

014 Seven Things to Know When Starting a Support Group for Porn Addicts

Welcome to Pornfree Radio, I'm Matt Dobschuetz. Pornfree Radio is the podcast for people who want to get free from porn addiction. In this episode, we're talking about Seven Things You Need to Know When Starting a Support Group for Porn Addicts.

Those people. Sometimes people use this phrase when they're trying to compliment me. They say it in a sentence like this: It's so great you're helping *those* people. It's sometimes people will say that at church. They're trying to compliment me, because they think that having a porn related podcast or having a church support group related to sexual issues is kind of a noble thing. And they see the people who go to that are not people like themselves.

And there might a little bit of condescension in it, there could be a little bit of shame. I'm not quite sure what they always mean by it. But what they don't realize is that when they refer to *those* people, they're referring to me. That I didn't get into this because of some Mother Teresa like noble mission to help those who struggle with pornography and masturbation. I got into this because *I* struggled with pornography and masturbation. I got into this because of my own journey and I help others because it helps me continue to walk out the journey. So when they talk about *those* people, they don't realize that they're speaking directly to one of *those* people.

And I know you guys probably know what that feels like when people say stuff like that, especially if you're thinking about starting a support group yourself. And now you might be new in your journey, you might be a little farther along, but at some point, if you continue, you realize that there's a great need to help others. And we talked about this in [Episode 13](#). There are benefits to helping others. And as you start to look around in your own journey and recovery, you start seeing others who are a little farther behind than you who are making the same mistakes you did. And you start getting a vision for helping them and to essentially coming alongside them and encouraging them.

And when you start feeling like that, even if you're in the midst of your own addiction, you're getting close to the path of starting a support group. And so, here's seven things that you need to know when starting a support group for porn addicts. Now this isn't going to be, look at this group or material, these are just general things that will help you as you sort of commit to starting a support group for other porn addicts.

1. Share Your Story, Model Vulnerability

All right, so number 1. The most important thing that you can do when starting a group and gathering people is share your story, model vulnerability. Your group will only go as deep and as real and as honest as you go. So if you want to inspire people to be real, to be honest, you need to do it yourself. You need to be very vulnerable. And you need to do this in a safe way for yourself. You can't just tell everyone in your life every detail of your struggle. But when you start to form the group, whether it's a small group, whether it's a larger support group at say a church or something like that, you need to start the meeting off. You need to start the vision off by being honest about your story and modeling vulnerability.

You really will not serve anybody well if you come in with sort of the leader hat on that you kind of have everything figured out and your struggle is 50 miles in the rear view mirror. People don't respond to that. People don't want to be... people want someone to kind of model themselves after. They want a role model. They don't want someone who is just going to tell them what to do. So they're looking to you for hope: that they're not alone, that there's freedom, and that this struggle and this process is worth pressing into. And so you can do that by sharing your story and modeling vulnerability.

2. Make it a Safe Place

Number 2, what you want to do, when you pull together a group, even if it's an informal group. You want to make it a safe place for everyone who comes. You want to make sure that you're not joking or minimizing about other people's struggles, you don't want to make fun of anyone who comes. Anyone who needs help should be open to coming and if they follow your group's guidelines and if they're in the right place, it should be safe for them.

I think of a good example. I was in a group once and it was over summer and people were wearing different types of clothes, like tank tops and shorts and things like that. And it came to the attention of the leader that maybe this dress, people dressing different ways could possibly trigger other people in the group. So we took a blind vote and basically said hey, we're considering not allowing people to wear shorts in the group, just because it could cause, it could trigger someone. So, anyone in the group that this could be an issue to, just put that on a piece of paper and we kind of had a blind vote and we decided that even 1 vote we would agree to not wear shorts. And so we did the vote and we got back like 2 votes, and we decided OK, we can't wear shorts. It's an issue for some people here.

Now, why did we do that? Did we want to create a bunch of rules for ourselves? Was it legalistic? No. We wanted to make the group safe for the people who came. And there might be things like that where you as a leader need to keep an eye on people. Make sure the conversations people have are safe. Make sure that people aren't falling into patterns of doing things that could make people not safe. So that's, it could be triggering, it could be making fun of things and you need to create a dialogue with people.

Anyone in the group if they have a challenge with something they should be able to come to you and say, hey I'm struggling with this. You can invite people, if you don't feel safe, let me know what's causing you a struggle. Sometimes in the groups that I've run people are coming from a background of childhood sexual abuse so there's some sensitive issues that can come up. And they need to know that it's safe to be able to deal with these issues and that they're not going to be made fun of or there's not going to be, their pain is not going to be taken lightly. So do everything you can to make it a safe place for those who come. OK, so share your story, model vulnerability, make it a safe place.

3. Be Committed to Working on Your Stuff

Number 3 this is really important. Be committed to working on your stuff. Even if you're a little farther along, you're going to be challenged if you're starting a group. Be quick to confess things as they come up before they turn into problems. And set boundaries. Be ruthless with yourself. We talked a lot about in earlier podcasts about what we watch on TV or if we have Internet filters, relationships, and other boundaries that we set for ourselves. As a leader, be very careful and be committed to continue to work on your stuff.

When I say be quick to confess, you know I had a leader on a team that as I with who would come to me when he just felt drawn to a woman in the group. He... nothing had happened; he hadn't acted out at home with masturbation or pornography. He wasn't sexually fantasizing about this person. But he would come quickly before anything got out of whack, out of control and say hey; I'm feeling drawn to this one participant. And just by saying it out loud broke some of the power of that temptation to fantasize or sexualize that other person. And that was a real learning point for me. That, wow, when things come up I need to be honest with the other leaders on my team. I need to be honest, even if it seems real small. So do that, be committed to work on yourself, be quick to confess things, set good boundaries for yourself.

4. Be Open to All

Here's another one. This is number 4. Be open to who comes. You might start a group in your area for guys who struggle with porn and you might have guys coming with other issues. [Pauses.] Sorry about that. You could have guys coming to your group who are struggling with depression or struggling with their marriage relationship. And they just need a group to come to and to be real and honest with. It might not be exactly like your struggle, but be open to who comes.

One season when I was running my group, we had a group that had men and women. At one point we had 30 women come to the group and 10 men. And I was just blown away because I was like wow, I can't believe how many women came to this group for help. I thought all my porn guys would come, but they avoided the group. And so, but you know in that group a lot of great things happened. A lot of the women who came got a lot of help and a lot of support. And so you know be open to who comes to your group.

5. Go Very Slow

All right, so share your story, model vulnerability, do all you can to make it a safe place, be committed to working on your stuff, be quick to confess, be quick to set strong boundaries, be open to who comes and number five, go very slow. A lot of times when you're putting a group together you have a picture of a program or kind of an idea and you know what these problems, this pornography problem, sexual addiction, masturbation, these are not going away. People are always going to have these things. And so take your time when you build your group. Take your time.

Feel free to start small. You don't have to have a big group at first. Find some other safe people. Is there someone else in the journey who's a little farther along that you can pull into your team? Are there some safe people that you can gather yourself with? Now the best leaders are going to be people who come out of the struggle. People who you actually help journey out with. So you need time to get around some people who are messy and who are in the struggle and help walk them out. Cause those are going to make the best leaders.

And if you're trying to go fast, it's really hard to take someone who's messy and who's in process and make them a team member. So go real slow. Take your time. You know, when I started my group I used to recruit people by saying, hey, would you consider being on my team? You seem to be doing, getting some momentum. But if you can't be a team member right now, consider it in the future. I want to do this thing for 10 years or more. So maybe in a couple years you'll feel ready. Take your time. Have a long goal in mind.

6. Start Small

I just mentioned it's good to start small. I'd say it's actually better to start small. Work on providing a high quality group, a high confidentiality group, a high impact group with a small group of people. The smaller your group, the more you can focus on each person who comes and give them individual attention.

I just did a group last year where I think we had 3 guys total. And there's a lot of time to go deep with each guy. Now, I think the ideal size group is about 4-5 people. 6 maybe max. That would be for a small group. The groups that I run right now have a small group, where we break into small groups, but there's also a large group component, a meeting kind of component. So one of the ratios I like is at least a pair of people to be team members for every 6 people who come to the group.

So if you have one other person in your life who's a safe person and has been on this journey with you, you could start a small group with 5-6 people. And I wouldn't recommend any more to be honest because you're going to have your hands full with 4-5 people. And if you have a vision for a 20-30 person group, that takes a lot of really healthy leaders to walk out well. So don't be afraid to start small.

Don't be afraid to get a little choosy about who's in the group. Look for the people who are most motivated and the people who really will do the work to be a part of the group. Don't just take everybody who comes along, because there's a lot of people out there who aren't ready to be a part of a group. They are not ready to be honest, they're not ready to work with others, and so you don't want to have a group of a whole bunch of people like that.

The best people who come to group are people who really know why they want to come, what they need help with, and are willing to do anything to get past the place that they're at in life. There's a little bit of desperation that they have. And sometimes people aren't at that point. You've heard of hitting rock bottom? Sometimes people haven't hit rock bottom and they could be very difficult to work with in a group because you spend half of the time convincing them that this is a good thing to do.

So let me just go back through a few of these, share your story, model vulnerability. Number 2, do all you can do to make it a safe place for everyone who comes. Number 3, be committed to keeping on working to keep working on your stuff. Number 4, be open to who comes. Number 5, go very slow. Number 6, it's better to be small with high quality than to be big and mediocre. So start small.

7. Ask for a High Commitment from Members

Number 7, and this is the last one. Ask for a high commitment from people coming. Don't be afraid to challenge people. And when I say high commitment, I'm talking about doing the things that the group commits to doing.

So, here's an example. We don't like it when people miss meetings. A lot of times when you're in a porn struggle, if you miss meetings it's because you're acting out. And so, if you miss a couple meetings in a row, that's not a good sign because if you do come back to group and you've had a relapse, then we have to spend the whole group putting humpty dumpty back together. And so it's better if you just don't miss. And even if you did have a relapse, it's better if you come and talk about it, because then you can start to learn the skill of being honest about where you're at when you have a relapse and ask for help sooner and pressing into community faster. So something like asking for people to come every week to the point of if they miss a couple meetings, you ask them to leave. That's something that I would recommend.

If you're studying a book, or going through material, it's not unreasonable that people do their homework. And if a guy continues to not do his homework or not do what the group's agreed to do, it's worth calling him out and holding him accountable. And it's not about shaming them, but it's about mirroring to them how they're doing life. Are they doing the group in a real sloppy way where they're ignoring the commitment of the group?

Another key one is coming on time. You know, again, it's not about being legalistic, but some people make a real high priority to be at group. And then other people come late. And what does it communicate to others when someone's constantly late? It communicates that they don't think the group is that valuable. Or that they don't think that they need to be there on time. And when we talk about number 2 about keeping a safe place that ends up making it not feel like a safe place, because you feel like this guy doesn't care as much as I do. He's not working as hard. He's not coming on time. He's not respecting the group.

So things like coming on time, doing the readings, coming every week: those are just basic things. If your group has a fee to pay for the materials or renting the space that you're meeting at and someone doesn't pay, that's another boundary where people are sort of taking advantage.

So set a high commitment. Ask people to commit to something high. You can always, if you feel like it's causing people too much consternation, you can always loosen things up after the group starts a little bit. But start with high commitments, ask for a high commitment and then ease up. Don't ask for a lukewarm commitment and then spend your whole time chasing people. That doesn't work.

So those are simple things about starting a group. Now, the group that I attended, I talked about it, in 2001, was a group called [Redeemed Lives](#), which is a Christian group. They're available at [Redeemedlives.org](#). You can read about that program there. I think the programs you can actually buy on DVD and watch together. So you might be able to start a group by getting together a group of people and watching the DVDs. There's a number of different programs you can choose from and I would probably start with one of the shorter programs 8-10 week programs. But that's something you could do together, Redeemed Lives.

The group I run is called [Living Waters](#) and they have a program called [Cross Current](#) and that's written by [Desert Stream](#). So you can go to [desserstream.org](#) and you can read about those programs. Living Waters there's a training that's involved to run it. Cross Current, I believe you can order the book, I don't think you can call it Cross Current but you can do it like a study. It's an 8 week study that you can do. So that's an example of another group. Now those groups are

not focused primarily on just porn addiction, they're Christian recovery groups aimed at all sorts of recovery issues related to sexuality and relationships.

Now there are some groups that are more focused on porn addiction, so one of them is [Celebrate Recovery](#), kind of 12 step model and that might be something to look into. I'll have the link to that in the show notes.

Another one is called the [Samson Society](#) which is a group started by Nate Larkin and he has a book that I think you can read and kind of get an idea of what running a Samson Society meeting is. Now Samson in the Bible was this guy who was isolated and had this great strength and you probably remember the story about getting his hair cut and losing his strength. There was the whole Delilah thing. But I think one of the things they say about the Samson Society is this idea that it's gathering a whole bunch of men who have been lone wolves together. And so it's really breaking the isolation that guys get into when they're struggling with porn and sexual addiction.

A final group is called [Faithful and True](#) and I'll link to that. That was a group that I attended for a while several years ago that had a workbook and some different kind of activities that you do in the group and it had a group format. So those are just a few examples of different types of groups out there that you could look to start.

And what I really encourage you to do is figure out what works for you and do that. Don't try to create a group for guys you know. Create a group that you really like. Because if you're going to set this up and be the servant and get the meetings and set up the chairs read the material ahead of time and think about how you want the group to look. You're going to have to do a lot of work. So you want to find a group that you really like.

You really like the reading or you really like the people who've developed the material. Find something that works for you and that resonates with you and start that group. For example, I started a group that had men and women involved. You might go, I don't want to start a group that has men and women involved. The vision I have is for a very accountable, a very strong men's group. So do that. Look for some material that would benefit a group of men gathering together. You want to start a brotherhood. You have a picture of a brotherhood of men, like in an army situation. Great, go with that vision. Figure out what works for you and do that.

All right, here's a next step that you can take. If you're... even if you're really new to this recovery. Just take about 30 minutes after this podcast, just get some time alone and jot down your ideal group. What would it look like? What would be things that they would do in the group?

Would it have 5 or 6 guys in it? Would there be check-ins every week. Would it meet weekly? Would it be an open group, could anyone just drop in or would it be closed? Would it be exclusively porn focused and masturbation focused? Would it be Christian? You know you may have a vision for it to be a Christian

group? You may not be a Christian and you might think, hey, I just want a 12 step group or I'd like a group that follows these ideas. So figure that out.

And once you start to get a picture of that, once you sort of have things written on the paper, start looking around at the people in your life and saying who might be interested in something like this? And if you could find 1-2 other people, who maybe you know from a conversation that you had or maybe there was a retreat you went on and someone got a little, in the retreat atmosphere, got a little deeper and a little more honest about their current struggle. Maybe you could go back to them and say, hey, I'm kind of thinking about this group. What do you think? And maybe they might have a couple of ideas.

But from that, see if you could get 2-3 other people to kind of buy in to this idea that you've written down. And then start looking for a book or a resource that you could get through and pile it together. That's the way I recommend doing it. You don't want to start a group that you think is going to be the be all and end all for groups. What you want to do, and this is a business case, you want to get a minimum viable product. Basically, you want to pilot some material and see if it works. So you can get a guidebook and or a resource and read it together and see, hey is the material helping us? Is this a good thing? Take 8 weeks, take 10 weeks together as a group and see, are we getting something from this? Is this valuable?

And once you get through that initial run, 8 or 10 weeks, reevaluate. Figure out what worked, what didn't work, and if things worked and if you have a good idea on what to do next, then start a group and make it a little more public. Invite people you don't know. Put an announcement at your church or wherever, what other places where you might be able to list your group. Maybe there's some counselors in your area, or maybe there's an SA group that might be willing to share about your group. And you can start to network and make relationships with people who might be helped by coming. So you make it broader.

But start with those first steps. Jot down your ideal group. Just write a picture of what it would look like. What would be the best group for you? Remember? I talked about finding out what works for you? Do that first. Think about what is your ideal group. And then as you have a picture of that, share that with other people in your community and invite them to maybe pilot a group with you. Pilot an idea. And take the initiative to look at material and instead of making it a democracy, where you kind of say, what do you guys want to do, what do you guys want to do? Come in and say hey, I think this is a great book for us to try first. Let's do this. If you have a book that you want to recommend, let's consider doing that next. Start with an idea of yourself.

So that's kind of how to get started. Well, I really appreciate you listening and I just thanks for all the comments and stuff. People have been posting on iTunes, which is great. I'd love it if you could take the time to go to iTunes and leave a

review and a rating. That helps get the word out. Tell your friends about Pornfree Radio. I just want to be a resource to as many people as possible who are struggling with this issue.

I wanted to read one email that I got this past week from a listener named Jason. He wrote, Listened to Episode 10 of your podcast. [Episode 10](#) was on the media and making decisions about the TV that we watch. It's at pornfreeradio.com/10. Anyway, let me continue reading. He said, wow, excellent stuff. Thanks for being so honest and open about your experiences and struggles. It would have been easy to make this a finger wagging type of podcast. But since you genuinely shared from where you are and where you've been, it came off as more genuine and inspiring. Instead of receiving a list of movies or shows we should not watch, you did a great job explaining how you came to your decisions and offered some honest questions that we all need to ask ourselves in our journeys. Thanks again.

Well, I really appreciate that, Jason, and again, yeah, it's not about finger wagging, it's not about a list of rules, it's not a list about don't do this, don't do that, it's about owning our struggle and being the steward of our journey. And you need to figure out what works for you and what doesn't serve you well. And the more that you are the one who's in control of deciding what you need to watch and what's good for you to watch and what's bad for you to watch, the better off you'll be. If you spend your time making decisions about what's good for others or what's not good for others, you could just stay stuck. So thanks again for that.

And I just thank any comments that you have on Google+ or Twitter reddit and as I mentioned last week we now have a Facebook page. Yes, welcome to 2014, Matt. You've finally joined Facebook. You can find us at [Pornfree Radio with Matt Dobschuetz](#) on Facebook. It's facebook.com/pornfreeradio. That's the show page and that's the best way to connect with me on Facebook. Follow, or friend, whatever it's called. [Like Facebook pages. When you like a page, you connect to it. Make sure you like posts as they appear in your News feed so the page continues to show.] Like, like us on Facebook, that's what you do. You can also connect with me, Matt Dobschuetz, on [Google+](#), on [Twitter](#), and on [reddit](#), I'm PornfreeMattD. The show notes for this episode will be at pornfreeradio.com/14.

So again, thanks again for listening to this episode. If you at any point today, just feel moved to shift in your thinking from being an addict or being someone who's just caught up in their struggle to thinking about starting a group to help others, man I just really encourage you to pursue it. It might be far off, it might be a long vision, but it worked for me. And it continues to give benefit and meaning to my struggle. And it can do the same for you. So thanks again and we'll talk to you next week.