

Identifying Your Sex Addiction Triggers

Some people think that sexual addicts are triggered only when they encounter an erotic image like a suggestive picture or seeing a person who is provocatively dressed. But in fact, almost anything can be a trigger for a sex addiction. A trigger is something that causes thoughts and feelings of desire, which result in sexual fantasies and behaviors. The trigger can be sexual in nature, but it can also be an unpleasant event or unhappy memory. The sexual desire and need to satisfy that desire then become a way to avoid the thoughts or feelings that are difficult to handle. Positive events can also be triggers for sexual acting-out. A feeling of accomplishment or a celebration can stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain and then trigger sexual desire.

Sex addiction is considered to be cyclical in nature. Triggers result in a sexual fantasy which in turn result in a ritual such as going to a porn site or contacting a sex partner. Acting out, where the actual sex and orgasm takes place, is followed by emotional distancing such as rationalization or blaming others for the sexual acting out. Then there is typically a rush of negative emotions including guilt, shame, anxiety or depression. This emotional distress may then trigger another cycle of sexual addiction.

When you are aware of the things that trigger your addiction cycle, you can prevent it from occurring altogether. This is particularly true if you can substitute a positive non-sexual activity when a trigger occurs. Positive activities could be things like talking to a close friend, going to the gym, working on a hobby, and so on.

Use the worksheet on the next page to list your internal and external triggers as well as possible activities you can do to stop your cycle of sex addiction before it starts.

Identifying Your Internal and External Triggers

List the internal triggers that can lead to a cycle of sexual acting-out. Common internal triggers can include low self-esteem, stress, feelings of loneliness and boredom, or sadness. Rate the “force” of the trigger from 1 to 10 with 1=Not powerful, easy to ignore and 10=Very powerful, no control. Also, note the positive activities that you can do when you encounter a trigger.

Internal Triggers	Force	Positive Activities

Thoughts and Comments:

Now list the external triggers that can lead to a cycle of sexual acting out. Common external triggers include drug and alcohol use, arguments, criticism, difficulties on the job or at school. Rate the “force” of the trigger from 1 to 10 with 1=Not powerful, easy to ignore and 10=Very powerful, no control. Note the positive activities that you can do when you encounter a trigger.

External Triggers	Force	Positive Activities

Thoughts and Comments:
