



"Just in
Case"

Relapse
Preparedness for Partners of Sex Addicts

So let's get this part out of the way:

If you're reading this note, you probably wish you weren't.

For whatever it's worth, I've been there, and I understand that feeling. For women like us who've been sexually betrayed, few things create more emotional disturbance than staring down the barrel of a possible relapse. We fear some future moment when we might learn that our loved ones have returned to old patterns of compulsive sexual behavior, or (even worse) that they've done so "in recovery," hiding beneath layers of increasingly subtle and complex forms of relational secrecy.

In our hearts, we hope and pray those moments never happen. In our heads, we continue to suffer varying degrees of distress and doubt. In response to both, we courageously reach out for help—to "find our brave," to face our fears, and to make smart and strategic plans for the future. We rally together with other women in similar positions, committing to support each other through whatever unknowns our futures hold next.

If you're still reading with me, I invite you to find YOUR brave. Consider reading my attached article, *How Can I Prepare for My Husband's Next Porn Relapse?* The article might comfort you, or it might make you angry. (And just for the record, I think either response is awesome.) If the idea of relapse preparedness rings true for you, please feel free to reach out and tell me so. I'd love to have you join my next Relapse Preparedness workshop, or to connect with me via phone, text or email.

In service and support,



Gaelyn Rae Emerson (APSATS-CPC, ICF-ACC, CPLC, CCRC, CDRC)
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WOMEN
ever
after

PS: I was touched to receive these kind words from a dear friend and colleague:

Gaelyn took a difficult subject and made it feel less overwhelming. I would recommend this course to any partner who desires peace of mind around this. —Heidi Monuteaux, LMHC, CSAT and Betrayal Trauma Survivor

workshop features:

- Live virtual workshop; join online or via phone
- Five small group sessions; limited to 3–5 participants
- Two-hour sessions; 6:30–8:30pm CDT
- Tuesday evenings; 5/15, 5/22, 5/29, 6/5 and 6/12
- Cost: \$400; includes all original materials

SESSIONS



MAY 15, 2018 • WEEK ONE

RELAPSE PREPAREDNESS + RELAPSE RESILIENCE

In this session, I will introduce the concept of relapse preparedness and relapse resilience, addressing the reasons why many women find hope and comfort in creating a Relapse Preparedness Plan (RPP). We will engage a group discussion around the myths, facts and fears women face when confronting this topic, and I will close this session by emphasizing the necessity of self-care, self-comfort and self-courage.

MAY 22, 2018 • WEEK TWO

RELAPSE AWARENESS + RELAPSE EXPERIENCE

In this session, I will introduce the concept of relapse awareness and relapse experience. I will invite each participant to share a few glimpses into your own story of sexual and/or relational betrayal (to whatever degree you feel comfortable), including your own internal experience of relapse (or fear of relapse) and its impact within your relationship. I will close this session by emphasizing the necessity of self-awareness, self-compassion and self-permission.

MAY 29, 2018 • WEEK THREE

RELAPSE RESPONSES + RELAPSE RESOURCES

In this session, I will invite participants to brainstorm a broad spectrum of tools, resources (internal and external), and optional courses of preparatory and responsive actions. We will discuss key features and factors that predict and characterize reliable sources for relapse support, equipping each participant to curate and customize your own personal RPP. I will invite you to envision your own immediate, short-term and long-term RPP strategies, and we'll close this session by emphasizing the realities of self-reliance, self-responsibility and self-advocacy.

JUNE 5, 2018 • WEEK FOUR

RELAPSE RISKS + RELAPSE REDIRECTION

In this session, I will invite each participant to share your RPP Outline with our group. As a group, we will explore and process any potential risks, roadblocks or vulnerabilities that could diminish the efficacy of your RPP, and we'll discuss the pros, cons and challenges involved in sharing your RPP with others. I will introduce the concept of Relapse Redirection, and encourage participants to consider ways that relapse responsiveness can create momentum and leverage for proactive and positive life change. I will close this session by emphasizing the value of self-awareness, self-strategy and self-empowerment.

JUNE 12, 2018 • WEEK FIVE

RELAPSE READINESS + RELAPSE RESOLUTION

In this session, I'll invite participants to share highlights from your final Relapse Preparedness Plans along with your Relapse Redirection Manifesto. As a group, we will identify and validate the growth we've observed in ourselves and one another. I will introduce the concept of Relapse Resolution, and invite each participant to customize and commit to honor your own Relapse Preparedness Pledge. We will close this session by emphasizing the gifts of self-focus, self-investment and self-celebration.

Bonus: Each session includes an opening and closing meditation, mindfulness tip or grounding exercise. These become tools you can incorporate into your relapse preparedness repertoire!



QUESTIONS? I'd love to answer them! My email is gaelynrae@womeneverafter.com, and my website is womeneverafter.com

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Relapse Preparedness: "Just in Case"

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION:

All information is optional AND confidential.
COMPLETE AND SEND TO: GAELYN RAE EMERSON
gaelynrae@womeneverafter.com | womeneverafter.com | 310.415.3614

Name: _____ Email: _____
Street Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____ Time Zone: _____ Age: _____
Best TIME to reach me: _____ Best WAYS to reach me: _____

I'm currently receiving support from: (Please check all that apply)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> individual therapy | <input type="checkbox"/> group therapy | <input type="checkbox"/> couples therapy | <input type="checkbox"/> family therapy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> individual coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> group coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> couples coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> twelve step meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> sponsorship | <input type="checkbox"/> faith-based recovery | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> spiritual direction | <input type="checkbox"/> spiritual counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> family therapy | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |

I AM: married separated divorce in process considering or planning for divorce
 other _____

I HAVE: no children young children teenaged children grown children grandchildren
 other _____

How long have I known about my partner's sex/porn addiction? _____

How would I describe where I'm at in my healing process? _____

Why am I interested in this workshop? What do I hope to gain from it? _____

Do I have hesitations about registering for this workshop? If so, what are they? _____

Is there anything else I'd like you to know about me? _____

At this point in my life, what benefits of group coaching support do I find I need most?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> accountability | <input type="checkbox"/> guilt | <input type="checkbox"/> transitional support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> action steps | <input type="checkbox"/> new relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> validation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> acceptance | <input type="checkbox"/> objectivity | <input type="checkbox"/> vision for my future |
| <input type="checkbox"/> boundaries | <input type="checkbox"/> reality checks | <input type="checkbox"/> writing assignments and journal prompts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communication | <input type="checkbox"/> rebuilding | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> decision making | <input type="checkbox"/> resources that others find helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> denial | <input type="checkbox"/> self-awareness and self-discovery | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> facing fear | <input type="checkbox"/> self-care—motivation and experimentation | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> shared/single parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> grief | <input type="checkbox"/> singleness | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |

Here's an easy example of preparedness: As a child, I lived in the Midwest, where tornadoes could flatten small cities within minutes. I later lived in the Middle East, where bus bombs, gas masks, and air-raid sirens were everyday encounters. I currently live in Southern California—home to earthquakes, wildfires, and an occasional mini-tsunami. In other words, I've never lived anywhere that isn't highly susceptible to crisis or disaster.

In situations like these, preparedness doesn't mean waiting, worrying, or wishing against bad outcomes. Preparedness means knowing how to navigate and survive a crisis, should one occur despite all available safety measures and preventative precautions.

PREPARE—OR GO CRAZY

If your husband is addicted to porn, I'm guessing you can recite this conversation in your sleep:

(ME): It's been a long time since he's looked at porn.

(MYSELF): Well, that we know about, anyway.

(I): Can't you two relax already? If he's using porn, don't you think we'd know?

(ME): I knew you'd say that. But you said that last time, and look how that turned out.

(MYSELF): But this time feels different, doesn't it? And besides, our therapist says our intuition is getting stronger.

(I): Either that, or he's got us all fooled. Addicts can do that, can't they?

(ME): Whose side are you on, anyway? Can't we give him a chance? He's doing everything the book says to do.

(MYSELF): I suppose it's not fair to assume the worst. Maybe we're overreacting.

(I): No, I don't think so. You're right. This is our life now. We can't let our guard down, no matter what.

(ME): So what then? We just wait for the other shoe to drop?

(MYSELF): I don't know what other choice we have. It's either that or divorce, isn't it?

(I): There's gotta be some kind of middle ground here, ladies.

(ME): I don't know. Like I said, it has been a long time since he looked at porn.

Conversations like these do one of two things: They give a girl nightmares or they keep her up all night.

In a perfect world, our husbands stop looking, lust, and lying—allowing us to stop wondering, worrying, and guarding old wounds.

But when that doesn't happen, it's time to switch gears, switching from reactive mode to proactive mode. It's time to launch a strategy of soul-intervention and self-preservation, calling an immediate halt to those tortured, circular conversations.

Because if we don't? Conversations like these will cost us our sanity.

WHY DOES RELAPSE PREPAREDNESS WORK?

I could list a dozen reasons, but here are my two immediate favorites:

- 1) Incidents of betrayal trauma hijack our "executive brain"—the part that makes intentional, organized and prioritized decisions. Trauma diminishes our ability to act within our best interests, reducing our capacity to act responsively and responsibly. With relapse preparedness, we compensate for this anticipated interruption, assigning a virtual "executive assistant" to step in when we need reinforcement.
- 2) Relapse preparedness empowers us to "stare down" one of our deepest, most painful, most paralyzing fears. By investing ourselves into relapse preparedness (ideally as part of a strategic, long-term plan for personal healing), we're able to live more fully and freely, without constant worry about the imminent "drop" of that infamous "other shoe."

SO, WHAT MAKES A GOOD RELAPSE PREPAREDNESS PLAN?

There is no one-size-fits-all script for relapse preparedness. However, having coached women through this process, I've identified two primary features that **MUST** be present for any relapse preparedness plan (RPP) to do its job effectively:

- 1) An RPP must begin and end with you. It must feature independent actions that you alone can take, to help yourself through the crux of your emotional crisis. Taking ownership is the fastest way you'll develop an effective sense of relapse resilience, reclaiming your powers of choice, personal agency and emotional autonomy.
- 2) An RPP must be strategically designed, strong enough to support the weight of emotional trauma, yet flexible enough to accommodate unexpected twists of circumstance. In my relapse preparedness planning workshops, I recommend an S.O.S. approach:

S = Support: Without support, RPPs are vulnerable to individual blind spots. Success relies upon soliciting the support of others—precisely when you're feeling injured, abandoned or estranged from your spouse.

O = Options: Without options, RPPs become impractical and ineffective. A plan that leaves you "trapped" can deepen your sense of vulnerability. Like trauma resolution, the power of choice is what fuels relapse resilience. By incorporating a broad spectrum of options, your RPP is likely to fulfill its intended purpose.

S = Safety and Stability: During a relapse, safety and stability are compromised, damaged, or even decimated. Creating and restoring safety becomes top-priority. Under the training of Dr. Barbara Steffens, author of *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse*, I've learned that safety and stability are crucial bedrocks of trauma recovery, making them the primary cornerstones of relapse resilience. ▶▶▶

A FEW MORE TIPS FOR RELAPSE PREPAREDNESS

- **Curate the RIGHT Support Team.**
Finding just the right support is more important than securing any available support. This is true during all phases of recovery from sexual betrayal, but it's essential during that brutally raw, post-relapse period. Hint: Do yourself a favor, and don't assume that a close friend is able and willing to support you through a potential relapse. Get gutsy, get proactive, get verbal, and just ask. You'll thank yourself later.
- **Set Aside Some Money.**
Money may seem superficial by contrast, but a dedicated "relapse preparedness fund" can provide material means to an emotional end. This isn't your "I feel like buying a new dress this week" money. This is your "Life feels like it's unraveling, and I need to buy myself time and space to plan my next steps" money. Hint: Has your husband asked how he might "make amends" for the harm he's caused in your relationship? Consider suggesting this "relapse preparedness fund" as a purposeful way for him to do that.
- **Prepare a List of Self-Care and Self-Comfort**
Eating broccoli is self-care. Eating Ben & Jerry's is self-comfort. In the aftermath of a relapse, self-care equals self-survival. Though different, self-comfort is equally crucial to relapse recovery, involving actions that soothe your senses, calm your central nervous system, and bring your "executive brain" back online. Hint: In her book, *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets*, Dr. Marsha M. Linehan compiles an impressive collection of lists for sensory awareness, distress tolerance, and emotional regulation.
- **Prepare an "Absence Excuse."**
Relapses happen at inopportune times (Murphy's Law, anyone?), so you'll want an honest excuse or two to utilize on the fly, should you need a "timeout" from social, occupational, and family obligations. You'll likely need to tweak the details, but it helps to prepare a copy-and-paste starting place. Hint: Don't be afraid to claim a sick day! (And yes, betrayal trauma counts as a legitimate illness.)
- **Plan What You'll Tell Your Children.**
As a mom, your kiddos likely come first, even during your own emotional breakdown. Draft a simple, age-appropriate explanation, to help your children understand the fact that you're struggling. Hint: This becomes particularly important if you or your husband is leaving your home.
- **Channel Your Anger.**
Sometimes, in the aftermath of a relapse, hurt and anger fuel us to make stuff happen—and more often than not, it's the stuff we wouldn't have the means, motivation, or chutzpah to initiate otherwise. In her book *The Journey from Abandonment to Healing*, author Susan Anderson describes rage as an expression of grief, a psychological response to relational or sexual abandonment: "Rage insists upon righting the injustice and restoring [our] sense

of self-worth. Despite its turbulence, feeling and expressing rage are necessary parts of recovery. It is an active protest against injury that demands change. It helps us to start functioning again." Hint: Anger can be powerful, either helping or harming your efforts toward relapse resiliency. While recovering from a relapse, exercise sensitivity toward your own thresholds for expressing anger in healthy (versus harmful) ways—and lean upon your support team to help you recognize the difference.

OCCASIONAL RELAPSE VS. CHRONIC RELAPSE

As long-time member of twelve step communities, I've been schooled in the wisdom of "just for today," and "one day at a time." But a few years ago, I was struck with an awareness that shifted my perspective:

At what point does "one day at a time" serialize into a lifetime? At what point do we look back upon our sequence of individual days in succession, only to realize we've spent a cumulative lifetime without addressing the impact of those daily decisions?

What I'm about to say next might lose me a few friends, but I believe in speaking truth, so I'm going to say it anyway: One relapse on one occasion—or even several relapses on a several occasions—is VERY different than chronic daily, weekly, or monthly relapses.

Perhaps it's unrealistic to expect that a porn addict will never relapse. (Depending upon whom you ask, that remains a heated topic for debate). And though I'm not qualified to speak firsthand about the experience of being a porn addict, I'm unequivocally qualified, both personally and professionally, to speak about the experience of being married to one.

It's impossible for a human being to heal from old wounds (for example, the trauma she suffered during her initial discovery or early recovery) when chronic relapses rip open those wounds, time after time, with no end in sight.

As the wife of a porn addict, I wish I didn't know the difference between occasional and chronic relapse. And as a betrayal trauma recovery coach, I wish I didn't know the precarious impact of chronic relapse upon families and communities. In spite of that knowledge, I'll spare you the gory details and leave you with this comparison:

Once upon a time, I lived through a relatively minor, one-time relapse, sandwiched between two long periods of my husband's solid sexual sobriety. It caught me off guard, and yes, it hurt horribly. But to my surprise, I healed in record time (less time than I'd ever imagined possible), with minimal damage to my long-term wellbeing.

Once upon a *different* time, I lived through a comparatively major, years-long relapse, sandwiched between sporadic periods of my husband's tenuous sexual sobriety. The hurt from that relentless experience went immeasurably, irrevocably deeper. And if I'm gonna be really, really, really honest? I'm only half certain I'll ever fully recover from the damage I sustained from that series of betrayals. ▶▶▶

I'm writing this article because I truly believe in relapse preparedness, recovery, and resilience. It's inspiring stuff, and I'm proud to engage with forums like Covenant Eyes and Betrayal Trauma Recovery—communities that facilitate these significant and soulful conversations. But just like an earthquake preparedness plan won't rescue anyone from a flash flood or wildfire, neither will a relapse preparedness plan insulate anyone from the trauma of chronic relapse. The premise of relapse preparedness is that it works as an emergency contingency—it's designed to carry someone through an occasional crisis, not to alleviate the trauma inflicted by a breathless succession of relapses.

IDENTIFY PROACTIVE (VS. REACTIVE) RELAPSE RESILIENCE GOALS

Remember, relapse preparedness is about reclaiming our power of choice within our own lives. That is why proactive goal-setting belongs within a solid RPP. After a relapse, 90% of the process involves responding to stuff that has already happened. But within that remaining 10% margin, the work of self-reclamation can flourish like never before.

If you take away only one point from this article, let it be this one: Sexual betrayal steals so much from us—but as women who are developing relapse resilience, we don't need to shut up, shut down, back off, or let porn have the last laugh.

Sometimes, an event we can't prevent (unwanted, unthinkable, unbearable, or unacceptable), reminds us of our deepest priorities, prompting us to draw that line in the sand, saying, "Sorry porn, but your game stops here. You're done playing fast and loose with my sanity." Healing may surprisingly eclipse our pain, with larger-than-life passion and not-of-this-world purpose, saying, "Not so fast, porn. This time, the joke's on you."

Has healing from your husband's porn addiction interrupted a dream you once cherished, before the bulk of your life began to revolve around this exhausting battle? Perhaps today's the day you pick up that dream, hold it close to your heart for a moment, then weave it back into your plans for the future.

IN CLOSING...

We don't live in a fantasy world, so here's the black and white truth of the matter: Even with a perfect relapse preparedness plan, if that day comes, it's gonna hurt. Your heart's gonna bleed all over everything, and your eyes are gonna flood with grief you hoped was gone for good.

But guess what, sister? You may have forgotten this, but I haven't: Your life is so much bigger than porn!

You may have lost faith in this, but God hasn't: You are so much deeper, more beautiful, and more victorious than this addiction.

In the case of a relapse, porn wins the battle. But you, beautiful girl, can still win this war. ■

"HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR MY HUSBAND'S NEXT PORN RELAPSE" Written by Gaelyn Rae Emerson | ©2017 | All Rights Reserved.

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Special Thanks to BETRAYAL TRAUMA RECOVERY (btr.org) and COVENANT EYES (covenanteyes.com)



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