

YOUR NORTH SHORE GUIDE to ACTIVE LIVING

LIVE



photo submitted

PARTICIPANTS in a 10-day expedition, organized by the Take a Hike Youth at Risk Foundation, hike the Chilcotins just north of Pemberton. The non-profit organization uses a blend of adventure-based learning, counselling, academics and community service to support Metro Vancouver teenagers facing a variety of personal issues.

Higher education

Foundation uses recreation as a tool to help at-risk youth graduate

Erin McPhee

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WHEN times are tough, sometimes taking a break from the everyday can help put things in perspective.

education program intent on helping at-risk youth successfully graduate high school.

The Take a Hike Youth at Risk Foundation, partnered with the Vancouver School Board, has been running in the Lower Mainland for the last 10 years. This year, 40 teenagers who have been unsuccess-

That's one of the philosophies behind a non-profit, alternative

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Internet porn: how much is too much?

QUESTION:

When checking the history on my partner's computer, I saw that he had been on 10 and sometimes 20 pornographic Internet sites at least five days a week. While I am no prude and have watched with him on occasion, his constant viewing makes me feel somewhat uneasy and insecure. When I talked to him about this he became very defensive and replied that he felt he was "being judged." How much porn is too much? Any input would be helpful.

Answer:

Let me first say that we are seeing a lot of people in counselling at our agency who are describing similar situations relating to Internet pornography use. These clients include people concerned that their own use of pornography is becoming a problem, as well as partners who are worried about its negative impact on their relationship. The simple fact is that the use of pornography has exploded because the Internet provides

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LIVE

Couples counselling can help navigate conversation

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a constant stream of material that can be obtained immediately and in secrecy.

I think you are actually asking two important questions: is my husband's use "normal?"; and, do I have a right to have feelings and input, including worries about our relationship, or do I have to just let him do what he wants to do?

Let's address your first question — is it normal or does he have an Internet porn addiction or compulsion? We need to look at this from his point of view. Is porn impacting his ability to have a satisfying sexual relationship with a real person (you)? You mention that you have both watched some together, which can be very stimulating and enjoyable if you both are in agreement and both finding it pleasurable. But has it also created a more disconnected experience where you (or he more importantly) are finding it difficult to enjoy a real life, physical and sensual sexual experience? Is his use of porn getting in the way of his time with family or his work? Is he not getting enough sleep? Does he seem to be craving porn, using it persistently, and using it exclusively to relax or escape from other things? And finally, is he engaging in any high risk behaviors like using porn at work or watching child pornography?

A few years ago I worked with a gentleman who was using a significant amount of porn and although he came to counselling to deal with it on his own, he was very reluctant to make any changes. As we explored the issues, it became clear that he was using porn to manage his anxiety. He had built his use into his normal daily schedule — one might say a ritual — so that even when he was not using it he could experience a level of comfort knowing he was going to use it later in the day. The concern he had was that he had started to use it at work and knew he could be caught, but even that didn't stop him.

Upon further exploration, it became clear that his use of porn was his way of avoiding his shame about not having a girlfriend, not doing well in his job and some leftover feelings of guilt from childhood. The porn became a way to both soothe himself (physically and emotionally) and re-enact his feelings of shame

— trying to stop himself, being unable to do so and then promising he would never do it again. This mental loop served as a way to disconnect from his feelings and experience of his life. In fact, our therapy sessions mirrored his disconnection to his inner life in that for the entire first year we almost exclusively talked about his porn use (creating excitement and shame within him during our sessions) and never talked about his feelings or emotions.

I have written about my former client (I have changed some details for privacy) to help you think a bit more about whether your husband's Internet porn use is an addiction or compulsion, masking some other issues that are not able to be thought about by him or discussed with you. One of the clues from your very brief question to me is that he gets defensive when he talks about it and shuts down the conversation. I would expect that if his use was more recreational, for lack of a better word, he would be able to talk with you and explore the impact that it is having on you. It is similar to someone who is drinking too much — they don't want to hear that they have a problem and then tend to do some or all of their drinking in private.

Your second question is really about whether you get to bring this up and talk about it with him; and whether you have a right to have its impact on you considered within your relationship. To this question I say simply, yes. This does not mean that he is going to change what he is doing because that is of course entirely up to him. And he may not engage with you in a conversation so you may want to come in for couples counselling so a counsellor can help navigate the tricky conversation, including exploring any issues that you may be bringing to the relationship that should be looked at as well.

Absent all of that, as with most relationships, you will need to decide what to do if he doesn't want to change, talk about it or go to counselling. Please call us if you would like to come in.

Julia Staub-French, M.A., R.C.C., is the director of clinical programs at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

Walk for memories

NORTH Shore Forget-Me-Nots Joanne Olsen, Lisa Exley and Betty and Bob Kellogg, and Investors Group's Alireza Fadaie, gear up for the 2010 Walk for Memories benefiting the Alzheimer Society of B.C. This year's event is set for Jan. 31 in Stanley Park. Registration is at noon. Info: www.walkformemories.com or 604-984-8348.

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