** Understanding Sexual Addiction**

**F**or the sexual addict, sex (not necessarily the physical act) was a consuming way of life. Although the details of each addict’s stories are different, the problems are always the same. They are addicted to sexual behaviors that they return to over and over, despite the consequences.

Sex addiction is a disease affecting the mind, body, and spirit. It is progressive, with the behavior and its consequences usually become more severe over time. Sex addiction is experienced as a compulsion, which is an urge that is stronger than the addict’s will to resist, and as obsession, which is a mental preoccupation with sexual behavior and fantasies. The addictive sexual behaviors are sometimes referred to as *acting out*.

A way to understand (not test) sexual addicts is to compare them to other types of addicts. A common definition of alcoholism or drug dependency is that a person has a pathological relationship with a mood-altering chemical. The alcoholic’s relationship with alcohol becomes more important than family, friends, and work. The relationship progresses to the point where alcohol is necessary to feel normal. To feel “normal” for the alcoholic is also to feel isolated and lonely, since the primary relationship he/she depends upon to feel adequate is with a chemical, not other people. Sexual addiction is parallel. The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or a process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict’s relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his/her life.

Addicts progressively go through stages in which they retreat further from the reality of friends, family, and work. Their secret lives become more real than their public lives. What other people know is a false identity. Only the individual addict knows the shame of living a double life-the real world and the addict’s world. Leading a fantasy double life is a distortion of reality. **An essential part of sanity is being grounded in reality, so in the sense that addicts distort reality, the sexual addiction becomes a form of insanity.**

Sex addiction is not just a bad habit. Nor is it the result of poor self-control, a lack of morals, or a series of mistakes. If it were something the addict could stop on their own, the negative consequences would be enough to make them stop. Many addicts have tried to cure themselves with religious or spiritual practice, moral discipline, or self-improvement. Despite their sincerity and best efforts, they continued to act out. The sexual addict’s behaviors elude all rational attempts at explanation or correction. It is not until the addict is able to face the reality of their addiction and the fact that they are unable to stop their addictive behaviors by themselves, that they are able to begin their recovery.

There are many things involved in sexual addiction and its effects on the addicts themselves and their loved ones. To learn more on sexual addiction please read:

***Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addition*** by Patrick Carnes, Ph.D. 3rd Edition: Hazelden