

# Why Group Therapy?

*Adapted from Forest Benedict, LMFT, SATP, Author of "Life After Lust"*

After leading over 1,500 group sessions over the last several years, I can vouch for the effectiveness and power of group therapy in helping sexual addicts recover. Still, few people want to join a group initially and I completely understand why.

For this reason, I want to share with you a chapter from "Life After Lust" on this topic, so you will understand why group work is so essential. It is my hope that all individuals in need of healing will take the courageous step and join an online recovery group. The first step will feel impossible but the last step will feel heroic. Because it is.

## CHAPTER 13

### **The Paradox of Pornography Addiction: What You Fear Most Will Heal You**

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#### *Skill to Master #8: Learning to connect in the context of a recovery group*

What if the one thing you feared most was the source of your deepest healing? This is the paradox of pornography addiction. In shame, porn addicts seek safety in the shadows of isolation. The sad irony is that in doing so, they separate themselves from a profound source of healing: Authentic and accepting relationships.

After years of pursuing personal recovery and helping others heal as well, I am convinced that learning to connect with others in a group setting is foundational for long-term recovery. Without the group experience, recovery attempts are destined to fail.

For most, participation in a group sounds scary. Porn addicts tend to have a strong aversion to the concept, even when told that groups are vital. Let me explain why porn addicts are repelled by the idea of recovery groups.

## Why Groups Can Be Unappealing

Most of us who struggle with pornography addiction learned early in life that other people could not be trusted to meet our needs. Whether this lesson came through neglect, abuse, or trauma, this belief made us vulnerable to porn addiction. When denied the connection we were wired for, we started looking for alternative connections.

In times of stress or distress, all humans reach out for soothing. Since our track record with people was poor, we turned to something non-relational to escape our suffering. For us, pornography quickly became the source of all soothing.

At first, it seemed to meet a need but eventually we were overwhelmed by an out-of-control addiction. What was meant to be our solution became our new source of suffering.

With this all too common backstory, our greatest need in recovery is the connection that seems to eternally evade us. As Carl Jung once said, “We are wounded in relationship and we heal through relationship.”

## Why Connection with Others Is Needed

Here are three powerful reasons why groups provide the connection necessary for a lifetime of healing, even though the idea of opening up may be what is most feared:

**1. We learn to trust.** Though we have been hurt by others in our past, groups provide a safe context in which we can learn to trust again. It is in groups that we get to practice connecting with others, possibly for the first time in our life. We can try new and healthier ways of relating to others in a safe setting.

As we trust the group more fully, we open up more fully. The miracle of recovery occurs when love begins to fill us in a way that lust never could. This transformative experience cannot occur in isolation, so groups are essential.

**2. Our shame and secrecy diminish.** Nothing fuels addiction like secrecy and shame. Active in our addiction, we believe we are innately broken and unworthy of love. Unless we learn to give voice to our inadequacies and hidden transgressions amongst those who support us, our addiction will thrive.

Groups provide a safe and confidential setting where we can share our shame-saturated secrets. As frightening as it may be initially, when we allow safe people to see inside of us, our shame is stunted and we develop a sense of belonging. While we once lived shackled by secrets, we experience how living in the truth sets us free.

**3. We find strength in numbers.** When we join a group, we suddenly have a team working for the good of each player. We are stronger together. Groups provide both a cheering section and a lifeline.

In times of temptation, there is power in reaching out to fellow group members. I liken this experience to letting someone talk us back from a dangerous ledge. In my personal battle against sexual addiction, having a handful of caring friends that I can call or text in moments of weakness or pain has strengthened my recovery in unimaginable ways.

## Replacing Lust with Love

I am both a group leader and a group member in several regular groups. Having helped many porn addicts find freedom, I can honestly say that without a group, real recovery is impossible. Sure, someone might achieve sobriety on their own. But in order to recover from an often debilitating and lifelong addiction, a person needs to do more than just let go of lust.

As I shared in a workbook I wrote for my clients,

“recovery is a process of letting go of lust and letting love replace it. It means letting go of your attachment to unhealthy coping mechanisms and connecting with what is real. Learning how to connect will likely be the hardest yet most rewarding adventure of your life. Connection truly satisfies what lust never could.”

It is my hope that those seeking long-term freedom from pornography addiction will lean into the fear of being seen and take the bold leap of joining a recovery group.

When we come out of hiding, healing can begin.

## Questions

1. *What might be the benefits of regularly meeting in a group for you?*
2. *What concerns do you have about being in such a group?*