

# Anxiously Engaged

## Supplemental Lesson

### Pornography

#### Introduction

*“As you progress in your dating to seriously considering sharing your lives together, you share your most private thoughts, your dreams, and your fears. You share who you are, who you have been, and who you want to become...If you struggle with pornography or have struggled in the past, a person considering you as an eternal companion deserves to know about your challenge and how you have faced it. If you have had difficulty with other addictions, keeping the law of chastity, lying or stealing, humility and honesty urges that you give to the person you love the opportunity to spiritually and prayerfully weigh the choices of going forward...A thoughtful approach is to ask yourself what you would want to know if you were in the place of your companion, prayerfully preparing to spend your life with someone you love....We should remember that no one is perfect. All of us have made mistakes. As the person you love speaks honestly to you, respect the courage that he or she is showing.”<sup>1</sup>*



Pornography is a pervasive part of living in our contemporary world and as such it should be an ongoing conversation in our relationships. Even though talking about problems with pornography can be uncomfortable, not talking about them can lead to more damaging problems later. In this lesson we look at counsel from our church leaders and links to resources and then provide discussion prompts to help you ask and answer important questions about pornography involvement and the path forward.

#### Everyone is exposed to pornography

Because the average age of first exposure is around 11, most people have been exposed to pornography in some way by age 18. That said, exposure is not the same as addiction. Dallin H. Oaks differentiates between varying levels of involvement with pornography:

##### Level 1: Inadvertent Exposure

*“I believe that everyone has been inadvertently exposed to pornography. There is no sin in this when we turn away and don’t pursue it....”*

##### Level 2: Occasional Use

*“This use of pornography may be occasional or even frequent, but it is always intentional, and that is its evil...The danger with any intentional use of pornography, no matter how casual or infrequent, is that it always invites more frequent exposure, which will inevitably increase preoccupation with sexual feelings and behavior...”*

### Level 3: Intensive Use

*"Repeated intentional use of pornography can make its use a habit...With habitual use, individuals experience a need for more stimulus to have the same reaction in order to be satisfied."*

### Level 4: Compulsive Use (Addiction)

*"A person's behavior is addictive when it forms a 'dependency' (a medical term applied to the use of drugs, alcohol, compulsive gambling, etc.) amounting to an 'irresistible compulsion' that 'takes priority over almost everything else in life.'"<sup>2</sup>*

## Activity #1:

Discuss the following questions together.

1. What have you learned about pornography and its effects in marriage?
2. What are our boundaries around pornography?
3. If it's been a problem for you, how have you addressed it?
4. When is the last time you used pornography?
5. Given President Oaks' "Levels of involvement," on what level would you place yourself?
6. What specifically will we do to be intentional about ongoing, open conversation about pornography exposure and involvement?



## Hope when pornography is a problem

If pornography is or has been a problem for one or both of you, there is hope! With the help of God and others, and through patience, compassion and intentional effort, damaging effects can be healed. There are a lot of issues to consider when working through pornography problems and there are a couple of important things to keep in mind.

### 1. Marriage doesn't "cure" pornography use

*"Many falsely believe that getting married and having a spouse will solve a pornography issue. It doesn't. Those who struggle will still be tempted and influenced by triggers. Heavy pornography use rewires the brain. Matrimony doesn't heal that. Nor does healthy sexual activity within a marriage. Lasting healing only occurs with help from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, hard work from the user, and, when needed, professional counseling."<sup>3</sup>*

### 2. Abstinence is not the same as recovery

*"It's critical that you both understand that abstinence is not the same thing as recovery. Although abstaining from pornography is the goal, it's not the same as true recovery from pornography use. Often, progress is better measured in how a person's heart is changing rather than how long they have gone without viewing pornography. Recovery involves their taking full responsibility for their actions, constantly seeking to improve themselves, turning to Heavenly Father and the Savior in moments of weakness, and focusing on becoming closer to Them through the journey to recovery. Because of how pornography changes the brain, true recovery requires a change in your heart and your brain. And that journey takes time, consistency, and patience."<sup>4</sup>*

## Tools to help us

Gratefully there are many readily available tools to work toward recovery. The October 2019 Ensign “Young Adult” section is dedicated to [“Dating and Pornography”](#) and has many helpful articles including:

[“Finding true recovery: Talking with my girlfriend about my pornography use”](#)

[“Six truths to remember if your dating relationship is affected by pornography”](#)

[“Four things to do when you’re dating someone who struggles with pornography”](#)

[“I decided to marry a recovering pornography addict”](#)

### Activity #2:

**Read together** [“Finding true recovery: Talking with my girlfriend about my pornography use”](#) **and then discuss the question suggestions in section 4 of the article.**

They include:

1. What are you currently doing to respond in healthy ways to your triggers and deeper, underlying needs?
2. What has motivated you to change and what motivates you currently?
3. What has the repentance (change) and healing process been like for you?
4. How has counseling with your bishop helped?
5. Did you ever feel the need to seek professional help?
6. What have you learned about the underlying biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors that have contributed to your pornography use?
7. What will we do to ensure that we keep the lines of communication open in our marriage and maintain a connection in spite of any future relapses? How will we handle any relapses?



Pornography involvement is one of the times when it can be beneficial to gain strength and support from others—i.e. other couples who have been on the journey and are doing well. Because other’s pornography use is generally unknown, it may be difficult to find couples to talk to. In the resources below you will find links to the stories of other couples who are successfully navigating recovery.

## Resources:

**There are many resources available for couples who are dealing with pornography involvement.**

The church has a website dedicated to helping those involved with pornography:

[Addressing pornography](#)

This website has support and resources for both the individual and partner. It includes links to articles such as:

[“How can I find the support I need?”](#)

[“How can I tell if I’m addicted?”](#)

[“When should I seek professional help?”](#)

[“How do I find a mental health professional who is right for me?”](#)

Additionally, this website has a section for partners of those involved with pornography. Articles include:

[“Am I to blame for my spouse’s pornography use?”](#)

[“Where can I turn for support?”](#)

[“What does the path forward look like?”](#)

It also has links to the church’s addiction recovery program:

[Addiction Recovery Program](#)

[Find a support meeting](#)

If you live in an area that doesn’t have Latter-day Saint addiction recovery meetings, the following link will connect you with pornography 12-step groups in your area:

[Find local 12-step groups for pornography addiction recovery](#)

# THE BOTTOM LINE

**When a relationship is moving toward marriage, it is crucial that pornography use is directly and honestly discussed. Although it can be frightening, both partners should know about each other’s past and present pornography use so that they can make an informed and prayerful decision about the path forward.**

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## Endnotes

1 [“Complete honesty, unselfish humility” Neil L. Anderson](#)

2 [“Recovering from the trap of pornography” Dallin H. Oaks](#)

3 [“Six truths to remember if your dating relationship is affected by pornography”](#)

4 [“Six truths to remember if your dating relationship is affected by pornography”](#)