

# Lesson 5:

## Vulnerable Host - Abuse

*“There is this idea of a vulnerable host. Through hurts and life situations, a person can almost be set up and become vulnerable to any kind of addiction.”*

*Laura Miller*

### **Basic Concept of Vulnerable Host**

The basic concept of “the vulnerable host” has been understood for centuries. Physically unhealthy individuals are cared for in ways that prevents their condition from worsening because their immune system is lowered and the probability that they could become more sick is higher.

In much the same way, emotionally unhealthy individuals are more susceptible to struggle with issues where emotionally healthy individuals have more resilience.

Typically, this occurs when someone did not receive in childhood the necessary abilities to cope with the stressors and difficulties of life. When issues arise, they do not have the experience or the confidence needed to face them head on. Therefore, they feel the best option, sometimes the only option, is to avoid or escape the problem.

Often times, they have not developed the trust to believe in others. When needing help through the tough times, help was not forthcoming. Those asked were unable to provide the help needed or simply refused to do so. Therefore, these individuals are much more vulnerable in developing unhealthy patterns by dealing with these issues in isolation, much unlike their healthier counterparts.

### **Common Factors of Sexual Addiction**

#### **Issues with Attachment**

Through repeated positive experiences with adult caregivers, infants learn they can trust others to meet their needs. Their primary caregivers, typically parents, have the biggest influence on the development of secure attachment.

“When the primary caretaker can manage personal stress, calm the infant, communicate through emotion, share joy, and forgive easily, the young child’s nervous system becomes ‘securely attached.’ The strong foundation of a secure attachment bond enables the child to be self-confident, trusting, hopeful, and comfortable in the face of conflict. As an adult, he or she will be flexible, creative, hopeful, and optimistic.

**97% of sex addicts  
report being  
emotionally abused  
81% sexually abused  
72% physically  
abused <sup>26</sup>**

Notes

**Our secure attachment bond shapes our abilities to:**

- ▶ feel safe
- ▶ develop meaningful connections with others
- ▶ explore our world
- ▶ deal with stress
- ▶ balance emotions
- ▶ experience comfort and security
- ▶ make sense of our lives
- ▶ create positive memories and expectations of relationships

Insecure attachment takes root when an infant’s attachment bond fails to provide the child with sufficient structure, recognition, understanding, safety, and mutual accord. These insecurities may lead us to:

- ▶ Tune out and turn off—If our parent is unavailable and self-absorbed, we may—as children—get lost in our own inner world, avoiding any close, emotional connections. As adults, we may become physically and emotionally distant in relationships.
- ▶ Remain insecure—If we have a parent who is inconsistent or intrusive, it’s likely we will become anxious and fearful, never knowing what to expect. As adults, we may be available one moment and rejecting the next.
- ▶ Become disorganized, aggressive and angry—When our early needs for emotional closeness go unfulfilled, or when a parent’s behavior is a source of disorienting terror, problems are sure to follow. As adults, we may not love easily and may be insensitive to the needs of our partner.
- ▶ Develop slowly—Such delays manifest themselves as deficits and result in subsequent physical and mental health problems, and social and learning disabilities.

**Major causes of insecure attachments include:**

- ▶ physical neglect — poor nutrition, insufficient exercise, and neglect of medical issues
- ▶ emotional neglect or emotional abuse — little attention paid to child, little or no effort to understand child’s feelings; verbal abuse
- ▶ physical or sexual abuse — physical injury or violation
- ▶ separation from primary caregiver — due to illness, death, divorce, adoption
- ▶ inconsistency in primary caregiver — succession of nannies or staff at daycare centers

*Notes*

- ▶ frequent moves or placements — constantly changing environment; for example: children who spend their early years in orphanages or who move from foster home to foster home
- ▶ traumatic experiences — serious illnesses or accidents
- ▶ maternal depression — withdrawal from maternal role due to isolation, lack of social support, hormonal problems
- ▶ maternal addiction to alcohol or other drugs — maternal responsiveness reduced by mind-altering substances
- ▶ young or inexperienced mother — lacks parenting skills<sup>27</sup>

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**Questions: Common Factors of Sexual Addiction**

**Attachment**

1. What experiences as a child impacted your ability to have a secure attachment?

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**Loneliness**

2. Describe what loneliness feels like to you.

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3. When was the last time you felt lonely?

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4. What things do you do to try to combat the feeling of loneliness?

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**Anger**

5. Do people often say you have a temper? What examples would they give?

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6. What things make you feel tense or anxious?

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7. Do you find yourself feeling guilty or embarrassed about anger outbursts? Explain.

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8. Are you married to someone with a temper? How does that make you feel?

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9. Are there things in your past that you still feel anger/resentment about?

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**Addictions**

10. Were there addictions in your family of origin?

Drugs            Alcohol            Money            Gambling            Work  
Food            Sex            Exercise            Other \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_    Other \_\_\_\_\_    Other \_\_\_\_\_

Children whose parents abuse alcohol and other drugs are three times more likely to be abused and more than four times more likely to be neglected than children from non-abusing families.<sup>28</sup>

11. Were these addictions acknowledged and dealt with or ignored? Explain.

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12. Are there any addictions that are currently active in your family of origin? If yes, list them and explain how they are being addressed?

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**Sexual Abuse**

Up to 50 percent of those who sexually abuse children are under the age of 18.<sup>29</sup>

20 to 50% of adolescents who have sexually abused children were themselves victims of physical abuse and approximately 40 to 80% were victims of sexual abuse.<sup>30</sup>

88% of cases of sexual abuse are never reported to the authorities.<sup>31</sup>

It is estimated that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will have experienced an episode of sexual abuse while younger than 18 years. The numbers of boys affected may be falsely low because of reporting techniques.<sup>32</sup>

More than 90% of juvenile sexual abuse victims know their perpetrator in some way.<sup>33</sup>

As many as two-thirds of the people in treatment for drug abuse reported being abused or neglected as children.<sup>34</sup>

**NOTE: The disclosure of abuse of any kind can be emotionally distressing. We ask that you seek out professional counseling in order to aid in the healing of any emotional or psychological distress you may be experiencing.**

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**13. Have you experienced overt (touch) sexual abuse? If yes, have you reported it to the proper authorities? If you have not reported abuse, what things prevent you from doing so?**

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**14. Abuse Experiences**

**Forcible**

**Seductive**

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**15. What did you feel as a result of the abuse you endured?**

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**16. How has the abuse impacted your life?**

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**17. What confusing messages about yourself did you receive as a result of the abuse experience?**

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**18. What confusing messages about sex did you receive as a result of the abuse experience?**

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**19. How has your view of sex been impacted by the abuse experience?**

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**20. What types of covert (non-physical touch) abuse have you experienced?**

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**21. When was the first time you saw pornography?**

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**22. What were the circumstances surrounding seeing pornography for the first time?**

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**23. Was pornography used by anyone in your house growing up?**

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**24. What messages about sex have you received from pornography?**

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**25. What messages does pornography send about the opposite sex?**

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**Arousal Template**

“Each of us has different preferences for what turns us on sexually, and this is what we call an arousal template—the total constellation of thoughts, images, behaviors, sounds, smells, sights, fantasies, and objects that arouse us sexually. While most of us, if we’re asked, can describe what turns us on, we generally react unconsciously to these sexual stimuli. They are just a part of us.”<sup>35</sup>

**26. What things do you find the most arousing?**

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**27. What were your first experiences of a sexual nature?**

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**28. What common themes or connections do you see between your first sexual experiences and what you find arousing now?**

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**29. In what ways has pornography shaped or changed your arousal template?**

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**30. Write a description of how you view God.**

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**31. Write a description of how you view your father.**

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**32. Are there any similarities?**

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**33. What unspoken messages about God did you receive from your parent's behavior and attitude towards God?**

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