

IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS & BOUNDARIES

Definitions:

A key part of overcoming any unhealthy or compulsive behavior is to identify what your triggers are, and what boundaries or fences you will need to set up in your heart, mind, and behavior to guard against those triggers. Self-regulation is the ability to make changes to your behavior at a point where you have control before triggers take over. Triggers are like the kindling for the fire—the precursors to acting out in unhealthy ways. If you are sufficiently self-aware and honest with yourself, you'll be able to see that you get a bit of a “buzz” from the trigger (e.g. texting back and forth with a co-worker of the opposite sex; watching sexy music videos on YouTube, etc.) that can lead to further “acting out” behaviors. Triggers are the stressors, moods, emotions, locations, persons, or situations that seem to provoke vulnerability to temptation—stirring a compulsive, self-medicating, stress-releasing, comforting, or mood-altering response. When precursors or triggers present themselves (a few steps before the acting out), that is the time when you have the greatest ability to change your behavior—before the slip occurs.

Many people find the mnemonic **B-L-A-H-S-T-O** helpful in identifying key trigger moods, emotions, or states: **B** is for bored, **L** for lonely, **A** for angry (this could include resentment), **H** for hungry, **S** for stressed, **T** for tired, and **O** for overwhelmed. You might even realize that one of your triggers is when your insecurities get piqued or you are feeling a sense of entitlement to the self-medicating behavior.

Directions:

In the first column below identify at least 10 triggers or circumstances in which you slip most often. In the second column identify a boundary that will allow you to do something differently in that situation in order to change your behavior and shift things, even a little. You might not be able to control the temptations that come your way, but you can control the situations (or triggers) that make you most susceptible or vulnerable. Use this as a worksheet and write directly into the table below or use this as a template and write on separate paper or in a notebook instead.

TRIGGERS - Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Going to work out at the gym where there is lots of visual stimulation.• Watching questionable movies on my computer when I'm home alone.• Wanting to binge on junk food at night.	BOUNDARIES - Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buy some work out equipment and work out at home instead.• Go for a walk or read a book to stay off my computer when I'm home alone.• Don't keep binge foods in the house.

PERSONAL STORY – Identifying Triggers and Setting Boundaries

The following story provides a powerful and inspiring example of how important internal and external boundaries are in avoiding unhealthy sexual behaviors and in developing greater mental and sexual mastery:

I can't emphasize enough how important the steps of identifying your triggers and setting healthy boundaries are in the recovery process of developing greater self-mastery. For many years I was focused solely on avoiding acting out (viewing porn and masturbating) and failed miserably. I eventually recognized that the acting out was a symptom of lust and that the lust was fueled by other, more easily controlled behaviors. I was surprised that there were only five things I needed to avoid in order to stop feeding the "lust monster" that led me to seek out pornography and act out through masturbation.

- 1. Do not "check out" women that I encounter throughout my day, whether digitally or in real life.*
- 2. No sexually explicit conversations with my buddies (locker room talk).*
- 3. Don't watch sexually charged, explicit, immodest, or crude TV shows or movies.*
- 4. No sexual fantasizing or daydreaming.*
- 5. No treating my wife or any women as sexual objects in any form.*

Everyone's boundaries are personally tailored to them and may vary in the details. I set these boundaries accepting the fact that I would never be strong enough to cross them. I kept the fight and my focus there because these were the precursors to my acting out. And when I found myself drifting across those boundaries, like letting my mind wander regarding a woman I'd seen, I made a course correction. This was a fight I could actually win. As a result, the cravings to view porn or masturbate have greatly diminished and have all but disappeared. The tsunami level cravings that used to hit me are now gentle waves. I feel them, acknowledge them, and then move on with my day.

I have had the opportunity to work with a lot of men that have a problem with compulsive pornography use. Setting these boundaries has been one of the biggest game changers for myself and the men I mentor. Everyone's boundaries are personal and slightly different, but they all are aimed at crippling the destructive lust that was ruling our lives.