

120. Relationship Spirals with Lindsay Poelman



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast episode 120, Relationship Spirals with Lindsay Poelman.

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.

Sara: Okay, you guys, welcome to the podcast this week. I'm so excited because Lindsay is back. I freaking love Lindsay Poelman, you guys. I don't know if you've heard my other episodes with her. If you're in the program, you see her occasionally. Lindsay is my soul sister. Lindsay, you want to say hey?

Lindsay: Hello, everyone.

Sara: Yes, I love her. So she is cool because she is a life coach, she has kind of started, like you started doing stuff for – You and Danny, your husband, started doing pornography. And so that's kind of how we got connected because we're like, hey, we're both in the porn world let's talk.

You started focusing your business around the spouses who are struggling with their partner's porn use. Now you do a lot of trauma informed training for life coaches. So I took all of my coaches through Lindsay's program and I only want to hire coaches who have gone through Lindsay's program.

And anyways, Lindsay has helped me so much learn about trauma and, anyways, through lots of that process. She lives in France. So that is so cool. Lindsay, what's France like?

Lindsay: Switch to my French accent, no.

Sara: Let's hear it.

Lindsay: My kids would balk at my French accent. So anyone in America who hears me speak French is like, "Oh, that sounds amazing." And then my kids are like, "Ugh, Mom, stop." But the weather's great. Yeah, I mean,

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we've had a lot of wind, like there's like a season in the south called the mistral and it gets really, really windy.

But we're thinking that has ended because we're right on the French Riviera, so there's a lot of winds that come from the west. And then there's winds that kind of come from Italy. But the weather is really nice, people were out at the beach today.

So we like the south because of the sun. So we get a lot of sun compared to the north. And we've got the sun and the sea, the Italian influence, access to what we want to have access to. We like the culture, it's like a very chill, beachy vibe. But it's also the French Riviera, so there's a little bit of a blend of that.

Sara: That sounds amazing. All right.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: Okay, so we could just chat for the whole hour. But I love Lindsay, she's awesome. I'm so excited that she's here. She is just a healer. She's an advocate. She wants to help all the people. I adore her. So we're going to talk about relationships. And we're also going to talk about – Relationships spirals is our topic and then also women who're struggling with their spouse's porn use.

And we say women, that's typically who Lindsay works with. But it can be any spouse who's struggling with their spouse's porn use or partner who's struggling with their partner's porn use. So we'll get into it. But tell us, let's start, tell us about relationship spirals and what that is.

Lindsay: Yeah, so I mean, anytime humans interact, we're all so much more connected than we know. And so anytime we're interacting with other humans there are energy exchanges happening and there's energy overlaps and things like that happen. So, of course, in a partnership they're going to be connected on an energetic level in some way.

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And so the idea of a relationship spiral is like where a pair of people in a partnership kind of loop together on particular spirals that is serving them and supporting and compounding where they want to go. Or something else, maybe where they don't want to go, okay?

And so what we're going to talk about a little bit more specifically is kind of like these relationships spirals that can get spiraled and kind of knotted up and why, for a lot of us, it more has more to do with our conditioning and how we were born than us being jerks or not caring about each other. Because a lot of times, at least with most of the couples that I've worked with, both people want healing for their partner.

They want healing for themselves. They want healing for their partner. They want things to work. They're generally pretty open to all of that. And so the more that we can understand our own conditioning patterns, male and female, it can just make a huge difference in how we understand ourselves and how we understand our partners so that we can kind of work independently to heal. Not callously, but independently so we can come together in a healthy interdependent way.

Sara: Okay, so just this idea that our relationships are a mesh, there's a reason that there's not just one person in a relationship, there's multiple people. And we get stuck in spirals and these spirals can either – So I'm thinking of like a spiral, and these spirals either help us all get where we want to go, or it can go the opposite way where we get stuck. And I'm sure you'll give us some examples here.

Lindsay: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I mean, the way that I like to think about it, too, is just when we think about conditioning or socialization as, I'll start with women. As women we're conditioned to be, a lot of times we're conditioned to be a support system around our spouse. Almost like our spouse is the sun, and as women – And I'll just speak generally as women.

But as women who are socialized as women, we may be, or people who have been socialized as women, we've been conditioned to kind of be a

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support system that kind of orbits or revolves around our spouse, okay? And it's almost like a planet following the sun revolving around our –

I'm going to just speak, I'll just say generally to women as the supportive spouse and to men as the partner or the provider. Kind of the way that a lot of people are, I would say, generally still socialized in America and in Western Europe, or were generations ago. I feel like a lot of shifting is happening.

But even though a lot of shifting is happening, there's still a lot of it's like intellectually we get it, but there's still a lot of conditioning that a lot of us still carry down underneath the surface that's still driving a lot of our behavior.

So, generally we may, as women, be conditioned to revolve around our husband, supporting his career, or any of his volunteer efforts. And it's like we're the person who supports him as a provider and what he can create for our family. And we're all kind of orbiting around that.

Sara: Yeah, so like we're moving because of their job. We're recreating our life around whatever he's doing.

Lindsay: Right, yeah. And so – Sorry, were you going to say something?

Sara: Or he's doing this volunteer work in the church, and so I'm changing everything and, what's the word? Revolving around that. Adapting.

Lindsay: Yeah, so it just kind of becomes about him and how can I support him? And so it makes sense when we're conditioned to be more of an object to support his success and his need, that we're also kind of conditioned to accept our role, our place and also be limited to our spouse's successes and failures.

Sara: What do you mean?

Lindsay: Well, so if our spouse is doing really well, then we kind of self-identify with that, right? So we're kind of like, his success is our success, right? So if you get into a church space, it's like a woman

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identifies as a bishop's wife or things like that, right? So we kind of identify with our spouse's successes, which can be great when things are going well. It can feel great. But also with the failures, we identify with that too.

Sara: I see.

Lindsay: So then when the husband is looking at porn it's like, well, crap. Now I'm the porn addict's wife. Right? And then for me, personally, when I was going through this, it was like, it can't be me. It's not me, my husband isn't this. But once I just accepted that, because at the time I thought he was an addict because that's what professionals told me, even though he wasn't.

It was like, well, crap. Now, I'm an addict's wife. Right? So I was identifying with his behavior. So that's why I say it can feel great when things are going well, but it's still somewhat of a reactionary way to live, if that makes sense.

Sara: I see.

Lindsay: And a lot of it just has to do with our conditioning. And so there's not a lot, like we don't have to blame ourselves for that. It's just what can kind of happen.

Sara: Yeah. Okay, so I'm seeing this spiral. So it can feel really great to identify around the husband's identity, he's a doctor, he's really busy. Or he's a dentist, we live in this house and I get to support him and it's beautiful.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: But if it's the other way, it's just reactionary. It's like, "Oh, well, I'm still revolving around my spouse, my partner. And so if he's not doing well, what does that mean about me? Or that means I have this identity now."

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: Okay, yeah, I see.

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Lindsay: Yeah. Like it means like, oh, I must be doing something wrong because I'm not supporting him in a better way. How can I make his life easier, right? And so it's like, oh, he's the dentist, he makes a lot of money. And so he doesn't come home, but let's keep adjusting to help him support his status because as his status increases, so does mine.

But unfortunately, it's like if we're identifying there, it's still reactionary. And then when things flip and we learn of his behavior, that his behaviors either aren't what we thought or his behavior shifts, we can kind of identify with that too.

And so in some ways it's like it's all kind of a reactive space to be in, right, where we don't know, like we have control, but we don't know that we have control. So it can appear secure for a lot of women, but it's also kind of like being on this roller coaster where you're just on it and you're kind of at the whim of where it goes. When really, as women, I like to think of it as like we're on a horse and it's more like choosing to take the reins.

But if we don't even know that that's a possibility because of our conditioning, life might feel like a roller coaster that we don't have control over.

Sara: Yeah, he's struggling with this, and my only options are I have to support him more or we've got to put more money towards him. I've got to really check up on him all the time and really make sure. But what you're saying is – Well, actually, I'm just going to let you keep talking.

Lindsay: Yeah, no, I mean, you make – And so here's the thing, too, when his behavior changes or whatnot, it's like, well, maybe I've done something wrong or maybe I need to change. It just becomes more about fixing him, and forgetting. A lot of this isn't even founded. There isn't a foundation of, what about me? It's more just about let's fix him so things can kind of get back to where it goes or to where we want it to go.

And what I like to offer, too, because I know, for me, when I went through this it was like, how do we fix my husband so we can get back to normal? It's just like, I wanted that. I wanted that. And I was very willing to do

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everything it took to “fix” him so we could go “back to normal.” But that normal wasn't – It was more of an illusion of safety than actual safety, because neither of us really knew what true safety looked like. And so I think it's just –

Sara: Yeah, tell me – Sorry. Tell me what do you mean by that? I think people will be like, what do you mean it was an illusion of safety?

Lindsay: Yeah, because, again, for me, when I was going through a lot of stuff with my husband, we were kind of doing all the checkbox things. And it was like it felt safe. I mean, you look at our careers that we both initially had, he was a dentist, I was working in public accounting. And so it's like we were doing all the safe things to create the highest potential for the most certain life with the least amount of surprises.

But the thing is, because it's a reactive space for a woman to be in to have everything to be reliant on a husband's behavior to feel safe, it might feel safe when things are going well. But it's not actually safe because you're basing all your safety on something you don't have control over, on someone you don't have control over.

And so there's no anchoring in ourselves. It's trying to anchor in someone else, which we're not really meant to do and it doesn't provide us the stability that we need. Especially when we realize that we can't actually anchor in someone to create that sense of safety that we're meant to have as humans.

Sara: So good. The sandy foundation just popped into my head. Like sandy foundation versus rock foundation. If we're trying to anchor our safety or feeling good in someone else, it just doesn't hold up.

Lindsay: Yeah. And the thing to recognize too, is I think there's this grounded and powered space to find in the middle, right? Because I think we're raised to be more – And when I say codependent, I don't mean it with a negative connotation, but it's just a word that a lot of people understand.

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So I think a lot of us, as women, had been raised to be in a more codependent space. And so when I talk about independent healing, that doesn't mean that like, oh, nothing he does could ever hurt me. But I think just kind of like getting grounded into this middle space where it makes sense that there may be impact. Like his behavior has an impact, but I can still ground into my knowing, grounding into myself.

It's so different than being in that reactive space because I know, for me, what it felt like – For me and for a lot of women, what it feels like everything relies on whether we can fix him and fix his porn habit or not. A lot of women will resort to more extreme means of attempting to fix him, which can be kind of like we try to control the situation.

Like I want to know every time you look. Let's have check-ins every day. It's like we become this babysitter and we think it's supportive, but it's also, in my opinion, not always the best thing. But also recognizing that as women, that state of hyper vigilance is a really normal response to something like finding out that your husband has been looking at porn. Or going into a marriage knowing that your husband looked at porn, but it just hasn't stopped and it's been chronic and ongoing.

It just makes sense that we would start behaving more based on our nervous system responses, like fight, flight, or fawning, or freeze responses. Versus kind of getting grounded into our knowing and learning how to create safety with respect to ourselves.

So I kind of went through a lot of those different trauma responses. It started out with a freeze, and then maybe a little bit of a flight. And then definitely more of a fight. And then once I realized I couldn't control him, that's when I was like, “Well, I guess I'll figure out me.”

Sara: What are our options?

Lindsay: But it was the best thing.

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Sara: Yeah, so good. And I love that you say, too, this doesn't mean that we're untouchable and that nothing he does can hurt us and we just deal with all the crap.

Lindsay: No.

Sara: Not at all. It's just – Well, I don't know, what would you say to that?

Lindsay: No, go ahead. Go ahead.

Sara: It's just recognizing that and having your back as you experience that and realizing that him changing isn't necessarily going to provide the safety that you – I don't know. I don't know.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: What would you say to that?

Lindsay: I think there's overlap to it, too. Because a lot of times, as women, it's natural to hinge everything on whether he stops. And when I work with my women, after they work through the pain, the trauma, the betrayal, whatever is there, what they realize they really, really want is the honesty and the intimacy.

And so as they can feel grounded in their knowing and anchor in that safety and stability knowing what they want, it's just a place to spend your energy leaning into. It's going to help you get there, whether your husband or partner gets on board or not.

But it's a great place to expend your energy, because you'll get there with your husband who's like, "Yeah, I want that for us too." Or it's just going to help you see more of what the essence of your marriage is as you kind of learn how to ground into what you want. But I think the thing, too, because we're talking about relationship spirals, I mean we could talk forever about those different things.

But also, the reason I call it this kind of spiral where it gets knotted is because here are the women who are conditioned like, "I support him. If

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something's wrong with him, I need to change. How can I fix him?" That's kind of a lot of the narrative a lot of us women have. And then for the dudes, for the men, a lot of you have been conditioned to please your wife, too. Who hasn't heard the phrase, happy wife, happy life?

And so it's like a lot of men have been conditioned to be a good guy, make a lot of money, associate their worth with how well they're able to provide. And then a lot of men have really internalized that pretty deeply. Like how much you're able to make, there's status, there's privilege. I would say even church callings can be associated with that, too.

And so a lot of men have potentially internalized and been conditioned to believe ideas like my wife needs to be happy. And I'm supposed to make her happy. And if she's not happy, I've done something wrong and I need to do something urgently to make her happy. And if I can't, I'm a bad husband or I must not love her enough, or something like that.

And so it's just kind of an interesting space to get in because here's this woman thinking, "We need to fix him." And then he's thinking, "Oh, she's not happy, I need to do something different so she can be happy." But it's like if they don't know how to anchor into themselves, they're both focused externally and not internally.

And they can kind of just loop and spiral into this deeper space where neither of them are learning how to support themselves. But they're kind of knotting in these belief systems of like, I can't do this, I need to make her happy, but I can't. And for men, it may turn into you notice more of their coping behavior of looking at porn, or numbing out, or checking out, or things like that.

And for women, their own types of coping behaviors. Because even for me – I should say even for me. For me, when I was going through my stuff, there was a lot more hyper vigilance and I had my own coping behaviors too.

And so it's just kind of one of those things where it's like it sucks for the guys because they've been conditioned to think that they're responsible for

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her happiness. It sucks for the girls because they kind of in a way have, too.

And it's like this conditioning, I don't know, I want to say whoever set it up and patriarchal systems had good intentions. I don't really know. Maybe I don't want to know. But ultimately it's just, again, reactive. It kind of puts both spouses in this reactive space where it's like they're trying to control the things they can't control and not focusing on the things they can control.

And so I can just see why we can get in these spirally knots. And so the idea is to start untangling and teasing out what you can control versus what you can't control so that you can anchor more into your true self and who you are and learn how to create that safety. And acknowledge that your behavior has an impact for your partner, but also acknowledge what you can control.

Sara: Yeah. Okay, so good. So there's, I'm just thinking of – This is common. This is common, right?

Lindsay: Oh my gosh, whether it's a marriage with porn or marriage without porn, this is happening everywhere all the time. So if you notice this, do not judge yourself. It's like, oh, yeah, I grew up in Western Europe. I should say like Western – Not Western Europe, sorry, I live in Europe right now. But like Western civilization or Western culture, just because I don't want to speak to cultures that I'm not privy to, I guess, if that makes sense.

So it could be your culture, too, if you didn't grow up in that way. But I just didn't want to assume that I know.

Sara: Sure. So let's say you're really struggling, you're a spouse, you're struggling with porn and your spouse knows about it. And they're really, really hurt by it and they're doing all these things. And they're really hyper vigilant and they want to know every single time you're viewing. They're really focused on you and maybe stuck in this spiral. What can you do as the spouse who is the one viewing porn without coming off like a jerk?

Lindsay: Yeah.

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Sara: Because I feel bad and I feel like I should feel bad because I am viewing porn, I'm speaking as the person who's struggling with porn. I feel like I should feel bad because I've caused this betrayal trauma in my person and I lied about it. And now here I am. And I understand that she feels so bad, but I also recognize she has a lot of self-confidence issues and there's a lot of this work that she needs to do. But I don't want to be a jerk. And also, am I not responsible for some of that? Like, what do you do?

Lindsay: Yeah. Oh, such a good question. And it can be such a confusing space to be, and that's why both people having professional support, to me, is so paramount if it's getting that sticky. But I think the big thing is, for the guys, recognizing your nervous system has safety needs too.

And I think sometimes when we're the betrayer, we're like, "Well, in order to be honest with my wife, I have to tell her everything she wants to know anytime she asks." And it can be a tough conversation. So I'm not going to say that it's going to be easy and she's just going to just be like, "Oh, yeah, okay, of course." But you get to be the primary caretaker of your safety.

And there are ways to be truthful with your wife without giving every, every single detail. And with your wife, and you might not be the person to talk to her about this, but this is why her having professional support can be so good. But the energy of her wanting to know what you looked at, specifically, that's what kind of matters.

I think that matters more, because some women will want to know specifically so they can know how they should look, or what they should do, or what they should try. And so it's like, they use that against themselves as a punching bag because they're like, "Well, I could never look like that. I could never do that. I had three kids, blah, blah, blah."

And so I think the big thing for guys is just recognizing you're a whole person too, and you get to prioritize your safety. And there are ways to be truthful without saying every single little tiny thing. Does that make sense?

Sara: Yeah. What would that look like? What would being truthful without saying every little thing look like?

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Lindsay: Yeah, I mean, I think you could ask, “So why is it that you want to know every single thing?” Just like, “Hey, I can tell this is really important to you. Why is it that you want to know every single thing?” And she might not even know why. And you might not – Don't try to coach your wife.

Sara: This is why she might need some support too.

Lindsay: But it could just be worth saying like, you know, you could just be honest, like, “I want to tell you everything you want to know, and I'm just worried that like, I'm kind of worried that if I tell you everything, is it going to be helpful for you? Or are you going to kind of use that? How are you going to use that?” And so I always tell my women that they always get to ask anything they want, and their husbands always have permission to say yes or no, right?

But I think just some version of – And just check in and see how you could tweak this to work more with yourself with respect to your partnership, but some version of like, what if we just try I tell you when I looked. I'll tell you when I look and I can give you loose, but I don't know if telling you all the details is helpful for you or for me.

Because for some men, trying to go back into the details can be really triggering for them too. They're already triggered and super ashamed that they looked, and then the wife's like, “Okay, go back and give me a play by play.” And then that can be triggering for them, too.

So that's why I say it's okay for men to honor their safety. And then if women don't respect that, if women don't respect that and they say like, well, now you're just lying, or withholding or things like that, you could just say I will totally have this conversation with you in a therapeutic setting.

Because then you can have someone there to help the wife, maybe it doesn't make sense to have every single thing laid out again because then it just gives – Sometimes it's easier to have things to hash out because that keeps us externally focused and not internally focused.

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And sometimes, as women, we think the safety comes from knowing how to, like that hypervigilance. Being super emotionally high-end and externally focused. And we think that's what creates safety so that we can prevent things from happening again, but it's not a preventative technique even though our brain thinks it is.

And a lot of times our brain would rather keep us there, up here, like in our prefrontal cortex than out of our body doing the healing, connecting and feeling the pain.

Sara: Yeah, really good. Okay, I have a few questions.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: First, so tell us a little bit about your story and what this looked like for you. Because you did this, right?

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: You were trying to make sure he wasn't looking and all the things. And then, I don't know, you found coaching or whatever, or therapy, all the stuff and you stopped doing that. What did that look like for you and what changed? Just tell us, like give us some hope here.

Lindsay: Yeah, no, I love it. I love it. I mean, one thing that I'm really grateful for is that my husband never blamed me for his behavior. So I mean, unfortunately, yeah, he wasn't the nicest person to himself. But I didn't know that because I didn't know what his negative self-talk story was. But he never blamed me for my behavior. So that was really helpful.

But just so you know, if your husband – Or sorry, he never blamed me for his behavior. But if your husband does think it's because you don't have enough sex or because of those things, he's obviously – I shouldn't say obviously, but he is misinformed.

He's been conditioned to believe that porn and sex are related, when they're not. And that could be a whole other episode. But I think the big

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thing for me with our story – Sorry, you just want to know kind of our story and –

Sara: I want to know, yeah, so when you stopped trying to control him, you got out of this relationship spiral in you. He was working through it on his own. He was getting lots of help with all the stuff going on for him. But yeah, what changed when you stopped?

Lindsay: Oh gosh, okay. So when I stopped, I stopped, and I was actually feeling at a pretty low point. So I was probably in more of a fight response because in the beginning it was more of a freeze. And then there was more of a flight, like my behavior was indicative of more of a freeze response, I was more shut down. And then I found myself kind of being more, like having more flight responses and whatnot.

And then I started having more of like a fight response, which might have been me being more pushy. Like, when are you going to heal? When is this going to stop? When are you going to start work again? Because my husband stopped working within a week of telling me about his porn use because he had a bunch of childhood trauma come to a head. And so I was getting really pushy about him starting working again and stopping looking at porn.

And so he actually set boundaries with me. He set emotional boundaries with me because I was being pretty pushy about it because he wasn't healing on my timeline. And I don't, like I totally get where I was because I was being told by people, like trusted people, I mean some trusted some untrusted, but I was being told by people like, hey, this, this, this and this.

And unfortunately, in a lot of high-demand religious cultures we're taught to think about his porn use in ways that just is not supportive of him, and it's not supportive of us, and it's not supportive of unconditional love in my opinion.

But basically he set some emotional boundaries with me and I got to kind of a low point where I was like, well, I don't know what's going to happen, but I know that I've got to figure out me. I've got to figure out how to be okay

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whether he stops looking, keeps looking, keeps stopping looking, starts working, never works again. I think for me, some of my bigger fears back then were like, oh my gosh, he might never work again and we've got dental school loans.

Sara: Yeah, because he had all that trauma come up and was just like unable.

Lindsay: He was non-functioning.

Sara: He was non-functioning, yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah. Yeah, and so it was a really scary place to be for me for years. And so after a few years I was still in that space, but I was getting more pushy about it because of my own fear. And so he set those boundaries, I got to that kind of low point. But now I kind of call it more of like a pivot point where it's like, well, I've just got to figure out how to be okay.

And that's when a friend introduced me to coaching. And then I started listening to different coaching podcasts and things like that. And I was like, so it just helped me get to this more empowered place because I'd grown up in a religious culture that was so focused on the disempowered face of your husband's porn use. There wasn't a lot of empowerment unless he stopped looking.

Sara: Yeah.

Lindsay: So it was still like the healing came as he healed, there was a lot of that there. So it was still just interwoven and tangled in what he did or didn't do. And I was just like, I've got to figure me out. So the coaching was really good because it helped me swing over to this really empowered space where I just, I learned how to anchor in me, and what I needed, and how I could heal, and how I could start thinking and approaching this work.

And to be totally frank, Sara, it actually gave him more space to just feel out his own healing.

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Sara: Yeah.

Lindsay: So instead of me being like a hover helicopter mom, which is what we're conditioned to be, like a little wife orbiting around, "What are you doing?" I just focused on me. And I did it in a, it was like a loving act for myself, it wasn't a callous thing. It's not a callous thing to think about yourself for a little bit.

Sara: Oh, so much conditioning around that, that we can talk for hours about.

Lindsay: I know. I'm like, do we need our own podcast for all this conditioning crap?

Sara: Probably.

Lindsay: But it really did give him space to just feel out his healing. His healing map is his, and mine is mine. And as we both just kind of separated and individuated with respect to our healing, it helped us get to this place where we could come together safely and interdependently and test out these conversations again, but knowing how to root back into our own bodies for safety.

And it was like every, to me, everything changed because I learned how to create for myself. And I did all of that before he even figured out how to stop looking at porn. And so it was like after I figured that out, and I'm not going to say this is like the same story is going to happen to everybody. But after I figured this out, he was like, "Oh, what does she know that I don't know? Because that kind of sounds cool."

And then he started using the tools that I learned to apply to himself to stop looking at porn and it made a huge difference. Like, everything changed.

Sara: Yes.

Lindsay: So I can't promise that that's going to be the story for everybody. But what I will promise is that if you are committed to your healing, those emotions that you're wanting to feel are, like those are going to happen for

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you. I can't guarantee it's going to happen within the scope of your relationship, but it is absolutely possible that what you're wanting, the connection and intimacy that you're wanting and seeking is going to happen.

Sara: So good. So good. And I love that.

Lindsay: I just mic dropped myself, everybody.

Sara: Mic drop. I know, I should have – I just couldn't keep myself from being like, “Oh, so good.” I should have just let it sit for a moment. But I love that he prioritized his safety when he set those boundaries with you, those emotional boundaries.

And I don't know what specifically those were, but maybe some examples of what that might look like for a guy in that situation are like, I need you to stop. I just can't be worried about telling you all the time, it's creating a lot of anxiety for me to be worried about this all the time. And it's actually keeping me from doing the work that I need to to quit, or whatever that might look like.

Lindsay: Yeah, I think that's a great example. For him and I, it was more like me wanting him to heal faster than he had capacity to and just being like, “When are you going to stop this? When are you going to start this?” And he was just like, I'm not – A lot of his boundaries were more like, if you keep saying this, I'm going to leave the room. It was more like just –

Sara: Yeah, healthy.

Lindsay: Yeah, very healthy emotional boundaries. And I'll say, it totally pissed me off in the moment. But then after I was like – Which that's how it is with boundaries, there's something that happens as we change the dances of our marriage and in our relationships, like it makes sense that there's going to be a little tripping and fumbling.

But then I was just like, oh, okay. I'm still resentful, but he's not even here. So I can choose to just let that simmer, or I can process what I need to

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process and then clear that smoke so I can see what to focus on in me, right?

Sara: Yeah.

Lindsay: And that can be done without becoming a doormat. So I say this in the context of non-emotionally abusive relationships and things like that, because that could be a whole other thing, too.

Sara: How do you know if you're in an emotionally abusive relationship?

Lindsay: Oh my gosh.

Sara: That's a whole other podcast.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: That's like 16 more, just like a quick answer.

Lindsay: Part two, no. So I would say generally, if there is like chronic discounting of your human experience, of your humanity, that can look like – So really, a lot of things, if done over and over and over and over, it could be considered emotionally abusive. But one-off stuff might not always be.

So maybe every, like twice a year I eye roll my husband because of something he says, like oh gosh, right? But for whatever reason maybe that's discounting something that he's experiencing, but it's the chronic piece that can be really, really helpful.

So it's more like anytime you're trying to share a part of you or something, it's like there's discounting, there's turning it around, there's stonewalling, there's gaslighting, there's making it your fault or something like that. So anytime you just feel like you're trying to express your true self in your relationship and it gets discounted and diminished chronically, it can be considered emotional abuse.

I have a lot of examples that I could give, but that's kind of the general way to think about it. And a lot of times, it's unintentional by the spouse. So just because it's happening doesn't mean your husband is an abuser or you

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need to identify him in that way and now you need to think about yourself in that way. But what some women need to just know is like, oh, this is why it feels so big to me, because I have been on the receiving end of this behavior, even though his intention may or may not have been there.

But, also, with our conditioning sometimes we discount our needs. We don't let ourselves experience the pain that we need to experience because we're like, "Oh, but he's such a good guy." Or, "Oh, but he makes so much money." Or, "The thing that helps it makes so much money, sometimes it overlaps into how I'm treated, but he's able to do all these other good things."

And so we want to make sure we can separate that out and draw a line for what we've been on the receiving end of, regardless of all the other good things that he's doing.

Sara: Yeah. Yeah, so good. Another question before we end, which we have to do in just a minute. So some people, I mean, I can absolutely see creating safety myself, if I'm prioritizing my own safety, what does that even mean? And is that not just like trying to run away from the struggle?

So, for example, in relationships, creating safety, what does that even look like? Like, I don't want to talk to my wife about this anymore. Is creating safety just me lying and not having to talk about it? Or trying to run away from that? What does that even mean? You know what I mean?

Lindsay: Yeah, I mean, it's all about the energy behind why you don't want to, right? Is there an energy of entitlement as far as like, "Hey, that sounds convenient. I'm going to say that I just need to create safety so that I don't have to talk about this uncomfortable stuff or get into this discomfort."

But it could look like hey, yes – Like if you're looking a lot, and a lot for you. And if telling her every single time is going to take over both of your days, it could be like, "Hey, this truth, this honesty is really important to me. What if we spread out our check-ins a little bit? What if we spread those out every week, every two weeks?"

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And just see, because for every couple it's different. For some, the porn use is in a space where just knowing within three hours is what the spouse wants. That's what she feels great about. And yeah, it sucks when it happens, but she knows how to process and move through that.

But for some it's like if telling your spouse is putting you both into this tailspin where it takes you both a lot longer than you think it would normally take to process an emotion and move through something, it could be worth asking like, "Hey, is there another way to be truthful and shift the way that I tell her or the duration of time in between when I tell her things like that?"

Sara: Okay, so good.

Lindsay: So it can still be honest, and it makes sense if she's feeling reactive to what you're doing just because of her own nervous system triggers and ways that she's been raised and the potential betrayal. We can hold space for that too. And I think for a lot of men, not being entitled to her believing that you're trustworthy just because suddenly maybe you're being trustworthy. But that doesn't mean that it doesn't take time for things to kind of work their way out with her too.

Sara: Really good. So much compassion, empathy and love for each side.

Lindsay: Oh my gosh, yeah. And that's the thing, too, I feel it for both sides. Because it's like, poor women, they've been taught to believe this about themselves when their husband looks at porn. And these poor men, that's so much pressure to carry to do this and this and this. And a lot of men they're trying to like keep their moms happy still.

There's just so much pressure for both due to a lot of our patriarchal conditioning. And so if we can just de-tangle that, well, first of all, just understand the context of why so that we can decide what truths we want to keep or what ideas we want to keep, it can help us just kind of see what we actually want to untangle.

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Sara: Yeah, so good. So good. Okay, Lindsay has something really awesome for those of you who are spouses. Is the program just for women or is it for any partner?

Lindsay: It is for women. Yeah, women or people who identify as women.

Sara: Okay. Yeah, so for those of you who are struggling with this, what's your program called?

Lindsay: Yeah, so I have a program, it's called Self-Advocacy For Women. And it's a healing program for women whose partners are looking or aren't looking, like who are looking, stopping looking, or who haven't stopped looking at porn. And it's a space to process, heal, learn how to connect yourself in ways that Sara and I have been talking about today so that you can feel the way that you're wanting to feel while he's figuring out all of his stuff.

So it's like learning how to turn inward and anchor into yourself while he's figuring out his stuff. And being in a group of women who are all figuring out the same thing because that, for me, was one of the biggest shame dissipators, is like doing that in a container where we had a guide to support us in our healing as well.

Sara: Cool. I always tell the women, I say, I know you just want to put all the money, like fix your husband.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: But you've got to prioritize yourself too.

Lindsay: Yes, I know.

Sara: It's worth every effort to do that. It's going to create so much more, like you say, safety and goodness, than just trying to put all the resources towards your husband.

Lindsay: Yeah, totally. And that's just, again, it's like another socialization thing. And again, we've also just been socialized to think, like a lot of us in

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these religious spheres have been told that the porn stuff is big. It's the big thing, it's going to be the end. So it's like we have this hierarchy of problems and feelings, and we've decided that porn is like way up here and that ours is way down here and nonexistent.

And so recognizing that he has feelings that are driving him to do this thing, but also you have feelings too. Your lived experience is real, too. And his stuff is impacting you and his experience, it makes sense that it would become your lived experience in some way too.

Because some women are like, "No, he doesn't want me to tell anyone. And it's his thing." But there comes a time, and all of you women know when it's going to be, like you all know where this line is for you where like, no, this is becoming your thing, too. Which means you get to create safe space for yourself too so that you can heal.

And so letting your husband find his own accountability partner and you not being the accountability partner for him, and then you getting that professional support that you need is huge. That's where everything turned for me. And it's a lot cheaper than a divorce, I promise.

Sara: Yeah. Yeah. So good. Even if it leads to divorce, like whatever it is, you're just going to be so much more grounded and safe.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: And you need the support to get there, it's so important.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: And so Lindsay is so generous, she was talking about her program and she was like, "I really want to offer this to women and like, especially for people who have already invested in your program. I want to give them 40% off of my self-advocacy program." And I heard that I was like, "What? That is so generous and so, so, so cool of you."

So that's what you're offering too. If you guys have already invested in Overcome Pornography For Good, you're working through it, maybe you're

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coming to some of the marriage relationship calls, but you need help, you need more help, Lindsay's program 40% off, that's where you've got to go.

Lindsay: Yeah, there's a lot of – And I basically decided this because I do coaching once a month for the women in your group and I just feel like having some structure to support those group calls, it can help so much. Because when we're activated, sometimes it takes us more than once or twice to watch through and learn how to self-apply these tools.

And so, yeah, everybody just deserves to have the healing that they want. And like Sara said, learning how to self-advocate, it really does help you see the true essence of your marriage, what it really is. When you're learning how to feel safe enough to express your true self and advocate for your wants and needs, your husband is going to be all over that and like, “Yeah, that's hot. I want that.” Right?

And it doesn't mean there might not be stumbling, but it really can help you see what the true essence of your marriage is so you can make informed decisions about what your marriage is, and not what the illusion of your marriage is or anything like that.

Sara: So good. So good. Cool. Okay, anything else that we need to add?

Lindsay: No, I mean, I think the big thing is just letting your feelings be just as big as his. And please don't identify with his porn use, it's not because of anything you did or didn't do, even if he thinks that. And if you have the desire for things to change, that desire is there because it's possible.

And then sometimes that comes with having professional support and having a support system around you, while he has a support system around him so you can both come together and see if it makes sense to come together in that interdependent, vulnerable way.

Sara: Yeah, get out of those relationship spirals.

Lindsay: Yeah. Yeah, those aren't fun. They're fun when they're like compounding.

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Sara: Yeah, they're fun when everything's going great.

Lindsay: Totally, totally.

Sara: Okay, where can they go to join the self-advocacy program?

Lindsay: Yeah, so if they just go to LindsayPoelmancoaching.com. I can send you a link so it can be in your show notes. But also, they can go to LindsayPoelmancoaching.com, it's P-O-E-L-M-A-N. And there's a little services tab, and just hit the self-advocacy one.

And if you're already in Sara's program, then she will have links available for you. She'll provide links for you to join with that 40% link. And if you're not in her program, then you could just join up anyway and come be a part of this great community.

Sara: Yes, you don't have to be a part of the program to join. The 40% off is for if you guys are already in the program.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Sara: And I'll put that in the actual program content and I'll send out an announcement to people who are in the program for that discount link.

Lindsay: Perfect. Yay!

Sara: Cool, thank you so much for coming on.

Lindsay: Of course. Of course, so much love to all of you. Thank you so much, Sara, you're the best.

Sara: Thank you.

Lindsay: Everyone's in good hands with Sara.

Sara: Thank you, and same to you. Same to you. All right, talk to you guys next week. Bye 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

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giving in to urges without pure willpower or relying on phone filters so that you can actually stop wanting pornography.

We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't have more willpower. And then lastly, we talk about how to make a life without porn easily sustainable and permanent. We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't have more willpower. And then 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. So you can go and sign up at Sarabrewer.com/masterclass, and it is totally free.