



porn and your husband

A RECOVERY GUIDE FOR WIVES

about this ebook



www.covenanteyes.com

1.877.479.1119
1525 W. King St.,
PO Box 637
Owosso, MI 48867

Copyright © 2021

Covenant Eyes Inc. Screen
Accountability is a trademark
of Covenant Eyes, Inc.

All rights reserved.

This ebook does not provide a diagnosis or treatment of any type and is not a substitute for psychiatric advice. Please consult with a healthcare professional or licensed counselor for treatment.

You are free to distribute or print copies of this ebook to anyone you choose. As a courtesy, email us at resources@covenanteyes.com and let us know you are doing this so we can keep you informed of other similar resources.

To distribute this ebook electronically, we ask that you share the page: <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/porn-and-your-husband/>

For more information about sharing our materials electronically, see: www.covenanteyes.com/permissions-policy/.

table of contents

Introduction

help! he's looking at porn! 5

what am i going through?

Section 1

common questions 8

Section 2

**3 stages of recovering and moving
towards forgiveness** 17

what do i do now?

Section 1

the next steps for recovery 21

Section 2

having productive conversations 23

Section 3

rebuilding trust through boundaries 26

Section 4

screen accountability and blocking 34

Section 5

finding a counselor 37

table of contents

Section 6
the God who hears 42

additional resources

Section 1
books for you 46

Section 2
books for your husband 48

Section 3
software and virtual challenges 50

Section 4
endnotes 52

help! he's looking at porn!

Anger. Betrayal. Mistrust. Loneliness.

Maybe this is the first time you've caught him using pornography. Maybe you've caught him many times and have finally reached the breaking point. Maybe he's even gone so far as acting out and having an affair. Maybe he's belligerent, insisting, "it's no big deal" or "it's your fault I need it." Or maybe he claims to be repentant but doesn't seem to be taking steps to stop, or despite the steps doesn't seem to be making any progress.

By viewing pornography, your husband has betrayed your trust and marital vows. Right now, your emotions are probably dominated by alternating feelings of anger, helplessness, and numbness, and your thoughts are likely dominated by his use of pornography. Recovery may seem impossible. Approximately 70% of wives dealing with a husband's betrayal fit the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. These symptoms can include:¹

- + Hypervigilance, such as actively looking for things that might be sexual triggers for him (lingerie ads, attractive women, etc.)
- + Nightmares

- + Obsessive thinking
- + Fear
- + Replaying the initial discovery
- + Trouble sleeping
- + Depression
- + Anxiety

No matter how you feel right now, **recovery is possible for both you and your husband**. At Covenant Eyes, we've heard the stories of countless marriages that were restored and transformed.

This will not be an easy process, nor is there a quick fix. This guide is just the beginning of your journey and is designed to help you understand why your husband uses pornography, as well as outline the pathway to recovery and restoration. To truly restore your marriage, it will require hard work from him to quit a habit that likely started when he was a kid, and it will require hard work from you—healing from your own feelings of betrayal and trauma, as well as establishing loving boundaries that protect you and your children and also help support and motivate him as he breaks the cycle. Long-term, the recovery process will involve other people: accountability partners, who can lovingly call him out when he slips up and watches porn again and encourage him to victory, and licensed counselors to guide you both through the healing process. This guidebook is here to act as a handy reference throughout all steps of the journey. At Covenant Eyes, we'll be here for you and your husband every step of the way.

**what am i
going through?**

common questions

Why does he look at porn?

There are a few things you need to understand about your husband's heart and his use of porn. The first is that men tend to be visually stimulated, and pornography offers unlimited access to naked women. Pornography also offers a fantasy world where people can imagine themselves being desired by eager and seductive women. Over time, as your husband watches more porn, his virtual harem can seem more appealing than face-to-face intimacy with you.

Your husband may also have developed a habit of porn use that started long before he met you. Many men were exposed to it at a young age. If your husband is Gen X or older, he likely stumbled across a copy of *Playboy* in someone's dresser or was shown a copy by a friend or something similar. If he's a millennial or younger, he may have stumbled across it online as a child or teen. One study reports that 93% of boys are exposed to porn online before the age of 18.² This early exposure almost inevitably leads to a struggle with pornography into adulthood.

This lifelong struggle has a neurochemical basis. It doesn't take long for pornography to start rewiring the brain. From childhood, it may have been rewiring your husband to desire the hormonal rush from porn instead of sex with you. The chemical vasopressin, which is released during the sexual act, bonds the man to his sexual partner.³ With repeated pornography use, he has bonded to images on a screen. In other words, he likely formed a strong sexual bond with the variety of online porn long before you entered the picture. Even if your sex life hasn't suffered, he may be struggling with lusting after your body instead of treasuring you for yourself and wanting you to do things he saw in porn.

Some men become so dependent on porn that it becomes a behavioral addiction. Much like a drug addict, men entrenched in pornography will do anything for their fix, including sacrificing what should be most dear to them.

There are likely other contributing factors, including a poor bond with his parents that led him to feel unsafe in sharing about his struggles, or even possible sex abuse as a child. A counselor will be able to help him identify and work through these issues.

In all of this, remember two things:

1. Your husband would struggle with pornography regardless of whom he married. His use of pornography is not your fault.
2. His neurochemical bond to porn is not an excuse for him to keep using porn, but it does mean that it will not be an easy process for him to quit porn and bond to you instead. But you and your marriage are worth the fight.

Read the ebook *Your Brain on Porn*, available at <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/your-brain-on-porn-1/>, for more details about how pornography has rewired your husband's brain.

Myth: Using porn is common, and that makes it okay.

Fact: Pornography use is common. It's estimated that 51% of *all* Americans—men and women, all generations—seek out porn at least occasionally.⁴

However, this does not make it morally okay. As Dr. William Struthers explains, “Just because something is a cultural norm does not make it morally right or wrong, good or evil.”⁵ In fact, our society deliberately values women for more than just sexuality and reproductive capabilities. Pornography, however, leads to the objectification of women as sexual objects, which actually makes it culturally reprehensible.

Why does he prefer porn to sex with me?

Some wives report that their husbands prefer porn to sex with them—sometimes even to the point of turning down the wife when she offers it. There are a few reasons for this. First, some men crave respect and measure their own worth in terms of adequacy. Your husband might fear really being known because it will result in you discovering his defects. In these cases, porn and masturbation may feel like safer alternatives to him than sex with you because he knows that the women in porn will never say “no.” They will never discover his inadequacies, and he never has to worry about meeting their needs.

There's a neurological side as well. We talked about the chemical bond your husband may have forged with porn in the previous section. To those who have bonded to porn like this, the "intensity" of the experience of surfing porn (created by a huge but damaging neurochemical hit) becomes what they crave. In other words, you, as just one woman, cannot provide the same experience or excitement as surfing through thousands of images and videos of naked bodies—nor should you.

Even if he wants to be intimate with you, he may not be able to. Increasingly, young men report experiencing erectile dysfunction with their wives or girlfriends because porn has literally rewired their brains to be only turned on by variety.⁶

It is not your responsibility to "become enough" for him. In fact, if you try to recreate the porn experience for him, it will only reinforce the addictive neural pathways. Instead, your husband needs to rewire his mind to make *you* his standard of beauty and desirability again. You do not need to compete with porn; rather, your husband needs to heal.

Myth: Watching porn isn't the same as cheating.

Fact: Pornography enables people to find physical satisfaction outside their married relationships. Dr. Phil McGraw says, "It is an insult, it is disloyal, and it is cheating."⁷ Luke Gilkerson writes, "It is engagement with a digital prostitute despite one's vow to forsake all others."⁸

Is this my fault?

People struggling with ongoing addictive behaviors such as pornography almost always exhibit distorted thinking and a

distressing lack of empathy. Some of the most common cognitive distortions are minimizing, rationalizing, justifying, and blaming. For example, many men will claim that if their spouse were prettier or thinner or more open to sex or less of a nag, they wouldn't need to turn to porn. Worse, this sort of blame-shifting is taught in a number of Christian self-help books and even from the pulpit. In many cases, men are treated as animals unable to control their response to sexual imagery; if the husband cannot control his sex drive, then the burden is placed on the wife to be both modest and sexually enticing enough to keep him interested.⁹

Even if your husband hasn't said any of those things, you may be wondering them about yourself. This decrease in self-esteem is common after a betrayal; a 2015 study found that 96% of the 73 female respondents reported that their body image had been negatively impacted by the discovery of the betrayal. When asked to rate their pain, around their damaged body image, on a scale of 0 to 100, 70% rated it above 50. Many of these women were already years into their healing journey.¹⁰

If your husband is trying to blame you, understand that he is trying to justify his addiction and simultaneously protect himself from the shame that accompanies sexual sin. If he is not ready to take responsibility for his own behavior, "he will say anything to convince [his wife], and even himself, that he does not have a problem. Blaming [her] is an easy way to save face," explains Ella Hutchinson.¹¹

As you both work at recovery, your responsibility is *not* to become his new sexual addiction. You're not even responsible for his

healing. It is more healthy and helpful for both of you if you show him an unwavering positive belief that he is better and stronger than his urges and is capable of showing self-control over his own body, and to find someone else to come alongside him as his ally through Covenant Eyes.

Myth: Pornography helps spice up your sex life.

Fact: Porn actually decreases sexual satisfaction. Porn and masturbation enable people to gratify themselves instead of finding fulfillment with another person. Porn makes reality seem extremely boring.

A study published in the *Journal of Sex Research* stated that for men, frequently viewing pornography was correlated with lower satisfaction with sex and relationships.¹² Another study published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* found that after even moderate exposure to video pornography, people feel less satisfied with their spouse's sexual performance and physical appearance.¹³

Eventually, many men get to the point where they can no longer perform without imagining themselves in a pornographic situation. Alexander Rhodes, founder of a popular porn recovery group, notes a high correlation between pornography use and erectile dysfunction among young men. He says, "Studies show between a 600% and 3000% increase in erectile dysfunction among young men since the emergence of Internet pornography."¹⁴ Dr. Judith Reisman explains, "If [a man] can't make love to his beloved, if he has to imagine a scene in order to actually achieve the heights of completion with this person, then he's no longer with his own power, is he? He has been stripped, he has been hijacked, he has been emasculated, he has in effect been hijacked by *Playboy* or *Penthouse* or any of the materials that followed."¹⁵

Does forgiveness mean forgetting?

As Christians, we are called to forgive one another. You probably know the passages: we forgive because Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32), and we are to forgive “seventy times seven” times (Matthew 18:22)—in other words, so many times that we lose count. So should you forgive your husband for his porn use, even if he’s unrepentant? Yes, absolutely. It is better for your long-term spiritual and mental wellbeing. That said, true forgiveness—forgiveness from your heart, rather than from a sense of cold obligation—will take time and does not mean that you should tolerate the behavior in the future.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you work toward forgiving your husband:

- + Forgiveness, especially of betrayal, is not an event. It is a process that requires grieving your pain and deliberately deciding to set aside the desire to retaliate. (Note that retaliation is different than following through on stated consequences.)
- + You may have built up layers of anger and bitterness, possibly over the course of years. Before you can get to the point of forgiveness, you may have to work through these emotions first. (A licensed counselor can help.)
- + Forgiveness does *not* mean you should just handwave future porn use. In fact, just allowing it to continue would be unloving to him. You should set boundaries, such as installing Covenant Eyes on all his devices, and enforce consequences when boundaries are crossed. (We cover boundaries on page 26.)

Ultimately, trust should only be given to those who have earned it. A repentant husband can rebuild that trust, though it will take time.

Is this it for my marriage?

Sometimes, despite a wife's best efforts to fight for her marriage, the husband refuses to give up pornography and shows no signs of moving towards repentance. Unfortunately, some couples do choose divorce. Before considering divorce, there are many factors to consider: your children (if you have any), your religious beliefs about marriage, and your support system. Do not make this kind of decision alone. Find trusted counselors to help.

However, countless marriages have recovered in spite of the husband's use of pornography or even an affair. This will require significant work from both you and your husband. You will need to set boundaries that will re-establish your sense of safety and security during this time. When he violates one of these boundaries, be prepared to follow through on the consequences you have promised (see "Rebuilding Trust Through Boundaries" on page 26 for more information). You will also need to seek counseling and support to help you recover from the trauma his actions have caused your marriage. Your husband will need to take whatever steps necessary to break free from pornography. This will likely involve putting Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability software on his computer and smartphone, as well as seeking counseling and personal support for himself.

Myth: You should have seen the signs.

Fact: There are signs that men could be using pornography, such as a decreased interest in sex or a push for sexual acts that may be uncomfortable for you. However, Ella Hutchinson reminds us that successful marriages are built on a foundation of trust, and most porn users are very good at deception. Believing in your husband is healthy. His lies are unhealthy.

There is hope after porn.

Every day, Covenant Eyes hears stories of wives who have restored their marriages after their husbands' pornography use. We have gathered four of these stories together in the free ebook *Hope After Porn*.

Download it at https://learn.covenanteyes.com/hope-after-porn/?_ga=2.216075542.1641535406.1635777028-1324642048.1634054780

3 stages of recovering and moving towards forgiveness

Now that you have discovered your husband's pornography use, the next few months—and even years—are going to be difficult. The recovery process will be slow.

Because of that, you need a general roadmap to understand what recovery will look like. On the bad days, remind yourself that there is an end; you just may not be able to see it yet.

Just as there are five stages to the grieving process, researchers have identified distinct phases to recovery from betrayal trauma. The Association of Partners of Sex Addicts Trauma Specialists (APSATS) has identified the phases as the Safety and Stabilization phase, the Remembering and Mourning phase, and the Reconnecting phase.¹⁶ (We also incorporate elements from an older model by Kristina Coop Gordon and Donald H. Baucom.¹⁷)

Safety and Stabilization Phase

In this first stage, you will try to understand why the betrayal occurred, such as whether this was a habit from childhood or whether a traumatic event in the past makes your husband fear intimacy with you.

You will experience trauma symptoms that keep you emotionally, mentally, and even physically in flux. Feelings may include fear, hurt, anger, numbness, and disbelief. (These feelings in and of themselves are neutral; your responsibility lies in how you control them.)

- + Your biggest need is to be and feel safe. You may need help identifying what will help you feel that way.
- + You may behave in ways that don't feel normal, especially while you seek safe spaces to express your rage, sorrow, and fear.
- + You may feel or even act like a "bad" Christian as you wrestle with issues like why God allowed this sin into your marriage.
- + You may need help establishing (or re-establishing) barriers and boundaries (such as sleeping in a different room).
- + You may need help processing your emotions, especially negative ones, without condemnation from others or even yourself.

Remembering and Mourning Phase

- + You will begin to grieve the loss of life as you knew it.
- + You may tell and retell your story as you work to make sense of it.

- + You may still be triggered at times, but you will also probably feel bolder and more willing to fight for your rights than you used to.

Reconnecting Phase

- + You will begin moving forward with a new set of beliefs about your marriage and start putting the initial trauma of discovering your husband's porn use behind you.
- + You will come to terms with what forgiveness means for you and how it is connected to reconciliation with your husband.
- + You may be required to make changes to your relationship with your husband so that it can continue (or end, if necessary).
- + You may need help understanding what God is telling you about the future of your marriage, especially if your husband is not moving toward reconciliation. A licensed Christian counselor or a good friend can help you discern this, but do not let yourself be pressured into a decision. God may lead one woman to end her bad marriage and call another to stay in it. The future of your marriage is ultimately between you and God.
- + You may reframe your story from the perspective of a survivor and a thriver.

Note that traversing these stages is not a linear process, nor does it guarantee your marriage will be healed. These steps are intended to help you understand where you are as you respond to your husband's porn use.

what do i do now?

the next steps for recovery

Your husband's recovery is ultimately his choice. If he chooses not to change his behavior and work to restore your trust, it is not your fault.

There are steps you can take to encourage him toward reconciliation, and you certainly still play a role in his recovery. Before you begin the process, however, remind yourself (and your husband) of these vital truths:

- + Your husband is responsible for his porn habit. **Not you.**
- + Your husband is responsible for his lies and secrecy. **Not you.**
- + Your husband is responsible for making changes in his habits. **You are not responsible for fixing him.**
- + Your husband is responsible for developing new behaviors that you deem trustworthy and trust-building. **You cannot do this for him.**
- + You are responsible for communicating to your husband **what trustworthy and trust-building behavior looks like to you**—and then taking note of those behaviors when they are present.

- + You are responsible for communicating to your husband **what hurtful behavior looks like and how you plan to react to protect yourself**—and then following through with consequences when necessary.
- + You are responsible for **seeking help for yourself** so you can cope with debilitating and negative emotions.

having productive conversations

For many women, one of the first challenges to reconciliation is in relearning how to communicate productively. Many wives are tempted to lash out in pain and anger. This, however, is usually unproductive for both people and may cultivate a sense of toxic shame—the belief that he is horribly broken and beyond hope. (In fact, he may have turned to pornography because of this. See “Why does he look at porn?” on page 8 for more details.)

As you talk to your husband about this problem, it is important to respond to his problem in a way that denounces his wrongdoing without feeding into his toxic shame.

- + Do **recognize when he is pushing your buttons** (like when he says he wouldn’t need porn if you were more attractive) and disconnect from them. This may involve deliberately choosing not to respond when he makes statements like this. You may also find it helpful to repeat reaffirming truths to yourself. (If you are Christian, for example, you may want to memorize Psalm 139:14 and repeat it whenever he attacks your appearance.)

- + Do **recognize lying and hiding is part of your husband's addictive cycle**—in part because he fears what others (including you) will think of him. Tell your husband you know this and that you desire to have open conversations with him. Tell him, “I want you to be open with me about your struggles, and when you tell me, I will likely be upset initially. Let's agree to this: I will work on not lashing at you, and you will work on being open and honest with me.”
- + Do **recognize it's his problem to solve**. If he claims that he looks at porn because of something you will or will not do, remember that he is trying to justify his problem as a defense mechanism.
- + Do **share your feelings constructively**. This isn't about a shame session but rather about helping him understand how his pornography use makes you feel. For example, you may say something like, “I feel betrayed and angry when I find out you have looked at pornography. It makes me feel like something is wrong with me.”
- + Do **present a positive belief in your husband**. Calling him a horrible person will simply reinforce toxic shame. Telling him you believe in his ability to face his addiction, take responsibility for his actions, and then rise above this challenge will give him hope and encourage him to break free from it.
- + Do **give yourself grace when you do lash out** (and ask for his grace if you do), especially early on in the recovery while you're still dealing with the shock and trauma of his porn use. Remember, in the Safety and Stabilization Phase, you might behave in ways that feel unfamiliar and uncharacteristic of yourself while you try to figure out how to handle new information. Do not use his failures as an excuse to lash out or take revenge, but do not be surprised when you do. It is part of your grieving process.

- + Do **be ready to talk about the next steps he should take**. You may want to hand him specific resources. Point him toward a counselor or 3-day intensive to help him get to the heart of his pornography use, and be ready to talk through steps he can take to remove temptation from his computer or smartphone. At a minimum, this will likely involve installing Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability to monitor his devices (see page 34 for more details).
- + Do **not promise to keep his secret for the sake of your marriage**. While you should be discerning about who you talk to, he will not break free from his struggle if it's just the two of you.

rebuilding trust through boundaries

Often, when trying to repair a relationship broken by pornography use, one person feels responsible for all of the healing and ends up resenting it, while the other person doesn't take on enough responsibility and becomes self-centered and controlling.

To avoid this or correct this in your own marriage, it's vital to establish relational "boundaries." Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend describe a boundary as a personal property line, the line where you end and someone else begins.¹⁸ A boundary defines what is your responsibility (your feelings, attitudes, choices, and behaviors) and what is your husband's responsibility.

According to one study, the top boundaries adopted by couples include:

- + Attending counseling (81%)
- + Adopting technology accountability like Covenant Eyes (77%)
- + Limiting media viewing (71%)
- + Ceasing acting out behaviors (71%)¹⁹

Boundaries like these provide concrete ways for your husband to avoid relapse. They also allow you to step back and trust that he is working on his own healing without you policing his efforts. As you see your husband following through with the boundaries that have been set, it will give your heart reasons to trust him. Consider these words by Vicki Tiede in her book, *When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography*.²⁰

“You will choose to trust your husband when you are ready. Don’t worry—trusting and forgiving are not the same thing. Rebuilding trust will probably take much longer than it will take to forgive. You will know it’s time to trust when your heart helps you to choose to believe that he will make the right choices. His behaviors will become your trust barometer.”

The following boundaries are designed to get you started. Whatever boundaries you choose to set, make sure you communicate them clearly to your husband.

Physical Boundaries

There are times when physical separation is important. This is especially true early in the recovery process when both of you may be emotionally volatile and while he is working on rebooting his body and his brain.

Intentional sexual abstinence: Early in the recovery process, most counselors recommend a period of abstinence for 45-90 days. This is important for you both: it means that neither of you can

use sex as a weapon against each other; it will help him reboot his body, and it will give you time to watch for signs that he is serious about rebuilding genuine intimacy. During this time, encourage him to pursue intimacy with you in non-sexual ways.

Exiting volatile situations: Remove yourself from the room when you notice things getting heated. Choose not to enter into a volatile situation. Say, "If you speak to me that way, I will need to leave the room."

Third-party mediation: Consider asking a trusted friend, mentor, pastor, or counselor to serve as a mediator. Say, "I have spoken to _____, and they have agreed to help us work through our difficulties because I don't know how best to deal with this. I would love it if you would agree to this, but you must decide for yourself."

Physical separation: Personal space and time away are important. Depending on the state of your marriage, this may be as short as a few hours, an afternoon, or a day to think through things. It may involve sleeping in a separate bedroom for a set period of time to help you avoid the negative emotions that come with sleeping next to him. Or, if things become abusive or unresolvable, you may need to ask him to move out of your home (or move out yourself). This is not giving up on your marriage but is about putting distance between yourself and the person who is constantly violating your trust.

When should you resume sexual intimacy?

Most couples benefit from a period of sexual abstinence of at least 45 days, though a true reboot will usually take 90 days, or perhaps longer. Your husband has likely been using sex to *disconnect* from the world around him instead of connecting with you. This period should be used to repair that connection by rebuilding intimacy in other ways.

Once you've reached the end of that first period of abstinence, sit down with him and re-evaluate whether you're physically and emotionally ready to be intimate again. If he continues to violate your boundaries, or if you suspect that resuming sexual intimacy will set him back, you may need to extend that period of abstinence.

It is also possible that despite your husband's active pursuit of recovery, you still find you are not ready to resume intimacy with him. If so, you may want to work with a counselor to see if there is some deep, unhealed trauma or abuse in your own life that is acting as a barrier to your relationship.

Please note that you should never tolerate physical or sexual violence from your husband. If you are experiencing domestic violence, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at thehotline.org or call 1.800.799.SAFE (7233).

Accountability Boundaries

Believe your husband's behavior, not his words or promises. The only way for him to establish healthy behaviors and rebuild trust is to become accountable for his actions, demonstrating to you and others that he wants to change and is changing.

Early on, during the establishment of boundaries, accountability can feel like a policing behavior. Remind both him and yourself that "catching him" is not the goal. You are not your husband's mother or babysitter. The goal of accountability is openness. The more open he is, the less you will feel the need to snoop, and the more you will feel you can trust him.

While you have the right to know as many details as you feel you need about his recovery, you should also remember that you don't have to be the one to hold him accountable. Instead, a counselor or a few friends you both trust may be the better choice; they will be able to call him out for his choices, and you will have room to heal.

Accountability software: Ask your husband to download Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability on all his devices. Covenant Eyes will send periodic, highly blurred screenshots of his activity to an ally of his choice. You may also want to lock down specific apps on his phone or even have him trade in the smartphone for a non-internet-enabled phone. Since your husband's porn use may have spilled over into the lives of your children, add Covenant Eyes usernames to monitor them as well.

Financial and technological transparency: Ask your husband to make his cell phone, bank statements, email accounts, and credit card statements available to you.

Accountability and Boundaries for the Whole Family

Talking about porn with your kids isn't easy and it's normal not to feel prepared for it! No worries—we can help. Download the free ebook *Confident* to learn how to assess where your kids are at, to handle tough discussions, and bring them to healing.

Download it at <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/confident/>

Full disclosure: Consider getting a professional counselor to do a guided therapeutic disclosure between you and your husband. This is especially true if your husband uses porn compulsively. Ella Hutchinson explains that without this step, husbands will often keep hiding, either lying outright or only telling partial truths. A guided disclosure session will help him move toward a lifestyle of full honesty.

Recovery: Ask your husband to seek out counseling, a support group, or an accountability group. This will be critical for him to overcome his porn habit.

Check-ins and transparency: Ask your husband to tell you about the steps he is taking to recover. Feel free to ask him questions: What is the format of the group you are attending? What do people talk about? Are you building any good friendships in the process? What do you and your therapist/counselor talk about? What are your triggers? How do you manage them? Early on, you may also need to ask him to let you know when he slips; long-term, though, it may be healthier for you to trust the counseling and accountability process for that level of information. Regardless, remember that you have the right to decide what you need to know about his recovery.

Avoiding triggers and temptations: Ask your husband to avoid triggers and patterns that may open the door to temptation. For instance, you may need him to limit overnight travel, go to bed at the same time as you, cancel certain streaming services, or turn off the Xbox by 9:30 p.m.

Setting Personal Action Items

You may find that you need to set additional boundaries beyond those listed here or set specific tasks for yourself. One big one is to seek personal counseling; a licensed counselor will help you find emotional healing regardless of whether your husband also chooses counseling or not.

In addition, counselor Mark W. Gaither recommends creating personal action items in response to two questions:

- + “If my husband refuses to seek help and continues his current pattern of pornography use, I will...”
- + “If my husband earnestly seeks help for his habitual use of pornography, I will...”

For the former question, boundaries may include physically removing yourself from a situation. For the latter, commit to working on your relationship. For example, as he works to rebuild trust, give him trust in return.

Building Positive Hobbies

Early in the recovery process, your husband may feel like he’s being deprived of not just porn but a lot of good things as well. Instead of letting him focus on the negative aspects, encourage him to explore positive hobbies that give him life. For example, maybe you’ve asked him to limit his time playing video games since late-night gaming sessions turn into a trigger for him. Encourage him to start a weekly strategy board game night or build LEGO sets with the kids instead.

Learn why this matters and get other ideas in our free ebook *Hobbies and Habits*, available at <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/hobbies-and-habits/>

As he is working on being honest and open with you, do the same for him. As you see him growing, learning, and improving, tell him what you see. If this issue has harmed your physical intimacy with him, tell him when you think you are ready to be intimate with him again.

Enforcing Boundaries

There are two important things to keep in mind when it comes to boundaries. First, **you must follow through with consequences when boundaries are crossed.** If he blames you for something that isn't your responsibility, leave the volatile conversation. If he chooses not to show you trust-building behavior, do not give him your trust. If he refuses to honor your physical boundaries, put more distance between you and him (move out of your bedroom, move out of the house, etc.), and do not back down even if he begs or claims he will fall apart without you.

With that said, **remind yourself and your husband that boundaries are a good thing.** They are not about getting revenge, being the porn police, or carrying around a “porn stick”—bringing up his transgression every time there is conflict. For you, boundaries are about structuring your relationship so that you feel the enormous freedom of avoiding responsibility that isn't yours, and so that you feel the great control of taking responsibility for the things you can do. For him, boundaries provide a clear pathway for him to rebuild broken trust and restore intimacy with you. Within these boundaries, love and trust can bloom again.

screen accountability and blocking

The availability of pornography exploded with the advent of the internet and only got worse with the introduction of smartphones and tablets. Psychologist Al Cooper described the temptation to view online pornography as a Triple-A Engine: it is accessible, affordable, and anonymous.²¹ By addressing even one aspect, like the secrecy and anonymity of scrolling on the phone, you dramatically reduce temptation.

Installing Screen Accountability software is vital for your husband's healing. First, it protects others in your home—like your children—from pornography. Second, it is a way for your husband to be proactive about being honest with others about the temptations he faces.

Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability takes random and frequent screenshots of device use and analyzes those images to determine whether they contain explicit material. Then, before leaving the device, the images are blurred to protect private information and minimize graphic imagery. A representative handful of the blurred

images are then selected and sent to an ally. Screen Accountability provides holistic insight into what we actually look at on our screens and provides talking points for your husband and his allies.

A blocking feature is included as part of your Covenant Eyes account and can be customized. When enabled, it automatically blocks known pornography domains and provides protections most people desire, like Safe Search on Google and Bing and YouTube Restricted Mode.

Helping Your Husband Choose an Ally

Successful use of accountability software depends on picking the right allies and having regular conversations about technology use. When considering someone, you and your husband should ask yourselves these questions:

- + Do you both trust him?
- + Does he share your religious/personal values?
- + Is he in a similar life stage? (If you're married with kids, you probably don't want him to be a young bachelor.)
- + Will he encourage your husband to change and grow?
- + Will your husband actually listen to him?
- + Will he ask the tough questions, like how often your husband stared at other women this week, or what led him to look at porn?
- + Would he be willing to let you know about major issues if he felt it necessary?

Should You Receive Your Husband's Reports?

Receiving your husband's reports might be one of the trust-building boundaries you establish. This is your choice. This can have many positive outcomes. Your husband will be more likely to think twice before he clicks on a questionable link. In addition, you might appreciate it as a sign of openness and transparency in your marriage.

This can also have negative outcomes. You may not want to receive a constant reminder of the temptations your husband faces online. This might place a very unhealthy strain on your marriage or unintentionally make you feel like you've been put in a mothering role.

Before deciding to receive your husband's reports, we recommend spending lots of time in prayer and introspection to determine whether it would be healthy for you to see them. You may also want to talk the decision through with a friend or counselor.

If you do choose to receive your husband's reports, don't be the only one who does. Your husband shouldn't lean on you as his counselor or the person who grills him about his reports every week. Your husband needs another man or group of men to do that.

finding a counselor

One of the most important things to do is to seek professional advice and support, both for yourself and your husband. No matter how much research you do or how many friends you poll, no advice can beat that of a trained counselor. They will be able to help you both deal with deeper traumas and provide practical, concrete strategies and next steps for your marriage.

Choosing a Counselor

If you choose to look for a licensed counselor, the American Association for Sex Addiction Therapy (<https://www.aasat.org>) or the International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals (<https://www.sexhelp.com>) are good places to start. Many counselors offer phone or online sessions, so you will not necessarily be limited to options in your area.

If you've never sought counseling before, the options may be overwhelming. If you are actively involved in a church or religious community, your first reaction may be to approach your pastor for help instead. Unfortunately, not all ministers are trained for this situation. Before relying on your ministry leader as your primary

counselor, ask whether they have specific training or experience. If they do not, ask if they have recommendations for counselors who share your faith.

You may also turn to a Biblical counselor for help and advice. Biblical counselors have many strengths and can provide spiritual insights and keep you pointed toward God, but a lack of certification programs or oversight means they may not be trained to provide the concrete healing you and your husband need.

Regardless of which route you pursue for trained help, you may need to test out a few different counselors before finding the right one. Sheila Gregoire provides an excellent list of questions to ask specifically of biblical counselors²²; we have adapted them slightly to be more applicable regardless of the type of counseling you seek:

What is your education or experience with dealing with pornography use in marriage?

Some biblical counselors undergo very specific training, but others may have very little experience or knowledge of the issue. While the Holy Spirit may still use them for good, they may also cause undue stress based on misapplied scriptures. Conversely, some trained, licensed counselors may not believe that pornography is harmful. This question should help you determine whether the counselor will be helpful to you on a basic level.

What is the spiritual role in psychological disorders? What is your opinion on the use of antidepressants or psychiatric medication?

Biblical counselors sometimes over-spiritualize physical problems. Gregoire explains, "We know that the evil one does plague people and causes confusion, doubt, and depression. But sometimes we do that to ourselves, too, and sometimes we have biological imbalances in the brain that also do that. If you see everything as a demonic attack and reject any other causes of psychological disorders, then that is a red flag."²³ You also don't want a counselor who does not recognize the spiritual implications for you or your husband. If your counselor doesn't at least appreciate the concept of sin, you may want to look for a different one.

What is your definition of a healthy marriage? What should a wife do if she feels that her husband is ignoring her legitimate needs?

If you are or were active in a church, you may have heard of, or even agree with, the concept of male headship and biblical submission in marriage. Unfortunately, some people (including some pastors and biblical counselors) take what is intended to be a beautiful picture of Christ's love for the Church and turn it into a false theology of male dominance to the point that the wife is subservient to the husband. Gregoire, for example, points out that they may define drawing healthy boundaries as sin.²⁴

On the other hand, some counselors may paint a picture of a healthy marriage that goes against what you believe. For example,

suppose you are trying to restore your marriage and will only treat separation or divorce as a last resort. In that case, you do not want a counselor who advises divorce quickly for less serious matters.

Under what circumstances have you recommended (or would you recommend) divorce?

As we just mentioned, you do not want a counselor who overzealously recommends divorce, but you also do not want a counselor who *never* recommends it, even in the case of domestic violence. Gregoire explains, “Even if you are not considering a divorce or separation, you need to see a counselor who is primarily concerned for your safety.”²⁵

Intensives

Many men or couples have benefited from intensive onsite, one-on-one, or couple-to-couple counseling. These highly personal workshops may last from a weekend to a full week and include a tailored action plan. In some cases, residential programs (usually exclusive to men) may last as long as nine months to provide enough time for a full reboot.

If you choose to research an intensive program for yourself, your husband, or both of you, consider the following questions:

- + What do I hope to get out of it? (e.g., a guided discussion between you and your husband; a reboot just for him, etc.)
- + Does this intensive align with my values? (The questions for counselors may be helpful here as well.)

- + What will this cost? (Consider not just price, but time away from work, babysitters for the kids, etc.).
- + Now that the cost is calculated, can you afford *not* to do it? (Even if your husband has to quit his job and move into a months-long residential program, the long-term value of a happy, healthy marriage may outweigh the short-term costs.)

the God who hears

Are you familiar with the story of Rachel and Leah?²⁶

It's a messy story, and not one that pastors tend to preach. Jacob loved Rachel and slaved for her for seven years. Then, the morning after his wedding, he looked at his bride for the first time, and behold, there was Leah! His uncle had married him to his older daughter instead of the younger one. It's often presented as an example of Laban's treachery and Jacob's deep love for Rachel, and not much more.

But Leah is a deeply empathetic woman. Unwanted and unloved by Jacob, Leah was forced to compete with her own younger sister for her husband's attention, even going so far as to bartering a fertility drug to her sister in exchange for a night with her own husband. As Rebecca Reynolds puts it, "Leah could have walked in front of the television naked and her husband wouldn't have seen her. No, Leah is the utilitarian wife, the one who runs to the CVS at 11:30 p.m. to pick up a gallon of milk."²⁷

In other words, Leah's story is profoundly unhappy, and she is not given a fairytale ending. Even after her sister died, Leah watched as Jacob played favorites with Rachel's children.

And yet God heard her. "When the Lord saw that Leah was neglected, he opened her womb" (Genesis 29:31). In a culture where a woman's future was connected to bearing sons, Leah gave birth to six. "God has heard I'm neglected," she said, naming Simeon, whose name meant "heard." "I will praise the Lord," she said, naming Judah ("praise"). It's oddly comforting to know that her faith is imperfect. Reynolds says, "She stumbles in her faith. (Don't we all?) She grieves. She maneuvers. She lashes out. She takes a few more steps; it's all so messy."²⁸ Yet in spite of her failures and setbacks, some of Israel's greatest blessings come through her children, not Rachel's. Her third and fourth sons, Levi and Judah, are the lineage of Israel's priests and kings. It is from Leah that we can trace the ancestry of Jesus, our ultimate priest and king, and our truer husband, who came to rescue his Bride.

Sister, no matter where you are in your journey, and no matter how alone you may feel, *God hears you*. He loves you, and he hears your heart's cry. Even your worst reaction on your worst day cannot change that. You *can* trust and lean on him for guidance as you walk this difficult path.

Remember: this will not be easy. You and your husband will both have good days, and you will both take steps back. Your husband may need to be brought to a point of crisis before he becomes repentant, and the boundaries you set may even become a part of that crisis. But even if your husband seems hopelessly enmeshed

seems hopelessly enmeshed in his porn use, repentance and reconciliation are still possible, and it happens. We have a number of testimonies about marriages that have been saved. (You can read some of these prodigal homecoming tales in the ebook *Hope After Porn*, available at https://learn.covenanteyes.com/hope-after-porn/?_ga=2.216075542.1641535406.1635777028-1324642048.1634054780).

Have faith! No matter how bleak things look right now, God hears you. He loves you with an everlasting love. He will turn your mourning into joy, and he will bring happiness out of your grief (Jeremiah 31:3, 13).

additional resources

books for you

Partner Betrayal Trauma

By Dr. Doug Weiss

The hope of this book is that any woman in a relationship with a sex addict can feel supported and not alone in this silent addiction. Doug Weiss, President of the American Association for Sex Addiction Therapy, walks partners through the healing process.

When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography

By Vicki Tiede

When your husband's addiction to pornography leaves you shattered, betrayed, and alone, where do you turn? Who do you turn to? Writing from personal experience, Vicki Tiede gently guides readers toward God and away from despair.

The Gaslight Effect

By Robin Stern

Some husbands will be manipulative or emotionally abusive to their wives, claiming things like, "Porn is normal, and it wouldn't be a big deal to you if you weren't so insecure." This book will help you identify manipulation in relationships and set boundaries to protect your emotional wellbeing.

Beyond Betrayal: How God is Healing Women (and Couples) From Infidelity

By Lisa Taylor

This book uses research and the stories of betrayed wives (including the author's own story) and offers couples guidance on how to move forward. It is also available as a couple's guide.

Your Sexually Addicted Spouse: How Partners Can Cope and Heal

By Barbara Steffans and Marsha Means

Highly recommended by counselor Ella Hutchinson, this book helps women understand that they are not alone in dealing with a sexually addicted spouse, and offers insights that lead to healing.

Hope After Porn

By Covenant Eyes

Discovering her husband uses porn may be one of the most emotionally devastating experiences of a wife's life. In this ebook, women share their stories of heartbreak because of their husbands' betrayal and how they found reconciliation and restoration in spite of it.

Download it at https://learn.covenanteyes.com/hope-after-porn/?_ga=2.216075542.1641535406.1635777028-1324642048.1634054780.

books for your husband

Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn-Free

By Tim Chester

This book helps men be captured by a better vision than that offered by porn and provides practical strategies for escaping the temptation to use it.

False Intimacy

By Harry Schaumburg

Recommended by Focus on the Family, this book helps those struggling with sexual sin to identify the root causes and break free from the false relationships available through pornography.

Your Brain on Porn

By Covenant Eyes

This free ebook unpacks a study that demonstrates five concrete ways prolonged pornography use actually lowers sexual satisfaction, lowers one's view of women, and desensitizes the viewer to cruelty. It also provides biblical ways to renew your mind. Download it at www.covenanteyes.com/yourbrainonporn.

The Porn Circuit

By Covenant Eyes

Science shows us acting out with pornography taps into our powerful brain chemistry, and this can quickly lead a person to use porn habitually. The good news is that the brain has a lifelong ability to wire and rewire itself. This free ebook shows why people become obsessed with pornography and how to break the cycle of porn use. Download it at <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/porn-circuit/>.

Hobbies and Habits

By Covenant Eyes

Most people view sobriety from porn as a “white-knuckle” experience—simply quitting the unwanted behavior. But what if it was actually about finding something better? This free ebook will walk people through the ways hobbies and habits may be contributing to their porn use and how they can also help people find true joy in freedom. Download it at <http://learn.covenanteyes.com/hobbies-and-habits>

software and virtual challenges



Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability

Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability provides more holistic insight into what we actually look at on our screens. It grabs snapshots of what is visible on the screen, analyzes them, and heavily blurs them for privacy before they ever leave your device. Some of these images are sent in a report to an ally you choose to have honest conversations about what you do on your devices. Learn more at www.covenanteyes.com.



RecoverED: 10 Days on the Road to Healing from Porn-Induced Erectile Dysfunction

A recent study showed a 400% increase in erectile dysfunction among men ages 18-30 since 1992. Another informal study found that such men had one factor in common: frequent use of internet pornography. And when they stopped using porn, their ED went away.

If your husband is struggling to understand how porn is impacting his body, this free, ten-day email challenge will give him a basic overview and will help kickstart his recovery journey. Learn more at <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/pied-challenge>

STRIVE: 21-Day Porn Detox

This email challenge offers unique videos and helpful content about porn use and recovery, and it also provides access to a community of like-minded men who are finding freedom from ongoing porn use. Versions are available for both Catholics and a more general Christian audience. Learn more at <https://www.strive21.com/>

Overcome Porn: The 40 Day Challenge

Available as an email challenge or an app for iPhone and Android, this biblically-based challenge looks at three main components of porn use and recovery and offers practical discussion questions and steps for freedom. It's perfect for your husband and his allies to do together as a basis for their accountability conversations. Learn more at <https://learn.covenanteyes.com/porn-free-challenge/>

endnotes

1. Barbara Steffens and Marsha Means, *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse: How Partners Can Cope and Heal* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizons Press, 2009).
2. Chiara Sabina, Janice Wolak, and David Finkelhor, "The nature and dynamics of Internet pornography exposure for youth," *Cyberpsychology & Behavior* 11 (2008): 691-693.
3. William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 105.
4. The Barna Group, *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age* (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2016), p. 38.
5. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, p. 52.
6. Chris McKenna, "Porn-induced erectile dysfunction: The science, stats, and stories of PIED," *Covenant Eyes*, August 7, 2017. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/2017/08/07/porn-induced-ed-science-stats-stories-pied/> (accessed March 31, 2021).
7. Dr. Phil, "Is Internet Pornography Cheating?" *drphil.com*, September 3, 2002. <https://www.drphil.com/advice/is-internet-pornography-cheating/> (accessed March 31, 2021).
8. Luke Gilkerson, "Yes, using porn is cheating. Here's why," *Covenant Eyes*, January 19, 2015. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/2015/01/19/using-porn-is-cheating/> (accessed March 31, 2021).

9. Sheila Gregoire, "Is the evangelical view of sex at the root of our sex scandals?" *Religion News*, February 18, 2021. <https://religionnews.com/2021/02/18/ravi-zacharias-carl-lentz-is-the-evangelical-view-of-sex-at-the-root-of-our-sex-scandals/> (accessed March 31, 2021).
10. Lisa Taylor and Marsha Means, M. "2014/2015 survey of partners of sex addicts.: In L. Taylor, *Beyond Betrayal: How God is Healing Women (and Couples) from Infidelity* (Whangarei, New Zealand: Oil of Joy Press, 2015).
11. Ella Hutchinson, "7 questions wives of porn addicts often ask (3-part series), part 2," *Covenant Eyes*, November 15, 2011. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2011/11/15/7-questions-wives-of-porn-addicts-often-ask-part-2-of-3/> (accessed March 31, 2021).
12. Elizabeth M. Morgan, "Associations between young adults' use of sexually explicit materials and their sexual preferences, behaviors, and satisfaction," *Journal of Sex Research* 48(6) (2011): 520-30.
13. Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Pornography's impact on sexual satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18 (1988): 438-453.
14. NoFap, "What is porn addiction," *nofap.com*, n.d. <https://nofap.com/porn-addiction/> (accessed July 28, 2021).
15. Sam Black, "Why marital sex is better than porn," *Covenant Eyes*, January 24, 2014. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/2014/01/24/marital-sex-better-porn/> (accessed March 31, 2021).
16. Association of Partners of Sex Addicts Trauma Specialists, *Multidimensional Partner Trauma Model Training* (2012; provided September 11, 2019 by Lisa Taylor).
17. Donald H. Baucom, Douglas K. Snyder, and Kristina Coop Gordon, *Helping Couples Get Past the Affair: A Clinicians Guide* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009).
18. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries in Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1999).
19. Taylor and Means, 2014/2015 Survey.

20. Vickie Tiede, *When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2012), p. 89.
21. Cooper, A. (1998). Sexuality and the internet: Surfing into the new millennium. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 1, 187–193.
22. Sheila Gregoire, "10 questions to ask a biblical counsellor to make sure they're safe," *To Love, Honor, and Vacuum*, March 19, 2019. <https://tolovehonorandvacuum.com/2019/03/question-your-biblical-counsellor/> (accessed March 31, 2021).
23. ibid
24. ibid
25. ibid
26. Adapted from Genesis 29:1-30:24
27. Rebecca Reynolds, *Courage, Dear Heart: Letters to a Weary World* (Eugene, OR: NavPress, 2018), p. 17.
28. Ibid. p. 22