



Checklist for Common Elements of Sexual Addiction

[] "Staring at naked bodies and sexual acts gives me a feeling of complete euphoria. I get high. I constantly seek the excitement and thrill that sexual acting out delivers." Examples: channel surfing for sexual material, seeking out bookstores where graphic materials can be found. Lie: "I can't enjoy sex the way 'normal' people do."

[] "I have reached levels of tolerance to sexual exposure. Over time, seeing erotic stimuli no longer produces the same high for me. As a result, I find myself searching for more intense or graphic forms of arousal." Lie: "I will have to do this more and more to be happy."

[] "I feel dependent on sex and sexual impulses and believe I could never be free of this." People can become physically clean of a chemical addiction in three to five days, but the psychological dependence created by sexual addiction is a much more difficult issue to address. Lie: "I will never be able to be free."

[] "I experience cravings for sexual opportunities (sudden, intense urges to have a particular type of experience). These cravings sometimes continue long after I stop the particular behavior." Lie: "I have no control or power over my cravings."

[] "If I don't look at sexual materials or act out sexually, I feel a sense of withdrawal. The tension, anxiety, anger, sadness, boredom, emptiness, irritation, hopelessness, and depression become difficult to handle." Withdrawal is another element common to sex addicts. After stopping the particular behavior, many people report physiological adjustments such as disturbed sleep and appetite, lack of concentration, agitation, and lack of pleasure. The psychological withdrawal symptoms can be even more intense. Lie: "My life will be empty and boring without this habit."

[] "I find that I obsess constantly about my next sexual encounter." Obsessions and compulsions are closely related and are very classical ingredients of sex addiction. Sex addicts will often be preoccupied with thoughts of a sexual nature which develop into elaborate fantasies. Many report that giving up the obsessions is one of the most difficult aspects of abstinence, most likely due to the fact that the brain becomes almost "hardwired" from the constant rumination. Lie: "I can't stop thinking about sex."

[] "It seems the only way I can calm down or feel better is to act out." Compulsions are the expression in action of obsessions. In other words, the acting out is intended to satisfy or quiet the obsessions. According to the addict, the obsessions cause a state of intense arousal that can only be gratified by indulgence in sexual behavior, which in most cases is compulsive masturbation. Lie: "The only way I can feel free is to do something sexual."

[] "I do this secretly so no one will know what I am into." Secrecy is another element that is perhaps more potent in sexual addiction than any other addiction. There is a great stigma to having a sexual problem in this society, and that engenders the need to keep "the secret." Lie: "I will always have to live with the secret."

[] "There are periods of time that I feel intense guilt, shame and remorse for my behavior, but the drive to act out is so powerful that it usually overpowers my sense of reason." Lie: "My conscience will always be twisted."

[] "People tell me that it seems that something is wrong with me." They say I am warm, loving, kind, and exciting one minute, and cold, manipulative, detached, and harsh the next. Personality change is a frequent hallmark of the sex addict. Just like an alcoholic can appear to be "no longer himself" when intoxicated, the sex addict can also change personality, albeit in less obvious ways. Lie: "I will never be normal like other people."

Adapted from Eric Griffin-Shelley, Sex and Love Addiction: Definition and Overview, Outpatient Treatment of Sex and Love Addicts. Westport. CT. Praeger, 1993.