

Internet porn addiction: you can get help

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When a Cape Town southern suburbs husband realised that his pornography habit could become addictive and threaten his marriage, he changed his behaviour and offered to help other men trapped in a porn addiction.

The husband, who does not want to be named, said studies had found that pornography was as addictive as cocaine, alcohol and cigarettes. For an Internet porn addict, a computer on his or her desk is the equivalent of a heroin addict having a drug dealer in the room with a ready supply of drugs.

So the man advises people who have developed an addiction to avoid Internet access if they find they are unable to resist the temptation to dial-up. Or move the computer to a communal room. Porn addicts are urged to change the route they travel home from work to avoid passing sex worker hangouts and adult shops selling hard-core pornographic material.

'They have my cell number and give me a call instead of dialling up the Internet' They must remove all pornographic material from their home and are given the telephone number of an "accountability partner" - the equivalent of an alcoholic's "sponsor" - whom they can call and chat to when battling with temptation.

"They have my cell number and give me a call instead of dialling up the Internet," he said. He works with an organisation, Standing Together to Oppose Pornography, which is investigating the possibility of introducing an American computer programme, called Covenant Eyes, to South Africa because it would assist porn addicts.

The programme keeps track of websites visited by the porn addict and sends an email listing the sites to the accountability partner. "You can hack around most Internet access-control programmes but with this one, any attempt to hack around it is also recorded," he said. The man said his own interest in pornography had been sparked as a schoolboy.

Later during rugby and business trips overseas his mates would urge him to bring back magazines to SA when pornography was still banned.

"I remember buying a new shirt overseas, pulling out the cardboard and replacing it with a Playboy magazine so that the customs officials would not spot it," he said. "I didn't realise the damage I was doing to my wife. I thought porn was no big deal, a man's thing. But it can affect a woman and your relationship for life."

Realising that his battle with porn was not unique, he decided to share his views at church, youth and men's groups meetings. What became clear at those talks was the extent of the problem and that women

felt betrayed and often to blame for not satisfying their porn-using partners. He offers support to the men and his wife reassures the women that their feelings of anger or betrayal are justified.

"It is painful and embarrassing to talk about and all these men have been needing is someone who understands what they are involved in," he said.

He hands out his phone number and never makes the first call. "These men must want to change," he said.

He also organises group meetings where men can discuss ways of dealing with the addiction.

"Most of them feel such relief when they realise they are not the only ones battling with this addiction, that they can stop beating themselves up and help each other through this," he said.

However if any of the men had reached an advanced stage - where pornography that had sickened them in the past was now considered exciting and acceptable - they were referred to professional counsellors.

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