



# the Journal

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ABM Issue  
Healthy Sex

# Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for re-

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## S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
7. We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.

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# Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally we try to avoid drawing undue attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

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## The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.\*

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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## Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

A leading sex addiction specialist in a book on sexual anorexia says that society thinks, “Sex is dirty. Save it for the one you love.”

Even when I was sober in S.L.A.A. for a number of years off of my bottom lines, I didn’t recognize that such anorexic thoughts were part of my belief system.

Once the sexual acting out stopped, I shared about it less and less. I was afraid of having conversations about it for fear I would trigger someone else or myself. But that didn’t help my relationship with my husband.

Talking to fellows and sponsees who struggled with the battle between sex addiction and anorexia helped immensely. The more open I became with others and the more I relied on Higher Power, the better able I became to have a healthy sex life.

It’s not perfect today, but it’s better than it’s ever been. I hope to continue to grow with time and recovery. The stories in this issue helped me along the way. I hope they do the same for you.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

The Conference Journal Committee, a service body within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, publishes *the Journal* for the good of the international S.L.A.A. membership. Oversight and policy is provided in accordance with the Ninth Tradition.

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# Question of the Day

## & Answers from Yesterday

“What has your journey been like towards a healthy sex life?

And/or how do you maintain a healthy sex life in sobriety?”

**My** approach to my sex life is decidedly steeped in optimism. Although the program begins with a First-Step admission of powerlessness, my perspective after working the Steps is one of confidence. After all, in Step Eleven, God granted me power to carry out God’s will, and God’s will includes me having a healthy sex life.

Moving forward, I consider my many triumphs in the areas of love and sex. Going into a new situation, I anticipate the best outcomes. Of course, I practice common sense, pay attention to what is being said, monitor comfort levels and take note whether the scenario is actually healthy. I do not, however, drag baggage from past confusion into a fresh start.

A sex life, in my opinion, shouldn’t just be ‘healthy,’ but aspire to evolve, thrive and operate in a robust style.

— **Anonymous**

**It** has been a long and difficult journey, that still continues. I have to continue to talk about my fear of sexual intimacy and my struggle with my partner to be sexually attracted. Through prayer, meditation, meeting attendance, talking with my sponsor and much communication with my partner, I am able to have a sober sex life. It is the healthiest I have ever had and I’m hoping to get even healthier.

— **Jim B., Huntington Beach**

**“The** basis for rejuvenating my sexual relationship with my wife was extended sobriety. I think this is important because during this longer period of sobriety I started to appreciate her much more sexually as well as emotionally. During sex, my goal wasn’t taking as much as I can anymore; now I can pay much more attention to her, as in the beginning of our relationship.

Because I’m paying more attention to her, she also enjoys sex much more. I feel more joy both emotionally and physically and can stay in the present during lovemaking. I often feel that it keeps getting better every time. It was unimaginable during my active addiction, when I wanted to get high sexually as fast as I could.

The foundations of my current good mental state are sobriety and keeping my ego and selfishness at bay. And to continue to do so, I must work the Program, and be honest with myself and others about my feelings. Only then can I have a clear self-image and healthy self-respect. This prevents the addictive cravings. My sexuality, like a river, may flow in its proper course.

— **Elek, Debrecen, Hungary**

**With** the help of my sponsors and recovery partners, it has been challenging but worthwhile. As long as I am asking for input and direction, I have a chance to hear what my Higher Power wants for me.

— **Christopher G., Largo, FL**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “What has your journey been like towards a healthy sex life? And/or how do you maintain a healthy sex life in sobriety?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #174 — September/October — The Smartphone in Addiction and Sobriety. Please share how smartphones affect your recovery. The deadline for submissions is July 15, 2018. And #175 — November/December — Acting out with someone in the program — How do you recover from acting out with someone in Program? How do you act around them, around your group? The deadline for submissions is Sept. 15, 2018. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

**A** lot of pain and loneliness. Thank God for the Fellowship as I continue my journey, because I know that I am not alone.

— **Jason S., Sacramento**

**Commitment,** honesty and investing time, and working on it.

— **Roberto, Frankfurt**

**It** has been a long and bumpy journey. I owe a lot to the meeting on healthy relationships and the books written by a leading lecturer and educator in the fields of addiction and relationships.

— **Christiane, Frankfurt**

**Having** ended a long-term relationship while in recovery, I am getting into a healthy relationship where sex is not the primary focus.

— **Rich K, Worcester, MA**

**To** me, healthy sex starts with a sense of safety and trust and being willing to expose ourselves to the other with all our warts showing. It's being “all in.” What a blessing healthy sex is! - a gift from Higher Power.

— **Anonymous**

**A** healthy sex life for me is no sex at all. It took my abuse of sex for years for me to realize that I don't need it. My life now is whole and peaceful because I don't have to do things that are destructive for me.

— **Anonymous**

**Sobriety** certainly changed how I was sexually intimate – at first, it was uncomfortable and even painful. I had been a performer and to share my fears, childhood trauma and receive pleasure were foreign to me. At 70 and single, part of my healthy sex life is healthy self-care which now includes masturbation (with guidelines and including my Higher Power).

— **Rita, Montreal**

**I've** made mistakes. I have a dating plan. I have many recovery partners. I have a sponsor.

— **Alex, London**

# If You Want Healthy Sex, Pray First



I've been married for over 30 years and have been sober for over 12. I find that healthy sex is a direct result of healthy connection with my Higher Power. If I feel loved and understood by Higher Power, then I can share that love with my partner. If I don't trust Higher Power, I can't trust my partner. If

I feel distant from my Higher Power, then I can't feel intimacy with my partner. So if I want sex, I have to have a healthy prayer life. So, in conjunction with other partners in recovery, I developed a list of 12 prayers, one for each of the Steps. I find it helpful to say them as I do my Step work and as I live the challenging moments in

my life. My friends and spouses like them too.

## Step 1

We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable. First, I



surrendered.

Just for today, acting out is not the way because I know sobriety will set me free.

## Step 2

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Second, I believed.

Can I act as if You are here for me? Open me to the possibility of Your reality. Touch me with Your truth tenderly.

## Step 3

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God. Third, I trusted.

Show me Your will.  
Give me direction.  
And make it obvious.

## Step 4

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. Fourth, I saw.

Center me in You as I cease straining to control my life. Free me from fear as I trust You abundantly. Fill me with faith as I feel You changing me radically.

## Step 5

Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. Fifth, I told.

Help me affirm myself as I heal.

I love and accept myself exactly the way I am today. My Higher Power loves me unconditionally. (Insert your own affirmations.)

## Step 6

Were entirely ready to have

God remove all these defects of character. Sixth, I opened.

Open me up and show me what You see, inside and out. Heal the holes in me and I will live wholly in Your peace.

## Step 7

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings. Seventh, I asked.

Higher Power, tell me the story of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name), who grew up in a world where my needs were not met. I developed coping skills, some of which are hurtful to me. Show me how my actions are simply part of my story. Release me from fear, anger, pride and resentment as you give me understanding and forgiveness.

## Step 8

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. Eighth, I cared.

Higher Power, \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name), my precious \_\_\_\_\_ (partner, parent, self, etc.) belongs to You. I release \_\_\_\_\_ and turn them over to You in the hope they will be governed by Your will. Give me only Your love and help, and I am whole enough and ask for nothing more.

## Step 9

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. Ninth, I repaired.

Give me strength in every circumstance. Give me patience with every person. Give me joy that no circumstance or person can take away.

## Step 10

Continued to take personal

inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. Tenth, I checked.

5 Suggestions for daily examination:

- What blessings and gifts have I received today?
- What have I done to support my recovery or spiritual growth today?
- What have I done to support another's recovery or spiritual growth today?
- What have I done to hinder anyone's recovery or spiritual growth today?
- What can I do to support anyone's recovery or spiritual growth tomorrow?

## Step 11

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out. Eleventh, I prayed.

Higher Power, thank You for S.L.A.A., for it proves daily that I am not alone. Thank You for my friends, both in and out of the Program, for they can guide and sustain me in recovery. (Insert your own gratitude list here.) But most of all, thanks for being in my life because You can keep me safe and sober.

## Step 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives. Twelfth, I lived.

Just for today, I believe I am loved, whether or not I'm sober. With gratitude, I will share this love in service and in joy.

— Maki

# A Healthy Sex Life as it Relates to the Signs of Recovery

## Sign of Recovery 1

*We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.*

To me, sex is a sacred aspect of a committed partnership. It is a natural drive where we connect to our soul. When I was in my disease I felt disconnected with God in all areas including my sex life. I started to pray before and even during sex so that my Higher Power could help me stay present. Sometimes I used to feel alone even while I was having sex, now I feel cherished by my husband and my Higher Power.

## Sign of Recovery 2

*We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.*

Before program, I was not able to ask for what I needed. This was because I didn't always know what I needed and if I did, I was afraid to ask for it. Through the Steps, I have become aware of my fear and God has given me the ability to communicate my needs. S.L.A.A. taught me to take relationships slowly. My Higher Power led me to choose a man that was safe. We got to know and trust one another. We talked about sex before it happened. With the help of my Higher Power I learned to trust the process of becoming vulnerable both physically and emotionally with my partner.

## Sign of Recovery 3

*We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual*

*intrigue and emotional dependency.*

Sexual intrigue was a way for me to get a hit and numb my pain. It was the first step in a pattern of having sex to get a man to fall in love with me. I used sex to create a fantasy. If I did manage to get into a relationship that way, I became emotionally attached in the hope that my partner would fix me.

Sex is now an expression of reality. I don't get an addictive hit from it. It is pleasurable but it's not always due to spontaneous lust or accompanied by fireworks. When my relationship was new, I used to count how often my partner and I had sex to assess how good our sex life was. I wanted to make sure it was living up to my fantasy of how it should be. I did this thinking it was what my husband wanted, and I could therefore have his approval. This is what my emotional dependency looked like as it related to sex. Now I try not to obsess about how it should look or put pressure on myself to have sex. I don't freak out when there is a slow stretch as I've learned that in reality, the frequency varies. Sex is no longer an obligation, it is a choice.

## Sign of Recovery 4

*We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.*

In the past, I didn't even consider avoiding risky situations. On a regular basis, I had one-night stands, pursued strangers, had unprotected sex and multiple partners. I usually didn't think to say, "No," because that may have caused them to dislike me. My first bottom lines included no sex without commitment and no unprotected sex. When our

relationship started, my partner and I talked and agreed upon a method of birth control that worked for both of us. Now I communicate when I'm not in the mood and I don't feel codependent about how my husband may react.

## Sign of Recovery 5

*We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.*

The process of working through the Steps gave me the self-esteem I needed in order to be ready for a relationship. I had never taken full responsibility for my sex life. I preferred to blame others if things weren't perfect in that arena. I had to learn what I needed from a relationship in general before I embarked on one. I made girlfriends in S.L.A.A. with whom I practiced having open and honest communication. Those conversations paved the way for me to be able to talk to my partner openly about sexual issues.

## Sign of Recovery 6

*We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.*

My first experience with being vulnerable in program was sharing at meetings. In listening to others share, I learned that they dealt with the same feelings and had similar past sexual experiences. This helped me to trust and accept others. I was able to ask for help from a sponsor and other women in the program. If I had questions or issues about sex, I felt safe going to them as they had once been where I was. They freely shared their experience, strength

and hope with me.

### Sign of Recovery 7

*We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.*

My disease added to my already low self esteem. I felt like I needed to take any crumbs that were thrown to me by perspective partners. This led to sexual experiences that caused shame. It was easier to play the victim and stay in self pity. In my mind, if I was responsible for sexual problems, I was a bad person. Therefore, I was unloveable, I would be rejected, and nobody would want me. Unhealthy sex and the shame it caused made me want to isolate.

At the same time, I could use my sexuality to take advantage of men. Sex made me feel powerful and in control. It gave me the illusion that I had confidence. I wasn't capable of honest intimacy, so I ran from it and stayed in fantasy. Being in the disease led to false pride. Recovery is about self love and sex that is empowering, not exploitive.

### Sign of Recovery 8

*We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.*

All of my recovery is a work in progress. Being willing to have God remove my character defects and taking contrary action is a lifelong process. I have become aware of my ingrained sexual coping mechanisms. I have also seen that my sexual development was impacted by negative cultural messages. Having said that, I can recognize that reality and at the same time know that I am responsible for changing. I accept my past imperfections and mistakes in my sex life and I know

that those same experiences can help with the recovery of another sex and love addict.

### Sign of Recovery 9

*We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.*

I used sex to either numb or change my emotions and feelings. Instead of relieving stress in a healthy way, I used masturbation to achieve a sense of calm. When I was lonely, I would make a booty call rather than spending time with girlfriends. I substituted being in a caring, supportive partnership with having a purely sexual relationship with someone who was emotionally unavailable. I had sex to convey my attraction for men and conversely used sex with men that I had no interest in just to feel wanted. I don't use these patterns anymore. I express my feelings and emotions in healthy, productive ways. I talk honestly with girlfriends and my sponsor and I continue to take inventory and ask for my Higher Power's help in prayer. The atmosphere in my marriage is caring and supportive. Self destructive ways of expressing my sexual feelings result in secretiveness, hurtfulness and emotional distance.

### Sign of Recovery 10

*We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.*

I practiced the aspect of being honest with women in the program before I got into a romantic relationship and started having sex. I wasn't honest in expressing my sexuality before program. Sex was sometimes secretive, I objectified myself and I was dishonest by pretending to enjoy sexual things that I didn't like. My sense of self was distorted because I thought one-night

stands didn't affect me. I was in denial and I thought I needed to be someone I wasn't. I was manipulative and codependent. Even in sobriety, I had sexual fantasies about other men. I became aware that this was a form of dishonesty. Through prayer, I have been able to let it go. Today, I try to be as honest and authentic as possible. I have been able to let my old thoughts and behaviors go. Now sex affirms who I am rather than making me feel like I'm fraud.

### Sign of Recovery 11

*We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.*

I used to use sex as a way to enter into a relationship or at least just get high without even thinking about a possible partnership. I used sex like a drug to alter my mood or numb myself out. When I did have a boyfriend, sex usually became the relationship. Now I know that sex is an expression of love and intimacy. In sobriety, my husband and I have healthy sex as a result of having developed our relationship emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

### Sign of Recovery 12

*We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.*

It is said in Twelve Step programs that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. I was involved in a pattern of addictive sex. It was not based in reality and it was irresponsible. Meetings, working the Steps, help from my sponsor and my fellows all help to make my sex life balanced, responsible and self enhancing one day at a time.

**— Kim, CA**

# Healthy Sex and Getting Older

After some 55 years of acting out sexually and not being able to maintain any semblance of a healthy relationship with a woman, I met my second wife. We fell madly in love and sex was fabulous (as I believe it should be early in a relationship).

It is biologically true that certain chemicals are released when you fall in love (P.E.A. is the actual substance) and after several years there is a chemical change where this chemical level changes back.

This means, for me anyhow, that sex must now be an offshoot of real intimacy and takes some work.

In my case, with my wife experiencing physical problems as well as a long menopause and almost no sex drive, we have had to try and create a different concept of our sexuality. (Did I leave out my own physical inadequacies being 70 years old in just a month? LOL.)

In addition, my testosterone levels are down which makes me, most of the time, not nearly as interested in sex as I used to be.

This is a blessing and a curse as you might imagine. The good news is that I really don't spend as much time fantasizing as I used to. It comes up occasionally but infrequently.

The bad news is that I must

work more to feel like having sex with my wife. On top of which, our busy schedules don't leave much time.

All stuff we talk about and deal with. We've been in therapy a few times to discuss our intimacy issues and seem in a good place.

Knowing that, as an addict, I tend to be intimacy-averse, I do the best I can to stay connected with my wife and create opportunities for intimacy.

These do not always include sex, but the closeness feels good and is so healthy. As We say, "more shall be revealed".

— Bob, Western MA

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## Healthy Sex Life = Freedom

It is a miracle of recovery, and pretty funny, that I find myself writing, or even having to consider, a healthy sex life. My thoughts about this topic are specific to me – I cannot determine what would be healthy for others (although my sponsees would probably say I act like I do know exactly that!).

First, some background. Prior to sobriety in this program, I had a lot of anonymous sex, used porn a lot, was in extremely addictive relationships, and was obsessed.

Now, my spouse and I are around 60-ish and we have been together 15+ years. I was sober quite a while before I met him. For the sake of full disclosure, we are normally sexual a couple of

times per week, but more often on vacation. I am not sexual with myself or anyone else.

The major difference between my sex life now and prior to recovery is freedom.

Before, I was so obsessed with sex or whoever I was involved with that I had no mental freedom.

Now, even when I know we're going to be sexual, I don't think about it that much. And when we're finished, I think about something else.

It's amazing! I admit, however, that sometimes I get triggered if I see a good-looking man, but you are teaching me how to recognize that for what it is – lust. And I know I don't have to act on it.

I must be sober to have a healthy sex life and I'm not acting out when we're being sexual. What's also critical for me is that I would not have a healthy sex life if my relationship with my spouse wasn't open (I don't mean an open relationship), honest and good. I know I must also be self-aware before, during and after being sexual.

Finally, there's Higher Power. I try to remember that I'm in Higher Power's presence when being sexual. Healthy sex would not exist without that power.

Time for me to go to my meeting. Thank you, *Journal*, for helping me to stay sober.

— Anonymous

# Sex Before S.L.A.A.: I Didn't Really Know What Healthy Was



**B**efore S.L.A.A., I thought sex was love and that love was sex. I thought that if I was having sex with a man then surely, he loved me. I thought sex was all that mattered.

I didn't think I had anything else to offer. But I was afraid that no one would ever want me after being with so many men that I lost

count. When I was in a relationship, all we ever did was have sex. Rarely were there any conversations or emotional connections. Sex was all I knew.

Sex was all that was necessary from me. It made my partners stick around and smile from time to time. So I thought, *as long as I keep this up then I'm set*. No one

ever asked me for love. Even if they had asked, I wouldn't know what to give them. Love to me was: *stay no matter what, don't cheat, come over*. It meant texting all day, buying gifts, eating a meal or wearing lingerie. Love to me was distance and obsession.

— **Anonymous**

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## Sober Sex

**S**ober sex for me and my partner has been a long gradual process. The intense highs and lows of acting out have been replaced with a more subtle form of connecting. It involves the giving and receiving of sexual nourishment as opposed to the

addictive pursuit of selfish gratification at the expense of intimacy.

The most obvious benefit is that there is a better emotional connection between us and the addictive cycle of arguing followed by make-up sex is not present in

our relationship. Neither partner is in a dominant or submissive role in the sexual relationship. It all seems very equal which feels very healthy and resentment free.

— **Anonymous in California**

# Freeing Myself From Objectification

The main focus of my early sobriety in S.L.A.A. was to free myself from compulsive sexual objectification. When I first started my recovery, I saw absolutely everyone as a sexual object, including myself. My only value, I believed, was in my sexual desirability.

I couldn't look at myself in a mirror without objectifying myself, without assessing my desirability as a sexual object (and therefore my worth). Not only was it a painful and hollow existence, it fueled my addiction and my desire to act out. It was clear that my sobriety would require a withdrawal from all forms of objectification.

That was easier said than done. Absolutely everywhere I looked, I saw people presented as objects – on billboards, in magazines, even in the lyrics of popular songs. It took an extreme, concerted effort to purge all objectification from my life. I didn't look at ANY magazines, even seemingly "safe" ones, because they all had images of objectification, even if only in the ads. I drove around with my visor down in my car, because I'd suddenly discovered that half of the billboards in Los Angeles seemed to be for strip clubs! For a while, I even stopped listening to any music with lyrics, because, nine times out of ten, if a song isn't about love addiction, it's about sexual objectification.

With my sponsor's blessing, I also put masturbation on my list of bottom lines. We decided that, if I couldn't do it without objectifying myself or someone

else, I wouldn't do it at all – which ended up meaning that I didn't do it for over a year!

It all sounds rather extreme to me now, after over 5 years in S.L.A.A. But at the time, I was desperate. I had hit my bottom and I knew I had to change, or sex and love addiction was going to kill me. I was willing to surrender my "whole life strategy," as it says in our literature. So, I went through a long, excruciating withdrawal. I started working the 12 Steps. I developed a relationship with a power greater than myself. I went to a ton of meetings and I did tons of service. Eventually, I started sponsoring others.

After finishing my Fifth Step, I made a dating plan and I started sober dating. After a year of sober dating, I met my now boyfriend. I followed the plan, which said we had to wait at least 3 months before sex, we had to be in a monogamous relationship (which ended up taking 4 months) and we had to get tested and have a talk about birth control first. By this point, I had been single and celibate in S.L.A.A. for over 3 years. And it had been a long time since I had looked at myself, or anyone else, as a sexual object.

Now, that's not to say that I didn't want to have sex... I was dying to have sex. But I had absolutely no idea how to do it without treating myself or my partner like an object. It was a completely new experience, both exciting and terrifying. It was so vulnerable... I was just a human being, having sex with another

human being. And I was figuring it out as I went along. (And I still am.)

At first, I had tons of questions for my sponsor and my fellows. It was scary to finally be allowed to express my sexuality again. I was afraid my addiction would come back. I worried about how often was too often. If we have sex twice in one day, is that sex addiction? (One person I asked said, "Yes, absolutely!") And what about certain acts/positions?

I wanted someone to tell me exactly how to have a sober sex life. It took a while before I realized I could relax and enjoy myself, trusting in my recovery and my sobriety. I started to see that, just like everyone's sobriety looks different in S.L.A.A., our healthy sex lives will look different, too.

For me, it's not so much about what I do, or how often I do it (although I do still vigilantly avoid any fantasies of objectification). For me, maintaining a sober sex life is all about continuing to work my program. I still have to go to meetings. I still have a home meeting. I still do service and work with sponsees. I still turn my will and my life, my "whole life strategy," over to the care of my higher power every day.

One day at a time, thanks to my S.L.A.A. recovery, I have a sex life that's imperfect, human and real, with someone I love and trust. But it's also fun and sexy and frequent - and I'm still sober!

— M, Los Angeles

# Gradual Growth to Healthy Sex

**M**y journey to a healthy sex life in sobriety has been remarkable. It's not what I thought would happen when I came into S.L.A.A., but to be fair I had no idea how deep the characteristics of S.L.A.A. went for me.

I came into the program in a relationship and, albeit, I have had worse bottoms. What brought me in was my sex addiction. I think it's difficult being a woman and speaking about sex addiction without feeling shame about it. Society has conditioned me to think men always want to have sex and women are bored by it and want to be left alone. Part of my journey into a healthy sex life has been letting go of my ideas about everything regarding sex.

Something that I do well, which has carried over from my other Twelve-Step programs, is sharing honestly about what is going on. My sponsor had a saying: "Share or die." It's a bit dramatic, but it works. I came into S.L.A.A. and in a general way shared and shared.

I shared through tears, rage, apathy, sadness, and all of it. I got a sponsor and immediately I asked him if I could break up with my boyfriend because I thought he was probably the problem and I wanted to do the program correctly. (There is no correct way to do it.) He answered, "No. Don't do anything. It could be you that's the problem."

That seemed unlikely since I was in therapy and another Twelve-Step program. He was right. I was/still am in a relationship with a man who had sexual trauma and depression and sex was also an issue for him. Something I have had to come to terms with in S.L.A.A. is that men have feelings. Men are human beings with complex emotions and



they are not there for me to objectify. They are not there to validate or invalidate me. I can't simply dismiss them.

Sex was a byproduct of a caring and loving relationship. I don't think I understood what that

meant. My partner used to say, "Sometimes it feels like it doesn't matter who you are having sex with as long as you are having sex." I would argue and say, "No. That's crazy. It's you." But once I got quiet, I realized that it's a little

bit true. Sex was something that I needed. I used it for validation, in order to escape, or as something to obsess about. It was not a byproduct of our relationship.

One of my first steps into a healthy sex life was not having sex for validation. Every time I want to have sex, I ask myself if I actually wanted to have sex or was I just hungry? Or was I sad? Or did I need something else?

What has been so interesting is how often I began to realize I didn't want to have sex.

Slowly, I have realized that I won't die if I don't have sex. My gradual growth to healthy sex has been a long one so I am just going to mention things that were "aha" moments and things that worked for me.

Early in my sobriety, I realized that I only wanted to have sex on my terms. When my partner initiated, I didn't want to have it and would sabotage it. This meant that I wouldn't have sex. This would lead to my inevitable obsession returning and the cycle would repeat.

My sponsor suggested that I stop trying to have sex on my terms and that was difficult for me to let go of that control. I also had to slowly deal with my partner's issues which have been slow moving. Something my new sponsor said to me was that maybe my partner wasn't getting better because I wasn't ready for him to be healthy and that was definitely the truth.

Pages 142 to 146 in the S.L.A.A. Basic Text were so helpful in continuing my growth into a healthy sex life. Slowly, I had to

have compassion for my partner and it was not and is not easy. I wanted him to perform when I was ready. I didn't have empathy for his trauma which meant I didn't have empathy for mine.

My sponsors and people around me helped me so much by giving me perspective and patience. Another great saying that led to a healthy sex life for me was, "Be patient for your partner to catch up to you." I have had to keep turning and looking at my part in my sex life.

It turns out for a sex and love addict I don't want to be intimate all that often. I have seen my anorexia come out, my manipulating of my partner and being nice to him only when I get something out of it like sex. I have had to practice being kind and loving to my partner regardless of what he did in return.

That is a big request for an addict. Turns out being selfless truly helps you get what you need. Our relationship is now in a place I never imagined it could be. I'm constantly shown new things for me to work on in this relationship that I never even thought about. Today I allow surprises.

I thought I knew what was best for our sex life which meant a certain amount of sex a week and what he needed to do to be healthy and blah, blah, blah. From the help of the Program, literature, sponsors, fellows and therapists, I am happy to say I don't know what is best for my husband and I don't know what is best for me.

Things I do for my sex life:

- We schedule sex weekly and make it a priority to connect.

Also if life gets in the way, we are flexible when we can't or don't feel well to make this commitment.

- No fantasy during sex.
- No negative fantasy.
- We try to kiss and not peck - I heard a saying by some psychiatrist that pecking is for birds.
- Everyone struggles with sex - you're doing great.
- Be in acceptance of my sex addiction.
- Be in acceptance of my partner.
- Being a woman and wanting sex more than my partner doesn't make him weak or me bad.
- Be open to compromise.
- Take the power out of sex and talk about it openly with my partner.
- Try not to judge and try to be patient.
- Do something loving for my partner.
- Keep working on me by going to meetings, sharing, working the Steps, couples therapy, etc.
- Try to separate what is my sex addiction and what is healthy - that takes practice.
- Continue to let go.
- Be affectionate towards my partner not just when I think I am going to have sex.
- Meditate and work out.
- No amount of sex will fill my God-shaped hole and I won't die if I don't have it.
- Write Tenth Steps and Fourth Steps when needed.

— Anonymous

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# Healthy Sex Life Started With Abstinence

**M**y journey towards a healthy sex life really started with a year of abstinence from sex when I first started my S.L.A.A. program four years ago. When a year of no sex or dating was suggested to me, I thought that I was going to lose my sexuality and my sparkly, fun personality. I didn't know how to be fun without being flirtatious. During that year of abstinence, I worked with my sponsors and worked the 12 Steps and worked a diligent S.L.A.A. program. I learned to detach from my sexuality as I knew it.

By being sexually abstinent, I learned to connect with men and women of the program in a non-sexual way. It was scary as hell at first, because I really identified in my core being as an extremely sexual creature. So, without that, who am I? It turns out, I am a very loving, kind, accepting, generous, FUN woman! I truly discovered this while participating in the process of recovery- going to meetings regularly, being of service, connecting with my Higher Power, working the Steps and sponsorship. I learned to appreciate my virtues separate from being sexual.

My first dating experience in S.L.A.A. turned into a committed sexual relationship after following my dating plan of no sex for at least two months. It almost immediately became very sexually addictive. Although, when in it, I

honestly believed that I was having "sober sex" in a "sober relationship" because I wasn't breaking any bottom lines. And I was in a committed, monogamous relationship. My partner was a porn addict and fantasy became a huge part of our sexual encounters, leading to complete dependence on it. Our weekend routine consisted of waking up to sex, breakfast in bed, having sex several times throughout the day, showering and then attending an S.L.A.A. meeting together. All the while convinced that I was in a healthy sexual relationship. After about a year, that relationship ended due to escalated addictive behavior that became unacceptable to me. I was devastated. I thought that I had failed.

I had to do another period of abstinence and returning to my core without being sexual. During that time, I accepted my first dating and sexual experience in S.L.A.A. recovery as just that. It is just part of my story and my journey. And I now know that sex can be very addictive for me even while following bottom lines and dating plans.

I am now in a committed relationship and my partner and I focus on connecting vulnerability outside of sexual situations. And when having sex, being in the moment with each other. Since I am a fantasy addict, staying in the moment is difficult for me. But

this is extremely important to me as part of a healthy sexual relationship. It's important to be present, to be emotionally and physically available to both give and receive pleasure while connecting on a more spiritual level as opposed to focusing on a high or an explosive climax hit. For so long I believed that getting the sexual high/hit was equivalent to great sex. Now I am experiencing great sex without that high or hit. It is very different, but not better or worse. For me, this is healthy sex. Having sex with a committed partner where there is trust and tenderness and where we meet each other and experience sex together being present in the moment, allowing vulnerability and connection.

I maintain a healthy sex life in sobriety by making sure that it is not the center of my life or my relationship. I spend a lot of time on my own, with other people, fostering other parts of my life and other relationships. When I stay in alignment with my Higher Power and his plan and will for my life, I am more emotionally available to my partner, both in day to day interactions and sexually. My sex life is healthier and more fulfilling when the other areas of my life are also being nurtured.

**— NB, Orange County, CA**

# Characteristics of a Sex Life: Then and Now

**M**y sponsor always said to avoid comparing myself to other people. “Compare and despair,” she would say. I saw everyone in the world having happy joyous and free sex lives. Why was I such a mess? My sponsor said I should always compare myself to where I used to be. So with that in mind, I thought I would write about a healthy sex life in sobriety in the context of the S.L.A.A. Characteristics.

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction:

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## Characteristic 1.

*Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.*

I didn't know what healthy boundaries were before S.L.A.A. The lines were always blurred by the necessity of getting what I needed (my drug of sex on demand.) I always needed more. Boundaries were just a straight jacket for boring “normal” people. A sober dating plan and bookending every date helped me learn healthy boundaries around finding a partner.

My old quick-fix way of having sex with people immediately so they would be forced to be in a relationship with me didn't work anymore. I always thought becoming sexually involved meant we were emotionally attached and knew each other really well.

The only thing that mattered in my addiction was whether we were sexually compatible or not. I

stayed in one relationship for eight years because the sex was good but everything else was pretty miserable.

I didn't even like the guy! My sponsor told me to act like I was going out on a job interview when I first started dating (not that the thought of using sex to get a job hadn't crossed my mind in the past). But I needed to keep dating businesslike and really get to know the person before I could have sex. Light and polite.

I also had to let go of my extremely low self-esteem. People in Program liked me. I was becoming a responsible adult.

I no longer had to use sex to make people like me and stick around.

## Characteristic 2.

*Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.*

I hated myself before program so why wouldn't everyone abandon me? I was deathly afraid of loneliness. If I didn't have anyone outside myself to validate me the loneliness would engulf me and kill me (or more likely make me kill myself). I had to stay in destructive relationships that isolated me from friends because we were always having sex. Needing sex all the time was not a healthy way to live. All my goals and dreams fell by the wayside. S.L.A.A. meetings and fellowship showed me that I never had to be alone again. I could let goals and

responsibilities back into my life because sex didn't take over all my time anymore.

## Characteristic 3.

*Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.*

It was like I was caught in some sick game with the endless pursuit of sexual encounters taking over my life. I had to have a backburner guy who would be there just in case my partner left. That doesn't allow for trust and intimacy in my primary relationship. Today I have that with my husband in part because I have no contact with qualifiers on my bottom lines. I don't leave the door open for other sexual or emotional liaisons.

## Characteristic 4.

*We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.*

I thought physical and sexual attraction were the only important things in a romantic relationship. Forget about communication, trust, kindness and a whole host of emotions that are important to a healthy partnership.

I didn't realize that it was only my sex addiction confusing love with my need for sex (which was over the top).

## Characteristic 5.

*We feel empty and incomplete*

*when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.*

I would have sex with a partner so they wouldn't leave and I wouldn't have to be alone. My fear of intimacy and commitment was so great that I would have sex to mask the fact that I couldn't handle those feelings. The intimacy in meetings, with my Higher Power, in fellowship and with my sponsor helped me practice until I felt confident in my ability to handle intimacy and commitment. Service commitments also helped with this.

### Characteristic 6.

*We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.*

I don't use sex for any of these things anymore. My husband and I do a lot to help each other out with errands, emotional support, and communication. Higher Power, meetings and fellows give care and support also so we don't have to rely only on each other.

### Characteristic 7.

*We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.*

I check my motives before having sex with my husband. Am I trying to get something in exchange for sex? With sobriety, I stopped thinking the quick fix of sexual manipulation was a good thing. It only created emotional hangovers that tore at the fabric of the relationship and ultimately doomed it.

### Characteristic 8.

*We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.*

This used to paralyze me before sobriety. I was afraid of it taking over in my partnership when I was newly sober. But healthy sex in sobriety doesn't open the door for powerful fantasies. I don't get obsessed or waste too much time pursuing sex. It has become a byproduct of sharing, commitment and trust.

### Characteristic 9.

*We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.*

I usually chose the emotionally unavailable person because my low self-esteem made me believe that I couldn't take care of myself and anyone healthy wouldn't want to stay with me.

S.L.A.A. taught me how to take care of myself. My healthy sex life today includes a lot of self-care and taking responsibility for my life.

### Characteristic 10.

*We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.*

I used to be enslaved to compulsive sexual activities. Just like the craving for a cigarette in the middle of a movie, the cravings for and pursuit of sex took over my life before sobriety. Sexual activities don't take over my life anymore. I have a healthy balance of "date" nights and other activities that fulfill my goals and help my life. My emotional life is stable and sane instead of the

apocalyptic teetering on the edge of oblivion and insanity like it was before.

### Characteristic 11.

*To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.*

This was the danger in the beginning of my relationship in sobriety. I thought the only way to stay sober and fight the cravings for sex was to avoid sex all together. That doesn't allow a healthy sex life and my relationship would not have lasted more than a decade like it has if I had continued that thought pattern. I had to trust that Higher Power would help me through anything and He did! I don't fear vulnerability because I know that Higher Power is always there for me and I chose a wonderful partner to marry because S.L.A.A. fellows and my sponsor helped clear away the wreckage of my past so I could see clearly and not slip into denial.

### Characteristic 12.

*We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.*

I don't blame my husband for being human. If sex isn't always the big dramatic show that it used to be in the days of my addiction, I realize that that's actually a good thing. I am more present for my life and for true love.

Thank you S.L.A.A. for helping me create a healthy happy life (and to create a sane sex life).

— Anonymous

# Share space

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## SLAAOnline Share

I've had moments where I felt the hand of Higher Power (HP), whom I call "God." The night I professed my faith for the first time, when I was 16, it looked like you could drive to the moon.

It was huge, and harvest orange. I was there with thousands of other kids professing faith in our HP. We were all immersed in water at the same time, in a bay off the ocean. It was an amazing experience.

I had fallen in love with my HP, and I wanted the world to know. Even when I walked away, He

pursued me. I lost sight of Him with this disease.

Another one of my other huge spiritual experiences was literally dragging a huge sack of rocks over to a huge symbol of my faith and leaving it there.

I felt this huge weight lift off of me and I haven't had to act out since. Next month it will be 12 years.

I shake my head in wonder that my HP loves me so much. When I turned around, He was right there saying, "Lay the rocks on me, Baby! My shoulders are broad. I

will lighten your load."

I'm so glad I let Him. I could have continued to carry those rocks for a long, miserable time. My depression was so bad at times, I wanted to jump over Niagara Falls. I was there; peering over the edge. I'm so glad I didn't jump. I came to S.L.A.A. instead, and surrendered to my HP.

Please keep coming back, everyone! Thanks for 12-stepping me today!

—Anonymous

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## No Matter the Cost

An SLAAOnline Share, by Anonymous:

"What was it like in the last days before I found the program? How was acting out a heart-breaking delusion? What is it like now in recovery?"

Oh how I remember the high of acting out!

I hope I never forget the insanity.

First came the powerlessness.

I felt like I just had to talk to him, and be with him no matter the cost.

I was taking huge risks to do so.

I was destroying relationships,

destroying my credibility at work, and my reputation. I was shattering, once again, any last shred of respect my family had for me. I was breaking up, and getting back together, time after time.

I was ignoring the red flags, and placing myself in physical danger. There was heartbreak, sorrow.



There were legal problems. I was never so scared in my life!

That was my bottom. They say you never have to act out again, if you remember your bottom; and if you don't remember it (how bad it was), you haven't had it yet.

This bottom is what drove me to work the program. I found a solution here: The 12 Steps.

I admitted my powerlessness

over my disease, over my whole life, really, and began working on the restoration of my relationship with my Higher Power.

I've worked hard on deepening this relationship, on clearing away everything that stands between me and my Higher Power, with His help. I've begun to heal here in S.L.A.A., by following a few simple directions. It's simple, but not

easy. I've found a measure of peace and purpose in my life. I'm so glad I stuck around long enough for the miracle to take place.

They say: don't quit five minutes before the miracle! and I'm glad I didn't.

— **Anonymous**

# Thank You for the Inspiration Line



**I** wanted to say a huge thank you to the Greater Delaware Intergroup, and in particular to Michael, for the great support we have received in setting up the

S.L.A.A. Inspiration Line here in the UK.

I first heard about the S.L.A.A. Inspiration Line from my sponsor who has done most of her

recovery in the U.S. I started dialling in from time to time, particularly when I was in desperate need for some inspiration.

This often happened late in the evening or at night, when there were no meetings or fellows available for outreach.

One of the issues I faced in my recovery was that I started compulsively watching random videos, often throughout the entire night so that I didn't get any sleep or only very little. I used this binge watching to escape from whatever I was feeling at those times and to escape from my life.

It was during those times that I felt particularly desperate and lonely but unable to connect with someone. So I started calling the inspiration line and it has proven a great recovery tool for me personally.

At the same time I was wondering why we don't have it in the UK. I always called into it via Skype, which doesn't cost much but nonetheless charges a fee for

U.S. calls. Some people might not be able to afford that. And whilst there might be other ways to dial into a U.S. number for free, I thought about the great S.L.A.A. recovery we have here in the UK and that it would be lovely to hear those people's inspiring stories and shares. Therefore, the idea to set up the line in the UK was born.

After contacting the Greater Delaware Intergroup for information, Michael has been an absolute star with the support he has provided. He made himself available for hour-long phone sessions and sent all the documents we needed for the setup. He even dialled into our Intergroup meeting in January to answer any questions the UK team had.

I'm thrilled to say that on the 27th of January 2018, the proposal to set up the S.L.A.A. Inspiration Line in the UK passed

unanimously at Intergroup. Since then we've been working consistently on the setup.

We found a service provider and are currently filling up our list of volunteers. The aim is to go live on Monday, the 30th of April 2018. Everyone is very excited, and we hope that we'll get some callers from the U.S. as well. I can't begin to tell you how overwhelmed I was by the support and enthusiasm we received from the U.S. team.

It really goes to show what a strong fellowship we have in S.L.A.A., no matter what country we are in and if there is an ocean between us. We're all in this together and here for the same purpose, to recover from our love and sex addiction.

With so much gratitude,

— **Katja**

## My Lifelong Quest

**M**y lifelong quest has been to discover exactly who my Higher Power is. What I have come to realize over the years is how much my conceptions have changed.

When I first came into this program, I believed in "God as God knows Himself to be." As it turns out, that was so vague and nebulous it didn't work for me.

It was all smoke and mirrors. I hit my most spectacular bottom

while in this program, working the Steps. I was working the Steps! And still, I flamed out. I was on the verge of losing my career and I had legal problems because of my acting out. I was suicidal and homicidal. I was also a hypocrite. I thought I knew what Higher Power was. I was so pious — smug, even.

Then I hit a spectacular bottom. This time, I completely surrendered; it was that or die. I

became teachable. Since then, my whole concept of Higher Power has changed. I hope I never again get so arrogant that I think I've got Higher Power all figured out. I know only a little now, and more is revealed to me daily, as I search diligently to know Him better. I'm so glad I found this program and that I finally have found some peace thru the Steps.

— **Anonymous**



theJournal