



PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIOR & SEX ADDICTION TREATMENT

Call Santé Center for Healing today to get
started on your recovery!

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CONTENTS

What Is Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB)?	3
What Does Problematic Sexual Behavior Look Like?	3
How Does Problematic Sexual Behavior Interact With Substance Use?	5
What Causes Problematic Sexual Behavior?	6
How Prevalent Is Problematic Sexual Behavior?	7
What Does Treatment For Problematic Sexual Behavior Look Like?	7
What Are The Benefits Of Seeking Treatment For Problematic Sexual Behavior?	9
What Does Long-Term Recovery From Problematic Sexual Behavior Look Like?	9
Wrap Up	10

What is Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB)?

Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB) is a spectrum of disorders (issues like pornography addiction, compulsive masturbation, anonymous sexual behaviors, sexual promiscuity and boundary failure) characterized by obsessive thoughts along with compulsive acting out.

At Santé Center for Healing, we define problematic sexual behavior as a "pathological relationship with a mood-altering experience."

Problematic sexual behavior is a very real problem. The definition of addiction developed by the American Society of Addiction Medicine incorporates behavioral addictions such as gambling, internet addiction and sex. This definition is supported by over 30 years of research in addiction medicine and an abundance of neuroscience studies.

What Does Problematic Sexual Behavior Look Like?

PSB is frequently understood as any repetitive sexual behavior exceeding a person's relationship commitments, personal values and/or self-control.

The Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health promotes these 5 questions for an individual to assess PSB:



Commitment

Are you keeping your promises?

Values

Are you okay with what you are doing?

Responsibility

Are you protecting others?

Negative Consequences

Is everything okay?

Control

Are you in control of yourself?



Common PSB experiences include but are not limited to: Repeated and intense sexual fantasies and behaviors consuming an inordinate amount of time and individuals feel as if the behaviors are beyond their control; sense of being driven by certain sexual behaviors, followed by tension release, but also accompanying shame and regret; unsuccessful attempts to cut down on behaviors; compulsive sexual behavior utilized as an escape from problems (i.e. anxiety, depression, loneliness, stress); continuing to engage in sexual behaviors in spite of significant risks - medical, legal, financial, relational and professional; difficulty cultivating and maintaining healthy relationships.

PSB is often progressive, and left untreated the acting out behaviors become worse over time. The behaviors are an attempt to self-medicate, become numb to escape problems or avoid intimacy. PSB's consequences (shame, guilt, broken relationships, etc.) can provoke increased acting out. No matter the PSB disorder, the same root issues are often at play (often childhood attachments or lack thereof, trauma, etc.) and just reveal themselves differently in acting out behaviors.

Problematic sexual behavior is:

- An intimacy disorder
- A relationship disorder
- A family of origin disorder
- A trauma disorder

Those who treat PSB, and specifically "sex addiction" have found the therapeutic landscape sometimes indifferent and sometimes in stark opposition to the distinction of "sex addiction." Recently, in a controversial decision, compulsive sexual behavior disorder was added to the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases. This publication often influences the content of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a handbook used by United States' health care professionals as the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders, containing descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria for diagnosis.

Pornography

One of the most common forms of problematic sexual behavior is the use of pornography. While pornography use is not necessarily PSB, it becomes an issue when it causes environmental and internalized stressors in a person's life. Ongoing behavior despite consequences helps determine if symptoms of PSB exist.



Love Addiction

A love addict experiences an intoxicating rush: when engaged in seduction; when in the initial phases of a relationship; when a pattern exists of intense, painful or obsessive relationships. A love addict can act out by clinging to a partner (even if destructive personally), by avoiding intimacy and/or love with a partner, by the succession of one relationship to the next, or inability to achieve closure when a relationship ends. Love addiction can also present when an individual is obsessed with a fantasy he/she has created about another person, believing he/she is "loving" the other but in fact is objectifying the other person through the use of fantasy. Or maybe is completely "love avoidant" - incapable of lasting feelings of attachment and/or avoid relationships and commitment all together.

in voyeurism or exhibitionism; may repeatedly seek anonymous sexual encounters; or believe that they are unable to stop repeated infidelity.



How does problematic sexual behavior interact with substance use?

Some clients act out sexually during active drug addiction/use; this typically is not discovered and addressed in a general sex addiction track/program. Yet, if not addressed, it increases the likelihood for relapse. Most of our clients with problematic sexual behavior enter Santé because of their substance use disorder, often coupled with depression or anxiety.

Sexual Addiction

A sex addict may compulsively view pornography; may compulsively masturbate; may engage in sexual acts for pay (via phone, internet or in person); may compulsively engage

If you think you need help,
we're here to support you.
Reach out to us today.





What causes problematic sexual behavior?

There are a number of reasons that may cause a person to engage in problematic sexual behavior. The Mayo Clinic lists the following as causes for the development of such behavior -

An imbalance of natural brain chemicals.

High levels of serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine have been related to compulsive sexual behavior. These chemicals help regulate mood.

Changes in brain pathways.

Like other addictive behaviors, compulsive sexual behaviors change the neural circuits. Over time a person may find themselves seeking sexual content that is more intense in nature to get the same satisfaction.

Problematic sexual behavior can occur in both men and women. There are a number of risk factors that may increase the risk of compulsive sexual behavior, according to the Mayo Clinic -

- **Ease of access to sexual content.** Access to technology, social media, and other social platforms make gaining access to intense sexual imagery and information easy.
- **Privacy.** You may have heard the phrase "secrets keep you sick." The secrecy component of compulsive sexual behaviors tend to make these problematic behaviors worsen over time.
- **Alcohol or drug abuse.**
- **Mental health symptoms or diagnosis.**
- **Family history of addiction (substance, gambling, sex).**
- **History of physical or sexual abuse.**

Many people who engage in problematic sexual behavior also have a history of trauma. According to the International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals, of those who experience problematic sexual behavior:

72% experienced previous physical abuse

81% experienced previous sexual abuse

97% experienced previous emotional abuse

How prevalent is problematic sexual behavior?

There is limited research in the area of problematic sexual behavior. Oftentimes, people who suffer from compulsive sexual behavior feel immense guilt and shame which can lead to underreporting of symptoms and can be a barrier to seeking treatment.

The prevalence of hypersexual behaviors in the general population is estimated to be between three and six percent ([Garcia & Thibaut, 2010](#)). Frequently people suffering from the effects of problematic sexual behavior also report co-occurring mental health symptoms. In a study by [Kafka and Hennen \(2002\)](#), 72% of patients with hypersexual behavior also reported the presence of a mood disorder, for example depression, 38% reported anxiety, and 40% reported substance abuse. Research has also noted high rates of compulsive sexual behavior coupled with substance use disorders, with rates ranging from 40-60% ([Sussman, Lisha, & Griffiths, 2011](#)).



What does treatment for problematic sexual behavior look like?

Founders Rip and Deb Corley opened Santé in 1996 at a time when the sex addiction model was not welcome in the treatment community; they were criticized by other treatment providers who had been trained that firm confrontation and shaming were the backbone of treating those with Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB). None of this deterred the programming at Santé and today there are still few residential treatment facilities working with individuals exhibiting problematic sexual behaviors in a welcoming residential setting.

Santé Center for Healing treats problematic sexual behavior in conjunction with other issues an individual may be facing, including substance abuse, unresolved trauma, and co-occurring disordered eating. An initial assessment by Santé's clinical staff can help determine the best course of action and healing for an individual.



Effective treatment of symptoms related to problematic sexual behavior include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), as well as medication where necessary. The goals of treatment for problematic sexual behavior include reducing feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation, increasing positive peer and social support, relapse prevention, and increasing coping skills for stress.

You may be feeling uncertain about what you need and what the best next steps are for your healing journey. We're here to help. To increase the likelihood of long-term recovery, Santé's clinical team uses an integrated model where substance abuse recovery and problematic sexual behavior are addressed simultaneously, resulting in mindfulness, distress tolerance, reduced shame, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness. Treatment includes a variety of clinical tools like individual therapy, group therapy, neurofeedback, EMDR, experiential therapy, expressive arts, physical fitness, and more!

"At the Santé Center for Healing we provide comprehensive treatment to individuals who are suffering by evaluating clients' individual needs and developing a comprehensive treatment plan. Frequently, through that process, it becomes apparent the client is struggling with problematic sexual behavior. We take a holistic approach to providing education, working through trauma triggers, working on increasing self-worth, and providing education and strategies to aid in decreasing these problematic behaviors.

Often these behaviors are steeped in shame, and our job is to bring the 'shame into the light' and begin the journey of a lifelong healing process."

- Santé's Residential Primary Therapist Ashley Whitted, MS, LPC, CSAT Candidate

What are the benefits of seeking treatment for problematic sexual behavior?

Treatment for problematic sexual behavior can help address the underlying causes of the compulsive behavior. Treatment serves to help individuals improve coping skills, build trust, challenge beliefs and narratives around the compulsive behavior, and offer support and validation of one's experiences.

Considering treatment is one of the bravest, most courageous, but also overwhelming decisions you can make. Seeking treatment in a safe and supportive environment can provide the protected space needed to face the shame, guilt, and isolation so often associated with compulsive sexual behavior. With new research, awareness, intervention and treatments, comes hope for long-term recovery and a fully robust and meaningful life including sexual health. Recovery does happen.



What does long-term recovery from problematic sexual behavior look like?

At Santé Center for Healing, recovery from problematic sexual behavior is a long-game. We want you to have a plan that's uniquely crafted to your needs after treatment. Recovery from the effects of compulsive sexual behavior takes time - incremental change, day by day.

Your clinical team may recommend ongoing support post-treatment that may include group therapy, individual therapy, and/or peer support meetings. Additionally, to help you stay on track, upon discharge from Santé alumni are automatically enrolled in Santé's "Open Road" program where you'll have access to support, activities, and more to help you along your path.

Wrap-up

If you think you need help, we're here to support you. You can reach us anytime at (800) 258-4250 or by visiting our website at <https://www.santecenter.com/>.

"I came to Santé extremely doubtful of its methods. I thought I was 'unfixable' and I planned to just BS my way through treatment. I got here, 19 years old, addicted to crystal meth and sexual acting out, and I truly hated myself. I couldn't stand the shame and guilt I had over my actions, but I had no intention of being 'rigorously honest.' But somewhere along the way, this place and all its strange tools and contracts and groups started to chip away at my walls, and against my better judgment I opened up. I learned things about myself at Santé that I never knew. I learned I can be a leader. I learned I have compassion and empathy. And most importantly, I learned that my past no longer has to cast its dark shadow over me. I love myself today, just for today. That is a miracle. My birth certificate may say something to the contrary, but I can honestly say that I was born on a small hill in Argyle, TX because here, for the first time, I experienced LIFE."

Santé Alumni

