

7 Tips for Overcoming Pornography Use

In working with young single adults trying to overcome compulsive pornography use, I've found some tips that you might also find helpful.



By Richard Ostler

When I was set apart as a new bishop of a young single adult ward, there was a line of young single adults outside my office door waiting to meet with me. Guess what we discussed in that first interview?

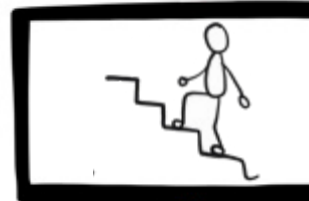
Pornography.

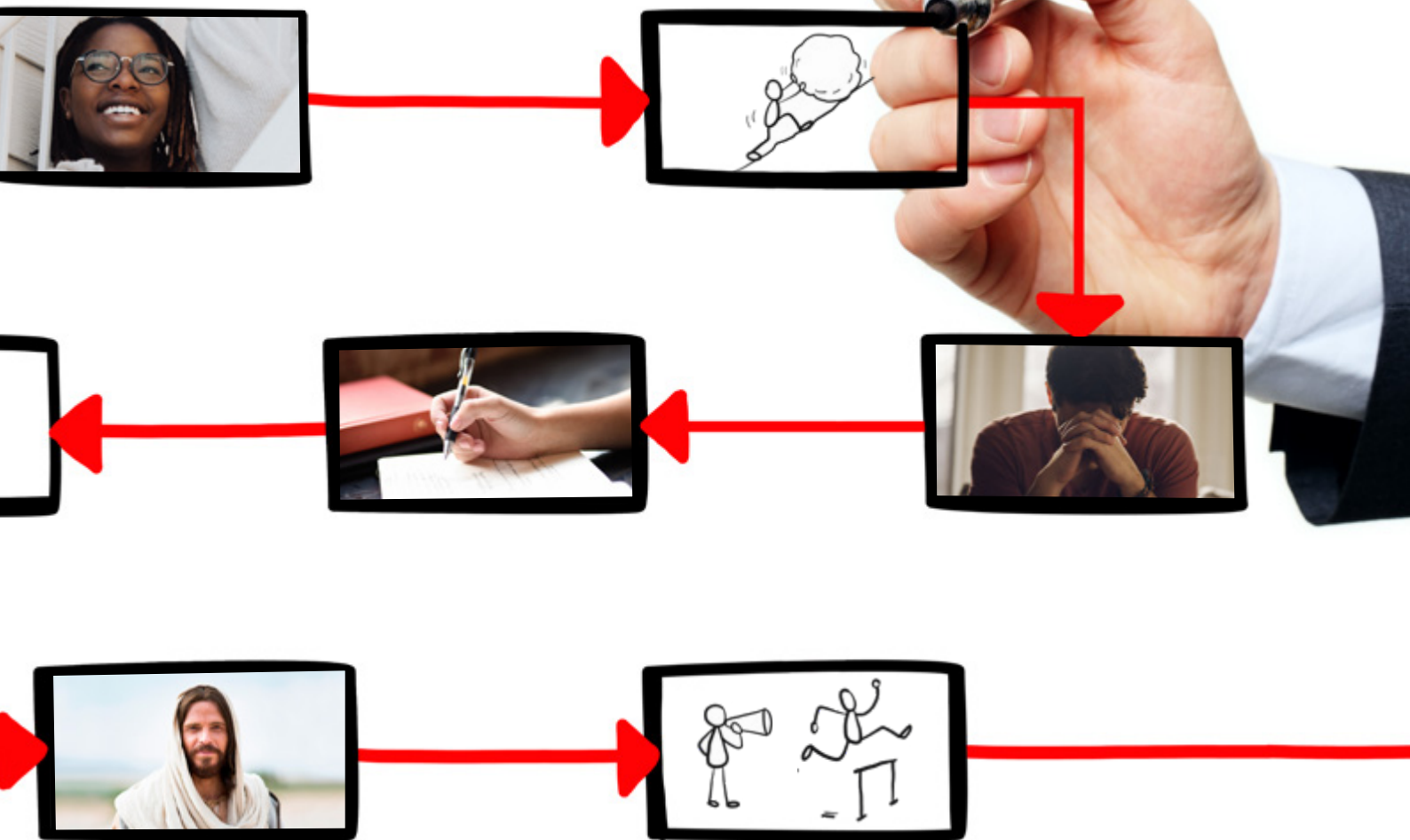
And for the next three years, trying to help young adults overcome a compulsive habit was a big aspect of my calling, so I knew I needed to learn as much as I could. I fasted, prayed, attended the temple, counseled with other leaders, reviewed all available resources, attended addiction recovery classes, and learned from those working to find recovery. I want to share some hope-filled thoughts about what I've learned.

1. Know That You Are a Child of Heavenly Parents Who Love You

If you are working to overcome compulsive pornography use, you might feel like pulling away from Heavenly Father because you think you're not worthy of love or help until you solve it. This is exactly what Satan wants—to isolate you from everyone who loves you with the idea that you can overcome pornography on your own and only then you'll be worthy of love.

Because of your divine nature, you are always worthy to receive hope, inspiration, and personal revelation from Heavenly Father and the healing power of Jesus Christ to overcome pornography.¹ Don't pull away from Them or from the people who love you.





2. Remove Shame

I've learned that removing shame is vital to overcoming pornography. Shame is feeling like you are broken, damaged, or a bad person. Believing these damaging ideas about yourself can actually keep you trapped in an addiction cycle. Feeling remorse for something you have done is part of the repentance process and can help you change your behavior. But shame makes you feel like your entire character is bad and that you are beyond help from the Savior.²

Heavenly Father wants you to have full hope in Jesus Christ and the blessings of His Atonement. Shame looks backward keeping you in a whirlpool of lies and self-loathing. Please stay off the shame road.

3. Don't Be Quick to Use the Label of "Addiction"

Many people label themselves as "addicted" to pornography. I caution you to not take on that label incorrectly. Most young people who struggle with pornography are actually *not* addicted.³ And

incorrectly using this label may make it harder to end pornography use because of the shame, decreased hope, and self-loathing that comes with it.

4. Create a Written Personal Prevention Plan

A personal prevention plan is a three-part document that can help you overcome pornography.

Part 1: List your triggers. Being triggered is the first step in the cycle that leads to viewing pornography.

There are several types of triggers:

- **Situational:** environments that create a trigger because of past thoughts or behavior (like being in the same room or at a certain time of day)
- **Stress/anxiety/loneliness/traumatic events:** difficult emotions or situations that trigger you to turn to pornography as a way to escape and deal with these feelings
- **Visual:** innocent exposure to something not pornographic but triggering via social media, movies, photos, etc.



Part 2: Make a plan for how to reduce triggers.

For example, if you have a situational trigger like feeling vulnerable late at night, turning off your phone 30 minutes before bedtime or sleeping without your phone in your room can be helpful. If pornography is a way that you cope with difficult feelings, find ways to better deal with these emotions. Could exercise or medication help you reduce your stress or anxiety levels? Could going out with friends or enrolling in an institute class reduce loneliness? Consider what you're struggling with and what options might be helpful to you.

Also, **don't underestimate spiritual tools.** Prayer, scripture study, service, and church and temple attendance are powerful tools that are vital in reducing triggers and helping you stay strong.

Part 3: Plan out what you will do when you are triggered. For each trigger, write out your multiple-step plan.

For example, when you are triggered, you might turn off your phone quickly, text or call someone, go for a walk or exercise, read from the Book of Mormon, or do anything else that might help you redirect your thoughts.

Write down steps that work for you! Sometimes triggers will pass without

having to go through all your prevention plan steps. But your steps can help pull you out of the moment. Once the trigger passes, update your prevention plan on what worked and how it can be modified to be more effective next time. Keep it somewhere you can see it daily.

5. Understand Lapse versus Relapse

A lapse is where you mess up, but you quickly recover and use it as a learning experience to improve your prevention plan. A relapse is where you give up, binge, and don't care.

Know that lapsing is part of improving your prevention plan. Don't conclude you have lost all your progress or all the work you've done doesn't count—because it does. Look forward with a positive attitude and know that you are one day closer to recovery.

When you have a lapse, ask yourself:

- What happened?
- Why was this trigger different?
- Have you been stressed out lately? How were you feeling emotionally?
- Did going some time with no scripture study weaken you?
- Have you not exercised a lot recently?
- Is something in your prevention plan not helpful?
- What can you do differently next time?

Write down what you are learning and keep going!



6. Believe in the Savior's Healing Power

Jesus Christ can help you in the growing process of repentance, and He has the power to enable you as you strive to overcome pornography. He understands how you feel and is waiting to take that burden from you. Don't think that turning to Him adds to His burden. He has already paid the price for you. Instead, do your best, come closer to the Savior, and ask Him to help you heal, to change your desires, and to give you more strength to move forward.

As Elder Ulisses Soares of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: "As we continually strive to overcome our challenges, God will bless us with the gifts of faith to be healed and of the working of miracles. He will do for us what we are not capable of doing for ourselves."⁴

7. Don't Do This Alone

Connection and friendship can also give you power and help you succeed. You should have someone who can help you keep yourself accountable and see you through your best and worst days. They should support you without judging you. And you could also provide the same support for them. Seek out counsel from your Church leaders or family members. And if needed, a therapist or professional mental health counselor can also help you discover the underlying reasons why you might be struggling with pornography.

Remember That You Are the Parents and Leaders of Tomorrow

You are the first generation managing 24/7 access to pornography. I believe this challenge is peaking with your

generation because you will have better tools and wisdom to lead others away from or out of this trap when you are parents and leaders one day. "Heavenly Father did not put us on earth to fail but to succeed gloriously."⁵

Although these tips can help in your efforts to overcome pornography, don't be afraid to turn to other resources as well. Everybody's journey to recovery looks different. Find what helps you. Don't give up. Take this one day at a time. You can do this. You truly can (see Philippians 4:13). And you will become who you were meant to be. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

DISCOVER MORE

Read about one young adult woman's journey of recovery in "Finally Understanding the Savior's Grace Helped Me Overcome Pornography" in the digital version of this issue.

NOTES

1. Sister Joy D. Jones explained the difference between worth and worthiness in "Value beyond Measure," *Ensign*, Nov. 2017, 14.
2. See Wendy Ulrich, "It Isn't a Sin to Be Weak," *Ensign*, Apr. 2015, 33; "Shame versus Guilt: Help for Discerning God's Voice from Satan's Lies" (digital-only article), *Ensign*, Jan. 2020.
3. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Recovering from the Trap of Pornography," *Ensign*, Oct. 2015, 34. President Oaks describes the distinction between different levels of involvement with pornography: "(1) inadvertent exposure, (2) occasional use, (3) intensive use, and (4) compulsive use (addiction)." It's helpful to recognize that not everyone who uses pornography is "addicted." There is hope for overcoming pornography, regardless of what level of involvement you're at.
4. Ulisses Soares, "Take Up Our Cross," *Ensign*, Nov. 2019, 114.
5. Richard G. Scott, "Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 30.

