

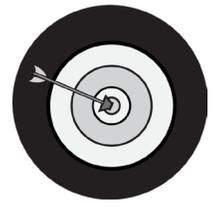
As we discuss the topic of ‘Aligning Your Aim,’ and determining who exactly we are working to become as part of the recovery process, it’s very important to understand where you are. As with any journey, the place at which you start makes a big difference on the path you will need to take to reach your destination (it’s a lot easier to get to Disneyland if live in Long Beach vs. traveling from New York.) In an article entitled *Recovering from the Trap of Pornography* (Ensign, October 2015) Dallin H. Oaks stated, “Having a better understanding of where a person is in the process will...allow a better understanding of what action is necessary to recover.”

In this excellent article, President Oaks outlines four levels of pornography use:

- **Inadvertent Exposure.** Viewing was unintentional, and the individual leaves it immediately.
- **Occasional Use.** The individual seeks pornography occasionally, with an increased frequency.
- **Intensive Use.** Frequent viewing has become habitual in nature, with the individuals experiencing “a need for more stimulus to have the same reaction in order to be satisfied.”
- **Compulsive Use:** The individual has a dependency on pornography wherein it has taken priority in an individual’s thoughts and actions.

Dr. Kevin Skinner has taken pornography addiction to an even more comprehensive level with his “Addiction Continuum--7 Levels of Pornography Addiction.” The full description of each level can be found in his guide, *Treating Pornography Addiction: The Essential Tools for Recovery*. I recommend this book highly and consider it to be the primary handbook I turned to in my own recovery. Here is a simple summary of each level:

- **Level 1:** Viewing is very mild-- once or twice a year--and it currently has no real effect on regular life and level of functioning.
- **Level 2:** Views occur more frequently (up to around 6 times a year) out of growing curiosity, not out of compulsive or addiction.
- **Level 3:** Viewing has increased to at least once a month. They tend to ‘white-knuckle’ as long as possible, and eventually binge for a day or two, but then do well for awhile again. Dr. Skinner states that use is starting to become more compulsive at this point. Individuals are fantasizing more, and more energy is exerted to fight off thoughts and desires.
- **Level 4:** Pornography use is starting to take over more aspects of a person’s life. When not viewing pornography, the individual spends a great deal of time fantasizing about sexual things. When attempts are made to stop viewing pornography, the individual experiences withdrawal symptoms (agitated easily, difficulty sleeping, always feeling stressed and tense, etc.) Viewing has increased to every other week.
- **Level 5:** Life is impacted more heavily because of porn use which often includes loss of some kind whether it’s in relationships, work, school, church, etc. Viewing has increased to multiple times per week with fantasizing filling the time not used to view. The type of pornography has become more explicit. Hopelessness begins to run high because the individual has likely been trying for years to stop without success. The hopelessness is a gateway to apathy and ultimately more negative behaviors.
- **Level 6:** Nearly everyday the individual is viewing pornography and spending significant times thinking about pornography and sexual things. At this level, Dr. Skinner states use “has become a compulsive addiction (pg. 29.) The individual lies to cover up behavior, and they may have their own stash of pornography (magazines, on their computer, etc.) Use has pushed out other interests and passions in life, and the individual has likely experienced major consequences for their behavior.
- **Level 7:** The individual views and acts out sexually nearly daily. Finding and viewing dominate their focus and attention, and the type of pornography being viewed is becoming very hard-core in nature (violence,



rape, incest, etc.) in order to be stimulated. There may be some aspect still that wants to change, but it feels extremely hopeless, and their attempts to change are mainly because of harsh external consequences being imposed upon them. “Often the devastating effects of level seven involvement are not seen for many months and sometimes years. Families are destroyed; jobs are lost.” (pg. 32)

Dr. Skinner has an assessment at the back of his book an individual can take to understand which level they fall into. He also has an online assessment which can be found at [www.growthclimate.com](http://www.growthclimate.com). Here are a few key areas to consider when looking at what level you’re at using the acronym FETTER:

- **Failure** to resist and stop behavior. You have tried to stop, but you have found yourself repeatedly going back to the same behaviors over and over.
- **Extensiveness** of viewing is longer than intended. When you begin to view pornography, time disappears and before you know it, hours have been lost in meaningless viewing.
- **Tolerance** is growing to meet your need. The nature of the content has become more and more explicit over the years in order to meet your needs.
- **Thinking** about it—fantasizing, preparing for it, etc. When you aren’t engaged in looking at pornography, it is not uncommon for your thoughts to turn to it. You often reflect on what you have seen, and how you will get your next “hit.”
- **Effects** when you haven’t “used” in a while. You start to feel jittery and anxious when you haven’t seen pornography for a certain period of time. You may also find it harder to sleep, to concentrate, etc. In other words, you feel withdrawals similar to what a drug addict feels when they have been without drugs for awhile.
- **Risks Taken.** You go out of your way, into harms way, in order to satisfy your cravings. Such harm may be actual physical danger, but it also means that you are pushing the envelope at work, or at home, even with consequences such as losing a job, losing a relationship, etc. loom over you.

As you assess where you are, please keep a couple thoughts in mind:

1. Be honest with yourself. It can be easy to minimize negative behaviors--especially behaviors we enjoy. But ultimately, that’s the kind of thinking that will suck you down into deeper levels of use.
2. Don’t excuse your use because it’s “not as bad as it could be.” It could be easy to try to shrug off your use as, “well, at least I’m not at a level 6 or 7, so I’m alright.” So long as pornography is part of your life, you’re missing out on blessings and opportunities the Lord can only give to those who have expelled it from their life. Focus on getting to level 0--no use at all--rather than excusing your actions because it’s “not as bad as it could be.”
3. At the end of the day levels and addiction definitions don’t really matter. Yes, it can provide insight to where you are, but the most important thing is that you are making the efforts to change and get help. Keep in mind these words from President Oaks: “True repentance from pornography requires more than simply ceasing to use it. Such repentance requires a change of heart through the Atonement of Christ” (Ensign, October 2015.) Regardless of what level you are at, the key is still to give the Lord your whole heart and let Him help you turn this weakness into a strength (see Ether 12:27.)