

How You Can Help These Hidden Casualties of Sexual Addiction

One of the often-overlooked casualties of sexual addiction is the children. When there is trauma in a marriage, the children feel it in profound ways, though they may not have the words to describe their feelings. I, for one, didn't have much to give my girls when I was simply trying to survive the pain. We tried to enforce an "invisible separation" by not having Dave move out right away. I figured once I had heard from God, then we would share about the divorce and him leaving all at once. Of course, things didn't turn out the way I thought in those first days, and by waiting to hear from God, we avoided upsetting our daughters more than necessary. (The girls were in junior high and high school.)

If asked today, they would laugh at our awkward attempt at an "invisible separation," for they surely felt the tension. They knew something was off but didn't know what. In some ways it was worse because their imaginations were far greater than the reality. When we finally sat down to explain, they asked if we were getting a divorce.

At that point I couldn't promise that would not happen, but I could honestly say that divorce was not the goal, and we were both working on our marriage. Dave didn't tell them all the details but shared about his porn addiction, and that he had lied to me. Our oldest was angry. Our youngest simply said, "I forgive you, Daddy." Not surprisingly, the oldest processed the pain more quickly. It took the youngest several years to write a letter to her dad, telling him how she felt.

The girls' lives took a huge hit. We did some things right, such as providing a safe place for them to share but asking them not to share with friends. When we did sit down together

as a family, we let the girls' questions lead what we shared. The first question was directed to their dad. "Do you look at us like that?" My heart broke even as he explained that he did not objectify his daughters. Their world had been shattered in different ways than mine. At that point, we realized they needed a third party to talk to about their fears, their embarrassment and their questions. They agreed to see a counselor, who met with the girls individually—and with whom we met as a family on occasion.

As hard as it was for Dave and me to endure the pain, the most difficult part of dealing with his addiction was witnessing the pain it caused our children. But I can see now how they were well on their way to living in la-la land as I had, so I can even thank the Lord that it happened when it did. As young women, my daughters knew what to ask about when they were dating, and they have their feelings planted in the truth. But each time a young man was honest about his use of porn, I watched my daughters' pain return.

If you have younger children, please understand they still pick up on what is going on in the house. They may need reassurance. They may even act out or have bad dreams. They don't have the understanding of older children, but it will still feel really scary. And please know that if you raise your voice or argue in front of them, it changes them. Make sure they also see disagreements resolved, and save the big issues for a time when you can get away or get a sitter.

I am a huge proponent of counselors, especially those who deal with sexual addiction and have experience counseling children. Our job as parents is to continually point our children to Christ as they grow. When they are preschoolers, we represent God to them. It's a huge responsibility. I say this never to add guilt but only to encourage you to get help if needed. Let God lead here too. No one loves your children more than He does.

There should be a book solely on how sexual addiction impacts the children, but I will try to give some key points. (This is in no way an exhaustive list.) I pray these shimmers will guide you.

- When to tell the children should be bathed in prayer and led by the Lord.
- It's best if both parents are there, if at all possible. If there is child pornography involved, protect your children, not your husband or reputation.
- Don't try to paint your spouse as the bad guy.
- Let their questions lead; address what is on their mind—no more, no less.
- Make sure what you share is age appropriate, and keep your information in terms they can understand. ("Daddy hurt Mommy's feelings by lying, and just like it takes time for a boo-boo to heal, it will take Mommy time for her heart to heal. She may be sad for a while.")
- Tell them it is not their fault and has nothing to do with them.
- Assure them that the best way to help is to pray.
- Check your motives before sharing.
- Don't try to gain their loyalty against your spouse.
- It's better to undershare than give too much information. Once it's out, you can't take it back.
- Give them someone *safe* to talk to.
- Secrets are toxic, but telling everything to everyone is also damaging. Let the Lord show you the balance.
- Even if you are getting a divorce, it's important to never speak ill of your spouse. All children should be free to love both parents. (If the children are not safe, protect them first; you can tell them later.)
- If your husband has been arrested or outed in a public way, get professional help to navigate the possible fallout. {eoa}

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speaker to women's groups, Bible studies and conferences. Eighteen years ago, she began leading Healing Heart groups, and in 2013, she founded the Hope After Betrayal Ministries to bring help and hope to women whose husbands are caught in the web of sexual addiction.

Her mission is to help women find hope and healing from the pain of their partner's sexual betrayal. In addition, she hopes to increase awareness in the church of how to minister to the brokenhearted. Wilson and her husband, Dave, have been married for more than 35 years and have two adult daughters. The Wilsons make their home in Vancouver, Washington.

Learn more about Meg Wilson at [www.habministries.com](#). You can also find her on Facebook (@habministries) and Twitter (@HopeAfterBetray).

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