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by Carol Juergensen Sheets, [Carol the Coach](#)

By understanding your addictive system you can begin to get to know and then break the cycle of your own sex addiction. The addictive system is how you have organized your life to participate in an addiction. I first learned about the addictive system from Patrick Carnes and his book, *Facing the Shadow*. It can also be found in the *Recovery Start Kit* which was created to help me at the beginning of recovery, but can be used at any point in recovery because it is so introspective and reflective.

### The Addictive and Belief System

The addictive system starts with beliefs. We've all grown up with some wounding, sadness, and trauma. We've incorporated it into our souls. I grew up in a family where I took care of everyone and I was the surrogate parent. I have to admit, I kind of like my position of power, but what it prevented me from doing was being taken care of. Early on, I learned I needed to be self-sufficient. One of the things that I learned in my trainings with Dr. Carnes is that neglect can actually be more devastating than emotional, or sexual abuse because it's insidious. You can't see it, you can't necessarily complain about it, and yet it forms and shapes us dramatically.

Being a sex addict starts with a belief system that involves some faulty thinking. So think back to some really important messages that you received as a child. Maybe you were told that you're a woman and you couldn't achieve as much as a man. Or perhaps you were told that boys don't cry and you can't show your pain. You shouldn't share your feelings. These belief systems helped to shape you and you internalized it.

### Impaired Thinking and how it sets Up the Addictive Cycle

Your belief system can create impaired thinking. This helps to set up the addictive cycle because it sets up some faulty beliefs for you. Perhaps you don't feel good enough. Maybe you don't feel worthy. You learned early on that if you numbed out or participated in certain activities that allowed you to fantasize you could medicate. This allowed you to move away from who you really were. You felt safe at least temporarily. Preoccupations add fuel to the fire. For example, when it comes to sex that preoccupation may be objectification.



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behavior — the compulsive behavior.

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### When Sex Addiction Becomes a Reality

Some clients say, “I am not a sex addict,” and indeed they’re right. They have compulsive sexual behavior, but it’s not addictive. They actually can stop, but more often than not, that sexual compulsivity moves right into sex addiction. At some point they can’t stop. They’ve tried and they’ve tried and they have not been successful. When they can’t stop, the activity is, whether it’s exhibitionism, or voyeurism, pornography; whether they exploit persons or things, whether they are involved in frotterism, touching people unbeknownst to them, or bestiality. They participate in that behavior, they numb out for a moment, and then the despair sets in. They stop what they’re doing, they’ve masturbated, and then they feel that relief followed by terrible despair. They say to themselves, “Why am I doing this again? I am unworthy. I have no self-esteem. I am not capable of love or loving myself.”

After they move into that feeling of despair, they truly believe their life is unmanageable. They say, “What good am I? I am a piece of crap. I am not worthy to be on this planet.” As they enter into this despair mode they feel like their whole lives are unmanageable. It’s unmanageability that takes them to a place that reinforces the belief system that says that they’re not worthy of love, to be loved, and to take care of themselves in healthy ways. Then they start the addictive cycle all over again. It’s exhausting, right?

### The Incredible Miracle of Recovery

Recovery is possible. There are recovery tools you can use to interrupt this addictive cycle. It just takes time and work. They say “one day at a time,” but I have to tell you it takes three to five years to change the brain. When you do it one day at a time and you do the next right thing, you’ll find that it works. When you work it, it works, and that’s what I promise you.

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### IITAP Headquarters

P.O. Box 2112  
Carefree, AZ 85377

[View Map](#)

Phone: [\(480\) 575-6853](tel:(480)575-6853)  
Fax: [\(480\) 595-4753](tel:(480)595-4753)  
Email: [info@iitap.com](mailto:info@iitap.com)