better because:-

My relationship with my friends will be better because:-

When I'm no longer dependent on sex, my work will benefit because:-

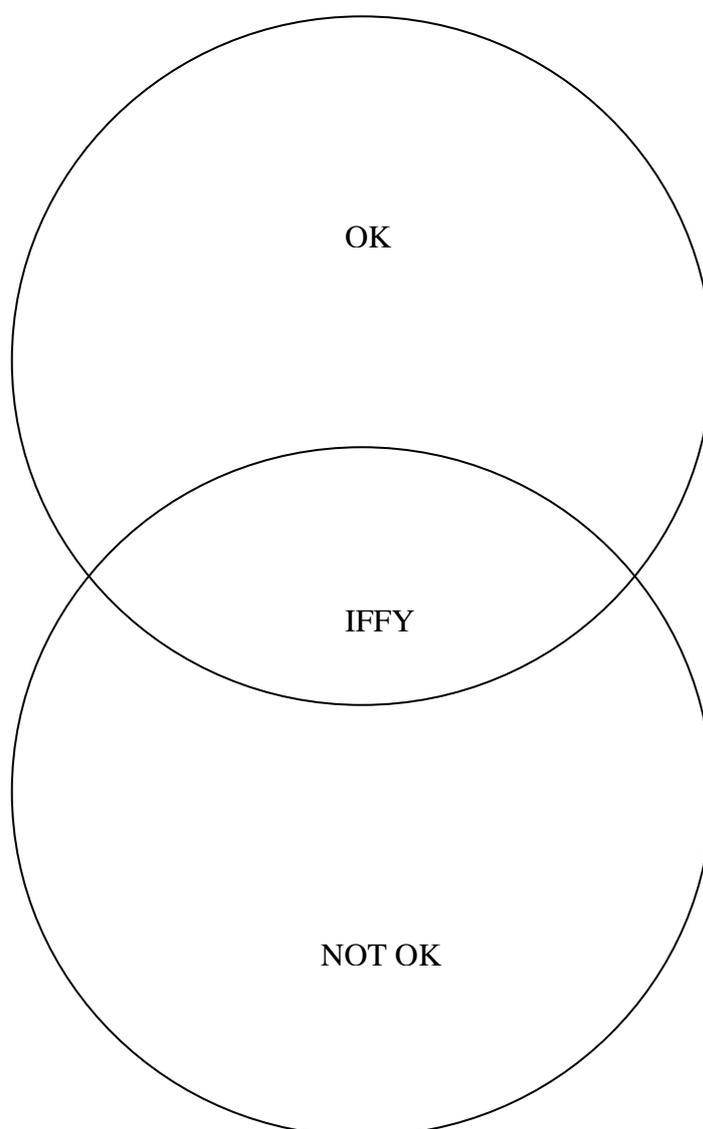
When I'm no longer dependent on sex, I will enjoy my leisure time more because: -

Hopefully this exercise will have inspired you to fight – not just to overcome your addiction but to get the life that you want. A life that is free of addiction and guilt and shame. A life that is relaxed, happy and fulfilled.

The next step in fighting your addiction is to decide exactly which of your sexual behaviours are positive and satisfying and you want to continue, and which belong to your addictive behaviour that you want to stop. Unlike drink or drugs, sex addiction is not about total abstinence. You are still a sexual person and hence you will continue

to have a sex life. That means you need to decide what you want that sex life to look like.

The next exercise is based on one used by Sex Addicts Anonymous and is known as the 3 circle exercise. The top OK circle is where you write all the behaviours that fit with your values and you are completely comfortable with. The bottom NOT OK circle is for the behaviours that are definitely outside of your value system. The overlap IFFY area is for those behaviours that you're currently unsure about. You might be unsure because you don't know how you feel about it or whether it would cause a problem for a partner. You should also list here any behaviours that, although OK in themselves, might lead to the NOT OK circle. For example, someone whose addiction has been to visiting sex workers may not have an addiction to internet pornography but they may put internet porn in their IFFY middle circle because they know they are much more likely to be tempted to visit sex worker sites when online.



When you've completed the exercise your next task is to make a once and for all decision about the activities in your IFFY box. Relapse is often caused by indecisiveness or kidding yourself that something is OK when really it isn't. If there's anything in your IFFY box that contradicts your values, could cause you significant

harmful consequences or does not potentially add joy to your life, then it should be in the NOT OK box. If you genuinely can't decide then talk to a 12 step sponsor, therapist or close friend and make a final decision about what's right for you.

Once the circle exercise has been completed and a decision has been made about what is OK and what is NOT OK, the next step, if you've not already done it, is to stop – and stay stopped.

Reprogramming the brain

A lot of people say that stopping an addictive behaviour is simply about choice. They say that all it takes is willpower. To a certain extent, this is true, but what a lot of people don't realise is that repeated patterns of behaviour become etched on our brains until they feel like an automatic and almost instinctive response. Therefore to change those behaviours you have to erase what's been programmed into your brain and re-wire it – and that's a tough choice that takes a hell of a lot of willpower.

For example, if you eat chocolate every time you're stressed, you'll create a neural pathway in your brain between the emotion of stress and the desire for chocolate. Over time that pathway will become stronger and stronger so that every time you're stressed you'll automatically associate it with the reward of chocolate. If you want to give up chocolate there are two things you need to do. Firstly you need to not reach for chocolate no matter how stressed you get so that the stress/chocolate neural pathway gradually dies and secondly you'll need to create a new neural pathway such as stress/apple. Not as appealing I know, but also not as damaging.

Your brain has become programmed to act out when you feel one of your triggers and if you've been acting out for many years, it may be that the programming is so deep and automatic that it barely reaches your conscious awareness. It's like a train that is stuck on just one track. From now on you need to change that. Whenever you experience a trigger you need to force your brain to think about, or even better, 'do' something else. In other words, to switch tracks. Your thinking train will try to head down the usual track, heading for the same crash, but with all your willpower you need to redirect it

onto a new track – one that's heading somewhere else. Preferably somewhere positive and rewarding in a healthy way. For example, do some exercise, go somewhere beautiful, make a healthy snack, listen to music, read or recite something uplifting, meditate, phone or see a friend. If you're not able to physically do anything then visualise yourself doing it. This takes discipline and repetition, but it really does work in time. An excellent resource for ideas and support from others who've been helped by reprogramming their brain is available at www.yourbrainonporn.com.

Porn Protection

If your problem is with internet pornography then the most important relapse prevention strategy is to prevent access. That means installing blocking software on your computers and your router to block any wireless devices. Cancel adult channels on the TV and get a blocker for your mobile phone. If you're a computer wiz who can get round these kinds of strategies then cancel your internet subscription at home and start using cyber café's or the local library. And change your mobile phone for an old brick that doesn't allow adult aps or internet access. If you work from home and need the internet for your job, then you'll need to get shared public office space where you can't access adult sites. Some of this might seem like extreme measures but if you're serious about giving up your addiction and turning your life around, this is what it will take.

One very simple way of making reprogramming easier, is to avoid as many triggers as you possibly can. Unfortunately not all of them are avoidable, but at least make recovery easier for yourself by eliminating the ones that are.

Avoiding emotional & environmental triggers

A key element of relapse prevention is planning. By thinking ahead about your personal circumstances and lifestyle, you can work out where and when you're most likely to hit triggers and avoid them. For example, if you know that anger is a trigger for you and you tend to get frustrated in traffic then either take the train or make sure you always leave enough time for a journey. Or if you know that arguing with a partner is a trigger for you then sit down together and get to the bottom of the issue or if that's not possible get some couple counselling. A common trigger for many people is simply having the opportunity to act out. For example having too much free time on your hands or spare cash in your pocket. Or being alone in the house with internet access. Again, these are situations that can be avoided if you plan ahead and ensure you're never putting yourself in temptation's reach.

The following exercise is one that I use in my Hall Recovery Course that encourages people not just to think about the temptations, but also the times that are helpful. Doing it in a group can be useful as you can learn from other people's experience, but it's still a worthwhile exercise if done alone. Take time to complete it thinking of as many emotions and situations as you can that either hinder or help your recovery.

	Dangerous to Recovery	Supportive of Recovery
Emotions		
Routines & Events		
People & Places		

Learning to R.U.N.

Unfortunately some triggers are unavoidable. For many people, seeing an attractive woman or sexual image on the street or in the media, being flirted with or being confronted with an unprotected PC while alone can be difficult times to negotiate. Someone with an attachment induced addiction may inevitably experience times when they can't avoid difficult feelings within relationships and those whose addiction was trauma induced may find periods of significant anxiety or loss challenging. In these instances sometimes the only thing you can do is RUN. Quite literally this means get out of the situation, and get out fast. Whether that means leaving the house, the office, the hotel or whatever it is. Get away from the opportunity immediately. In addition it can be a useful acrostic to remember:-

- **R**emove yourself immediately from the situation - don't let yourself flirt with temptation for even a second more than you have to - get out now.
- **U**ndistort your thinking – this will *not* make you feel better, one more time *does* matter, you *do not* deserve this, you *do not* want to have to lie again.
- **N**ever forget what you have to lose – you made the decision to stop being a sex addict because it was ruining your life - that fact has not changed.

Learning to RUN is perhaps the single most important relapse prevention technique there is. I have heard countless stories of relapse when this simple principle had been unheeded. If a trigger is ignored, minimised, flirted with or indulged, it will become stronger and stronger. Imagine an energy saving light bulb. Like a trigger, when it's first switched on the light is dim and perhaps barely noticeable, but leave it and it will become brighter, leave it longer and it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore and a trigger can become so bright that it blinds out everything else. Immediate action is always the best policy.

It's an unfortunate reality that most people with addiction will at times 'slip up'. If that happens, then don't kid yourself that it's ok to go on a binge 'cos you've already failed. You haven't. Pick yourself back up, read back over the work you've done on this programme and get yourself back on track again. If you continue to 'slip up' or if you experience a full relapse then you might want to consider getting some additional help. There's a list of resources on the last page.

Although triggers can be painful and difficult to manage, it's important to recognise that they can provide essential clues to the underlying function of the addiction. Furthermore, successfully managing triggers can create positive self esteem and deepen commitment to recovery. Someone who has never been tempted during recovery often has less self confidence than someone who has survived temptation.

Pulling out the roots of addiction

Overcoming sex addiction is ultimately about developing a new way of managing life. If you remember back on page 9 we talked about the function of addiction. How sex addiction becomes a way of managing difficult emotions and the stresses and strains of life. Therefore to completely overcome the problem, what you need to do is find healthy ways of managing difficult emotions and the stress of daily living. Simple strategies include things like looking after your body through regular exercise and healthy eating and doing what you can to ensure your job is something that's rewarding and satisfying. And also working on your relationships with friends, family

and your partner to minimise conflict and maintain companionship and intimacy. For some people these changes are relatively straight forward, but for some the problems go deeper.

The way we manage emotion and the way we feel about ourselves and our relationships is often rooted in previous experiences. Our experiences of other relationships and friendships and also our experiences in childhood when our identity and emotional intelligence and resilience was first being formed. If you have found yourself working through this programme and ticking items under the Attachment or Trauma headings, then this is more likely to be the case for you. Problems that go back to childhood are often best resolved by talking to other people who can provide a different perspective as well as empathy and support. You may have trusted friends or family you can talk to or you might find it easier to speak to an independent counsellor or therapist. Often the biggest block people face when they think about getting help to overcome sex addiction is the very thing that keeps the cycle of addiction spinning – and that's shame.

Dealing with Shame

Someone once said that shame is to sex addiction what oxygen is to fire. Shame is perhaps the most damaging consequence of sex addiction as it robs people of the power to seek the support and love of others that they so desperately need. Shame can drive people further into their self destructive behaviours as they increasingly feel this is all they deserve. Shame isolates and drives the behaviour deeper and deeper into secrecy. It is often only by recognising that you are not alone in your addiction and it is not a character deficiency or evidence of irresolvable psychological problems that you can really begin to claim your right to recover and move on with your life. That takes a lot of courage, but when you reach out to others and share your problems and difficulties and find that you're respected and valued, then you can let go of the shame that binds you to your addiction. This is the very reason why group work is such a common component of addiction recovery, whether that's a self-help group such as 12-Step or a treatment programme such as the Hall Recovery Course. Overcoming the fear that these types of programmes create is actually one of the key resources for recovery as they break through shame and replace it with self confidence, self respect and autonomy.

Moving On.....

And so we come to the end of this Kick-Start Programme. Task 1 - **Face It** is a task that can come to an end and Task 2 - **Understand It** is one you feel more confident with, even though your understanding will deepen over time. But Task 3 – **Fight It** is one that you will need to continue to do, at least over the coming months, and for some people, for the rest of your life. But if you're struggling, remember that you don't have to do it alone. Although there are still limited sources of help that situation is gradually changing. Do take a look at the resources that follow and find out what's available within your area.

I do hope that this has been a helpful resource to you and before you move on completely in your life, please, please take a few minutes to complete the 5 minute survey to let me know if, and how, this programme has helped you. This is totally anonymous and will help me to continue to develop the programme to help others.

Many thanks – and warmest wishes for an addiction free future.

Further Reading & Resources

Books

Cruise Control – Understanding Sex Addiction in Gay Men, Robert Weiss (*Alyson Publications Inc*)

Don't Call it Love - Recovery from Sexual Addiction, Patrick Carnes (*Bantam, New York*)

In the Shadows of the Net – Breaking Free from Compulsive Online Sexual Behaviour, Patrick Carnes, David Delmonico & Elizabeth Griffin (*Hazelden*)

Out of the Shadows – Understanding Sex Addiction, Patrick Carnes, (*Hazelden*)

The Porn Trap - The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems caused by Pornography, Wendy Maltz & Larry Maltz (*Harper*)

Understanding & Treating Sex Addiction – A Comprehensive Guide for People who Struggle with Sex Addiction and Those who Want to Help Them, Paula Hall (*Routledge*)

Untangling the Web - Sex, Porn and Fantasy Obsession in the Internet Age, Robert Weiss, Jenifer Schneider (*Alyson Books*)

Psychotherapy, Counselling, Support & Treatment Services

ATSAC - Association for the Treatment of Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity - www.ATSAC.co.uk. *The UK's professional association for sex addiction professionals provides a register of therapists specialising in sex addiction treatment.*

IITAP (International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals) - www.IITAP.com. *An American based organisation founded by Dr Patrick Carnes that provides a register of therapists around the world specialising in sex addiction.*

SAA (Sex Addicts Anonymous) - www.saa-recovery.org.uk *FREE*
Peer support groups around the UK for sex addicts following the 12 step principles.

SLAA (Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous) - www.slaauk.org *FREE*
Peer support groups around the UK for sex addicts following the 12 step principles.

The Hall Recovery Course - www.thelaurelcentre.co.uk
A recovery course for sex addiction developed by Paula Hall in the UK, both weekly and residential. Available around the UK from private therapists and Relate Centres.

Recovery Nation - www.recoverynation.com *FREE*
A recovery website that provides online recovery tools for sex addicts, partners and couples along with expert coaching and community support

www.yourbrainonporn.com *FREE*
A science based website that provides information about the impact of pornography and recovery advice for those whose porn use is a problem