

What is a Sexual Compulsion?

Broadly speaking, sexual compulsion (or sexual addiction) is the inability to stop destructive sexual actions. "Destructive" can mean that the sex makes you feel bad about yourself, or that you are cheating on your partner, or that you are hurting someone else.

Generally speaking, if you feel bad about yourself after having sex, but can't seem to stop, you may want to think about the likelihood that you are have a sexual addiction.

Here's a list of activities that may indicate a problem with sexual compulsion:

Compulsive Masturbation

accompanied by mental images or thoughts about sex, or while viewing sexual images on the TV or computer screen or while looking at pornographic publications (or even while looking at non-sexual material, such as underwear or swim wear ads).

Compulsive Sex with Prostitutes

this can be with female or male prostitutes or transvestites (transvestites are usually men dressed as sexy women) at their place of business or dispatched to your location or picked up on the street.

Anonymous Sex with Multiple Partners

"one night stands" picked up at bars, or sex with strangers in parks or restrooms, or sex in any number of anonymous situations, where sex is the object and no relationship is established with the person.

Multiple Affairs

outside a committed relationship, or serial relationships (one after the other).

Frequent Patronizing of "Adult" Establishments

including topless bars, bathhouses, adult bookstores or sexual massage parlours.

Habitual Exhibitionism

exposing one's private body parts to unsuspecting onlookers, either directly (by removing or opening clothing) or indirectly through skimpy or revealing clothing. An example is the man who sits in his car with his fly unzipped and begins masturbating when someone appealing to him walks by.

Habitual Voyeurism

the so-called "peeping Tom," who finds sexual excitement in forbidden secret looks into other people's privacy. Examples are: looking into a neighbor's bathroom or bedroom window in hopes of seeing someone disrobed, peering up shorts or skirts on the sly, or looking through "glory holes" in restroom walls (strategically located holes in walls separating urinal or toilet stalls).

Inappropriate Sexual Touching

touching someone for sexual excitement in a manner that attempts to appear accidental, such as "accidentally" brushing up against another person's breast or genitals in a crowd.

Broadly speaking, there are four fields of education that produce psychotherapists: Psychiatry, Psychology, Social Work & Counseling.

Psychiatry

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has training in psychiatry. This requires four years of college, four years of medical school, and then an additional four years of psychiatry residency.

Psychiatrists are the only mental health professionals who can prescribe medications. Often, a psychotherapist will send a client to a consulting psychiatrist for medications while providing psychotherapy.

Psychology

Doctors of psychology can hold a Ph.D. or a Psy.D. The Ph.D. is the traditional degree, whereas the Psy.D. is a more modern degree that focuses on practice instead of research. There is also a Master's degree in psychology, which is usually a M.A.

Perhaps the most important distinction between psychologists and the other professionals listed here is that doctors of psychology can administer certain tests that other mental health professionals cannot.

There is one other concern that a client may want to consider: In the State of Michigan, anyone who practices psychotherapy with a master's degree in psychology (M.A.) must be supervised by a doctoral level psychologist (Ph.D. or Psy.D.). If you are seeing someone with an M.A. in psychology, he or she is required to disclose information about their supervisor to you.

Social Work

Most of this country's mental health services are provided by individuals trained in social work.

A psychotherapist trained in social work will probably hold a master's in social work (M.S.W.). There is a social work Ph.D., and also a doctorate of social work (D.S.W.), but the vast majority of clinical social workers have an M.S.W.

Counseling

Counselors will most likely hold a master's degree in counseling (either an M.A. or an M.S.). Counselors often specialize in a particular area, such as children, addictions or marriages and families.

So I've Made My Choice... Now What?

Call the person that you've chosen and speak with him or her. Ask about scheduling an appointment and about fees. Many clients are surprised to find that the majority of private practice psychotherapists do not accept insurance—because of this, discussing fees in advance is essential!

You may also want to consider the amount of time between calling the therapist and the initial session. Some therapists will tell you that they are "fully booked"—this means that they are not taking on new clients at the moment. Some therapists will ask if you want to be put in a waiting list, which means that you are willing to wait until the therapist has an opening before you schedule an initial appointment. Other therapists will offer you a referral to another profession who has a similar practice.

Conclusion

It is essential that you feel comfortable with your therapist. I hope that this guide will be helpful to you as you negotiate the (somewhat) complicated world of psychotherapists. Of course, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me.



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