

## Seeking Help for Addiction Tough To Do By Geoff Steurer, MS, LMFT

### Question:

I feel like such a hypocrite. I am hiding an addiction to pornography that I can't get away from. I'm married with children, I serve in my church and in the community, and I have a good reputation. I want to get help, but I can't afford for anyone to find out. Is there any way out for me?

### Answer:

I'm glad to know that you want to end your double life and reach out for help. Addiction is a lonely place and it takes a tremendous amount of courage and honesty to come out of hiding and get the help that you desperately need.

Your desire to get help for yourself without outside pressure is encouraging. Please realize that if you wait until you get caught to seek help, it will be more difficult to restore trust with your loved ones. It will also be more difficult to convince yourself that you're getting help for the right reasons. Now is the time to get help while you still can prove to yourself and your loved ones that you need help and that you are willing to get it without external threats or ultimatums.

Your concern about others finding out is a common barrier to getting started on the path of recovery. Indeed, there may be consequences for others knowing about your behavior. However, your secrecy is already creating internal distress in your closest relationships.

You believe that you can't afford to let anyone find out. I believe that you can't afford not to let others find out. Secrecy generates tremendous self-loathing, feelings of brokenness, and the worry that you are a "walking fraud." It's hard to be truly connected and intimate with your loved ones when you are hiding a secret.

You are not required to tell everyone about your struggles. Start by telling only those who can truly help you – this includes your wife. As you admit your struggles to your loved ones and seek help, there will most likely be an initial period of stress as your loved ones deal with the shock of your secret life. Don't let this keep you from getting started. Your loved ones deserve to have an authentic reaction to your secret, so don't stop your progress toward recovery as soon as they react with shock and strong emotion.

You need to accept the reality that you won't be able to overcome this addiction without telling someone and without getting some assistance. When discussing your struggles with your loved ones, make sure to explain what you plan to do to seek help for your behavior. Most individuals who struggle with addiction try unsuccessfully to stop on their own many times before asking for help. The sooner you reach out to somebody who can help you through the process of change, the sooner you will start to heal.

The problem with hiding a secret is that it creates a distortion of reality. The distortion convinces you that others couldn't possibly respect you if you ask for help. It convinces you that others probably can't help you. These distortions keep many people from asking for help.

Please believe me when I tell you that I have tremendous respect and admiration for the individuals who are willing to ask for help and work to end the destructive

patterns that hold them hostage. Anyone who can truly help you will feel the same way about you. Step out of hiding, take the risk, ask for help, and discover how much support is available to you.

You can attend a 12-step recovery group, seek individual and couples counseling, or speak with an ecclesiastical leader. Just get started. Follow through on this genuine desire to stop the deception and step out of the shadows by asking for help. Make the commitment that you'll start the journey, even though you don't know the way. You will find that there are others who are on the same journey to wholeness and are willing to assist you. The initial discomfort and pain you experience as you begin the process will eventually diminish as you begin to see more clearly how much happier life is without secrets.

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