

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

[Overcome Pornography for Good](#) with Sara Brewer

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

You are listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast episode 140, Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders.

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.

Hey, you guys, welcome to today's podcast episode, I'm excited to talk to you about this topic today. It's something that I just think we need to address for just a minute. We are not taught about boundaries very often, especially when it comes to porn use. And there's just a few things, just a few little things I want to mention today.

So, before we dive into that, we have that religious leader, ecclesiastical leader training coming up at the end of the month. So if you are an ecclesiastical leader and want to join us, it's only \$25. It's going to change everything with how you minister to people who are struggling with porn. It's going to be really a game changer.

Or if you are interested in maybe having your religious leaders attend this training, I would send them the link. We'll add the link in the show notes for you.

So, talking about boundaries. If you remember, those of you who listened to our conversation with Jessica Farmer, we talked about relationships and disclosures. And it was so good. If you haven't listened to that interview, please, please, please go and listen to it. Especially if you are working through this with your spouse and it's been hard and difficult. And there's a lot of difficult stuff that comes up with this often.

And please go and listen to that, it is such a great episode. We talk about disclosures. We talk about how to disclose. We talk about so much from the spouse's perspective. How to do it in the best way. How to overcome any roadblocks that might be keeping you from disclosing. It's really great.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

And something that's come up since then is just talking a little bit about boundaries. And we did talk about boundaries there in that episode, but I want to just mention a few things with spouses. And then we're going to go into boundaries with friends and family, and boundaries with religious leaders.

So, if you remember from that episode, the purpose of disclosure is trust, to build trust. The purpose of disclosure with your spouse is not for them to help you feel better. The only goal here is trust. We don't typically recommend that your spouse is your accountability partner, there can just be a lot that goes on there.

Anyways, we talk about that in that episode. But we do, of course, recommend that there is full transparency and that we're building trust. And we build trust by being honest, by working together. And sometimes when you're having these conversations with your spouse, there might be some things that your spouse wants to know that you might not be totally comfortable with.

Now, I'm just you making a precursor, if you're thinking about this with your spouse, go and listen to that episode first before you hear this because we talk way more in depth. But just a few examples. Sometimes spouses want to know exactly what you saw. Tell me everything that you saw, exactly what kind of porn you watched. And they want to know all the nitty gritty details.

Sometimes they might want to know, like tell me within 30 minutes every single time. And maybe you don't feel comfortable telling them within 30 minutes every single time. That doesn't feel aligned, that feels kind of like a breach of what feels comfortable to you. Or maybe your spouse, they're bringing it up often and bringing it up daily and bringing it up in times where it doesn't really seem to be part of the conversation. Maybe they're bringing it up and saying really hurtful things.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

Now listen, we can set some boundaries here with so much love and understanding because the spouse here deserves healing. And there could potentially be that betrayal trauma that we've talked about quite a bit on this podcast. So I say this with a lot of love in my heart for the spouses.

And you can set boundaries here that can still help you build the deep connection and trust that you want without just having to do whatever they say. Because what we find sometimes is that people who are struggling with porn, they feel so terrible about it with their spouses that they almost feel like they deserve punishment. And so they just have to roll over and do whatever their spouse says with this habit.

And while it's important that we do start building that trust, we can also be aware of some boundaries that we might want to put in place. We don't have to tell our spouse exactly what you saw. And actually I don't recommend doing that. I recommend you having that conversation with your spouse and telling them why you don't want to tell them those things. The response, typically – And Lindsey Poelman, I think she talks more about this in depth in one of our interviews with her.

But there, there can be stuff going on with the spouse, really deep insecurities. It can feel like they haven't had control and so if they know exactly what you saw, they will have that control. That can be stuff for them to work through in our marriage calls every single week with Lindsey. That's a great place for your spouse to come and work through those things with her.

So remember, they get lifetime access to those for free. They can just show up any month and go and talk to her about that. But that might be something that you guys want to talk about together and decide if that's really what we want to be doing, is telling each other exactly what we saw. And that's going to be a place where it's going to be really helpful to get some conjunctive support with therapy or with coaching, either together or individually.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

And, like I said, we do have those marriage coaching, not just marriage, relationship coaching calls every single month. We have a call for the spouse of someone who is struggling with porn, and we have one for the spouse who is struggling with porn. And so you can bring these questions up and these boundaries up and work through these together with us in those calls and together.

So another one, if your spouse wants to know within 30 minutes every single time and let's say maybe you're struggling a lot and so it sounds like you're telling them consistently, constantly. You can talk to your spouse and say this feels like too much to me, I still really want to build this trust, but I'm worried that if I'm telling you, it's going to be a lot. There's going to be a lot of shame. I'm going to feel like I'm just stuck in this, that I'm always working through telling you.

And instead, what I might prefer is for us to have check-ins once a week or once every few days or something. Does that work for you? Can we work something out that way? Talking to your spouse with the general idea here that we're still building as much trust, we're not hiding anything. And we're doing it in a way that helps us feel safe and that can help us build trust with our spouse.

If your spouse is continuing to bring stuff up at random times and it really throws you off and sets you off, you can set boundaries. Honey, I love you. I'm sorry, I know you're hurt. For me to move forward, I need to not feel attacked by this. Can we please set aside time every single week to talk about this and any concerns that you have?

You can bring it up then and we can talk about it. You can ask any questions, but can we just make this a once a week discussion instead of bringing it up when we're upset and when we're stressed?

You can also set boundaries, and we talked about this with Jessica, but boundaries about those conversations. What are we allowing into this

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

space? And what are we not allowing into this space? What's the purpose of this conversation? And what can we say and what can't we say?

So name calling, there's no name calling. Everyone's allowed to have their feelings. We're not going to dismiss anyone's feelings. I'm not going to tell you you shouldn't be hurt. I'm not going to tell you it's not a big deal. I'm going to let you feel whatever you need to feel, okay, those types of things.

So that's just a few notes to spouses boundaries with disclosure that you can keep in mind that can be really helpful.

Second, talking about boundaries with friends and family. This is a conversation that I had during a coaching call recently. Someone, we were coaching and talking through and working through things. And he said, "This is really helpful. I'm making a lot of progress, but my goals have changed. And instead of me being so focused on not viewing porn, I'm more focused on learning these skills and healing this part of me.

And I know that if I'm so focused on never, ever, ever slipping up, I get in that all or nothing mindset and it sets me back. But what do I do? Because I have friends and family that are checking up on me with this. They want to know how I'm doing. And I feel a lot of pressure and I get into the all or nothing when they're checking up on me."

And we talked and I said, we can set some different expectations here. You can tell them, especially if this isn't someone that you need to rebuild trust with like a spouse, if it's a parent, a friend, you can tell them, hey, I'm a part of a new program. It's going great. I have some new accountability partners in this program. And I don't want this to be a part of our relationship dynamic right now.

I don't want you to be checking up on me with this. I'm okay. I'm working through things and I'm making a lot of progress. And instead I would prefer if maybe you just asked me about it every two months, every three months, if you want to, or you can figure that out with them.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

But you can absolutely set some boundaries around what parents, what friends can ask you. And maybe you want one of them to be your accountability buddy. That's great if you have someone in your life that there's enough distance that they can continue to help you progress without shame, use them, use them, use them.

But sometimes, and this will come up in different areas, there are people doing the program and they're like, well, I've been meeting with this group every week, and it's a great group but I'm finding that it's creating a lot of all or nothing for me, it's creating a lot of shame. And the things that we're talking about in there actually aren't really helping me quit porn. But I don't know, is it wrong to just leave? Or I don't want to just leave. I don't want them just to think that I'm done trying, because I'm not.

You can take control there. You can decide how you want to have those conversations. And you can absolutely set some boundaries and some new expectations around these relationships when it comes to porn. Listen, no one knows better than you what you need in your journey to quitting porn.

You have the authority here to make the best decisions for you. And so listen to those parts of you that might need breaks from certain groups, from certain people that might be keeping you stuck in the all or nothing, the shame or some of the tactics that just aren't really working.

And lastly, let's talk about religious leaders, okay? I recently brought this up on my Instagram page and I was like, it would be really good for me to talk about this in a podcast episode just a little bit. And, again, with that caveat that I adore, religious leaders, and most of them are just incredible and trying really hard to do the best that they can, and they're doing a great job. And sometimes you get some religious leaders that aren't so pure in heart.

And there's a lot of the, unfortunately, the horror stories that you hear. Just where I grew up in my state there was a bishop who was abusing kids and was arrested. And you hear horror stories like this. So I want to talk a little bit about boundaries with religious leaders because we were not taught

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

this, and we should have been. It's dangerous to not have boundaries with religious leaders.

It's very, very dangerous, especially for those of you who have kids and your kids are meeting with religious leaders often and occasionally. I would really just beg you to have these conversations with them. Talk to them. What is it okay for a religious leader to ask you and to not ask you? Make sure you're having the healthy safe body conversations.

It's not okay for people to touch you in these areas. In fact, your religious leader shouldn't be touching you anywhere except for shaking your hand, right? People should not be seeing these things. We keep our swimsuit parts safe by not letting anyone see it and by not letting anyone touch it. Those are basics that you need to be having with your kids, whether or not they're meeting with, you know, it's not just a religious leader conversation because that's just safety.

But if they are meeting with their religious leaders, just like what is it okay for them to be asking you? What is not okay for them to be asking you? What do you have to tell them? You don't have to tell them anything that you feel really uncomfortable sharing. So I'm going to give you some examples, because here's what I mean.

Boundaries that need to be there with religious leaders is that they shouldn't be asking you very specific questions about your sexual activity. Like what exactly did you see? How long did you last? Did you finish? Did you orgasm? They should not be asking you about your masturbation habits. They should leave that up to you to disclose if you feel like it is something to disclose. That would absolutely be a boundary for me and for my kids.

And, unfortunately, I do need to bring this up because I hear a lot of stories about this. And I've also had a lot of people really close to me, like really, really close to me who have had really awful experiences in those rooms.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

And so, like I said, most religious leaders are going to be great and fantastic and aren't going to ask you these things. But it's important that you know that they shouldn't be asking you specific questions about your religious activity.

A number of my girlfriends, too, have had meetings with religious leaders where they ask them specific details about their sexual encounters with boys. Really inappropriate details and asking them to replay them multiple times where it gets creepy and extremely inappropriate.

And it's difficult if we don't have those conversations with our kids and if we don't have someone tell us about these things, it's really, really hard to know what to do in those situations because you have a lot of trust and you're like, "Oh, well, maybe they need to know all these things." And they don't, okay? They don't.

Religious leaders only need to know what you choose to disclose to them. And if you're choosing to disclose some sexual sin, they don't need to know all the details in order for you to repent. They don't. And they should not be asking you specific details about encounters, specific details like those things I already mentioned, okay?

What I would recommend if this is happening to you, if this has happened to you, if this happens in the future, I would recommend, number one, just saying these questions, or I am uncomfortable disclosing these specifics and I will not be discussing this with you further. And then I would recommend reporting that leader to the next person above them. And we don't have a lot of control with what happens with that reporting, but I would recommend doing that.

You can also have boundaries if your religious leaders are using a lot of shame and fear tactics. And that boundary can just be simply like, if my religious leader is going to use shame and fear tactics with me, I will not be sharing this with them.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

That can be really difficult and scary because a lot of us have been taught to confess no matter what. And there can be even some scrupulosity symptoms here, where if we're not confessing and if we're not telling them every single thing they're asking us, even if it's inappropriate like we just talked about, or if I'm not confessing, I'm not right with God.

Now, this is where this idea of spiritual maturity really comes into play. Spiritual maturity is understanding that you are in charge of your spiritual results. And you know and you can make the best decisions for you and your spiritual well being. No one else can tell you what is best for your spiritual well being except for you. And you have that connection with God to know.

And so some of you, and hopefully not too many – And this is another big reason why I'm doing this ecclesiastical leader training, right? Like, sometimes bishops, maybe they're not asking inappropriate questions, but they are using some fear and shame tactics that we can just rework a little bit and they just don't really know anything better. So that's a big reason why I'm doing this, I want our leaders to be equipped and to be able to help.

They have so much power in those chairs. So much ability to do so much good. And let's just make sure we've got the right understanding to really do good instead of the fear and shame.

But if you do have a leader who's using fear and shame, you can talk to them about it. You can share with them what's working for you. You can tell them the tactics that you're going to use and what you're not going to use. You're not going to count days, you're going to count urges. You're not going to use harsh deadlines, that's not helping you.

You can talk to them about that. And if they're really adamant against that or don't quite understand, you can decide that they're not going to be an accountability person for you anymore. And you can have someone else be your accountability person.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

But back to spiritual maturity, right? So it's understanding that you know, you have a responsibility to do what is best for you spiritually. And sometimes the things that are supposed to be the best for us spiritually, like meeting with a leader, aren't. And spiritual maturity is being able to make those decisions for you, even if other people disagree.

And you can know what is good and right and true by feeling into your spirit, by feeling into your intuition and by doing models, right? Models are going to help you. And if you don't know what a model is, I talk about it in a lot of episodes, but it's just the idea that the CTFAR. So circumstance, thoughts, feelings, actions, results, we do it a lot in the program. I have a whole module on in the program.

But what results are we getting from these actions and these feelings? If the results that I'm getting from meeting with this specific leader are negative results, I have the responsibility to do what I need to do to get better results. Even if ideally meeting with a spiritual leader would help me get better results, sometimes it doesn't. And that's okay. And that doesn't mean you have to continue to meet with them. You can set some boundaries there.

And, like I said, ideally it is helpful, and ideally it is serving you. And that's why we have this ecclesiastical leader training that I am putting out for leaders. But I want you to be aware and to have the power that you need to make the best decisions for yourself instead of just following and doing what other people say because they say that you should, right?

All right, you guys, that was kind of a hard conversation. That was kind of hard. That was kind of icky. That was kind of a hard one to have, but a really important one to have. And I want to remind you that those hard conversations are so important. Especially with our kids. Especially with those people that we love.

Oftentimes, we want to just keep peace, but keeping peace isn't going to help us have beautiful, strong connections. What's going to help us have

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

beautiful, strong can elections is difficult conversations. Please have these conversations with your kids if you haven't yet. Remember, the best way to protect our kids from pornography and other dangerous sexual activity is sex education.

So if you want your kids to stay abstinent and to stay safe, a lot of times we think, well, if we just don't talk about it, they won't be curious. That's not true. The best way to protect your kids and help them make value-based decisions around sex, is to talk about sex. And to talk about it often. And to talk about what it is, talk about body parts in age appropriate ways. And there are tons of books out there that can help you do that.

And most importantly, a part of this sex conversation with kids is consent and boundaries. And so consent, no one should be able to touch you when you don't want to be touched, period. You have to have other people's consent in order to touch them. So if your sister doesn't want you to give her a hug, you can't give her a hug because she's the boss of her body.

That's one thing that my kids walk around and they say a lot is, "I'm the boss of my body. I'm the boss of my body." And it works so well. They're little and they're cute, but they will hit each other and so you'll hear someone hit the other person and the other one yells, "I'm the boss of my body." They'll run up and tell me and I'm like, "You're right, you are the boss of your body. And no one should be touching it and hurting it if you don't want them to."

So teach them consent. Teach them boundaries with religious leaders, these are things that are appropriate to talk about, these are things that are not appropriate to talk about. And ideally, I would love for you to feel comfortable enough to come and talk to me. I can come into these meetings with you if you would like.

With my kids, if it were me and my kids, I wouldn't allow them to go into meetings alone to talk about these types of things. It's just too dangerous in my mind. I need to be there and I need to do the work so that my kids feel

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

comfortable enough to talk to me instead of some random person. And that might take awhile, and that might take some trust building.

And you might have to have that conversation with your kids. Listen, I want to be a safe person for you. And I might not have had these conversations with you in the past, but I really want to change that. I really want you to know that you can come to me with any questions about sex, with anything that happens around sex, I'm not going to judge you. I'm not going to shame you. I love you and I want to be a safe person for you, okay?

And here's what I'm going to do to do that. I might have a few conversations with you and we might both feel a little uncomfortable. But it's important for me to have these with you because I love you and I want to keep you safe. And I want you to know how much I value our relationship and that I'm always going to be here for you. And so here, maybe read this book and then we can talk about it a little bit and see if you have any questions.

Or have you heard anything at school about sex that you might have questions about? And then you can tell them a question or you can tell them a story about how you learned about sex and how you want that to be different. There's lots of ways that we can connect. Some of my favorite resources for this, Kristin B. Hodson is a great sex therapist and educator for kids. She's got a great website, tons of great stuff. Kristin B. Hodson.

Shame Free Chastity with Meg is amazing. And I'm actually having Meg come in and do some contract work for us in the program around research, just making sure that we're really research-based. She's an awesome researcher and has tons of examples on her Instagram page on how to talk to kids about sex.

Those are the two that come to mind, Kristin B. Hodson, Shame Free Chastity.

140. Boundaries with Spouses, Family and Religious Leaders

All right, you guys, have a great week. Go have those hard conversations. Make sure that you keep yourself safe and remember that you are the authority when it comes to your spiritual well being. And you can make decisions that are aligned with you and God to make sure that you're making the best progress that you possibly can, even if that means setting some boundaries in relationships and relationships with religious leaders that might not fully be there yet.

All right, you guys, have a great week. We'll talk to you later. 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 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.

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.