

298. Emotional Regulation (Pillar Three of Quitting Porn)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the Overcome Pornography for Good podcast episode 298, Pillar Three: Emotional Regulation.

Welcome to the *Overcome Pornography For Good* podcast. I'm your host, Sara Brewer.

Hey, you guys, welcome to the podcast episode this week. So let's talk about the third pillar of overcoming pornography for good. The third thing that we have to make sure that we have to really quit porn for good. And the third pillar is this skill of emotional regulation. So if you remember, unwanted porn use is about escape, not sexual appetite.

There's the wanted porn use where you use it intentionally for entertainment, it's something that you're choosing to do that you want in your life. And then there's the unwanted porn use, which is those of you that are listening to the podcast, probably why you're here where maybe it's more compulsive. Or it's against your value system, you don't want it to be a part of your life. Or you're doing it in secret and it's creating problems in your relationships.

So this unwanted porn use is about escape, it's not about sexual appetites. And I know that might be a new idea for some of you if you haven't heard me say that before. And so let me explain what I mean by that and how this is true. So it's about an escape from your emotions. We have different buffering activities, and I call them buffering activities, which are just activities that we do to escape our emotions. Maybe eating sugar, or Netflix bingeing, over shopping, over playing video games, things that we do to escape our negative emotions.

And pornography is just one of those buffers that we do escape our emotions. And so if you have unwanted porn use, it's not because your sex drive is out of control. It's not because it's an unregulated sex drive and it's just all over the place you can't control it. It's because you are trying to escape your feelings.

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So let me give you some examples. You might be feeling lonely and you're missing people and you're missing connection with people. And you know that porn is a quick escape from that loneliness. And it doesn't really work long-term, and it doesn't really last, but it is a small escape from loneliness.

Or you might feel stress. Maybe your job is stressful, maybe you hate your job. Maybe you feel like you're disappointing people. And it just builds and builds and builds, and it just gets to be too much, and you know that you can escape for a moment with porn. And so you view porn to escape for a moment.

Shame or self-loathing is a big one. You have thoughts like I'm not good enough, there's something wrong with me, I am just displeased with myself and my life. And that builds, and builds, and builds, and the pressure and the shame, it builds. And it just gets too much, and you know what, we can escape that for a moment by viewing some porn. Like I said, we know it doesn't really work long term, and we know it's not a great solution, but it is a short escape for you.

Or being bored. You can escape boredom through porn. Or even just feeling antsy. Maybe you're escaping from that urge, maybe you have witching hours between, I don't know, 10 and 11 or whatever it is for you. You have these witching hours where you're feeling really antsy and you're experiencing a lot of urges, and you know that you can escape that feeling by just giving in and watching porn, so it goes away.

So this concept will be life-changing for some of you. Starting to see your porn habit as a buffer and as an escape, and asking yourself consistently, what is it that I'm escaping here? And if you've heard me talk about this before, which you probably have, I really want you to take some inventory and ask yourself, do I know what I am trying to escape when I view porn? Do I know what emotions are really difficult for me to feel? Do I know what emotions I'm feeling a lot of that I'm having a hard time managing that I use pornography as an escape from?

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So that's step number one, is just notice. Notice what am I escaping here? Point it out to yourself. Say it very clearly, don't lie, don't push it away. Because what happens is when we don't point it out to ourselves, when we don't notice it, we push it down. And it builds, and builds, and builds, and builds, and builds. And pretty soon we need an escape from it.

As you can start pointing it out to yourself and noticing it, you can allow it to move through your body and stop resisting it so that it doesn't keep building, and building, and building, and building. My old pattern is that I would feel a lot of anxiety. And what I would do is I'd push it down, and push it down, and push it down, and ignore it, ignore it, ignore it, and just work, and work, and work, and try to work away the anxiety.

And what that led to me doing was, "I just need to get rid of this." And I would escape that anxiety and then just watch Netflix for a few days and just like pass out on my bed and not move for a couple of days, just on my phone or watching Netflix because I just am exhausted.

Or anger. I'd feel anger and I just tried to push it away, and try to ignore it, and try to pretend like it's not there. Push it down, push it down, push it down. And what happens is it just explodes, and my anger comes out of all these different areas, and I act in ways I don't want to act.

I was talking to a client the other day who had similar stuff happen with school. There's all this pressure and anxiousness from school and to perform well in school. And instead of recognizing that and handling that emotion and regulating yourself emotionally, he just tried to work his way through it.

Tried to ignore it, tried to work, and work and work and get rid of it. If I can just get all my work done, I won't feel anxious anymore. If I can just get all these things done, or I just ignore it, it'll go away. But what happens every single time he does that is that he goes and he looks at pornography eventually because pornography is that escape from that emotion for him. It's his way of coping and dealing with the emotion.

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So another way to think of this idea is pornography as a coping mechanism. When we are not able to emotionally regulate ourselves in a healthy way, we use unhealthy forms of regulating ourselves: pornography, overeating, overdrinking, overshopping, over video games. All of the buffers that we could use.

So instead, what we want to learn to do is to emotionally regulate ourselves and learn to feel our feelings. So instead of pushing those feelings away, notice them, feel them, ground yourself. And just be honest with what it is you're feeling. And you know what, dang it, why weren't we taught this in elementary school?

This is something that we should have been taught in elementary school. And I have a lot of hope that future generations will learn how to do this at a young age because therapy is becoming more and more mainstream. And coaching is becoming more and more mainstream. And learning to feel your feelings and this emotional regulation, all these different techniques, these grounding techniques, we're talking about it more. We're learning how to do it ourselves and we're going to be able to teach this to our kids.

I just did a little post on Instagram, like a little story, as answering someone's question. They had a question for me that was like, "Hey, I just found your page. I really love it. I'm fascinated by what you're teaching. And I'm trying to help my kids by having positive sex talks with them. And I'm trying to be open with them about sex. But I don't know what to tell them to do when they want to go look at porn or when they have these urges to act out in these sexual behaviors that are against our family's values. I don't know what to tell them to do."

And so I went, and I talked about that a little bit on my story. One thing I said is, if we can teach them how to feel their feelings and to feel their urges in other ways in other areas of their life without acting on them, it will directly correlate to them being able to do that with these sexual urges and urges to go and view pornography.

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So, for example, if we can teach our kids, “Hey, you're angry, and that's okay. And you can totally be angry. And there's nothing wrong with being angry. And you can't punch your brother.” And teach them how to manage that anger without just reacting to it.

Or “Hey, I know you want another piece of pie. And you know what, we've had five pieces of pie already. I don't think it's going to be good for our body. That's probably not going to help our body feel good if we eat more pie. So I know you really want that. And that's okay. Let's breathe into this together, feel that feeling of you wanting it, and we're not going to have it. And it's okay to feel this. And I want you just to notice it and notice what it feels like. And we're not going to have another piece of pie.”

And we learn how to do this with all the emotions, with anxiety, and worry, and sadness. I don't know about you guys, but a lot of what I was taught about emotions growing up was like, “Oh, it's okay. It's okay. It's okay. It's okay. We're just going to try to feel happy. I know you're bummed out, but we need to be positive here and think happy.” And what we want to do instead is we want to learn to feel those feelings.

When we're telling ourselves just be happy, this is fine. We're going to be okay, you're going to be okay. That's pushing it away. That's pushing it down, which usually leads to these unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Emotions don't just go away until we feel them. That's really important. I really want you to hear me when I say that. Emotions don't just go away until we feel them. You have to feel them for them to go away.

And I recently heard someone say, I loved this, I don't remember who said it, but they said “And let it be big. Feel your feelings and let your feelings be big.” Let yourself really feel them to the extent that they want to come in and let yourself even like overdramatize them a little bit in your body. Just let it be big. Let yourself have really big emotions, and then let yourself feel it.

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What's going to keep us from emotionally regulating ourselves is thinking that there's something wrong with us for having big emotions. There is nothing wrong with you for having big emotions, and they are safe to feel. And they're okay to feel, and it's okay to take your time to feel them.

That's one thing I said to this client too recently, is like you're spending all this time working, working, working, working, working, getting all your stuff done. And you're not spending any time managing the emotions that are coming up and giving time and energy and space for these emotions that come up. You need to give adequate time to managing the anxiousness and the stress that comes up as you're doing your schoolwork.

This is something I've learned so, so deeply for myself, is that if I just— Because that's been my pattern, just work, work, work, work, work. If I just work, work, work, work, work, without taking time to be aware of my emotions, taking time to do thought work, taking my time to get coached, taking my time to ground myself and emotionally regulate myself, and give time and energy to those emotions, I am not as effective as I could be.

And the reason is because when I'm just working, working, working, working, avoiding those emotions, I'm not very effective because I'm just trying to do all this stuff to make it go away. When I really take time and breathe and work through that stress or whatever it is that I'm feeling, that emotion that's coming up, I'm so much more effective with my time. I start doing the things that actually matter instead of just busy work.

And so I'm imagining that this is something that many of you probably struggle with too, is just trying to work, work, work, work through your emotions. And if you're getting burned out, and if you're getting exhausted, and if you're struggling with pornography with this, it's because you're not taking the time that you need to take to stop, emotionally regulate, work through those emotions, and then move forward.

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You might have really big emotions that feel really overwhelming. With these really big emotions that feel overwhelming, there are so many grounding techniques that you can use to help yourself feel that feeling.

A grounding technique, what I mean when I say grounding is it's just like centering yourself and allowing yourself to feel that emotion and let it pass through you. Grounding is this process of balancing your physical, emotional, mental, your energy states and just reconnecting them.

So some grounding techniques that you can start to practice and use that would be really useful for you to learn how to feel and deal with these emotions is meditating, which I love. I've gotten so into meditating this last year.

Tapping, tapping is a form of meditation but you add tapping. So you tap your collarbone, and you tap the side of your hands. There's an awesome app called The Tapping Solution where you can try this out, or you can YouTube different tapping videos. This is really nice, especially because meditating, there's not a lot that you're doing with your body. But just doing stuff with your body and tapping helps you release some of that energy too.

Visualizing, specifically, you can visualize your favorite place in the world, and really go there. So where are you? What does it feel like? So if I'm imagining I'm on the beach, I'm imagining what the sand feels like in my hands and what the sand feels like in my feet. And what are you hearing?

And I imagine hearing the ocean. And what are you seeing? And visualizing with all the senses of your body.

Journaling is a great grounding technique. Using the earth and the different elements of the earth is great for grounding. So water- getting in water- a lot of people use water as a way to ground. And swimming or getting in the bath. Using the dirt and imagining yourself just being centered and grounded as you can feel the earth on your feet or beneath you.

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And then, of course, to really simplify this, just grounding and feeling your feelings is as simple as stopping, noticing what you're feeling, dropping into your body, really becoming super aware of what's going on in your body, and breathing. Breathing into it.

I also have a podcast episode on how to feel your feelings where I go into some additional steps that can help you as you're figuring this out. And listen, this isn't comfortable. It's not Zen, it's not like you're entering into this new plane, and you're really content and happy, and everything's amazing.

It's not comfortable to feel your feelings. And sometimes I think when we think about meditating, or visualizing, we think, "Oh, I'm going to get into this new plane and I'm going to feel amazing." No, not always. Not very often. It's uncomfortable to feel your feelings, but you become more confident in yourself, you become more disciplined and immovable as you learn how to do this.

If you don't learn this skill of emotional regulation, you will not be able to quit pornography. Quitting porn, you guys, is just emotional management. It's just sitting with your feelings, that's it. That's it. The only thing, and I really, really, really want you to think about this, really listen to me here. The only thing that's keeping you from quitting porn is an emotion that you aren't willing to feel.

The only thing that's keeping you from quitting porn is some emotion or some feeling that you aren't willing to feel. Whether that be stress, loneliness, an urge, shame. Whatever that is, it's just a feeling that you aren't willing to feel. But if you could learn this, if you could learn how to feel anything, you would be able to quit porn. No doubt, it's that simple.

And that doesn't mean it's really easy. But it's that simple. And that's where a lot of people go wrong in quitting porn, is they don't even think about this. They don't even practice this. They don't try to feel their feelings, they don't learn emotional regulation, they don't learn urge management and feeling

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your urges. When in reality, quitting porn is that simple, you just have to feel your feelings.

If you could learn how to feel anything, if you could learn how to feel anything, not only would you be able to quit porn, but you'd be able to do the most amazing things in your life. The only difference between you and that person that you have in your mind that has their dream life is their willingness to feel emotion. It's their willingness to feel more scared, to feel more lonely, to feel more afraid, to feel more stress. Because you have to feel all those things in order to get what you really want.

Anything that you want is just on the other side of an uncomfortable emotion. Professional athletes are very, very willing to feel all the pain of discipline and hard work. CEOs of big companies are just really willing to feel the pain of failure, the pain of embarrassment, the pain of all these things that they might feel as they're trying to get where they want to go.

The only difference between someone who has quit porn and someone who hasn't quit porn is how willing that person is to feel all the emotions. And this is something that we coach on all the time in the program, and something that I have a whole video series on to help you with too.

And I want to point out to you too, if you're feeling bad about yourself because you're like, "I feel like I should be able to do this. And if it's that simple, why am I not doing this?" Sometimes our brains want to go there and beat ourselves up. Here's what I want to say to you: this is something that I still need to have someone walk me through occasionally. Especially when big things come up, big emotions.

I still have a coach. To date, I have a coach who will walk me through this and help me feel my feelings and point out to me when I'm resisting them. Even though I've been doing this forever. Even though I coach people on this all the time. Even though I'm very, very good at it. I still need someone on the outside who can see a little bit more clearly what I'm doing, because

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it's hard when you're in the middle of it. It's hard to really see what you're doing.

I still need someone to help walk me through these feelings. I still need someone to point out to me when I'm resisting it. So no matter how much you know, or how much you think you know, it's nice to have someone on the outside who can help you. And there's nothing, nothing to feel bad about if you're not perfect at it yet.

All right, you guys, have a great, great, great week, and we'll talk to you next week. Bye bye.

Thanks for listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast. If you're ready to take your next steps, visit centerforovercoming.com. We'll talk to you next week.