

SEXUALITY
BY DESIGN

PITFALL of PORN



Equipping Teens to Avoid or Escape
the Trap of Pornography

SEXUALITY BY DESIGN: PITFALL OF PORN, VOLUME 2

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INTRODUCTION

Being a good steward of a gift or a resource involves more than just stashing it away in a safe place. It involves recognizing its true value, assuming personal responsibility for its care, and continually making decisions that assure its well-being.

At Align Life Ministries we recognize that sexuality is a gift from God to be stewarded—to be valued, respected, and governed by choices that honor God, others, and ourselves. *Sexuality by Design* helps teens steward their sexuality by acknowledging what God says about it and encouraging them to make choices that align with His design and purposes for sex.

Foundational Principles

Sexuality by Design is written from the perspective that God is the ultimate authority on all things related to life and that He communicates pertinent, practical truth to us through the Bible. Some of the foundational principles on which *Sexuality by Design* is based are listed below.

- ❖ *God defines marriage as a committed, covenantal relationship between one man and one woman.*
- ❖ *God intended from the beginning that sexual activity is to occur exclusively within a marriage.*
- ❖ *The Bible identifies any sexual activity that takes place outside of His design as sexual immorality and instructs us to abstain from it.*
- ❖ *God's desire is that we demonstrate sexual integrity in every stage of life. This involves keeping our thoughts, conversations, and behaviors in line with God's standards regardless of age and marital status.*

- ❖ *Pornography is one of the most widespread and blatant examples of disregard for God's design for sex.*
- ❖ *Pornography violates every biblical principle that has to do with how we should think about and treat others and ourselves.*
- ❖ *The Bible makes it clear that God has provided all we need to live holy lives—even in the realm of our sexuality.*
- ❖ *If someone has made poor sexual choices in the past or has been the victim of someone else's poor choices, God willingly offers healing and restoration.*

Key Features of the *Sexuality by Design* Curriculum

Scientific

Sexuality by Design incorporates principles from biological and behavioral science to support the truth of God's Word. Some lessons illustrate key concepts with science-related demonstrations and object lessons that are inexpensive and easy to perform. *Sexuality by Design* references classic as well as cutting-edge research related to brain chemistry in order to better understand how sexual activity impacts us physically and emotionally.

Customizable

Sexuality by Design is designed to work equally well in a variety of group settings and formats. Time allotment, venue, group size, available technology, and staffing vary tremendously from group to group. Align Life Ministries created *Sexuality by Design* with group diversity in mind.

- ❖ *Use the curriculum with mixed-gender or gender-specific audiences.*
- ❖ *Schedule it as a weekly series or retreat-style event.*
- ❖ *Include large group teachings with small group breakouts or create your own configuration.*
- ❖ *Use the lesson scripts "as is" or present specific segments.*
- ❖ *Use all video clips and activities or choose the ones that work best for your group.*

Topic Based

The *Sexuality by Design* curriculum features multiple stand-alone volumes. Each volume includes several lessons that take an in-depth look at issues teens face today, such as influencers and pornography.

How *Sexuality by Design* Works

Each volume within *Sexuality by Design* consists of individual lessons meant to be presented sequentially.

Overview

Each lesson begins with an **overview** that identifies the lesson objectives, highlights the core truths that are communicated throughout the teaching, and details the sequence of the lesson contents.

Script

The next major component is the **script**, which includes the main teaching content for the lesson. The script is written as though the lesson is being presented by the author of the curriculum. The leader can choose to use the video teaching version of the script produced by Align Life Ministries and made available with the purchase of *Sexuality by Design*. Or the leader can familiarize himself or herself with the content and then communicate the lesson in his or her own style and voice. Elements from the script pages could easily be transferred into presentation software or group member handouts. There are places in the script where someone is asked to read a Scripture passage in a specific translation; we recommend the leader make that translation available in some format.

Each lesson script is divided into three sections:

- ❖ *Assess: What Does Current Culture Say?*
- ❖ *Acknowledge: What Does God Say?*
- ❖ *Align: What Strategies Help Us Line Up with God's Design for Sex?*

Assess

The **Assess** section of each lesson identifies what current culture says about the topic. This section discusses attitudes and behavioral trends often communicated through various media outlets. It also typically includes pertinent video clips and/or group activities designed to initiate engagement with the topic. Since current culture is constantly changing, group members should be encouraged to describe the cultural landscape according to their own experiences, as well as identify struggles they deal with related to the topic.

Acknowledge

The **Acknowledge** section of each lesson reveals what God says about the subject. This section uses specific Scripture passages as the ultimate source of truth related to the topic where applicable. *Sexuality by Design* also applies biblical principles to topics not specifically addressed in Scripture in order to establish an informed perspective on the issue. In the Acknowledge section, this curriculum often uses scientific research to reinforce the truths found in Scripture. Activities, demonstrations, and object lessons are also support elements in this section.

Align

The **Align** section provides a brief recap of the lesson and then introduces practical strategies designed to help group members make sexual choices that keep them in alignment with God's design. This section is designed to give opportunity for deeper conversation related to the topic. For this reason it is suggested that group members divide into gender- and age-specific small groups, if possible. Due to some of the conversations that will arise during this lesson component, it is strongly recommended that each small group have at least one adult leader of the same gender as the group.

Each Align section includes multiple options for the group leader to choose from and present. There are **Small Group Activity** options within the lessons. Another possibility is to read one or more of the **Small Group Scenarios** and have group members answer questions about stories that relate to the topic. The leader can choose one or more of the **Small Group Discussion** questions to initiate in-depth conversations about the topic or give group members the opportunity to ponder lesson truths chosen from the **Small Group Reflections** page.

The script pages also include suggested and optional support materials like **Video Clips**, **Activities**, and **Demonstrations**. Detailed instructions on how to perform these are provided within the text. If the leader is presenting the materials himself or herself and chooses not to use a video clip, a description of the video's content is often included and can be communicated to the group verbally. Note: The teaching video produced by Align Life Ministries includes embedded video clips and pauses where Activities and Demonstrations are meant to take place. Instructions for Activities and Demonstrations can be found in the script pages and should be communicated by the leader to the group members.



Sexuality by Design includes highlighted **Leader Notes** throughout the curriculum to provide additional support information.

Leader Considerations

Any videos, whether the ministry-produced video teaching or separate video clips within lessons, should be secured and tested on your available display equipment before they are presented to the group. Align Life Ministries extends permission for you to use the *Sexuality by Design* video teaching. For separate video clips, please refer to your church's/organization's policy on media use and licensing.

When difficult topics, like the ones discussed in *Sexuality by Design*, are presented in a group setting, it is important that the leaders be sensitive to the following possible dynamics:

- ❖ *In any group, there may be members who have never been sexually active, members who have been and/or are currently sexually active, and members who may have experienced sexual trauma.*
- ❖ *Topics should be treated with respect and communicated with grace and truth. Judgmental or condescending comments from the leaders or other group members should not be allowed.*
- ❖ *Some group members may lack a basic understanding of Scripture. This would require a deeper level of guidance and more background instruction by the leaders.*
- ❖ *Some group members may be hearing or impacted by the truth of what God says about a topic for the first time. This new realization may bring an emotional response, especially from those who have been sexually active. The leaders should be prepared to address possible feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, etc.*
- ❖ *Know and follow your state's laws related to mandatory reporting if a group member shares information about sexual relationships or an abusive situation (past or present).*
- ❖ *Have local referral options and materials readily available for group members who could benefit from additional support. For individuals struggling with pornography use, there are many resources available such as Covenant Eyes (covenanteyes.com) and Axis (axis.org).*

At Align Life Ministries, we recognize the importance and value of youth ministry. It is our prayer that you will find *Sexuality by Design* to be helpful as you engage with teens about the challenging—yet essential—topic of sexuality.

LESSON

4

MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

OVERVIEW

LESSON OBJECTIVES AND CORE TRUTHS

OBJECTIVES:

1. Recognize the presence and positive functions of mirror neurons in the brain as an important part of God's design.
2. Understand that mirror neurons make it difficult for our brains to distinguish between viewing and doing specific actions at the chemical response level.
3. Acknowledge that the presence of mirror neurons in our brains means that watching porn is not a harmless form of entertainment.
4. Consider the role of mirror neurons in the concept of empathy and relate it to Romans 12:15.
5. Learn the importance of imitating the attitudes and behaviors of faithful Christians as they imitate Jesus.

KEY VERSE: EPHESIANS 5:1-2

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (ESV)

CORE TRUTHS:

1. Mirror neurons in the motor cortex of our brains make it easier for us to learn crucial life skills that require specific movements.
2. The same mirror neurons that enable us to feel another person's joy or pain also make someone who views porn feel like he or she is actually part of the scenes.
3. Because of mirror neurons, as far as our brains are concerned, there is little or no distinction between actually engaging in sexual activity and watching other people do the same.
4. Mirror neurons directly link viewing and doing at the physical level; Jesus links viewing and doing at the spiritual level.

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What to Do About Past Mistakes

Recap

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Small Group Component: Scenarios

Small Group Component: Discussion

Small Group Component: Reflection



SCRIPT

MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

Review

In the previous lesson we focused on the chemical messenger dopamine, which is released in the brain when we anticipate doing things that bring us pleasure. We learned that dopamine is commonly referred to as the “crave hormone” since it makes us want more of whatever triggers its release—good or bad. Activities like skydiving, sex, using cocaine, and watching porn are examples of things that cause the amount of dopamine in the brain to skyrocket. We discovered that when dopamine levels remain elevated in the brain for too long, we become less responsive to it, which is often the experience of people who are addicted to something. They eventually need more and more of their dopamine trigger in order to get the same “high” from it.

We discussed the Coolidge Effect and how it drives porn users to seek out more extreme forms of pornography over time. We talked about how brain cells are able to wire themselves together, creating pathways or “ruts” in the brain—a process called neuroplasticity. We described these “ruts” as habits. We noted that neuroplasticity also allows brain cells to rewire themselves, creating a new rut in place of an old one. Replacing bad habits with good ones is an effective strategy to escape the pitfall of porn.

Introduction

Q1: How many of you have ever heard the phrase “monkey see, monkey do?”

Perhaps you heard it from a parent or grandparent, or maybe you remember it from a cartoon series aimed at preschoolers. Even if the phrase is totally unfamiliar you can probably figure out the essence of its meaning.

Most people associate this saying with the common situation of a child mimicking the behavior of someone else.

Origin of “Monkey See, Monkey Do”

The origin of “monkey see, monkey do” is most likely based on a fictional story about a hat merchant who was robbed by a troop of monkeys.

In the story, a hat salesman traveling between villages stops for a needed nap in the jungle. He wakes up to find that a group of monkeys has stolen his supply of hats and is wearing them in the trees above. The merchant makes multiple attempts to convince the thieves to return the hats only to have the monkeys copy his every move. In total frustration, the man takes off his own hat and slams it to the ground. True to form, the monkeys imitate the man by removing their stolen hats and tossing them to the ground—to the salesman’s delight, of course.

You might be wondering what imitative children and a group of thieving monkeys have to do with our current topic of pornography. A more complete explanation for that will be given later. But for now, the connection between mimicry and porn relates to the parts of our brains specifically designed to make us good at copying the behaviors of others.





ASSESS

WHAT DOES CURRENT CULTURE SAY?

Viewing vs. Doing

In today's highly sexualized culture, one prevalent attitude about viewing pornographic material is that, since it doesn't involve direct contact with another person, there's nothing really wrong with it. People compare viewing porn to watching a low budget sci-fi movie, a WWF bout, or anything else that is understood to be make-believe and for entertainment purposes only. Many do not consider pornography to be immoral.

This doesn't mean that the majority of people lack moral standards. It means that they tend to disconnect viewing porn from any kind of sexual wrongdoing—including adultery.

For example, 91% of Americans believe that cheating on a spouse is morally wrong.²² But only 19% of them think that watching porn without their partner is the same as cheating.²³ This implies that most adults consider private porn use to be morally acceptable, even for people in committed relationships. After all, “viewing” and “doing” are two completely different things ... right?



ACKNOWLEDGE

WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Mirror Neurons

In the 1980s and '90s a group of neurophysiologists made observations while studying brain activity in monkeys that challenge the notion that “viewing” and “doing” are completely different. Their discoveries provide an explanation for our remarkable ability to mimic the actions of others and give another meaning to the phrase “monkey see, monkey do.”

The scientists used sophisticated equipment to determine which specific brain cells, also called neurons, activate when monkeys perform simple tasks. One example involved the scientists mapping the brain cells used when a monkey picks up a piece of food and moves it to its mouth. During one of the trials scientists noticed that some of the same neurons fired when a monkey watched another monkey pick up a piece of food as when it performed the action itself.^{24, 25} In other words, some cells in the monkey's brain responded identically when either seeing *or* doing an action. The scientists called these specialized cells “mirror neurons.”

Other studies showed that the human brain has mirror neurons as well.²⁶ The part of the brain that controls body movement is called the primary motor cortex. Specialists estimate that up to 20% of the cells located here act as mirror cells.²⁷ They fire when doing or watching a physical activity.

The mirror neurons in the motor cortex of our brains make it easier for us to learn crucial life skills that require specific movements. By observing other people performing even complex tasks, we can complete the same tasks without ever having done them before.

Let's do an activity to illustrate our natural ability to mimic behaviors.



CORE TRUTH #1

The mirror neurons in the motor cortex of our brains make it easier for us to learn crucial life skills that require specific movements.

SEXUALITY
BY DESIGN

PITFALL of PORN

Pornography. It's just a harmless form of entertainment, right? What does it matter that more than 3 out of 4 women and men ages 18 to 30 view porn at least monthly? Who does it hurt?

In reality, pornography completely disregards God's good design for sex and is associated with a variety of damaging effects.

Sexuality by Design: Pitfall of Porn equips teens to make choices that honor God, others, and themselves in our porn-saturated culture. It helps them:

- **Assess** what current culture says about the “benefits” of porn
- **Acknowledge** what God says in Scripture, reinforced by biological and behavioral science, and
- **Align** themselves with His design through activities, discussions, and realistic strategies.

Use this mixed-gender, highly-customizable curriculum to help young people avoid or escape the pitfall of pornography.

“I confidently recommend this curriculum to health educators, churches and families!”

“Current research is clear that pornography has become a public health crisis. Throughout my twelve years as a health educator, I've been searching for a curriculum that combines research-based sexual health education with a solid biblical foundation. *Pitfall of Porn* provides clear biblical truth while educating youth on the temptation and real life consequences of pornography use. The open-and-go format is easy for leaders to facilitate in a variety of settings, and the student activities encourage critical thinking and allow opportunities for teens to learn key skills. I confidently recommend this curriculum to other health educators, churches and families!”

Lauren Green, MPH, CHES
Public Health Educator and Church Youth Leader, PA

“This truth-based and grace-oriented message can help youth avoid porn's trap.”

“*Sexuality by Design: Pitfall of Porn* is age-appropriate, practical and creative. More importantly, it's based on the solid foundation of God's good design for sexuality. As a pastor and counselor who regularly encounters adults struggling with sexual sin, I recommend this resource to help disciple teens. Its truth-based and grace-oriented message can help youth avoid porn's trap.”

Tim Bouffard, Pastor
Mount Aetna Bible Church, PA



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Align Life Ministries has served women, men and teens unprepared for pregnancy in South Central Pennsylvania since 1985. As one of its core services, the ministry has provided sexual integrity education for decades. Using that expertise, Align Life Ministries developed *Sexuality by Design* to serve and equip church leaders as they engage teens about their sexuality.