



How do I know how I'm doing and if I'm progressing? Is there a way to gage my improvement other than the number of relapses I have had?

Great question! When we first start trying to change, we often gage our progress by how often we have relapsed. While yes, we should be working to relapse less and less, the number of relapses we have is only a very small part of the picture of progress. Remember, focusing solely on not relapsing is a short-sighted goal and will give short-term success. The loftier, long-term goal is a change of heart and a subsequent change of character which sustains the change of heart we have experienced.

So once again, how do we gauge our progress with something as intangible as a mighty change of heart and character? Here are five key areas I believe should be looked at when measuring progress and change using the acronym REACH:

- **Reduction** in (and eventual removal of) negative behaviors. While the big-picture goal is a change of heart and character, a key part is reducing the amount of times we are seeking pornography or engaging in other sexual deviant behaviors. The amount of time between relapse should be increasing, the explicitness of content should be decreasing, etc. Keep the big picture in mind when looking at this area. Perhaps there isn't a dramatic change when looking at a week, month, or even 6 months, but over the lifetime of the addiction, there should be improvement if you are "all-in" with recovery.
- **Engagement** in positive behaviors. As our addiction starts to make its way out, there is a space that needs to be filled. Or an even better way of thinking about it, when we start engaging in positive behaviors, there is no room for addiction, so we kick it to the curb to make space for what matters! We should be opening up and connecting more, going to support group and therapy, participating in hobbies that provide us meaning and fulfillment, spending time with loved ones more, and taking time daily to be with God through prayer and scripture study. We should be taking better care of ourselves through sleep, exercise, and eating better.
- **Accountability.** As we return and report regarding our progress and give an inventory of what's going well and not so well, it helps us to see and think more clearly. Progress in this area can be seen when we not only start seeking out others to report to when there has been a relapse, but when we do so quickly. True success in accountability comes when we seek to account for *any* misbehavior which would have previously led to a relapse. This can mean reporting things we accidentally saw which stimulated us, unpure thoughts we have been having, or ways in which we noticed we are starting to scheme toward viewing pornography.
- **Connecting** with others. Pornography is all about creating connection, but it is a counterfeit connection with inanimate things. As we begin to change, we recognize the need to be with others. Part of this is for the sake of accountability, but it goes much deeper in that. We realize we need others--that human connection and the need to be seen, heard, and loved is at the core of our mortal experience. We also realize others need us including the need for them to hear our story so they can figure out their story. We start to understand the Savior's admonition to serve when He said, "and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:32)
- **Hope.** One of the key aspects in Dr. Kevin Skinner's 7 Levels of Addiction is the hope an individual feels. The deeper the addiction becomes, the more hope that change will ever happen begins to wane. The reverse is true to. As you make incremental progress, your hope that you'll eventually get there grows. Don't let the adversary tell you you'll never get there. Shame and negative self-talk should be decreasing and replaced with self-compassion and positive self-talk. Let hope be the anchor that drives you forward, and you'll find that it will grow "brighter and brighter" until you find yourself not only out of the hole of addiction, but standing upon a firm foundation which cannot fall (see Helaman 5:12).