



# the Journal

Issue # 177

Single Issue \$4

FINDING S.L.A.A.

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

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

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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,

When I read the articles in this month's issue of the Journal, it was good to be reminded about what it was like to first walk through the doors into a meeting of S.L.A.A. My first meeting was in Los Angeles in 1998. It was a year after I had first walked into an A.A. meeting. In A.A., they had a line of people at the door to welcome you and shake your hand. When I was sitting in the meeting grimacing in pain, 2 people sat next to me and talked to me and after the meeting they came to my house to pour out all the liquor I had stashed there. They didn't do that in S.L.A.A. — nor would I want them to! They had very strict personal space boundaries. But I felt more safe and supported when I first walked into the rooms of S.L.A.A. for some reason. I didn't see any drama. There were only 8 people there, but they all seemed happy. They smiled and were welcoming and shared about some pretty intimate details of their lives. I'm glad that S.L.A.A. members welcomed me.

This issue helps to remind us try our best to create a safe and welcoming space for newcomers so they can keep coming back.

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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at its meetings.

In submitting such content to S.L.A.A., the member releases S.L.A.A., any other members of S.L.A.A. and S.L.A.A.'s officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the "Releasees") from any and all claims which the member may have against any of the Releasees in connection with the member's submission of content to the Journal.

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# Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “What was it like to first walk in the doors? Did you feel welcome? What can meetings do to help Newcomers feel more welcome?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #178 — May/June — Combatting Negativity: “How do you quiet the negative voices in your head and have a more positive outlook?” Deadline for submissions is March 15, 2019. And —#179 — July/August — ABM Issue\*\* Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Journal — “How has the Journal helped in your recovery? and/or Please share any special stories you have about the Journal or the Conference Journal Committee.” — Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2019. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

“What was it like to first walk in the doors? Did you feel welcome? What can meetings do to help Newcomers feel more welcome?”

**I** was so hopeless and rattled the first time I walked in the doors. I felt as if I needed something to help me. S.L.A.A. seemed like the answer. I was in a love triangle. I was dating two people at the same time and I felt insane. I felt as if I was welcome in the rooms of S.L.A.A. and at the same time, I didn't want to call myself out even though the only way to get help is to ask for it. It's good that meetings allow the space to actually say if you are a newcomer or not. It helps when people share their stories and talk to the newcomer after the meeting. Someone who is there to welcome the newcomer is helpful as well.

— ALESSANDRA

**I** first walked into an S.L.A.A. meeting on a Sunday afternoon. It was a women's meeting and there were 5 women including me there. I was full of shame, feeling hopeless and in tears throughout the entire meeting. The other women were warm, calming and welcoming. I immediately felt that I was not alone. At that first meeting, I received a newcomer's chip (that I still keep in my change purse with my wallet), a newcomer's packet and a schedule of other meetings. Three of the longtime members gave me their numbers and said I could call them. I feel that this one-on-one contact was very helpful and instrumental in helping me feel welcome and therefore I kept coming back.

— NORA B., ORANGE COUNTY, CA

**Walking** in the doors was both intense and wonderful. I met a best friend right off the bat and have met SO many amazing, fantastic people! When people write welcome with their name on the phone list, offer to answer questions, or be outreach partners that can help a newcomer feel welcome.

— ANN

**I** was extremely nervous in my first meeting. But once I heard the shares and experience, strength, and hope, I knew I could be safe and that I had found a place among others.

— CORY F., HOUSTON, TX

**Be** there even if you are the only person there. When I came into the rooms in January 2000 after a snowstorm, only one member was present. If he had not been there, I am not sure I would be here.

— RITA, MONTREAL

**I** was blessed to be taken to my first meeting by a close friend. I cried through most of it, primarily from relief that I found others to share with and didn't have to hide. Many people there looked happy. Meetings can help newcomers feel more welcome by having a designated person to meet at the meeting. If they call ahead, we try to arrange this.

— ANNE K., TAMPA BAY

**I** felt ashamed and humiliated. I was older, and it seemed like I should have figured this out by now. Listening to the shares made me know I was in the right place. A member approached me after the meeting and offered me her phone number. It was like she threw me a life preserver.

— ANONYMOUS

**I** was a mess. I was scared. Then, as I heard the story of the woman at the front of the room, I was overwhelmed with the feeling of coming home after an exhausting, terrifying journey. Afterwards, another woman with a bright smile approached me, showed me the literature, told me to get a sponsor and said, "Keep coming back."

— SARAH E.,  
OAKLAND, CA

**I** was at my bottom. I first heard about S.L.A.A. at a treatment center, and then I learned of the women's phone meetings. I didn't have any in-person meetings. I felt very welcome. I think reaching out to newcomers right away one-on-one is one way to help. Another would be to follow up with them and call them.

— JACLYN P.,  
COLUMBIA HEIGHTS, MN

**When** I went to my first meeting, it was closed! It was very triggering, but it made me persevere and made me feel more committed than ever to find a meeting. I wish all meetings would make sure their website advertised their correct opening days and if they are still running.

— ANONYMOUS

**When** I first came to S.L.A.A., I felt very welcome. I was shown the literature and people suggested that I find a sponsor. Many people shared their numbers with me.

— FIONA, LONDON

**When** I first came to S.L.A.A., I was greeted immediately and offered a newcomer's meeting where I heard 2 other fellows' stories of experience, strength, and hope. I walked away with a packet of literature and a sense of warmth and belonging.

— SCOTT F., MILWAUKEE

**I** felt so much shame walking into the rooms of S.L.A.A., but the first meeting I attended was warm and welcoming. There was a good balance of sharing of the problem (identification) and solution (hope and recovery).

— MARC S., TORONTO

**My** first hand in the door in 1989 was Wayne A. who guided and helped me and though not a sponsor, mentored me and brought me into service. There is a scholarship in Wayne A.'s name. His warmth and welcome are missed.

— ANONYMOUS

**As** an abused boy, I was terrified to go into a meeting of mostly male attendees. I had to use the courage of 2 other programs to stay there. I was greeted by a caring gentleman who did not know my history. He didn't ask any questions except my first name. He said, "Please consider coming back to 6 meetings before making a decision."

— ANONYMOUS, PENNSYLVANIA

**I** was in another S fellowship. I had heard about S.L.A.A. and was nearby a meeting. I considered myself only a sex addict. At my first meeting, I was asked to read the characteristics. I identified with 7 or 8 out of 12.

— DAVE G., LOS ANGELES

**I** came from another S fellowship and knew many members already, so I felt welcome. The best way to welcome newcomers is with a smile, ask them if they have any questions, offer any information you have and welcome them to come back.

— ANONYMOUS

**I** Googled “low self-esteem, cheating on husband” and S.L.A.A. was the gift from a Higher Power that I got even though I did not know it existed. I called a contact number from the phone list and the man informed me that the meeting has not been largely attended but he would be there. I started attending a variety of meetings. I held the welcome chip closely and use it now for all newcomers.

— ARI, NJ

**I** was forced to go by innuendo. I was accepted immediately. Meetings can offer contact by at least 3 S.L.A.A. members to affirm and support the newcomer.

— ANONYMOUS

**I** felt very welcome and at home. I was very nervous when I entered and very intimidated. I was welcomed and received a newcomer packet. Many members gave me their numbers for contacts.

— JOE C., SHERWOOD

**My** very first meeting is quite a story. I had been discovered by my wife and knew I needed to get help. I called the phone number listed on the Internet and the man that answered my quavering voice said to me, “You must have really screwed up.”

I said, “Why yes, I have.” He said, “Well, don’t worry. Everyone else did too.” When I first walked into the meeting there were over 50 people there. I sat down and listened.

In the first 15 minutes I felt like I had come home. I was in awe of the strength, hope and experience of the members of the meeting. I wanted what they had. I wanted the clarity, the abstinence and the sanity they had. I went back the next week.

— SETH S., NEWTON, MA

**It** was pretty hard, and it was very much a round-about kind of thing. I actually first started going to A.A. meetings for women because my town had no S.L.A.A. meetings, or O.A. meetings as far as I knew. I’m not an A.A. person, but I think I really just needed the meetings.

I dreaded going to a church. At the time, some 10 years ago now, I hated God and I told myself that I didn’t believe in God. I also hated churches, and I had to go inside a church. But at the meeting people were wonderful.

They were very welcoming and accepting, and very gentle, and they told me how I can choose my own idea of God instead of a god that was created by another person or religion or idea. I LOVED it! That, honestly, was probably one of the main reasons why I stayed.

I also had nowhere else to go. This was the only place I knew of. And over time, by listening, I learned that I belonged here, with these people.

Over time I learned to not be ashamed, and I learned the definition of addiction. It helped me to become better, stronger. I’m still on my journey. I’m not really recovered, but I am much better than I used to be.

— DIANA

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# Welcoming Newcomers: An Interview



**Lisa:** How long have you been going to S.L.A.A.?

**Asher:** About 2 years. However, I've come in and out of program several times. I basically came in more regularly and fully in May of 2017.

**Lisa:** Why did you go in and out?

**Asher:** I came in because I was in a long-distance

relationship and I was not faithful. I let my girlfriend know. I told her I would look into this and quote unquote "fix" myself and get better. So, I started going to S.L.A.A. I was in it for approximately 6 months. In the meantime, she moved in with me. And then we got our own place, and, in my mind, I

thought, *I don't need this (S.L.A.A.) now because I'm in a relationship. I don't have the same problems. So, I don't need S.L.A.A.* So, I left. Cut forward, 2 years later, I was having emotional and physical affairs with women.

My girlfriend discovered this behavior because one of the women confronted her on social media. We broke up. Then I was single, and I thought, *I'm single so there's no reason to go to S.L.A.A. now.*

And I continued to have this pattern of having relationships with women, not being faithful, and going back into S.L.A.A. to try to solve that.

But then, quickly leaving the program because I was thinking, *If I'm in a relationship I don't need it, if I'm out of a relationship I don't need it.*

Either one was a reason for me not to stay. But really, I wasn't addressing the issue. I also had a hard time identifying with the people that I was meeting in the program. It was too extreme. I didn't identify fully, or I wasn't ready to identify.

What brought me back in the most recent time was having a complex relationship that broke up and got back together and broke up and got back together.

I was in this cycle of not being able to be with my significant other and not being able to be without her. When I was with her, I wanted to be with other women and when I was away from her all I wanted was to be with her.

I had this period of time (months) where I was dating her and other women. It was not only driving me crazy, but it put me face to face with this disease and I knew I was living a life that I didn't want to be living. What I was doing was not my highest potential. It was somewhat disgraceful. I knew that I needed to really address this head on.

I officially ended the relationship. And I ended the relationships with all the other women. I went in full time to S.L.A.A.

**Lisa:** So that kind of touches on another question that I have. Did you have any support to go into S.L.A.A. or did you do it on your own? And it sounds like from what you're describing that it was mostly on your own (your own ideas about what S.L.A.A. is).

**Asher:** I forgot. I skipped over something. I had been in Al-Anon regularly every single week for years, since 2005. I've had sponsors that I've discussed a sexual inventory with. Just because it's a different Program, it wasn't really addressing the sexual element.

I even felt that I was on the extreme side of the sexual addiction. My sponsor didn't see it that way. He didn't push me into going to S.L.A.A. That was another reason why I didn't go.

It was like, well my Al-Anon sponsor doesn't think I need it so maybe I don't. What really got me into it the last time was meeting a woman in Al-Anon, and having a relationship with her during the time that I was in and out of a relationship with my ex. She told me about S.L.A.A. I said, "Yes. I'm very well aware of it. I have the book. I have the pamphlets." She said, "Yeah, but have you read them?"

I said, "Yes, it's been awhile but I have read them." She said, "Well, maybe you should read them again." She told me that she's in the Program, and that she's a member - not someone who's just aware of it, but someone who's in it. And she encouraged me to take a look at it.

So, I begrudgingly did. I found a meeting and went to it. And she was at that meeting. I didn't plan it that way. I didn't plan to meet her there or anything, but she was there anyway.

**Lisa:** Wow.

**Asher:** She was very supportive of me becoming involved in the Program.

**Lisa:** Great.

**Asher:** So, I did have that assistance.

**Lisa:** You described the last meeting that you went to where you started your recovery. But in the beginning when you first started going to S.L.A.A. meetings, did you look it up on the website, or did you find out from friends? How did you initially learn about S.L.A.A.?

**Asher:** Being a member of Al-Anon, I heard of other 12-Step programs and I knew S.L.A.A. existed. I looked it up, but I didn't know anyone in the program, I just knew of it.

**Lisa:** Describe your feelings before and after your first meeting.

**Asher:** I think probably like anyone I was nervous and uncomfortable. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know anyone in the rooms. It felt a little bit mysterious to me. Some folks were saying things that I related to on some level and then some were saying things that I did not relate to. Of course, the terminology was new, so I just felt a little bit in the dark for the first meeting.

**Lisa:** Did you feel welcome? Describe anything that made you feel more welcome or not welcome.

**Asher:** My very first meeting was so long ago. I didn't feel unwelcome. Because I was familiar with 12-Step rooms, I knew the format. I definitely didn't feel excluded. I did feel welcome. I've been in and out of S.L.A.A. 3 or 4 times and I never felt unwelcome.

**Lisa:** We had a newcomer orientation at one of our meetings. It was like a 15-minute introduction with explanations of terms that are used in meeting

sometimes. Newcomers could ask questions. The person leading the meeting usually had a long time in Program. There is also time set aside for newcomer shares at my home meeting. They have an announcement at the beginning of some meetings that says, “If you’re a newcomer please restate your name so we can get to know you.” Everyone says, “Welcome,” to them after they introduce themselves.

**Asher:** Yes. We have something like that at one of my meetings and we tell them about our literature. I think newcomer orientations would be great. The Saturday morning D.A. meeting in Mid-Wilshire does that and I found it very helpful. I don’t know how that would get started but I agree it’s a great idea.

**Lisa:** And what about fellowship? As a newcomer or with newcomers now did you participate in the “meeting after the meeting” and go to fellowship?

**Asher:** Fellowship is actually only something I started doing this last time I came back into Program. However, I had actually heard through a friend in Al-Anon that the Friday night men’s stag had a really great fellowship. I heard about that since 2010. But aside from that I hadn’t heard about fellowship being a big part of the Program until I came back in 2017.

I think maybe part of it was the meetings that I went to or that I wasn’t going to meetings that had strong fellowship. Today, fellowship is a huge part of my recovery.

I go every chance I can. I think it’s vital to this Program for several reasons. One big one is creating healthy intimacy with men. Since I’m taking away the drug of sex and love addiction, I need a top line activity that includes connection, and interaction with others. Fellowship also helps me stay sober. If I didn’t have that connection, I know I would turn to my bottom line activities much easier and sooner.

**Lisa:** Is there anything you do now to make newcomers feel more welcome?

**Asher:** Absolutely. This is almost through sponsor direction, but I’ve learned the value of it – if there’s ever a newcomer there I almost always try to make it a point to go say, “Hello” to them. I try to get a vibe for where they are emotionally. Some newcomers just run out of the room.

Yesterday someone did that. But I almost always greet them, give them a newcomer packet, give

them the bottom line newsletter (LA Intergroup’s newsletter), walk through what’s in the newcomer packet, and tell them about the inspiration line (Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup). I let them know that there’s phone numbers on the bottom line for people that have volunteered to take calls. I ask if they have questions. Depending on their share, I tell them if I relate or if I identify. Sometimes I offer my phone number, but the bottom line is, I always try to make it a point not only to welcome them, but to hear them out, find out where they’re at, and if they want any support, I offer that.

**Lisa:** The newcomer packet is actually a Los Angeles Intergroup thing. It has definitions of S.L.A.A. terms, some of the S.L.A.A. Core Documents, and quotes from S.L.A.A. literature. I’m happy that the Intergroup prints those and gives them to meetings for free to help the newcomer feel more welcome.

**Asher:** It also helps to have someone walk the newcomer through what it is. It’s good to tell the newcomer, “This is what our Program is, what we’re trying to reach for.” It’s good to leaf through it and give them a brief summary of what they’re looking at. I believe that that facilitates them actually picking it up and reading it instead of setting it down and not picking it up again.

At the Wednesday night Sherman Oaks meeting there’s designated male and female S.L.A.A. members who hang out by the doors after the meeting to talk to newcomers. I think that’s good to help newcomers. It would be helpful if there was a service position for newcomer outreach.

In other 12-Step programs they make people feel welcome with coffee and snacks in meetings, but I don’t see that in S.L.A.A. meetings.

**Lisa:** We used to serve coffee at our Saturday morning Robertson meeting but had trouble finding people to take the commitment. And Monday night served snacks, but people complained about the sugar. I think sometimes sex and love addicts can also have eating disorders and body image problems, so it became an issue and we had a group conscience vote that said to stop bringing snacks. But I agree that that can make people feel more welcome.

Thank you, Asher for doing this interview!

— LISA C. AND ASHER

# Desperate Enough to Go to a Meeting on a Highway Median



I was in such pain my first meeting that I don't even remember it. I had experienced recovery in another Fellowship so I knew it was possible. I remember early on, seizing on two members who seemed calm, spiritual and had years of recovery. I wanted what they had, and knew it was possible.

I don't particularly remember if I felt welcome. I knew from experience that the rooms were a safe place, and I knew that it was vital for me to be there. They could have held a meeting on a highway median and I would have been there. I was that desperate and convinced I had to be there.

I think the phone lines and my former face-to-face do pretty well with welcoming newcomers.

There are special meetings just for them in both. We also specifically welcome newcomers on the phone lines, and reserve time for them to ask questions after the meetings.

Perhaps if we could somehow pair newcomers and more seasoned members and have them communicate regularly for a time, it would be more beneficial than having the newcomer have to wait on the odd chance someone will jot down their number and give them a call. We've had sub-groups in another fellowship where we did that and I found it solidified connections to the program between meetings. It was a great tool.

—ANONYMOUS

# Speaker Meetings Are a Powerful Tool

I walked into my first meeting on 8/8/1986, 32 years ago.

It was a large meeting that happened to be a speaker meeting.

Two minutes after the speaker began to tell her story, I knew I belonged in the Fellowship. It did not matter that the speaker was a female. I wanted what she had, peace and serenity.

I believe there was a “greeter” there but I was taken back by the number of attendees present. I was not expecting 35 or 40 people.

When I walked in the “greeter” was helping someone else, so I just sat down and listened.

Speaker meetings are a powerful tool for newcomers to witness. You don't feel alone when you

hear pieces of your own story being told by a stranger.

Currently, in New York City at 107th Street in Manhattan, there is a speaker meeting every Wednesday evening at 6 p.m. It's a men's-only meeting that draws 50 to 60 men every week. It's one of the most powerful meetings I've ever attended. The shares are phenomenal and touch everyone in attendance.

My vote would be to encourage groups to have experienced speakers at all beginner's meetings — maybe even a short question and answer period right after the speaker shares.

— MICHAEL S., PHILADELPHIA

## In the beginning...

Thinking about what it was like when I first walked into our miraculous program made me laugh — not because of anyone or anything else. What I remember the most is how miserable and angry I felt. The group could have rolled out the red carpet and had a parade for me but I probably would have only responded by grinding my teeth even louder! I certainly don't remember feeling unwelcome, but I was just a bit self-absorbed. If I knew how important this Program would be to me, I would have paid more attention to every single detail!

However, very early on members invited me out to the local bakery and listened to me ramble about my qualifier. I also talked about my fear that our program wouldn't work for me because I had a dozen years of sobriety in a different Program and had

worked the Steps several times. How they listened without telling me to “STOP TALKING!” I'll never know, but that also helped.

There was one member who stressed the importance of having fun in sobriety. He would arrange holiday meals for members and theater trips to New York City for us.

Those events helped me to feel “part of” the group as well. One idea that may help newcomers feel more welcome is if some appropriate member offered to be a newcomer's temporary sponsor. I could certainly improve in that area. That would not ensure that the newcomer feels welcome but it may help engender that feeling.

— CHRIS

# Uncomfortable at My First Meeting, But Welcome



Someone had suggested earlier in another Program that maybe I should go to S.L.A.A. but at the time I said, “Maybe so, but I don’t have time for it.”

I first came into the rooms in 2005. I was miserable and desperate because I was

experiencing a terrible withdrawal from a relationship that I knew I had to end. I was suffering so much that I wanted to grab onto any thing that would keep me afloat.

When I came in to the room, the speaker asked if there were any newcomers. The meeting

participants said, "Welcome." I felt uncomfortable to be in a group of people I did not know and to be busy with sex and love addiction made it feel even more uncomfortable!

When others shared, I found I could relate to what some of them said. After the meeting, a woman came up to me to introduce herself and welcomed me personally. She offered her phone number in case I needed to talk to someone.

It took me a little while to get up the courage to do that, but I felt so bad that I finally began to call people sometimes.

I continued to attend the meetings and also went to another Fellowship's meetings because I could not bear to be alone at night. Eventually, I asked that woman to become my sponsor and she helped me by letting me share my Step work with her.

In my current home meeting, the format has a place for the introduction of newcomers and we

read part of Step 1. The newcomer is encouraged to speak with someone after the meeting if they have questions.

We give newcomers a newcomer folder and people write their first name and number on the back if they feel they would be a suitable person to take calls from the new person and are willing to do so.

At the end of our meeting, we join hands and close with the serenity prayer followed by "Keep coming back, it works if you work it, so work it, you're worth it!" People exchange handshakes or hugs if both are comfortable with that.

The newcomer is personally greeted by a compatible member after the meeting. I can't think of anything else to add to make this share any better, but maybe others have some more ideas.

— CLAIRE, AMSTERDAM

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## I Felt Welcome at My First Meeting

I did feel welcome, especially because there was a beginner's meeting in a separate room. A few folks with some recovery shared their story. Then we were able to come back to the larger group where they broke into smaller groups and got current. I remember staying afterwards and talking to very warm and supportive members. I knew that I was in a place with like-minded people who shared the same affliction.

Interestingly, there were several attractive women in the group and my reaction was, "This is what I am trying to avoid so what should I do?" Very quickly, I found 2 men's meetings which I attended for over a

year before I felt ready to encounter the trigger of attractive women.

I think my home groups do a fairly good job of welcoming newcomers. There's always someone who takes them outside and speaks with them for a few minutes. Never does a newcomer leave without a few members getting their number and chatting briefly after the meeting. It would be great to have a newcomer's meeting but the numbers don't support that anymore. We used to have 3-5 newcomers weekly in the 90s but things are different.

—ANONYMOUS

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## In Denial at My First Meeting

When I walked into my first S.L.A.A. meeting on a Monday night, I was in the full throes of my addiction. I had been involved in multiple liaisons the previous weekend, and had put myself at great risk with little

awareness of the fact. The next day, I had a wake-up call when I confessed for the first time to my therapist about what I was up to. I thought what I was doing was problematic, but my therapist thought it was life-threatening. She insisted I go to

an S.L.A.A. meeting that night or she couldn't work with me because she didn't know how to keep me safe.

So, it was with fury (at her), deep anxiety, and complete denial that I went to my first meeting. Up until that afternoon, I had never told anyone about my addiction (which I didn't know I had). I was very secretive and guarded about it. So, it was with dismay that I entered a packed room with only one seat left. There were so many people there!

Then, to my utter horror, a former student from a course I had taught the previous semester walked in the door!!! I was mortified. Had I not been tucked into a corner away from the door, I probably would have slipped out.

To make matters worse, when they went around the room and read the Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction, I scoffed inside. I could not identify with a single characteristic. Then they read the 12 Steps, and I got even more bent out of shape because of the repeated use of the word "God."

I share all this by way of saying that, for many of us, when we come to our first meeting, we are still fully immersed in acting out. Trying to recall that moment now, all I can think was that I was in a sort of shell shock.

What was helpful? The suggestion that we attend at least six meetings before we decide if S.L.A.A. is right for us. It was good to know that if I attended six meetings and still didn't think I belonged, then I

could show my therapist I had tried.

I'm pretty sure that a few people approached me afterwards at my first meeting, welcomed me and gave me some literature. It's hard to recall much else. But it was the next five meetings that were really important in getting me connected to outreach partners, purchasing the S.L.A.A. Basic Text, finding out about the women's- only phone meetings, reading the pamphlets, starting to relate to the Characteristics, and working on my bottom lines.

What else was helpful? The kindness of people in the S.L.A.A. meetings. The acceptance. Nobody tried to convince me of anything, they just encouraged me to keep coming back. The clear structure of the meeting format and the opportunity to share with no crosstalk or feedback was a revelation.

Meetings that focused on recovery and offered experience, strength, and hope were the most helpful. I avoided meetings where several members with little sobriety graphically shared their acting out behaviors. As a newbie, those shares were triggering, and I didn't have enough experience to know how to handle those kinds of situations using group conscience.

To this day, I am forever grateful for that first meeting. Although I remember so little of it, because it was there, because people showed up and chaired that meeting, I was able to make a new start in life.

— ANONYMOUS, AZ

## Sober 533 Days by God's Grace

**M**y name is Peter. I'm a sex and love addict. By God's grace, I'm 533 days sober today from my addiction. Before my first meeting, I felt completely lost. A few days earlier, I was preparing to commit suicide. Thankfully, a member in another 12-Step group dissuaded me from doing so while on the phone. During those days, I was drowning in the dark sea of my addiction, and all was lost to me.

My non-stop craving made it difficult to find the location of the first meeting. But my Higher Power led me there, where I was met with warmth and understanding. I told my future fellows before the meeting that I was going to share quite bluntly.

They simply nodded.

I don't talk about the things I share in S.L.A.A. with anyone else. So, sex and love addiction is the most difficult problem for me to recover from. I don't dare to open up and tell anyone about it. So, in the first days the road to recovery was a real labyrinth.

My withdrawal has forced me to seek recovery. The ruthless frenzy of waiting between two sessions of acting out has caused me terrible withdrawal symptoms. At this point I imagined what would happen if my life arrived at such a place where I would feel imprisoned by not being able to visit striptease bars. I resolved that I



wanted to give chastity as a gift to God within my service, and not as an unbearable restraint. That's why I needed S.L.A.A. That is when I decided to get help from this group so I could serve God wholeheartedly.

Feeling lost and desperate on the stormy sea of life, amidst raging dark feelings, I went to my first S.L.A.A. meeting. It was on September 28, 2016.

I was welcomed with warmth, compassion, and true humanity. I shared why I came, and they

understood. After that, my fellow sufferers shared similar stories. In these meetings, I always feel we are encircling God's warmth, love, and glory. I voice what's hurting me, and I feel the warmth of my Higher Power.

It's the ray of hope which shines through my cold, Dante-esque hell during each and every meeting. For me, the meeting is the message of hope.

— PETER, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

# Newcomers Can be Given the Solution of Recovery



I entered the doors in 2003 by starting a meeting myself because there were no meetings in my area. This was actually surprising because I started the meeting in the capital of the country where I live.

I heard of S.L.A.A. from a speaker share at an ACA meeting. The speaker told the story of one of my latest relationships exactly as it happened in my story. But surprisingly, she was in a sober relationship.

I had to ask her how this could be possible that she could have a sober relationship after all that. She said she was also a member of the S.L.A.A. Fellowship. She was one of only four members in our country. Getting in touch with these members and all of us agreeing to meet once a year was my way of being welcomed and entering S.L.A.A.

We tried to find our way to doing S.L.A.A. work and getting sober. We searched for written material on how to do the Steps in S.L.A.A. but couldn't find anything other than the A.A. Big Book workbooks. We had all done the Steps that way in other Programs. We felt we needed more recognition of being a sex and love addict. Even when we switched the wording of alcohol and alcoholic as suggested in Chapter 4 of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text, it wasn't enough.

Luckily, S.L.A.A. in 2018 made a booklet on doing the 12 Steps with the S.L.A.A. Basic Text. Thank you so much! I look forward to doing the Steps again (for the fourth time) in S.L.A.A. finally from the experience of members who've done the Steps through the eyes of this addiction.

Meetings have expanded throughout the years in the city where I live.

We still struggle in welcoming newcomers. This is not to say that we don't greet them at meetings, but

unfortunately most people who are new in recovery leave the Fellowship after three years. There aren't many people who do service, Step work, or who take on sponsors or sponsees. Not many finish the 12 Steps. Many relapse or get stuck, lacking the energy to continue the Steps.

Therefore, at many meetings most are newcomers or old-timers who are not working the Steps. They relapse because they only go to meetings and don't do any of the other work or read any of the Program literature. Some do prevent relapse by only going to meetings though. A lot of newcomers don't stay.

Continuously we try at business meetings to improve interest in doing S.L.A.A. service and Step work.

Doing my own inventory— I honestly didn't start doing the Steps right way when I first joined. I didn't take advantage of the help from the Fellowship, but relied on my old habit of doing things on my own and not reaching for help. So, of course, when I started those meetings long ago people didn't get anything from walking in the doors except a friendly smile, some coffee and laying their remorse on the table. They didn't get any solution of recovery in return.

— ANONYMOUS, DENMARK

## Newcomer: A Poem

Dad was quiet or else he screamed "Go to your room," it wasn't a dream.

Brother was mean, I was his punching bag,

Being home could be a real drag.

From the outside, middle class were we,

Nice little family, that's what everyone could see.

But love from dad was all I craved,

I tried and tried to be good and brave.

All I wanted was kindness and hugs,

Not getting in trouble for leaving toys on the rug.

But he was busy, working so much,

He didn't have time for a hug or touch.

Boys became my obsession through my teen years. I thought having sex would calm my inner fears. One after the other, so many I seduced,

Not knowing my self-esteem was being reduced.

It kept on through high school and college too,

Then I met a guy who stuck to me like glue.

He was a good man, smart, funny and more,

But after a while, it became a bore,

I didn't know how to connect in a deeper way.

When the sex got boring, I walked away.  
Kept searching for something outside of me,  
To fill the hole and make me free. But no matter how many men I had, The feeling inside was always bad.  
I had a career, and many friends too,  
From the outside, no one had a clue.  
Of my inner pain, my struggle to find peace,  
I wondered if it would ever, ever cease.  
Can't someone save me? Anyone? Please?  
I even tried meditation and walking amongst the trees.  
Finally I got married because the sex was great,  
He was a good guy, and it felt time to create,  
A family and home, I was at the right age,  
I thought my life, was turning a page.  
It was fine at first, as long as we were busy,  
But after a time, I got into a tizzy.  
Even with friends and the kids and the house,  
I still had the pain, and felt like a louse.  
Blaming my hubby for all of my sadness,  
"He's in the wrong," now I see my madness.  
Maybe, I thought, it was me all along,  
I pointed the finger at all he had done wrong.  
The years went by, resentment grew,  
I thought that my blaming was 100% true.  
So when I found another to share my heart,  
I thought, maybe it's time for us to part.  
He should have been more attentive to me,  
It's all his fault, I'm sure you can see.  
I thought I was in love, even with all the strife,  
Even though he already had a wife.  
I loved the attention, it filled the empty hole,  
For a while, it met my goal.  
And then it ended, with our lives we moved on,  
But soon after that, I met a guy named Don.  
He had a girl, but things weren't great,  
So we made out in his car, I'm sure you can relate.  
Now we're just friends, and that's fine with me,  
I know it's the only way it can be.  
But as you might guess, another came along,  
We met at a party, while singing a song.  
Another married guy, lonely and sad,  
Our chemistry was on fire. We both felt so glad.  
A one night stand was all I had planned,  
So easy to manage, as he lives far across the land.  
But fate threw me a curveball with this guy,  
He fell in love with me, and his wife said, "Bye, bye."  
So tempting was this! Our connection was deep,  
We talked about things, we would laugh, we would weep.  
Never before had I felt this way,  
Will he be the one, to pull me away?  
I pondered this love, and decided, YES!  
And then what happened? I bet you can guess.  
I couldn't leave, went back to my spouse,  
I was still torn, and felt like a louse.  
Back and forth, for months on end,  
I could not decide, maybe he's just a friend?  
But every time he visited town,

The passion was too much for me to resist,  
It just felt different whenever we kissed.  
But if he's the one, then why was I still,  
Staying in my marriage, was this just a cheap thrill?  
What's keeping me here? What's the deal?  
I finally realized the only way to heal,  
Was to look inside my own mind and heart,  
I pulled away, it was time to start.  
The hard work of healing myself, just me,  
Taking control, I started to see,  
I was looking to others to heal my pain,  
But it wasn't working, there was no gain.  
From the crazy dilemma, I walked away,  
And now I am quiet, with not much to say  
To others anymore, now I talk to me,  
I'm the only one who knows how I should be.  
Only I can make me happy, that's one thing I know,  
I need to become the star of my own show.  
I need to take stock, see myself for who I am,  
Find joy in myself, maybe then I'll be happy as a clam.  
Or, maybe I won't, and that's okay too,  
All that matters is I learn to be true,  
And honor myself, no matter what,  
That's the secret, it's time to strut.  
One more thing I want to say,  
Thanks for listening, for being here on this day.  
For hearing my story with an open heart,  
Because of you, I'm getting a new start.

— ANONYMOUS



# Share space

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## A Gifted Woman Who Attracted Narcissistic Charming Princes

**I**n October 2012, I was in the garden in the Christian Monastery on the French Riviera coast. I arrived there by God's will after a long period of homelessness for months, sofa surfing and sleeping in my car.

I rented my first all-furnished studio in a very isolated camping site without a car. My life was a total disaster. I lost everyone I was attached to emotionally: my parents (my father died just 3 months earlier.).

In 2010, my mother passed away in my arms and in 2011, my boyfriend left me in the street without a word of explanation after 10 years of us being together. Since 2010, I couldn't breathe because a surgeon made big mistakes after 3 surgeries on my nose. I only tried to survive one day at a time with God's help in a male prior's monastery.

Since I was born, my mother taught me to be very vigilant with men. She was abused by her first husband and after this experience, she taught me to be strong and not to be dependent on a man.

My father taught me males are obsessed with sex and they only want sex from women. I have a lot of anger towards him because he considered women less intelligent than men. (That was the soil of the future feminist and my rage against men.) I had no sexual relationships before the age of 25. I had decided to have sex only with a man

who would be my future husband.

I had two boyfriends who left me at the age of 24 just after a few months. I searched out how painful it is to be betrayed, rejected and abandoned — three of my main emotional wounds. I was lost without any direction except trying to find a solution to go through the intense pain and rage against the unfair situation I was in.

In October, E. contacted me after a post I had put on a video on YouTube. I was super excited, I was single, I had been without sex or affection for more than 5 years, because T. didn't want to touch me or have sex even though I was his girlfriend for 10 years. Now I know he was very anorexic, emotionally, sexually and physically.

I decided to give E. my phone number even though I knew it was not good to be enmeshed with him. Secretly, I had admired him since 2008 and I tried to save him from his problems.

He was so selfish that all he did was talk about himself all the time. But I had been without affection for so long.

I participated in OA and CODA phone meetings and my OA sponsor discouraged me from love relationships, but I decided to stop the sponsorship instead of leaving him.

It was the first red flag. My intuition told me I was contacted by him not because he left his wife for me but because she decided to divorce him because he was unable to stay alone without a

woman in his bed.

I had no idea I would play the “nurse, savior, replacement” woman to help cure his withdrawal from his wife. In fact, I fell in the jail of codependency and sex and love addiction with him.

I had sex every day with him (at the beginning). But I had no idea about all the drama of his story. I was vulnerable, living on a campsite, without a house, and I tried to help him to find solutions for his divorce (I had no idea about divorce laws), children, business. I was his spiritual guide, sponsor, lover, mother.

He took all my energy for himself. His first energy was sexual and as an anorexic I felt loved because of the physical contact. If I'm honest, I became more of a food anorexic, had no sleep because of sex and talked all night about his problems. At the beginning I didn't share about my own issues. But little by little I let him know everything, including my 12-Step program. He had all the secrets of my personal life in his hands.

Little by little he abandoned me for his children. He had to take care of them on holidays and weekends. I felt jealous. I tried to stop the relationship. It was impossible. After a few months I returned to him, I was so enmeshed and addicted. I asked him to choose between me and his children because they had insulted me in my own home.

I know myself better now: I discovered I'm a talented gifted woman.

He was the prince charming, but I knew at the beginning it was love addiction. I began to listen to S.L.A.A. phone meetings. I introduced him to CODA and we created two phone meetings. He followed my decision and my will. I was the leader, the coach, the spiritual guide, the mum. I knew this “destroying passion” was a love addiction with no way out. It got worse and worse, with ups and downs in my mood, emotions, stress, drama and dysfunctional behaviors. It cost me a lot.

I decided three times to separate but each time I hit bottom emotionally, crying for hours and days, unable to cut contact, trying to believe we could be friends.

He became jealous and violent. He contacted all my friends to say how sick I was.

I had no contact for a while. I deleted all pictures of him and I tried to forget my memories. I wrote pages about how I felt. I was suicidal because I became homeless.

I discovered why I was attracted to such a guy — I was an active codependent too, and an anorexic sex and love addict. But most

importantly, I am a talented, gifted woman. So, I'm as vulnerable as a child when it comes to relationships. I was totally powerless toward him.

I got back together with him. But, I didn't know how to be a mother for kids who told me I wasn't their mother. I didn't know where my place was.

My troubles became more and more intense. I tried to follow phone meetings about sex and love addiction and codependency with no sponsor. I tried to work the CODA program with him.

In April of 2014, I hit bottom. For the first time in my life, I called the police. He had cut the electricity and water. He didn't want to leave and was noisy. I was so afraid. He became violent. The police didn't come. I didn't sleep. In the morning I called my neighbor to save me.

I didn't return to this place. I felt devastated and exhausted. I didn't like what happened to me. I lost my serenity.

I started the first questions of S.L.A.A.H.O.W. in October 2014, but no physical contact with him started in September 2014. I was so willing to call my sponsor early each morning, but she left me after one week. It was very difficult.

I found another sponsor. This second sponsor taught me so much about self-care. I did my Step 4 in Monaco in a palace.

I found another sponsor in S.L.A.A.H.O.W. anorexia because I finished the S.L.A.A.H.O.W. Steps, and this woman worked on the same level with me.

In my recovery, I attract people who are not control freaks and I've realized it's better for me to have a co-sponsor.

At the same time, I had several sponsees and one left me. Another slipped but I didn't abandon her, she found another sponsor.

I finished all the suggested books before writing my dating plan. I wrote the maintenance questions and responded to 50 questions about healthy relationships.

I'm dating. My life is much better. I feel I have much more to discover about life. I focus on my top-lines list to be happy: dancing, massage, walking, and socializing. After 4 years of recovery, I feel better than before. I went to S.L.A.A. face to face meetings in my town and in a town that it took me 2 hours to get there and back.

I know the past is the past and I'm willing to go to a better tomorrow. I recently realized that the guy who worked for me was a narcissistic man. I believed the women who I shared with in S.L.A.A. and I cut contact with him without saying a word. Now when I feel a relationship is insane, I cut contact. In my opinion, codependency is the worst addiction in our society. I still think about my

qualifier but it's less and less.

I create my life following God's will. I'm a very special woman and I don't know if I will meet a special man who will become my husband. For now, I am trying to buy some land and build my dream home.

I would like an available man to be calm with me, to share my happiness, and my daily routines.

I don't know where to go. I'm so ignorant about my own happiness. I really need to ask God. Changes are slow, especially inner changes. I don't want to be in contact with addicts and I'm aware they are everywhere and there are no perfect people, without addiction.

I know I can't have sex if I don't feel loved or love my partner. I have had a dating plan for 1 year and try to date online. I have a list of questions and I have specific criteria. I subscribed to a vegan dating website to find somebody who has the same diet.

I study so hard in S.L.A.A.H.O.W. and S.L.A.A.H.O.W. anorexia. I carry on with outreach calls and accept all service I can do in the online meetings. I participate more or less every day. I work on my journal daily and share my step 10 inventory and my food.

I know it's better when I share everything with my cosponsor including each "date" or relationship with guys who interest me. I'm able to stop immediately when I see a red flag: compulsive reading of messages, issues with sleeping, eating too much, compulsive writing, messages, compulsive Googling of people, obsessive thinking etc. I don't know: again, love, like death, is not in my hands but in God's hands. I'm powerless and I try to fill my emptiness with activities, sport, and dance.

I was able to write what I expect: I'm looking for an honest vegan man available to commit for long friendship first. Emotionally available to communicate clearly. A man who is a nonsmoker, has no addictions, no children, single, independent in his home and job (financially self-sufficient), no more than 10 years age difference, no long-distance relationship (if unwilling to relocate to France). A very good sense of humor, very sensitive, a spiritual practice.

I know what I expect in a couple:

1- A true partner, someone to share equally in the responsibilities of life (neither partner feels or is taken advantage of).

2- An intimate relationship (someone who can

see me, see my dark side and light side. Someone with whom I can take emotional risks and let them in behind the wall I put up and not abandon me (totally accepting of me -good and bad without expectations to change; if change comes it's from God...)

3- A monogamous relationship -spiritually and sexually, where I show reverence and respect of our love and commitment (i.e. demonstrate that I am number one all the time of my life (before, job, family and friends) with honor and cherishment)

4- Someone with whom I am free to be truthful -not afraid to be honest with - both omission and admission.

5- A lover -open, honest, physically available to tenderness and physical gestures of caring.

6- Fair play- total commitment to harmony through fair, expedient compromise using the rules to keep our disagreement within boundaries and open commitment to a quick fair resolution to restore harmony in our relationships.

7- Safe, loving, nurturing home-emotionally stable, filled with love and self-sacrifice for the good of the union.

8- A balanced relationship that nurtures our couple-hood. Someone to grow old with until death.

9- Someone who will share in our combined vision of our future, our lives to come, with whom I can strive to reach a mutual goal of serene old age where we look back on happiness in the journey -not a finishing line.

10- My number one fan, supporter, best friend, confidant, lover, spouse, husband, companion and hero- where we revere each other through sacrifice and love to become one and that the one we become can give back and help others. Now I have plans for dates (love and sex), relationships, money and food. I'm not perfect. Sometimes I slip but no relapse for more than 3 years and 11 months in S.L.A.A.H.O.W. I respect my relationship bottom-lines in CODA and have not purged in OA for 6 years. Respect and trust are at the foundation of any healthy relationship. I'm unwilling to accept anything less than what I deserve! I am smart! I am beautiful! I'm a good woman and I deserve to be happy and I am. I know that after all I did these last couple of years, I won't leave my freedom for another love addiction.

— ANONYMOUS

