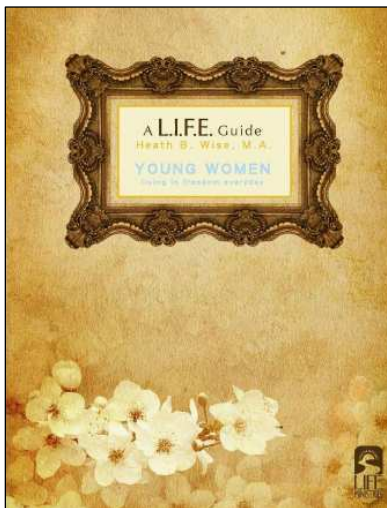


Letter to Parents



As a parent myself, I have much compassion for parents today. It is such a threatening world that we live in and most parents fear for the safety of their child. And most fear that their child will make choices that will harm them or scar them for the rest of their lives. I talk to so many parents who are confused about how to help their child. They want to be good parents but they do not know what to do. You might be the parent who is desperately hurting because you have done all you know to do and nothing seems to help. Or you might be the parent who never suspected that anything was wrong. The fact that you are reading this letter, tells me that you are a good parent. You care about what your daughter is reading and doing. My prayer is that you will be able to be supportive during this journey.

You might have some questions when you see the topic of the workbook. It is addressing sexual integrity issues. I have found that nothing causes more anxiety for a parent than finding out that their daughter is struggling with sexual integrity. But the good news is that there is hope. This workbook will help her get to the root of the issue and begin to make changes. It will help her to stay sexually pure and to have a vision of the kind of woman she wants to be. She will look at her identity and who God says that she is. She will learn to have supportive, healthy relationships that encourage her to be healthy and whole.

The best way for you to be supportive is to come alongside and be willing to talk if your daughter wants to talk. Do not force her to tell you everything if she does not want to do so. Be a safe person for her so that she will talk to you when she is ready. Pray for her. Sometimes in their fear, parents can come on strong and shame their children. Remember, the Bible says that it is the kindness of God that leads to repentance.

As threatening as it is, be thankful that she is talking to someone and working on the issue. I always think it is a good idea for parents to be informed. Buy a copy of the workbook yourself so

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that you can see what she is doing. But don't intrude on her privacy by reading hers. Take this opportunity to educate yourself about addictions so that you can understand your child. Get general updates from the leader as the group progresses. Remember, our children are always being influenced for good and for evil. There is so much negative influence, aren't you thankful to have other people who are willing to influence her for good? This is a battle and we need to work together; it is tiring to try to do it alone.

Sometimes parents are concerned because there are secrets in the family that everyone is trying to hide. Addiction is a family disease because it affects the whole family. If one suffers, the whole family suffers. You know this yourself because you have undoubtedly been affected by your daughter's struggle. Addictions often run in families. So there might be other family members who are also struggling. There is no shame if that is the case. There is help available. There are women's and men's L.I.F.E. groups available as well as other resources for other addictions. Please get help if you need it and join your daughter on her journey of recovery.

INTRODUCTION

By Heath Wise, M.A.

Allie is a typical teenager, active in church and school activities. She appears to have plenty of friends and a close family. When there is something that needs to be done at church, Allie is quick to volunteer and always does a good job at whatever she is asked to do. People would describe her as sweet, confident and happy. But Allie has a painful secret. She is sleeping with her boyfriend and cannot seem to stop. In fact, this is not the first guy that she has slept with. “I keep thinking that if I just pray enough or read my Bible more, I will be able to stop,” Allie says. “But it never seems to work. I cry and cry and beg the Lord to help me but I just do it again. Why can’t I stop?”

Maybe you can identify with Allie. The details might be different but the struggle is the same. You really want to be sexually pure and have made promises to yourself and God but have not been able to keep them. Sometimes it seems like you are on a rollercoaster, doing well for awhile and then falling again. You wonder why other people don’t seem to struggle the way you do. You feel ashamed and wonder if the Christian life just doesn’t work for you because you are so messed up inside.

Well, I have good news. There is hope for you! This book is about learning to live in freedom everyday. And that is possible! This is not another self help or abstinence program. Those have their places. This is a different approach, one that many people have found very effective. You will learn about addiction and how to break that rollercoaster cycle. There are reasons that you have been struggling with your sexuality. You are not just a bad person who will never get it together.

There is so much confusion about what it means to be a woman in today’s society. Our culture tells us that to be a woman you have to be desirable sexually to a man. Look at the commercials on television. Sex sells everything from soap to cars. A provocative woman is seen as the ideal.

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It doesn't matter if the woman has character or intelligence. Her whole value is wrapped up in being sexual. Her whole identity is a sexual identity tied to her body image. Instead of having an internal sense of her identity and worth, a woman in this system is dependent on external validation. Do men find her attractive? Then she must be. Do men look at her body? Then she must have value. She has to have the approval of men who find her desirable. This is such a trap. External validation of identity never works. It will never be enough; she has to keep looking to see if another man finds her attractive and then another.

In response to our highly sexualized culture, the church often takes a negative view of sexuality. The motive is a good one. They want to save young people from making mistakes that wound them and cause scars. But even though the motive is a good one, the result is not helpful. We come down hard on sex and teach young people to shut down their sexual feelings until they can get married. Seems like a good idea but it doesn't work. Or we just don't talk about it at all which sends a message that sex is shameful. And one of the most damaging things that we do is to join the culture in making women sex objects.

When my own daughter was a teenager, I remember so many talks at retreats and church events about girls being careful about the way that they dress because it made it difficult for the guys. The underlying assumption is that guys are sexual beings and that they are going to lust. But it shifts the responsibility for the guys' lust onto the girls. They are sex objects that need to be covered up so that they don't cause the guys to sin. Don't misunderstand me. I think girls need to be careful about the way they dress. But when I see a skimpily clad young woman, I am saddened not because she is making it difficult for some guy, but because it tells me what she believes about herself and where she gets her value. We are totally missing the heart of the issue for men and the women.

God made you a woman and He intends for you to delight in the creation that He has made. Being female is a large part of who you are. Learning how to celebrate your sexuality as a female and still remain pure is part of what you will be learning in this book. You don't have to act out sexually to know how valuable you are. God made you female and that is a glorious thing!



Principle One

We admit that we have absolutely no control of our lives. Sexual sin has become unmanageable.

Confronting Reality: I'm Shackled in My Own Prison

It started when Tina was 7. Her older brother showed her how to “touch herself” so that she would feel good. Tina tried to stop over the years but could only last a couple of weeks. Every night she would tell herself, “this is the last time.” Then she would get stressed at school and do it again. Each time, she felt so ashamed and guilty. Why couldn't she stop?

Can you identify with Tina? It takes a lot of humility to admit that your life seems out of control and that sexual sin has become unmanageable. Sometimes people think that by saying their life is unmanageable they are calling themselves losers. Nothing could be further from the truth! You are precious and dearly loved, made in the image of God.

Think about the Father in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. He ran to meet his wayward son, watching and waiting for him to come home. The son's life was unmanageable but he was not a “loser”. The Bible says that the son had to be honest with himself, to “come to his senses”, before the healing could begin. That is when he could experience the love of his Father. Are you ready to come home? There is nothing that you have done that can separate you from the love of your Father. The Bible says that “nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.” Do you believe that?

Assignment One: Getting Real About Sexual Truth

Let's take a moment and look at the term sexual addiction. Many young women who struggle with out of control sexual behavior would never consider themselves an addict. That is because addiction can look very different for a female than for a male. According to Patrick Carnes, sexual addiction is defined as any sexually-related, compulsive behavior which interferes with normal living and causes severe stress on family, friends, loved ones, and one's work environment. We tend to think of the male who spends hours viewing pornography on the computer or who has multiple affairs. In young women, the compulsive sexual behavior is often relational, needing to have one boyfriend after another and being sexual in order to "keep" the relationship. The goal for these women is the relationship, and sex is the means to that end. Or it can be about the romance, either real or imagined, where the high of new love is the thrill. As soon as the new wears off, she looks for another relationship in order to have the same excitement again. However, it does not have to be relational. Females compulsively masturbate and use the internet to have anonymous cybersex or visit online chat rooms in order to "hook up". We are seeing an increase in compulsive pornography use among women. Marnie Ferree in her book *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Shame* delineates the typical presentations of sex addiction in women. Take some time and fill out the chart next page. Remember, humility is being completely honest. That is where recovery begins.

Typical Presentations of Sexual Addiction in Women

Relationship addiction	Began	How Often
One relationship right after another (never being without a man, or at least looking for a man)	_____	_____
Intense, emotional involvements, with or without sex	_____	_____
Most significant relationships becoming sexual	_____	_____
Simultaneous relationships, with or without sex	_____	_____
Affairs (sexual or non-sexual, long term with emotional involvement, short term and non-emotional, one night stands)	_____	_____

Romance addiction	Began	How Often
Fantasizing about people or relationships, real or imagined (if married, these fantasies are not about your spouse)	_____	_____
Fantasizing about sexual activities, real or imagined (if married, may use fantasy to enhance sex with spouse)	_____	_____
Intense, short-term relationships, with or without sex	_____	_____
Interested in the “chase”, not in maintaining a relationship	_____	_____
Reading romance novels, including “Christian” ones	_____	_____

Pornography and/or cybersex addiction	Began	How Often
Viewing pornography (Internet, magazines, videos, books)	_____	_____
Participating in sexual chat rooms	_____	_____
E-mail or cybersex relationships	_____	_____
Engaging in cybersex activities	_____	_____

Stereotypical “sex” addiction	Began	How Often
Compulsive masturbation, with or without pornography	_____	_____
Exhibiting yourself (even if “only” through provocative clothing)	_____	_____
One-night stands or sexual activity with someone you’ve just met (often alcohol use is a contributing factor)	_____	_____
Visiting strip clubs or other voyeuristic activities	_____	_____
Bestiality	_____	_____
Sado-masochism (S&M) or pain exchange sexual activities	_____	_____

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Partnering with another sex addict	Began	How Often
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Choosing a sex addict for acting out partner (there may be a fine line between sex addiction and co-sex addiction)	_____	_____
Selling/buying/trading sex (prostitution, stripping, using sex manipulatively to get what you want)	_____	_____

Sexual anorexic	Began	How Often
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Totally shut down sexually	_____	_____
Compulsively avoids sex	_____	_____

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Your Sexual History

Sexual History

Draw a timeline of your life. One way to do this would be to write your age in the left margin of a sheet of notebook paper. Begin with your earliest memories and continue until you reach your current age. This timeline could be several pages long. In the space to the right of your age record your sexual and relationship history. The following questions can help jog your memory. They're intended to help you begin the process of telling your story. You may want to include other things that aren't listed in these questions. This can help you begin to understand how the sexual addiction started and developed over time.

1. What is your earliest memory of being sexual? How old were you? What happened?
Was there anyone else involved? Did you tell anybody (parent, teacher, friend, etc...)?

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2. Note the times when the frequency of sexual behaviors increased and new forms of sexual acting out began.

3. Addicts often act out when they are hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. They also act out when they are fearful, anxious, sad, and bored. Can you recognize times when these feelings prompted sexual behavior? If so, indicate on your timeline when this was true.

One of the characteristics of an addiction is that the person continues the behavior even though there are negative consequences. Sometimes the consequences are even harder to face than the behavior itself. But the reality is that our behavior does not happen in a vacuum. We impact the people around us and we impact ourselves. Take a moment and pray and ask God to help you to face and own the consequences of your sexual behavior. Then do the next exercise using the questions provided to help you.

Consequences

Consequences

Make a list of your consequences and note when they occurred on your timeline. You might want to use a different color pen for your consequences.

Physical - Have you contracted any sexually transmitted diseases like herpes, chlamydia, genital warts (HPV)? Do you need to go to a doctor or the health department to be tested for any diseases including AIDS? Have you gotten pregnant? What did you do about the pregnancy?

Emotional - What is your stress level like? Have you been losing sleep due to the guilt and shame that goes along with acting out sexually? Are you having difficulty concentrating in school? Have you been able to fulfill responsibilities at home?

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Social - Have you been through the breakup of a dating relationship over your addiction? Are people angry with you because of things you've done to them? Have you found yourself isolating and pulling back from your relationships? Is your sexual acting out causing problems in the family with your parents or siblings? With extended family members?

Vocational - Perhaps you work a part time job after school. Are you using work time to be sexual? Have you lost a job due to sexual acting out on the job or with another employee?

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Legal - Have you been arrested or spent time in jail? Have you or your family experienced any other legal consequences as a result of your sexual behavior?

Questions

1. Have you lied or minimized your sexual behavior in the last 6 months. Give an example.

2. Are you giving the impression that you have it all together on the outside but inside you feel confused and out of control? Give an example.

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3. Many young women feel powerless in their lives and use sex as a way to feel powerful. The paradox is that when you admit that you have no power/control over the behavior you begin to get your power back. What does it mean to have no control over your life? List things over which you have no control.

Did you include your sexual behavior in the list?

4. What things **do** you have control over?

Did you include the choice to get help and do the hard work of recovery?

5. If sexual sin has become unmanageable, what things have you done in the past to try to manage the behaviors?

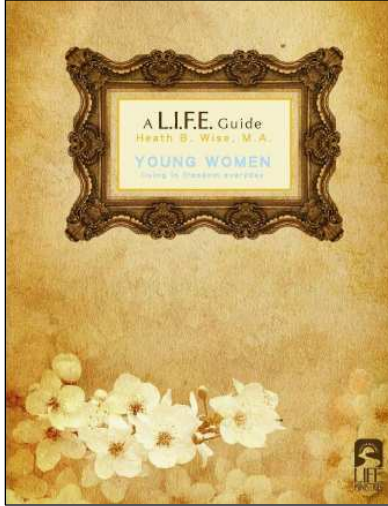
Recovering alcoholics often say that humility is stark raving honesty. Being completely honest with yourself and others is one of the hardest steps, yet it is crucial for recovery. Maybe you have tried to be honest with someone and they rejected you. It takes a lot of courage to try again.

Sharing your story with someone is a very important part of the healing process. This person needs to be a safe person who will love you and not use the things you tell them against you. Maybe you are doing this workbook with a mentor or youth pastor. Or maybe you are a part of a L.I.F.E. group. L.I.F.E. groups are designed to be safe places where healing can occur. There are safety guidelines for the groups but each group is responsible for following those guidelines. The important thing is that you find a place to tell your story as openly and honestly as you can. It has been said that silence keeps us sick. Breaking the silence-having a voice- is actually empowering, not diminishing like we fear. It has not been easy to do the written exercises. But now comes the hardest part. I'm pulling for you!

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