

Churches can help members deal with sexual addiction

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DALLAS—Even though many churches might choose to believe otherwise, most congregations have members facing sexual addiction issues, said Darin Griffiths, licensed professional counselor with [South Texas Children's Home](#) family ministry in Corpus Christi.

Griffiths believes the only way healing will occur is by providing a safe haven to deal with the issue.

“We’re going to have to deal with this, because it’s not going away,” said Griffiths, who led a workshop at the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting. “In fact, it’s getting worse.”

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He noted studies that indicate:

- 25 million Internet users (nearly half) visit pornographic sites at least 10 hours a week, and 80 percent of porn traffic takes place between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., the typical workday.
- 30 percent to 40 percent of churchgoing Christian men deal with strong sexual issues.
- 20 percent of the churchgoing female population struggle with pornography.
- 33 percent of clergy admitted to having visited a sexually explicit website.

If these figures are accurate, as Griffiths believes they are, then more and more pastors will see members in crisis due to the aftermath of sexual addiction and compulsion.

Griffiths defined sexual addiction as compulsive behaviors that usually include viewing pornography, masturbation, serial infidelity, and cyber and phone sex. He prefers the definition by one addiction therapist—any sexually related, compulsive behavior which interferes with normal living and causes severe stress on family, friends, loved ones and one's work environment.

Similar to an addiction to drugs or alcohol, Griffiths said, sexually addictive behaviors cause a release of dopamine to the brain that leaves a feeling of euphoria. But the cycle, he said, begins with anything but positive feelings.

"I've never come across a person struggling with sex addiction who says, 'I like what I do' and means it," Griffiths said, adding that addicts typically have poor self-esteem and feel they are unloved and have unmet needs, with sex being the most important of those needs.

So what should the church do with members struggling with these behaviors? Griffiths said the key is rallying around men and women who

deal with addiction and provide an outlet to deal with them in healthy, biblical ways.

“We don’t need to build counseling centers all over our state,” he said. “We have counseling centers already in our churches, with Christians who can love people. You don’t have to have a counselor to do this; loving people and making them be honest with themselves is all that’s required.”

Although sexual addiction is not exclusively a male problem, Griffiths said men are more likely to come forward in churches and ask for help. He urges churches to start a group for men—even men who are not yet to the point of true addiction—to deal with their issues in a safe forum.

Calling them “Men’s Integrity Groups” helps alleviate shame and embarrassment from men and encourages them to deal with the issue among their peers. A key component of the recovery process, he added, is encouragement for the men to be brave enough to go against societal norms and actually combat the problem.

He also encourages churches to form a women’s support group for wives of men struggling with addiction. Their own issues, hurts and behaviors need to be worked through as well, Griffiths said, and they need to know they’re not dealing with these issues alone.

He recommended a book and workbook series by [Ted Roberts](#), *Pure Desire*, to use in men’s groups. A workbook for women only also is available for use in support groups and works through the issues with biblical principles.

Griffiths stressed several times the importance of getting a wife on board with the recovery process for support and encouragement.

“A wife’s involvement in the recovery of a sex addict is very important,” he said. “If the partner is not in on the process, the odds are slim to none that they’ll truly recover and be restored.”

Another key to working with sexually addicted people is realizing the underlying needs and issues—many have endured traumatic experiences such as molestation or early exposure to pornography—and averting the guilt and shame so it breaks the cycle of addiction, he noted.

Because so much of these issues are related to the Internet, Griffiths recommended accountability measures for computer users such as [Covenant Eyes](#) (which sets up a partner system and sends e-mails about sites visited) and filters that block explicit websites.

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