

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Emotional Triggers And Sexuality

By Dr. John Splinter

All guns have triggers, and anyone using a pistol, rifle or shotgun had better understand how they work or there's going to be a problem. Trained shooters learn to keep their fingers *off* the trigger until their weapon is pointed in the direction of its target, and there is some preliminary focus upon actually sighting the weapon, whether barrel-sighting, notch-and-bead sighting, or sighting the crosshairs of a scope. Then and only then, does a trained shooter move his index finger to the trigger.

As a person matures into adulthood, many learn that *they* have triggers ~ something, some person, some circumstance, or some feeling that sets them off. In this regard, as I matured into a man I began to understand that **I** had triggers ~ components in my life and character that launched me toward broken thinking. In this chapter we're going to learn about triggers and how they inter-connect with sexual problems.

Our target in this chapter is going to be gaining an understanding of pornography and emotional triggers. To set the stage correctly, it's important to understand that pornography is *not* itself a trigger. It may feel like a trigger, but it's more like a bullet in how it functions.

Let's build on that thought. Pictures aren't triggers. Most often in life, a man isn't walking down the street when suddenly the wind picks up a Playboy center-fold and blows it right into the man's visual line as he was reaching to put a nickel into a parking meter. If a man is looking at a Playboy center-fold, it's highly likely he's put a little effort into making that happen ~ whether he was in an airport away from his wife ~ or online and thought he'd check the latest issue of Playboy. And his looking at the pinup may lead him to masturbation, and in that regard the picture was a form of trigger.

But in this study we're going to go a lot deeper and try to gain an understanding of why the man went into the airport book/magazine shop, or why he turned on his computer and went to the Playboy web page in the first place. The triggers that led him to those places are far more significant.

Back to our gun analogy for a moment, emotional triggers are about psychological mechanisms that prepare the way for the ignition of bullets in a gun. They have to do with why a man opens the breach of a gun and inserts a shell in the first place. They're about what sets a person up for repetitive failure. They're about what goes on in our heads *so that* we find ourselves in situations in which it's very difficult (for some, impossible) to resist some compulsive behavior, and we actually start looking for opportunities to fail.

Examples of Triggers

There are many kinds of triggers ~ it's impossible to name all of them. Perhaps a few common examples may help you understand what they are and how they work. Here's a partial list. As you read the list, notice that *none* of them have the appearance of being sexual. Common emotional triggers include: Loneliness, anger, sadness, fear, fatigue, tension, despair, feeling unappreciated, living with chronic pain, feelings of rejection, bitterness, relational isolation. Nobody likes experiencing any of those. Each of them calls for resolution. Each of them "launches" us toward a solution ~ and therein is the understanding of the problem.

The core issue is that many men (especially guys struggling with sexual addiction) don't know **a)** that these kinds of issues are even tied to sexual thinking, and **b)** how to resolve the issues causing these emotional experiences, so as to make themselves less vulnerable to sexual acting out. These issues, in the form of internal experiences, can become chronic ~ a regular staple in the person's daily experience of life ~ a hurtful inner feeling that constantly cries out for redress and thereby launches them toward *some* form of resolution ~ even if the resolution is temporary in nature and perhaps not even seemingly linked to the source of the emotional pain. That "resolution" is often *some* form of sexual activity.

The larger and more controlling these issues are in a person's life, the more likely they find their roots in the person's childhood, and involve some level of abuse or emotional abandonment. To help you see this more clearly, here's a chart created by Dr. Mark Laaser. Dr. Laaser is one of the leading sexual therapists in the United States, focusing much of his practice on sexual addiction issues. Look at the percentages in this chart, and if you struggle with pornography or other sexual issues, ponder your own childhood. *Note also* how frequently it happens that people who have been abused, marry others who have also been abused. (i.e., the sexually out-of-control person marries the sexual anorexic. Or two sexually out-of-control types marry each other, thinking each other is what they need.)

Abuse Statistics¹

	Addict	Spouse
Sexual	81%	81%
Physical	72%	71%
Emotional	97%	91%

Let's look again at the triggers listed above. As you look at these, ponder how their roots may have been formed in childhood experiences with families that hurt. Here's the partial list of triggers again: Loneliness, anger, sadness, fear, fatigue, tension, despair, feeling unappreciated, living with chronic pain, feelings of rejection, bitterness, relational isolation. Just as when a cowboy jumps on a horse's back and spurs the animal, the horse leaps into action, so also when a deeply wounded person experiences these kinds of feelings, they seek some sort of resolution to (at least temporarily) assuage the pain. We'll look at other triggers in a moment. But first, let's examine how the resolution of the tension they create, becomes sexualized.