



## **What can you do if your spouse is struggling with pornography?**

Discovering that your spouse is struggling with or addicted to pornography is not only something that hurts him; it deeply affects you as well. Most women who find out about their husband's use of pornography feel betrayed and may struggle with feelings of anger, helplessness or doubts about their marriage.

Yet we know that Christ "makes all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Once this sin is out in the open, there is an incredible opportunity for healing, not only for your spouse, but also for your marriage.

Some things you should know:

- Your spouse's pornography use is not your fault. You are not the cause of his struggle.
- You also will not "cure" his struggle. Any struggle with pornography, but particularly an addiction, is a habit which your spouse must strive to overcome with the aids of prayer, your encouragement and, if necessary, counseling, group meetings or a spiritual director.
- You have a right to be upset. Pornography may be rampant in our culture, but it is not healthy and it does not respect your marriage vows.
- While you should let your husband know this is unacceptable in your marriage and that it hurts you, you should not condemn him. Those seeking to stop using pornography often struggle with feelings of helplessness and cycles of guilt which is not helpful for a spouse to contribute to.
- Encourage him to find someone besides you to be accountable to, whether that be a trusted friend, a priest or a support group. This allows both of you to work on repairing your relationship of mutual love and support without introducing a management/supervisory relationship.
- Your love and encouragement gives men the extra strength they need to combat (with the help of God's grace) this scourge.
- If you personally are suffering because of this, you can also seek support through talking with a close friend (while avoiding telling many people about private concerns). Keep in mind that because many men struggle with this issue, their wives do too!

This is a perfect time to strengthen your marriage. Trust is damaged by one spouse's use of pornography. As we all know, trust and communication are essential parts of a good and healthy marriage. Below are some ways you can strengthen your marriage in light of this struggle.

1. Encourage your husband in his recovery. Men respond very well to encouragement especially when it relates to a particular task or goal. Give concrete examples of success and accomplishment of goals.

- a. Example: I have been really impressed with the effort you've been putting into the struggle for purity.
  - b. Example: I have really noticed the change in how you relate to me and appreciate your efforts.
  - c. Be supportive and affirming of him/her in voicing struggles he may be having
2. Reinforce your commitment to him by providing tangible expressions of interest in your husband
- a. Recovery requires stable relationships and support from those closest to him
  - b. Example: Make an effort to remind him through a note, phone call and/or email that you are thinking about him and are committed to him.
  - c. Example: Choose to sit next to him at dinner or during activities
2. Strengthen your foundation in Christ
- a. Go to Mass together.
  - b. Plan regular times and go to Confession together (suggest that you go to Confession together rather than tell the other person they need to)
  - c. Choose an activity to do together
  - d. Choose to read a book together and discuss what you are learning and experiencing
3. Build trust
- a. Look for ways to build trust back into your relationship;
    - i. Have a specific time each day to check in with each other (or sometimes a few times a day)
    - ii. Use a shared calendar to write down each other's (family) activities (this could be a paper calendar at home or a shared electronic calendar like ones offered by Google)
    - iii. Build into your weekly calendar time for each other. (This doesn't need to be talking, but just being together – doing something specific, or sitting at a park.)
  - b. Hold each other accountable for reaching a new level of trust
  - c. Do more with joint friends; rather than individual friendships
  - d. Look for shared interests;
    - i. Show attention in each other's individual interests. You may not enjoy basketball, but if your husband plays on a team, make sure to come out at least once or twice a season to support him.
4. Become one, unified, team, a union –
- a. Consider using one, shared email address.
  - b. Put all credit cards/bank accounts into both names (do not hold separate accounts).
  - c. Have one cell phone and cable. Review it monthly – together.
  - d. Pay bills together.
5. Be a partner of support-
- a. Resist the temptation to be a parent to your spouse.
  - b. Watch the kids, while your spouse is seeking healing in his struggle OR
  - c. Get a sitter, and drive your spouse to wherever he is going to seek help (then, perhaps going to a coffee shop and wait). This time in the car together can be invaluable.
  - d. Be respectful, and don't share your spouse's confidences with family members