

## Love, Trust, and Truth: Talking About Pornography When You're Dating

Vauna Davis, MA, Founder and CEO of Reach 10 and former Executive Director of Utah Coalition Against Pornography

### INTRODUCTION



Dating is a process of getting to know another person and seeing how you work together. There are many important issues to discuss as relationships progress. Media is such a big part of our lives that it is important to be open about your values when it comes to media and entertainment, especially regarding sexualized content.

**Because the challenges of pornography affect so many people now, it is wise to be prepared to talk about this issue with your friends, your family, and in dating relationships.**

For many people, sharing their life with someone they love in a wonderful relationship is one of their greatest desires. When you think about what you hope for, qualities such as loyalty, commitment, honesty, compassion, and appreciation are probably on your list. Unfortunately, pornography use dramatically affects these qualities and threatens the happy relationship you want. Achieving the relationship you hope for will require honestly sharing your experiences and expectations, and understanding how pornography has affected the life of your love interest.

In this lesson we'll cover when to start discussing pornography, who should start, how to start the conversation, what to talk about, and why it is important.

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### WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO START TALKING?



**Remember a time when you were interviewing for a job?** What were some of the first things you were asked? (*Ask for some responses*). What if the interviewer had said, "Thank you for applying for this job. Can you please tell me about your most embarrassing moment in high school?" Would you tell them the whole truth? Or would you talk about something else that wasn't so embarrassing? Maybe you would be defensive, think the question wasn't appropriate, and say you would rather talk about your job skills. Would you look for an opportunity to end the interview as soon as possible? Would you still be interested in the job? How would you feel? (*Have a discussion. Possible answers: that question isn't appropriate or relevant to this situation, they don't know me well enough to ask that, I wouldn't trust them and would want to protect myself, they don't care about my good qualities, it feels like an invasion of privacy, I wouldn't feel guilty about not answering that question truthfully because they don't have the right to ask that, I would think this company is crazy and I would have no interest in working for them, etc.*)

On the other hand, have you ever been in a relationship where it was comfortable to share your most embarrassing moments? What made that situation different? (*Ask for responses. Examples: Trust, we cared about each other, it was a way to get closer and understand each other, we had a long-term friendship, I knew I wouldn't be ridiculed, we were sharing our experiences equally, etc.*)

In some ways, beginning a dating relationship is like interviewing for a job. It's a time to start learning about someone, beginning with info we are comfortable sharing and is appropriate for the situation. If the relationship continues and trust and love for the other person grows, in time we share more details of our lives with each other. We evaluate if our friend is right for a long-term relationship and maybe even marriage. Because pornography use has a devastating impact on people's lives and relationships, it is important to understand your friend's attitudes and behavior on this issue.

**Talking too early or too late can both cause problems.**

Even though your intentions are good, asking about such a personal issue early, before you have built trust and commitment, shows a lack of consideration for your friend. Everyone you date deserves respect for their privacy. We gain more access to someone's private life as we earn trust over time.



It can create a perception that you are trying to quickly weed out people, without caring enough to get to know who they are.

For someone who is struggling with pornography, being asked early can lead to deception, shame, secrecy, and isolation. They may give less than fully honest responses in order to protect their privacy. It can impact their trust in others, and reduce their willingness to take risks and date.

**Talking later in a relationship also creates some issues to be aware of.** A couple that is already engaged and making plans for marriage before they discuss this issue has an emotional involvement that will make it harder to evaluate whether they are ready for marriage, or if more recovery is needed first. It can lead to minimizing or denying problems, or hoping that marriage will eliminate the desire for pornography. Of course, it is never too late to start talking. If you are making marriage plans, now is the right time!

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GUIDE FOR WHEN TO TALK

**Here are some things to look for when determining the best time to bring the issue up.**

- You truly care about each other.
- You are able to appreciate the good things about each other and be patient with weaknesses.
- You trust each other to be sensitive, kind, and respectful.
- You are talking about other significant personal issues.
- You are together exclusively.
- You might be thinking about becoming engaged or married, but are not engaged yet.

Ask the class if they have comments on these guidelines.

## WHO SHOULD BE THE FIRST PERSON TO BRING IT UP?



### DEFINITION

Do you imagine a man or a woman being the most likely one to first to bring the subject up? (*Take a few responses*).

Of course it can be either - both men and women can effectively start the conversation. It can start with someone who wants to disclose their own history of using pornography, or someone who hasn't been involved but would like to know where their friend stands. Be brave and be the one to start talking! Show that you truly care about this person and listen respectfully to understand their feelings. Be sensitive, recognizing that shame is one of the biggest blocks to honesty and achieving recovery.

We should be careful that we don't assume that only men use pornography. Pornography comes in many forms, and both men and women become involved with it. This means that not only should everyone be prepared to ask, but also be ready to answer honestly when asked at the right time.

To have confidence to start a conversation, it can help to have a clear definition of what pornography is.

**Pornography is media that clearly shows or describes bodies or sexual conduct in a way intended to create sexual feelings. It can be online, or in many other sources such as video games, movies, books, radio, TV, music, magazines, advertising, and texting.**

**How can you respond if you are asked but don't feel it is the right time to discuss it yet?** You could say, "I appreciate you asking because this is an important issue. I would like to talk about this when we know each other a little better. I will plan to bring this up again."

**Those who have a past or current involvement with pornography need to discuss it with any person they have a serious relationship with.** When it is the right time, speak up and disclose your challenges. Building a trusting, supportive, truly loving relationship depends on complete honesty.

### ONE WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

#### Recognizing Honesty and Commitment to Recovery

One woman wrote about the different experiences she had going out with two men who had pornography issues. Because one young man was never very open about his problem, she never felt she could truly trust him and eventually she decided to break off the relationship. A year later, she dated a man who was very open about his struggle and where he was on his path to recovery. She explained, "I knew that he was taking a courageous leap of faith to be so honest with me, someone he hadn't known very long but whom he genuinely cared about. I know it wasn't easy for him to talk about it, and I found myself trying to be as unassuming and kind as possible when he opened up. Every honest conversation we had helped take down the fortress around my heart, brick by brick. It's astonishing to think that I trusted him—really trusted him." (Tessa James, *Why I Kept Dating Someone With a Pornography Problem*, [Idsliving.com](http://Idsliving.com))

**Honesty, trust, and commitment to change are keys to both individual recovery and strong relationships.**

## HOW DO I START THE CONVERSATION?

Whether you want to open up about your own history or ask about your friend's experience, it can be hard to know how to bring it up.

For this section, have three class members take seats facing the class and be prepared to give the examples for these four ideas for conversation starters.

### CONVERSATION STARTER 1

#### Share your love, respect, and faith in your friend.

Express that you care about this person and your relationship and you feel it is the right time to talk about this important issue.

Examples:

1. "I really value our relationship, and I want us to be able to be open with each other. I know this can be a difficult subject, but how would you feel about discussing our experiences with pornography?"
2. "You mean so much to me, and being with you makes me happy. I feel like we know each other well enough to share our challenges. I have something I want to share with you that has been a big struggle for me."
3. "I really care about you, and I know that pornography is a big issue that you could be worried about. I want to talk to you about my history with it to let you know where I am."



### CONVERSATION STARTER 2

#### Be up-front about your worries.

Specifically, what are people afraid might happen if they start talking? (*Make a list on the board - examples: it will be awkward, I'm embarrassed or ashamed, I don't know very much about this issue, they may be disappointed in me, they may feel I am accusing them, it may end our relationship, I may find out my friend has problems, etc.*)

When we recognize these concerns, it can be powerful to just bring them out in the open. Take your concerns and turn them into an opening statement.

Examples:

1. "This might be hard to bring up, but pornography seems to be a big issue. We have a good relationship so I think if we just get started, we can be open about it. Is that ok with you?"
2. "I have something I want to share with you, but I worry that you might be disappointed in me. I really care about you and what you think. I think it is the right time for me to tell you about my challenges with pornography."
3. "I think it's important for people to talk about big social issues like pornography, but I have hesitated because I've been worried you might feel like I am accusing you. So I hope we can just share what our experiences have been. Can we talk about it?"



### CONVERSATION STARTER 3

#### Share a personal experience.

Almost everyone has been exposed to pornography or has a friend or family member who has been affected by it. How could you use that appropriately to create common ground for a discussion?

Examples:



1. "I heard a lesson encouraging people to talk about the problems that come from pornography. It reminded me of when I was 13 and I saw my friend's brother watching pornography at their house. It was upsetting because it seemed wrong, but I was curious too. What happened the first time you saw porn? Has it been a challenge for you?"
2. "I know a couple who successfully worked through their pornography issues and created a stronger relationship. I learned it is so important to talk about this issue. It seems like a good time to bring this up. Do you feel like we're ready to talk about it?"
3. "My parents didn't really warn me pornography. I wish we had been able to talk about what it was like for me in high school when my friends were sharing it all the time. I wasn't sure how to handle it, and I got more involved in it than I should have. Did your parents do a good job?"

### CONVERSATION STARTER 4

#### Build on a news story or other media

Use something in the media to spark a conversation. It could be news, music, movies, a video, social media, etc.

Examples:



1. "I saw that new music video from (group) and it was so disturbing. It was way beyond suggestive, and it seems the lines between entertainment and pornography are disappearing. I think it would be a good time for us to talk about our experiences with pornography. When have you run into it?"
2. "There was a news story today about people watching porn while working at a government agency. It seems to be a big problem affecting our society. I've encountered porn before, and I have been wondering what your experience has been. Would you be ok to talk about it?"
3. "I used to really like (name a celebrity), but lately he/she has been publicly defending pornography, saying it is normal and harmless. It really bothers me, because I learned through my own experiences that pornography can be destructive and addictive. I feel like it's a good time for me to tell you about my history with pornography and where I am now."

**Ask the class for more ideas for starting these conversations.**

## WHAT SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT?



### Now that the conversation is going, what is most important to discuss?

Some things you want to talk about are:

- Their attitudes toward pornography: do they feel it is normal and acceptable behavior, or do they understand the problems it creates? Do they justify using sexualized media?
- Their experience with pornography: how involved each person has been viewing pornography, both now and in the past.
- If someone has been involved, learn how often they view it, how long it has been since the last time, and what they have done to try to stop.
- If neither person has ever had a problem, now is a good time to talk about how you stay clear of sexualized entertainment and how you can support each other.

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**If a person has overcome a pornography problem in the past, why should you still be open and talk about it?** It's important because both people have an incentive to minimize past pornography use – both a former user and their boyfriend/girlfriend want to believe that the problem is over and could not return. Minimizing pornography use or addiction is a big part of the problem. People living in recovery need support to stay strong and continue healing, and that requires transparency. Recovery is entirely possible, but it is important to understand that it is often a long journey that requires some help. Therapists say it may take 1-2 years of consistent work to achieve recovery. That said, **recovery is really about healthy living**—which takes consistent effort and commitment for an entire lifetime.

#### There is a difference between abstinence and recovery.

Abstinence involves going a period of time without viewing pornography. Recovery requires making permanent lifestyle changes —changes that bring us peace. People sometimes achieve abstinence for a while, but after relapsing come to understand that there is more work to do to achieve true recovery.

Ask your friend about personal actions they have taken and resources they have used to overcome pornography. **Often the most successful people in recovery have used four resources:**

1. Qualified therapy from a therapist who specializes in pornography and sexual addictions.
2. 12-step support groups
3. Support from a church leader or accountability partner
4. Education to understand the issue

Ask how they feel about their situation. Are they feeling discouraged, guilty, isolated, or helpless? Do they feel hopeful, determined, and confident of success?





### Principles to keep in mind as you are talking:

- Express how much you care and want the best for their happiness and your relationship.
- Compliment their efforts to talk.
- If there is hesitation, ask if you can continue in the future when you have both had more time to think.
- Be patient – it may take several times to become more comfortable talking.
- This should be part of many conversations, not just one. Over time couples need to move past the initial, tentative conversations and progress to more details and real honesty.
- Be compassionate, kind, and understanding. Reduce shame. Porn use is a very common problem. Understand that this often resulted from the social environment of our day, not being prepared well by parents, and not knowing where to find help.

Learning that someone has a problem with pornography does not mean you should immediately end the relationship. However, it does mean you should **become educated on the issue, work on building open communication in your relationship, set boundaries to protect yourself, and learn to recognize honesty about progress in recovery.** These steps can guide and strengthen someone who is worried about loving someone with a pornography issue. We all have weaknesses and challenges, and someone who is determined can overcome this problem.

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## UNDERSTANDING COMMITMENT TO RECOVERY

### Good signs that someone is committed to recovery:

- Being honest about their struggles —without wallowing in shame
- Understanding the difference between abstinence and recovery
- Being able to describe what they are doing to recover
- Full participation in therapy, 12-step group, education, and regular visits with a church leader or accountability partner
- Willingness and a plan to continue recovery steps through their life (remember: recovery = healthy living = lifetime commitment)

Pass out copies of the S.A. Lifeline handout, ***Am I Serious About Dealing with My Pornography Problem?*** It has more points about what recovery looks like.

### Warning signs that someone is not committed to recovery yet:

What if the discussions aren't going well? What if your partner won't talk, or you are concerned that they are not being fully honest? Do you have a gut feeling that something is wrong? If you notice some warning flags such as these, express your concerns and consider ending the relationship if your concerns are not resolved.

- Not being willing to talk about the issue even in a committed, long-term relationship
- Giving vague, incomplete answers



- Being defensive
- Emotional withdrawal, distance, detachment
- Lying
- Criticism, blaming you or others for their problems
- Rejecting resources for help, not having a plan for recovery
- Refusing to talk about a problem in the past, especially if there wasn't adequate time or help to achieve recovery
- Possible signs of porn use:
  - Asking for or sending photos, texts, or messages with inappropriate sexual content.
  - Viewing movies, TV, and other media with sexual content that doesn't meet your values.
  - Speaking with disrespectful, sexually suggestive language.
  - Being overly concerned with or critical of physical appearances.
  - Periods of uncharacteristic disconnection, depression, criticism, irritability, tiredness.

As you decide whether to continue a relationship, be patient and set healthy boundaries. Some experts recommend at least 1 year of solid recovery before making serious commitments, but it is even more important to establish honesty about recovery and be able to handle setbacks effectively. You may decide to wait to move forward, set and follow boundaries in your relationship, or end a relationship.

Be careful to not let emotions confuse you in determining the best course of action.

**Continuing a relationship with a person who has an active pornography addiction can have very serious and unexpected consequences.** Remember, abstinence is often temporary and is not the same as recovery.

**One of the most important things to know is that marriage does not cure pornography addiction.** Many couples have hoped that being married would solve the problem, only to find that marriage complicates the issue. Get educated and talk with trusted advisors to help you make these important decisions.

**Getting the relationship you really want requires the courage to walk away from an unhealthy relationship if needed.**

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THIS ALL SEEMS DIFFICULT, UNCOMFORTABLE, AND RISKY. WHY SHOULD I TALK ABOUT IT?

Studies show that 85% of college-age men and 1/3 of college-age women view pornography on some level. That means most people will have a chance to start a meaningful conversation about it with someone who is involved. By learning to discuss the issue, understand what recovery takes, and make informed decisions, many couples can build great relationships.

**There are great blessings and opportunities for those who accept the challenge to carry on a dialogue about the impact of pornography on their life and relationships.** It doesn't have to go perfectly to learn life-changing truths about communication, trust, and creating great relationships. The important thing is to start.



**For people who are struggling with pornography, effects such as isolation, secrecy, and shame are part of the pain.** Too often people with pornography problems do not date or they keep friends at a distance. No one has to stay trapped alone in an unhealthy cycle of pornography addiction. Learning how to be open and honest, connect with other people, and reach out for appropriate support are all part of the healing process. Happiness, freedom, and love are all possible when you commit to a lifetime of healthy living.



**With these principles to guide you, you will be prepared to decide what is best for you and your relationships.** As you speak up, you will help others learn to do the same. You will find that there are great people who are learning to overcome pornography and becoming extraordinarily humble, compassionate, and self-disciplined in the process.

**This is a great challenge today, but great challenges can lead to great power!** Overcoming pornography and supporting a loved one in recovery are experiences that can build exceptional patience, self-awareness, humility, and compassion. A relationship that has grown through recovery is built on communication, trust, and honesty. These are characteristics of successful lives and relationships. **A couple that has learned to talk and take action on this sensitive issue is prepared to accomplish great things together.**

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#### SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING:

There are many opportunities where you could use this lesson and discussion:

- Small groups of friends or family – even a few roommates could have a great discussion
- School settings such as classes, student organizations, forums, etc.
- Church groups
- Community and public organizations that serve young adults
- Online communities
- Marriage preparation classes

You could divide this lesson and have a series of shorter lessons.

It may be most effective to

- Teach in small groups where there can be discussion
- Have teachers who are peers of the group
- Have a single man and woman team teach
- Teach a mixed group, rather than only men or women, to include both perspectives and avoid generalizations of the opposite gender
- Make acceptance, respect, and a safe environment a priority

CREDITS:

Author: Vauna Davis, MA, Executive Director, Utah Coalition Against Pornography

Evangelical Christian page contributed by Aszia Walker, pureHOPE

The author gratefully acknowledges guidelines, insight, and handouts from **Protecting Families from the Harmful Effects of Pornography: A Resource for Families, Religious and Community Leaders** by S.A. Lifeline Foundation and Dr. Jill C. Manning (used with permission).

This lesson is available on the S.A. Lifeline Foundation website:

<http://salifeline.org/article/love-trust-truth/information-for-young-single-adults>

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WHERE TO LEARN MORE

**Organizations**

These organizations have information online about pornography addiction and recovery, the effects of pornography on relationships, and healing from betrayal trauma.

Fight the New Drug	fightthenewdrug.org
SA Lifeline Foundation	salifeline.org
The Togetherness Project	togethernessproject.org
Addo Recovery Blog	addorecovery.com
PureHOPE	purehope.net
Whole Women Ministries	wholewomenministries.com
Your Brain on Porn	yourbrainonporn.com
The Porn Effect	theporneffect.com
XXX Church	xxxchurch.com
Utah Coalition Against Pornography	utahcoalition.org
National Center on Sexual Exploitation	endsexualexploitation.org

**Principles to bring into the lesson:**

1. The Atonement of Jesus Christ makes it possible to overcome all things, including pornography challenges.
2. We can receive divine guidance for our decisions about relationships through personal revelation. We can trust the Lord to know what is best for us.

THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS  
CHRIST BRINGS HEALING,  
FORGIVENESS, PROTECTION,  
AND POWER

These scriptures and quotes from LDS Church leaders can be used to support the ideas in this lesson.

Ether 12:27 And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

Mosiah 7: 33 But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.

Elder Lance B. Wickman encouraged people making marriage decisions to consider the heart, not just the outward behavior of their dates. "Do not base your decisions solely on whether someone has served a full-time mission or holds a particular calling in your ward. . . Know someone well enough to learn his or her heart and character firsthand and not just his or her 'gospel résumé.' A corollary is this: avoid being judgmental about someone until you get to know him or her. Snap negative judgments can be just as erroneous and misleading as snap positive ones. Be just as alert for a diamond in the rough as you are wary of fool's gold." (Confidence Tests: From Fear to Faith in the Marriage Decision, Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional, September 25, 2007)

DIVINE INSPIRATION WILL  
HELP YOU MAKE WISE  
DECISIONS

The Lord expects us to become educated, listen to good advice from parents and advisors, and make carefully considered decisions. Along with this preparation, we have been promised personal revelation through sincere prayer to guide us. Through inspiration you can understand what steps to take in your relationships.

"The more closely you follow divine guidance, the greater will be your happiness here and for eternity . . . As you continue to live righteously, you will always be prompted to know what to do. Sometimes the discovery of what action to take may require significant effort and trust on your part. Yet you will be prompted to know what to do as you meet the conditions for such divine guidance in your life, namely, obedience to the commandments of the Lord, trust in His divine plan of happiness, and the avoidance of anything that is contrary to it." (Elder Richard G. Scott, How to Obtain Revelation and Inspiration for Your Personal Life, April 2012 General Conference)

Matthew 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Mormon 9:21 Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth.

**Principles to bring into the lesson:**

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THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS  
CHRIST BRINGS HEALING,  
FORGIVENESS, PROTECTION,  
AND POWER

These scriptures can be used to support the ideas in this lesson.

1 John 5:3-5 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

FIXING YOUR HOPE IN CHRIST  
WILL HELP YOU MAKE WISE  
DECISIONS

1 John 3:3 Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies Himself as He is pure.

Did you catch that? You *will* pursue purity when your hope is in Christ. It's not a statement of obligation (you should, you must, you ought to), it's a promise of overflow. As we remember our identity in Christ, moment by moment the natural response is worship and obedience, to love Him and others out of His love for us.

The world will leave you feeling perpetually empty. Porn will leave you and others empty. Relationships are life-giving, but not ultimately so. Hope in Christ alone fills and satisfies as the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5).

Practically, let's ask Him to give His Spirit of revelation to see the hope we have in Him (Ephesians 1:17-18). Let's fix our eyes on Him and press in to things and relationships that spur us on to affection for Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:11). We can guard our eyes and heart (Job 31:1, Proverbs 4:23), turn our mind and motives to keep seeking things above (Colossians 3:1), take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), steward our body by making no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14), and cultivate a posture of keeping ourselves unstained by the world (certain types of media or cultural influences) and serving (Romans 12:1-2, James 1:27).

Where our pursuits reveal a lack of readiness for dating relationships, may we have the wisdom to wait. And where we find this lack of warring well in the person we are dating, may we lean into the Spirit's guidance and power, trust that our Father knows best, and find strength to do the most loving thing, even if that means a break up.

*Contributed by Aszia Walker, pureHOPE Discipleship + Outreach Director*

# Comparing Recovery and Addiction

Prepared by Jill C. Manning, Ph.D.

<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Addiction</b>
Rooted in humility	Rooted in shame
Emotionally engaged & present	Emotionally withdrawn
Open to discussion about issue	Defensive about issue
Self-caring	Self-centered/narcissistic
Honest	Deceptive
Takes responsibility for problem	Criticizes and blames others for problem
Transparent	Secretive
Recognizes need for help	Rejects help
Insists on boundaries	Has poor boundaries
Values people	Uses people
Focused on health	Focused on pleasure-seeking & escape
Has a plan for healing & healthy living	Has an urge that feels uncontrollable