

239. Dating while Overcoming Pornography with Jessica



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast episode 239.

Welcome to the *Overcome Pornography For Good* podcast where we take a research-based, trauma-informed, and results-focused approach to quitting porn. This approach has been revolutionary and changed thousands and thousands of lives. I'm your host, Sara Brewer.

Jessica Farmer: Hey everyone, welcome to the Overcoming Pornography for Good podcast. I am Jessica Farmer. I am a coach at the Center for Overcoming Pornography, and I am so excited to talk to you guys today. Today, we're going to talk about, if you know me from the program, you know relationships are my jam. I love talking about relationships, and so today we're going to talk specifically about dating and how to navigate kind of the unique circumstance of dating while also trying to overcome pornography use.

The idea for this podcast really came from my one-on-one clients in the program. So if you're listening to this and you are one of my current or former clients and we have ever talked about dating, this one is for you guys, and everyone else obviously. But it's kind of my love letter to some of my clients because this is, it's such a difficult dynamic and full of all sorts of feelings of uncertainty and fear and vulnerability and lots and oh, lots of really hard feelings. And so we're going to hopefully get some clarity on how to approach dating when you're also working through pornography struggles.

So, what we're going to talk about, I really want to give you some good, solid tips on how and when to talk about your history with pornography, setting boundaries around dating, and how to manage shame and other difficult emotions that might come up during that whole process. So if you've ever wondered if it's the right time to tell someone, when is the right time to tell someone that you're dating about your struggles with

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pornography or if it's even necessary or should I even be dating? This episode is going to be for you. We're going to go through all of those things.

If you've been in a dating relationship, if you've been in a dating scenario anytime in the last, I don't know, 30 years, porn use needs to be a part of the conversation. And like I said, we're going to go into all of that, but first, I want to talk about how I just want to normalize how difficult that can be. It brings up so many emotions. It's just kind of this weight of vulnerability that can just be hanging around your neck from the very first date until you decide to open up that conversation.

There might even be like there's this question of when and how, but also there's this like temptation to hide or to overshare too soon. It can kind of be on both sides. I've had clients who have expressed to me that they just want to get it out of the way upfront on the first date and how that way if it's a deal breaker, they get it out and they clear the air, get it out in the open before it even gets far so that they don't have to risk that feeling of vulnerability and that fear of rejection, really.

Those are all really, really common fears, along with like things that come up as like, will this person still want to be with me if they know what I'm struggling with? What if I relapse, or what if I end up slipping up while dating? Even, am I even ready to start dating? Is it fair to start a new relationship when I'm dealing with this still? So with all of those fears, all of those thoughts that might be going through your head, I just want to say that we don't put our life on hold while working to overcome pornography use.

It's, in fact, dating can really be a great time to practice the skills that we're learning here on the podcast and in the program. It's a great way to kind of step into the arena and expose yourself to some really wonderful and amazing emotions and some really uncomfortable emotions and practice processing and experiencing those emotions without viewing porn as a way to disconnect from the emotions and to disconnect from our experience of

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it. We don't put our life on hold while we're working through working to overcome pornography use.

So if you have a goal that you want to have a relationship and you're holding off because you want to figure out your porn use first, I want to not so gently challenge that.

Challenge that belief because if we are trying to put our life on hold until we figure this out, we're going to miss so much goodness and so many of the wonderful things that life has to offer, including relationships. So I want to give you permission to explore all of all of the beauty that life has to offer. Having struggles with pornography use does not disqualify you from having good experiences in your life.

So as we're exploring this, the first thing that I want to talk about is setting ourselves up for success. There are some things that we want to make sure that we have kind of in line in order to set ourselves up for success when we go into relationships. And there's a couple questions that I like to answer, and before I give them to you, I want to just clarify that these are not yes and no questions. These are, it's more like a scale. I want you to think about like answering these questions on a scale of 1 to 10. So, like on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being absolutely yes, one being absolutely no. Am I wanting to date to seek connection and to seek closeness with another human, or am I trying to escape?

Because sometimes we use, we can kind of think, okay, if I am in a relationship, maybe the urges, maybe the triggers won't be as bad. If I'm getting physical affection from somewhere else, maybe my urges to view porn won't be that bad. And so we kind of use that other person, use the relationship as a way to try to escape the negative feelings of urges. And so I want you to think, okay, on a scale of 1 to 10, where do I fall? Am I wanting to explore this because I genuinely want connection, or am I using it as a way to escape from the uncomfortable urges and feelings that come up as I'm going through this process?

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The second question I like to ask, am I practicing good emotional self-care? And this is really important, and we're going to talk a little bit more about this later on, but when we are practicing good emotional self-care, we're in a good, solid place to be able to engage in a relationship from a really healthy foundation. So am I practicing good emotional self-care?

Again, on a scale of 1 to 10, it's not binary. It's not yes or no. It's a scale, and these can fluctuate. There may be some months where I'm doing really good with self-care, and there may be some months where I'm not. And that's okay, and that's totally normal. But you just want to have an idea of like where you're at on that scale.

Am I practicing good emotional self-care? That looks like, am I aware of the emotions that are driving my actions on a day-to-day basis? Am I allowing myself space to feel all the emotions that come up for me? Do I have a practice of grounding and managing my nervous system when my emotions get my nervous system dysregulated?

The third question is, can I successfully manage urges and triggers? And again, a scale of 1 to 10. Most of us aren't ever doing this perfectly. So we want to kind of see where we're at on that spectrum. Can I successfully manage urges and triggers? Do I know what to do when I feel an urge? Do I know how to pull myself out after I've had, after I've viewed porn, so I don't get caught in a cycle, a shame cycle around it? Do I recognize those things that are triggering to me, and do I have a plan for how to deal with them? These are the kinds of questions that we want to be asking.

And depending on where you're at on that scale, that might be indicating, okay, I might need to, there might be some work that I need to do and not before I get into a dating relationship, but just as kind of like, okay, this is something that I need, I need to work on. This is something that I want to work on.

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So the biggest question that I get when talking about this is, when and how do I disclose my pornography use with somebody I'm dating? And the first thing that I want to that I want to talk about with this is kind of reframing how we think about these disclosure conversations because so many times it comes across as confession, right? It comes across as, okay, I have to confess all of these things to this person that I'm dating. I have to be really shame, I feel a lot of shame about it. I need to be really apologetic about what my experience has been

And I want to shift that a little bit because we rather than confession, we want to think of it more as collaboration. So when you decide to have, to open up this conversation with somebody you're dating, instead of the confession framework where it's like, okay, I need to expose this part of myself to this person, and I need to prove to this person I'm dating how bad I feel about this. We want to neutralize that more.

And think of it more as a collaboration. So something along the lines of like, okay, I want to, I really care about this person, and this person is becoming really, really close to my heart. I feel like I can trust them, and I want to bring them into this part of my life, meaning my sexuality. I want to start sharing my sexuality with them.

And you know, you can be sharing sexuality with somebody and you can be choosing to engage in a sexual relationship or not, right? Like this, when I say collaborating on sexuality, that doesn't necessarily mean, oh, we're having sex, right? Like you can share your sexuality and things that you feel, things that you enjoy, you can have those conversations and not be engaging in a sexual relationship yet. So that's just kind of an aside.

But we so we want to be looking at it from that perspective of collaboration. So, when? When in the relationship do you have, do you open up that conversation? And in classic coaching in the classic coaching way, the answer is, it depends. You want it to not be on the first day and you want it to not be after you're engaged, right? Something in between.

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Mostly, you're looking for a few indicators that the relationship has reached a point where it can handle the weight of sharing that sexuality with each other. So some things that you want to look for, you have a sense of exclusivity, right? You've decided that this is a person that you want to invest in. You've noticed that there is a sense of deepening trust, right? You've kind of started baby stepping and exploring together some things that are a little bit more sensitive that you wouldn't share with other people. And you've started doing that in smaller ways to build that deepening trust.

If you're starting to think about long-term potential, if this is somebody that you want to be a significant part of your life, then it might be time to consider opening up this collaborative conversation around your sexuality.

So how do we have this conversation? Like I said, we want to frame it as a collaboration, not confession. And we do that by really not necessarily focusing on the porn itself, because again, and we talk about this in the program all the time, porn is just a piece of the puzzle. It's one piece of the puzzle. We want to talk open up this conversation about your sexuality, how you got there, what you enjoy, what you enjoy about the person that you're dating. You can do this in really, really connecting and ways that are going to improve the intimacy and strength of the relationship, okay?

So that's how you want to, you want to approach it, and you want to frame it because it's not about the pornography, it's about your overall experience and what has brought you to this point. So, a couple of things to avoid. First of all, we want to avoid trauma dumping. And this can be really tempting, especially early in the relationship where when we're trying to avoid those uncomfortable feelings of possible rejection, we can kind of push it all out on onto the other person, and in really kind of sabotaging ways, right?

That's what trauma dumping is. We're using all of our experiences and dumping it on this relationship that's new and can't hold the weight of that level of closeness yet. So we want to avoid, avoid doing that and allow space; we want to manage our emotions around the discomfort that can

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come from that vulnerability. And I'm going to we're going to talk more about that in just a little bit.

Another thing to avoid is blaming others. We can get into a lot of blaming past partners, blaming people, blaming our primary caregivers when we were kids. We can just get into a lot of blaming and shaming, and we want to avoid that because it will just gum up the whole conversation.

When it comes to when and how to disclose or how to open up that conversation, I want to kind of a final thought is that not everyone is going to respond perfectly, and that's totally okay, right? You might open up this conversation, and somebody might have some initial feelings of their own, fear or uncertainty. And that's totally okay. That doesn't mean that the relationship is necessarily over. It just means that we're opening up this series of conversations. We're exploring this new area together, and their response is just data. It's data about their capacity for empathy and maturity, and ours. It's all data. It's all data about what we can handle and about the relationship compatibility.

So I want to talk about like how to manage shame and fear of rejection because those are real. Those are so real when it comes to the dating relationship in general, and especially when there's pornography use mixed in. So I just want to first of all validate your fear of rejection is totally normal. It's not a problem if you're feeling that fear, if you're feeling that nervousness about talking about this with somebody that you're dating, or if you're nervous about dating in general.

It's totally normal to feel that fear and that vulnerability because that's really what it is, is when we're engaging in a relationship with somebody, the closeness and the intimacy of that relationship is directly correlated with the level of vulnerability that you can tolerate. The price of intimacy is vulnerability and that's uncomfortable. It's so uncomfortable and that's kind of part of the whole experience. So I want to give you some tactics for how to sit with and manage those vulnerable feelings.

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So a personal experience that I have had with this with that feeling of rejection, that feeling of fear of rejection and vulnerability in a relationship, I, when my husband and I were dating, it was, we dated for, we dated for about 5 months before we got engaged, and then we were engaged for a long period of time. And during our engagement, there was a chunk of our engagement when we weren't living in the same, in the same town. We were, our relationship was long-distance.

And that was really, really hard for me because there was, for me, it felt like there was a real disconnection, you know? And at that point, we were already really serious. We and then we got engaged while we were in that time apart in that long-distance part of our relationship.

And I had so many fears. So many fears come up, lots and lots of panic and fear, because I knew I was sunk with this guy. I was so in love with him, and I knew it. And we hadn't really expressed that to each other yet. And so it was just this period of lots of turmoil, and he wasn't there on a daily basis to kind of soothe those feelings. So I felt very alone in these feelings of vulnerability and fear, and I had all of these just kind of simmering.

And I remember at the time my roommate, that I had probably had, I don't even remember what the situation was. I had probably had like a mini panic attack and about everything, about my relationship, and she was so good and so helpful with bringing me back down, right? And reminding me of my worth, reminding me that I, whether this relationship with this person worked out or not, I was going to be okay. You know, she really helped me to ground myself and to remind me of those things that I already knew, but because of all the fear and the vulnerability, I had kind of lost sight of for a little bit.

And so she helped me remember a few things. First of all, I was going to be okay, no matter what. It was all going to be okay because I knew that I had skills and that I could take care of myself even if the relationship ended up going sour, right? Another thing is this idea of the fear of rejection really

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comes from this idea that if things don't work out, if this person rejects me, then it is a confirmation of my insecurities, my unworthiness. It must mean that there's something wrong with me.

And my roommate at the time, she helped me to remember that rejection is not about confirmation of my unworthiness or my insecurities. Rejection or ending of the relationship is all about clarity about compatibility. It's all about clarity, right? It's making things really, really clear about, is this person actually the kind of person that I want to have in my life? And sometimes the answer to that question is no. And so, although that rejection or that ending of the relationship can feel really horrible, it can feel really painful, it's all about clarity, not rejection or that confirmation of our insecurities.

So how do we set boundaries around all this while we're dating, right? Because sometimes our partner, just like we can get dysregulated, sometimes our partner gets dysregulated, and boundaries help to keep us safe so we can engage in those relationships in a really healthy and affirming, and authentic way.

So boundaries while dating, first of all, I think it's really, really important to have an open dialogue about what you're experiencing, right? Like, have an open dialogue around this part of this sexuality part of your relationship, whether you're having sex or not. The communication needs to be open about that part of your relationship.

So keeping an open conversation about it and knowing, getting really good at your own emotional regulation, meaning you know when you're getting dysregulated and taking care of yourself when that happens because a lot of times we can get really tied up in, if I'm not okay, it's their job to fix it, or because I'm in this relationship, if they're feeling bad, that means I have to be feeling bad or I have to jump in and fix it. We get really emotionally entangled.

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And so we want to separate those out through our own personal emotional regulation. If I notice that I am having big emotions, if I'm feeling that fear, it's my job to take care of it. It's my job to regulate that, not my partners. It's not my partner's job. They can't do it. They don't have the skills to regulate my emotions for me. So it's my job to regulate my emotions.

The last thing that kind of goes along with that is identify and establish your self-care non-negotiables. So these are the things that you are doing every day to take care of you. That can be emotional self-care, it can be physical self-care, spiritual self-care, social self-care, all of these things that we need to be taking care of that so quickly when we get into relationships, they so quickly kind of go by the wayside. So identify those self-care non-negotiables, those things that you know keep you on track.

So that can be doing the mindfulness practice or meditation every day. That can be making sure you get enough sleep. Oh my gosh. Getting enough sleep is one of the biggest things that we can do to make sure we stay emotionally regulated. So, having that physical self-care, mindfully exercising, processing your emotions through exercise or through yoga or stretching, or just doing some deep breathing, these are all things that we can do to set healthy boundaries in our relationships.

All right, guys. I hope this is helpful. Please let me know. You can leave a comment here in the podcast, or you can email me jessica@sarabrewer.com if you have any questions or thoughts about any of this. I would love to hear from you. Thank you for being here, and we will see you next time. Bye.

I want to invite you to come and listen to my free class, How To Overcome Pornography For Good Without Using Willpower. We talk about how to stop giving in to urges without pure willpower or relying on phone filters so that you can actually stop wanting pornography.

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We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't "have more willpower." Lastly, we talk about how to make a life without porn easily sustainable and permanent. If you're trying to quit porn, this class is a game changer.

You can go and sign up at SaraBrewer.com/masterclass, and it is totally free.