

# Trapped? Use the Right Timing to Break Free

BY THE RECLAIM SEXUAL HEALTH TEAM - #R010



Sexuality is an important part of our lives. Throughout the world, individuals choose to express their sexual energies in a variety of ways. For many people, the sexual outlets they pursue can become a major disruption in their lives and get in the way of enjoying committed, fulfilling relationships.

These sexual outlets can include things like hooking up and one-night-stands; phone sex, sexual chat rooms, masturbation, prostitutes, many different forms of pornography; strip clubs, massage parlors and many more. Frustrated and unhappy with the results of their sexual behaviors, many get to the place

where they realize, "This just isn't working for me any more." So, they try to stop the behavior, but too often discover that they can't. No matter how hard they try, they keep going back to the same sexual outlets, even though doing so is messing up their lives and their relationships.

Why is it so hard to break out of unwanted sexual behaviors and outlets? Shouldn't it just be a matter of deciding, "I'm not going to do that any more" and stop? Unfortunately, it's rarely that simple. Dr. Page Bailey's illustration of "The Funnel of Sexual Process" helps explain why breaking out of negative sexual habits can be so difficult.

Imagine in your mind an hourglass, wide at the top and slowly narrowing down to a very small passage-way in the center and then back to a wide opening at the bottom. This is a perfect illustration of how the brain behaves in sexual process. As people go along in everyday life, their brains have a relatively wide perspective taking in all of the people and things around them. Once an individual becomes sexually aroused, however, the brain immediately begins to narrow its focus as it releases a tidal wave of endorphins and other neurochemicals.

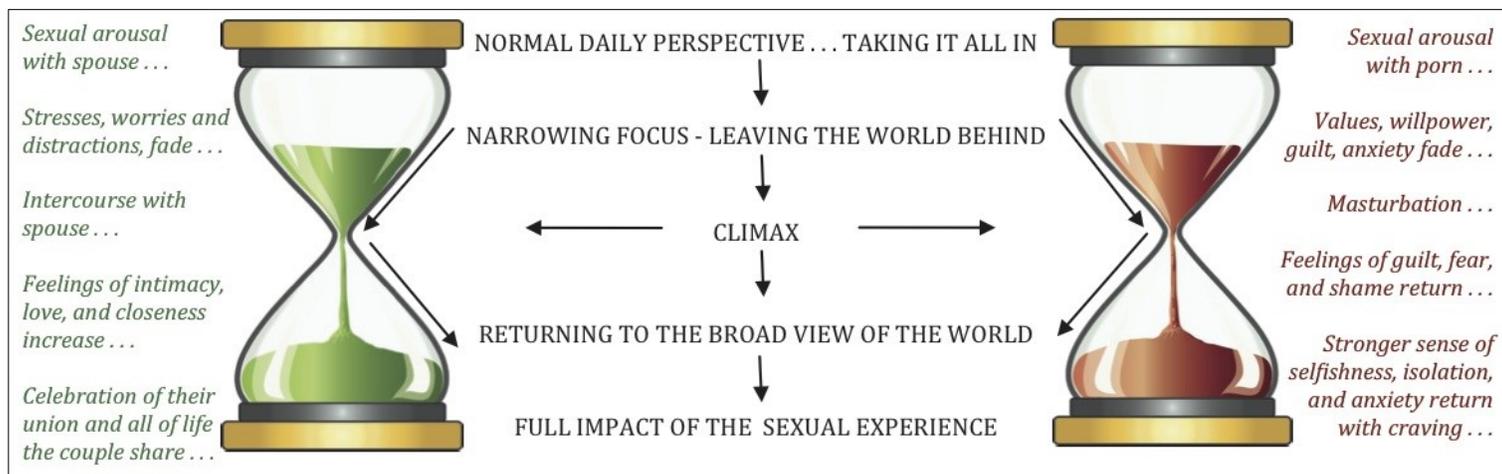


The word endorphin is derived from two words—"Endogenous" meaning produced from within, and "morphine" a powerful pain-killer. So, in the funnel of sexual process, the brain and nervous system release its own natural pain killers.

In addition, it also releases other powerful neuro-chemicals like dopamine—the body's pleasure chemical. In the funnel, stress and pain are blocked out and at the same time, the individual feels enormous pleasure. The further the person heads down into the funnel, the more narrow their focus. The logic centers of the brain shut down and the pleasure centers take over. And the pleasure center of the brain has only one absolute goal—climax. On the way there, the person blocks out the world and all distractions.

In a healthy relationship, this narrowing process causes the couple to narrowly focus on each other and enjoy the pleasure together. However, when the funnel is entered through any number of sexual outlets outside a one man/one woman marriage relationship, the narrow focus is on self and getting one's own rush or high as a pleasure outlet or on escaping from the stresses of life—just like any other drug. The trouble is, because the pleasure center of the brain is in complete control, all thoughts of logic, values, consequences, self-control, and future goals are blocked out.

After climax, the individual emerge from the narrowest part of the funnel. The Logic center of the brain regains control, and the struggling person often realizes that they have given in yet again, and experience powerful feelings of frustration, loneliness, and depression. At this point the person often feels the greatest motivation to get the help they need to break out of their unwanted sexual behaviors. However, the negative feelings can soon dissipate along with the determination to get help as the person gets back into the routine of life, and they can miss the chance to get on the path to breaking free.



### Another way to look at this cycle . . . The Avoidance Cycle

When it comes to bad habits and addictions, people typically use one primary strategy in their attempt to break free—avoidance through willpower. When they feel an urge to indulge in unwanted sexual outlets, most individuals who are trying to break free of the behavior, attempt to force the thought or urge out of their mind and avoid the situation. All of us have heard the traditional advice, "You just need to try harder." This is the worst advice there is because it usually plunges the struggling individual into what we call the Avoidance Cycle.



What happens when you try to force a thought out of your mind? For instance, right now I don't want you to think about a big, bright, yellow school bus. No matter what, DO NOT think about that bus! Of course, the more you try to fight and keep the image out of your mind, the more it forces its way in. In psychology we call this an intrusive thought. Continually attempting to force the same intrusive thoughts, urges, or feelings out of one's mind can hopelessly plunge individual into the Avoidance Cycle.

In the Avoidance Cycle, the struggling individual fights the sexual thoughts and urges and does everything to resist them. But they just continue nagging at the person and trying to force their way in. Often, worn out from the constant battle, the individual gives in and indulges in the same old sexual outlets. Temporarily, they feel relief because they don't have to fight the urges anymore. But once the rush is over, all of the negative emotions set in. The person often then makes a new vow—"That's the last time I will ever do that!" but heads into the Avoidance Cycle again! After years of being trapped in this cycle, many people simply resolve themselves to their sexual habits— "Why bother trying. I'm never going to get past this. I might as well just give in and stop fighting."

However, the best time to take action and get help with your unwanted sexual behaviors is after you have indulged and you're feeling the emotional fallout. Use these negative emotions to your advantage—use them to motivate you to get the help you need and start changing your life and relationships for the better!

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