

Secrets and Isolation

In my work with clients struggling with sexual addiction, I often tell my clients that "they are only as sick as their secrets". For many of my clients, I'm the first person they've ever told about their secret behaviors. Many of them were caught by a spouse or loved one and had to admit to their secret behaviors.

Remember that secrecy is the lifeblood of addiction. One of the most powerful ways to break the compulsive cycle of sexual addiction is to step out of the shadows of secrecy and isolation. People who have disclosed secret behaviors often report that the disclosure was an essential step in their recovery.

Breaking out of secrecy and isolation requires the addict to make a genuine and sincere effort at reaching out to another person who can be helpful to them in their process of recovery. This could be a church leader, a therapist, a close friend, a parent, or a spouse. Sometimes individuals are caught viewing pornography or engaging in compulsive sexual activity and they believe that this counts as being out of isolation and having their secret exposed. While it is true that they are now not alone in their secret behavior, they still haven't demonstrated a willingness to get out of isolation on their own.

The following is a list of recommended steps to follow when making your disclosure:

1. **Take a Personal Inventory** - Write down all of your behaviors as you remember them. Take time to make sure they're all included.
2. **Prepare the Time and Place** - Make sure that you'll have plenty of time to disclose and discuss.
3. **Write your Disclosure** - Write down what you'll say and how you want to say it. Avoid going in- depth on every behavior, but instead list the frequency, duration, longevity, and severity of your behaviors
4. **Prepare for Reactions** - This includes your own reaction to disclosing and the reaction of the person you'll tell. Many people, especially spouses and parents, will be deeply hurt by your disclosure. This shouldn't stop you from disclosing, however.
5. **Answer Questions & Accept Consequences** - You should avoid being defensive about your behaviors. Accept any time and space requests from a spouse or other sanctions imposed by a leader or parent.

It's important that you have a person you can report to, such as a therapist, who will not shame you. Consider this person a "fair witness" who will listen, provide counsel, and hold you accountable for what you say. You've got to feel safe talking about your addiction. It might even be wise to practice your disclosure with your therapist.

You will feel relief as you disclose your secret behaviors. Breaking out of isolation and secrecy can help you use the energy you were spending on guarding your secret toward getting on the road to recovery.