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a resource in:

Marriage

Support For Wives Feeling Betrayed By Their Husbands' Sexual Sin



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Support For Wives Feeling Betrayed By Their Husbands' Sexual Sin

For individuals who are helping a wife deal with her spouse's sexually addictive or compulsive behaviors.

Isaiah 42:3, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth."

When a wife learns of her spouse's sexually addictive or compulsive behaviors (either by discovery or disclosure), she is placed in an extremely difficult and emotional situation. The secretive nature of the issue leaves the wife feeling particularly isolated and unsure of what to do next. The hurt, anger, shame, embarrassment, uncertainty, and secrecy associated with sinful sexual behavior impacts the ability for women to cope. It often leaves them feeling less able to reach out for help and even leads them to withdraw and isolate themselves from the established support structure they so desperately need.

Psalms 119:82, "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?"

Outlined and defined below are five aspects of support which women commonly find helpful to effectively cope with a spouse's sinful sexual behaviors¹. This support may be provided by one person or a group of people, depending on the resources available.

I. CONNECTION.

Galatians 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

- A. A wife in this situation needs connection due to the isolation experienced from the shame, embarrassment, fear, and uncertainty about who can be trusted for disclosure.
- B. She needs help connecting to God, others, her spouse, and even refocusing on life itself.
- C. A wife needs relationships where she can feel accepted. Note that true "connection" with others can, but does not always, require acknowledgement of the problematic sexual behavior. A wife needs times to talk about dealing with her husband's sexual sin, and she also needs times where she doesn't have to focus on it.
- D. Connection has a normalizing effect; breaking isolation helps to fend off Satan's attacks.

II. ADVOCACY.

Psalms 54:4, "Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul."

- A. Advocacy can be provided by someone who has a degree of authority (often an elder, minister, or mentor). This individual can advocate for the wife's needs and positively influence the husband and hold him accountable.
- B. Advocacy honors the pain and needs of the woman and helps clarify the need for the husband to take responsibility for his problem.
- C. The typical emotional reactions that stem from discovering the husband's problematic sexual behavior leads to difficulty making decisions or following through with effective action. An advocate helps the wife make good decisions during a difficult time and find strength to move forward.

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III. VALIDATION.

Proverbs 20:5, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out."

- A. Validation provides affirmation and reassurance that a wife's feelings and experiences are understandable and legitimate.
- B. It serves to counter the self-doubt, insecurity, and self-blame that is so often experienced.
- C. Being validated helps her depersonalize the issue, not blame herself, and assign the responsibility to the proper person. This will also allow her to be able to better see the areas where she needs to grow.

IV. EDUCATION.

Proverbs 23:12, "Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge."

- A. Education about problematic sexual behavior and sexual addiction can help the wife better understand the problem and separate herself from it in a healthy way, so that she can think clearly about what kind of action she needs to take.
- B. A wife often needs help understanding that working toward healing is a process for herself, for her husband, and her marriage. Educating her to develop accurate expectations for herself and her husband is essential.
- C. She is better able to cope when she has a clear sense of her role, as well as the roles of ministers, accountability partners, etc.
- D. Specifically, education topics include: (1) the problem itself, (2) treatment options, and (3) learning how others have dealt with this type of problem in their marriages.
- E. Helping a wife understand what she can and can't control in her husband's recovery is important.

V. DIRECTION.

Proverbs 19:20, "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end."

- A. Due to the often intense and overwhelming emotions a wife experiences in these situations and the hidden nature of the issue, there is a great need for direction on what to do and how to cope.
- B. A wife often feels a great need to know specific information about what her husband has done. While this is understandable, it is important to help her discern when more information is helpful versus when it will simply lead to further hurt.
- C. Many women also need direction on where to go for specific help and counsel, as well as some step-by-step directions on their role in dealing with their husband's sexual struggle.

1. Adapted from J. C. Manning & W. L. Watson, "Common Factors in Christian Women's Preferences for Support When Dealing with a Spouse's Sexually Addictive or Compulsive Behaviors: The C.A.V.E.D. theory," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 15:3 (2008): 233-249.