

Shame

*It's said that the number one offender for alcoholics is resentment.
We believe the number one offender for sex and porn addicts is shame.*

You're scrubbing your browser history when you hear the doorknob turn. Your heart jumps into your mouth and you quickly close your browser window as the door swings open. There stands the last person you would want to walk in on you—a roommate, parent, or partner. "What are you doing?" they ask. "What did you just *hide*?"

Your greatest fear has come true. Someone knows your secret—that you can't stop watching porn and acting out. Your chest constricts so tight with shame that you can't breathe. Your mind races for an excuse. You want to disappear.

Many of us insisted we did nothing wrong. We gaslit our loved ones, making them feel like they were the problem. "How dare you accuse me of looking at porn?" "How *did* that porn charge get on our credit card?"

We may have convinced other people we didn't have a problem, and even tried to convince ourselves. If only we had a delete button, we would erase everything we hated about ourselves—the belief that we were inhuman and unlovable. That we didn't belong.

We avoided people with whom we felt embarrassed, or buried our secrets deep within. Other times, we've gone on the offensive. When someone uncovered our sex and porn addiction, we tried convincing them to look the other way. When all else failed, some of us threatened to leave unless our partner got off our case. We've even used shame to fight shame with arguments like, "Why were you going through my stuff? What is wrong with you?"

For some of us, the roots of our shame went deeper than sex. It was a distorted self-perception, like a funhouse mirror, magnifying our defects. We were convinced that we were constantly failing: to get the job we want, the person we desire, or the validation we crave. Each failure confirmed our great suspicions that we don't deserve better, aren't smart enough, aren't worth loving, or that things won't work out for us.

Unchecked and out of control, our distorted thinking and acting out behavior escalated to harmful extremes: increasingly deviant content, more frequent relapses, or riskier sex. Our insides twisted with shame because of the dark places our disease had taken us—another failure, another reason to feel ashamed and act out. These hits of our drug may have allowed us to cope with our shame for a moment. But eventually, shame came roaring back.

We became convinced, "I will never be accepted. I am too broken to be fixed." Trapped in this hopeless place, some of us considered ending it all. We'd rather die than live with this heavy, unshakeable shame.

We won't pretend it was easy to admit our shame for the first time. Some of us remember walking into our first SPAA meeting, seeing the laughing, happy people, and thinking, "That will never be me. I'm too sick."

So we hesitated to raise our hands and share. Some of us didn't open up at a meeting for weeks or even months. But as we listened to the other members, we started to see ourselves in their stories, and they revealed something to us. These aren't bad people; they're sick. They have a disease. We have a disease—not a moral issue.

Inspired, we raised our hand for the first time and finally let the group in. "We hear you," they said. "We've been there."

We felt a rush of relief. Decades of shame fell from our shoulders. We wanted to run out into the world and shout from the rooftops, "I'm cured!"

But relief is temporary. Shame eventually returns, as do our old behaviors in dealing with life. For lasting freedom from shame, we need a profound alteration in our reaction to shame. We need *recovery*.

So, how do we go about this? How do we find freedom from shame?

We surrender our thinking about shame. This requires admitting that shame, like sex and porn, has made our lives unmanageable. This is Step One.

We come to believe that only a higher power can remove our shame. This is Step Two—we accept that restoring our sanity requires a power greater than ourselves.

We turn our shame over to the care of God as we understand God. This is Step Three.

We use the moral inventory of Step Four to put our shame on paper. We list the causes of our shame, where self has failed, and we resolutely look for our own mistakes. Step Three empowers us to take on this spiritual process.

We admit our shame to God, to ourselves, and to another human being. Once we get it down on paper and share it, shame loses its grip. This is Step Five.

We become entirely ready to have our shame removed. We might resist the idea that we cannot change ourselves—that only a higher power can remove our shame. But we must be willing. This is Step Six.

We humbly ask our higher power to remove our shame. This is Step Seven.

As we continue, we stop seeing ourselves through a distorted lens, and start to become right-sized. Self-esteem and confidence are restored. We can look the world in the eye and come out from hiding.

We become less defensive and can admit our faults. When criticized by a loved one, we seek to comfort and understand. We gain the ability to have intimate conversations with close friends and partners. We begin to listen more and react less.

Deep down, we come to believe this can work for us. We gain trust in the momentum of working the Steps, and we begin to practice their principles in all our affairs. As we practice this way of life, we realize a higher power is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. And we begin to outgrow shame.