

# the Journal

Issue # 190

Single Issue \$4

Returning to  
Romantic Relations 

# 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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## 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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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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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*.

The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. 1550 NE Loop 410, Suite 118 San Antonio, TX 78209, 1-210-828-7900 Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT except for holidays (fax) 1-210-828-7922. [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

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Managing Editor	Lisa C.
Art Director	Fiona
Outreach Director	Lisa C.
Proofreaders for this issue	Chris D. Beth L.

## **Letter from the Editor**

Dear Reader,

I learned more about the value of a sober dating plan and open communication with a sponsor in this issue. I see through the stories that everyone's recovery path is different but the feelings are the same. Recovery in S.L.A.A. can be difficult but worth it! Returning to romantic relations isn't so much about sex as it is about self-love, self-respect and faith. The articles contain useful information to help S.L.A.A. members stay sober if they are returning to romantic relations after withdrawal.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

## Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day for this issue is, “Have you ever returned to romantic relations after a period of abstinence in the S.L.A.A. program?”

Please share any issues and concerns and how you dealt with them.” Here are some insights that were submitted in service from fellow S.L.A.A. members. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #191 — July/Aug \*ABM Issue\* — “Breakdown to Break Through — Do you feel Higher Power demolished your life to build it back up with a stronger foundation? Please share your experience, strength, and hope.” Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2021. And #192 — Sept./Oct. — People as Drugs — “Through sex, charm, emotional appeal, or persuasive intellect, we had used other people as ‘drugs,’ to avoid our own personal inadequacy.” S.L.A.A. Basic Text page 74. Please share your story of using people as drugs and your experience strength and hope in overcoming the desire to use people as drugs. Deadline for submissions is July 15, 2021.

Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

“Have you ever returned to romantic relations after a period of abstinence in the S.L.A.A. program? Please share any issues and concerns and how you dealt with them.”

My husband and I, also in program, have separated within our home and I have left for a period during our marriage and recovery journeys. When we reunited it was somewhat overwhelming due to the shame that I felt due to long-term acting out. Staying present with my husband and focusing on the moment helped tremendously. Forgiveness of each other and seeking our HP’s will in our relationship was healing and encouraging.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

Yes, I did return to an ex after I had no contact for 4 months and our relationship had ended. It started out wonderful like it always did, however I got the sense from the very beginning that I was not working a program and I wasn't being true to myself. There were little lies that I caught him in along with actions not matching words. But I continued, even after breaking some of my bottom lines. I felt that if he treated me better than the first time we dated, then I did not need to work my program.

Things continued to deteriorate over the year we were together. I continued to lose myself in the relationship and I also continued to get sick, and I got to the point where I could not leave him even if I tried. My whole life was consumed with that relationship. It was also consumed with trying to catch him in a lie or cheating on me. I felt like once I had concrete proof that I could leave the relationship. It did not need to be based on how unhappy I was, but was rather based on him and his actions.

Finally, after 10 months, we ended the relationship. At that point, I entered withdrawal which was so unbelievably painful; more so than the first time. It took everything in me to come back to the meetings and to admit that I had relapsed. I was embraced by so many women. They held me up and kept telling me to come back which I did. I started working with a new sponsor and working through the steps again. It has now been exactly a year since our relationship ended and even though I still have nightmares and dreams of him, I can honestly say that I am grateful that it happened, and I am grateful to have my life back. I highly recommend that people not return to a relationship that has ended.

— MONICA, BERWYN, PA

## Question of the day

When I got caught, lost my job, got caught again, and (finally) surrendered into honesty and told my wife everything, her immediate response was, “I don’t know if I want to be your wife again.” I set up a bed downstairs at her instruction. For three months (and after) we would spend our evenings talking and reading recovery literature to one another. We would pray and then head to our separate sleeping arrangements. I took a minimum-wage job — anything to support my family. I started doing the dishes without being asked. This translated to a deeper sense of togetherness and sharing than we’d ever known before. After 3 months, my wife shared that she didn’t enjoy sleeping alone and invited me back into our (or her!) bedroom. Cuddling felt exhilarating like teenagers embracing for the first time. Sexual intimacy happened in an unforced, natural way — precisely because of the emotional, relational, and spiritual intimacy that had been built over those 3 months. And that’s how sexuality works for me — in the context of a committed partnership where emotional, spiritual, and relational intimacy is maintained.

— ANONYMOUS

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After more than two years out of any dating or romantic relationship, and more than a year of working on a sober dating plan and reflecting on questions and exercises from “Sober Dating: Questions for Discussion,” I finally ‘got back out there’ by creating an online dating profile. I still have plenty of fears of relapse, slipping and otherwise losing my sobriety, but after spending so much time in my comfortable cocoon of serene solitude, my fear of becoming stuck in patterns of social, emotional, and sexual anorexia began to outweigh my fear of my patterns of love addiction. Today I have boundaried use of the online dating app and continue to nurture my most important relationships — relationship with self and with HP. My fears haven’t disappeared. I just pray every day for clarity and the courage to take healthy risks in spite of my fears.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

After joining S.L.A.A., I abstained from sex and romantic relationships for two years. I waited until I had done most of my Step Eight and had created a sober dating plan. I didn't end up following the plan exactly, but it was helpful to have some guidelines in place. I picked someone who is an alcoholic, which went against the plan, because their addiction triggered my codependence. I wanted to manage their addiction and "fix" them. Of course, I couldn't solve someone else's addiction, so whenever this person drank, it created tension in our relationship. If I had picked someone who wasn't an addict, our relationship wouldn't have had that problem, but I really liked this person, and we were able to make it work for a while. While in the relationship, I had similar patterns of obsession that had plagued my previous relationships. However, other aspects were much better: my boundaries were much stronger; my communication was better; my self-esteem and self-respect were stronger; I was able to be vulnerable; I had other things in my life that were important to me besides the relationship. When the time came, I was able to end the relationship in a mature, compassionate way; it was completely unlike any of my previous break-ups, where I had been immature, hateful, inappropriate, and I immediately latched onto the next person. After this breakup, I realized that I needed to be single for a while and fully grieve this relationship before moving on to the next. I'm still dealing with withdrawal from this relationship, still wanting to keep reaching out to this person, still stuck in fantasy. I'm practicing mindfulness and prayer to help with these issues. I also have my sponsor holding onto my ex's number for me, so that I don't have the number on my phone, so it's harder for me to contact them. I hope that eventually I can be friends with this person, but right now I can't talk to them without triggering obsession and intense longing.

—ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

I have returned to romantic relations after a period of abstinence in a way that felt compulsive, and also in another way that felt in alignment with my recovery and Higher Power. The difference for me was truly getting to the space of surrender to God's timeline and will.

The first time that I returned to romantic relations, I was counting down the days to the arbitrary number of days that I thought was enough to count as a "period of abstinence" but white-knuckling and thinking that time was running out for me to find someone and get married and have kids etc.

The second time, I really surrendered to the idea that a fulfilling single life is possible for me and that God is in the entire process. There was peace, rather than compulsion in the process. I connected with my current husband unexpectedly in that space, and it allowed for an experience that allowed me to hold onto my primary relationship, which is with my Higher Power. That relationship requires the same kind of time, focus and attention as the other relationships that I want to be healthy. Doing my part to keep the relationship with my Higher Power healthy allows me to have healthy relationships with others.

— ANN, DENVER

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# Grateful for My Life



I took a year off from sex and dating. I figured that if they recommend a year sobriety in A.A. before re-entering the dating scene, then a year of sobriety in S.L.A.A. was a good amount of time, too. I had wanted to complete my Steps Four and Five and a dating plan before getting back out there, but God had other plans.

I was 410 days without sex, a year and two weeks off of my bottom lines when I visited the

location of an old flame and was guided to reach out to him. He ended up coming over that night and we had sex and he slept over. I hadn't finished my Steps Four and/or Five (but was so close!!) but knew that this was the right path forward towards opening my heart again for a new relationship to come in.

It was really scary but also beautiful. I'd never gone this long without having sex and it felt good to have this

experience of being with someone that I trusted and still cared about. I consulted with my therapist and another trusted healer. I connected with a trusted fellow. I'll catch up with my co-sponsor later today and start talking about sex/dating communication protocol with them in the interim before I have my dating plan.

I'm concerned that I went off script, even though I know that my Higher Power delivered this experience to me for my evolution and healing. I'm concerned because I don't want to make my old flame a current obsession. I'm praying to release whatever obsession is still lingering, and to see him as a human being, with all his beauty and limitations.

I'm worried that I slept with someone unavailable (he lives on an island and the relationship is not going to progress.) I'm worried what it means to have this door still cracked open. I'm worried about over-processing this whole event in a way that is obsessive and unhealthy.

I don't know what's next. I'm visiting the place of another old flame in a couple of weeks (hello Mercury

retrograde.) This time, it's going to be my "qualifier" though I don't put him on a pedestal anymore and am genuinely looking forward to seeing him again. I believe it's another important part of the process of reopening my heart to romantic relationships — first by going back to some familiar territory before truly moving forward.

I am grateful for my 410 days, my year and two weeks. I am grateful for this day. I am grateful that this *Journal* question popped into my inbox the morning after this all happened so that I can participate in my recovery by sharing with you.

I trust that I have the ability to create and be in relationship with someone who is all the way available — emotionally, physically, geographically, and situationally. And I also trust in the beauty of my own process and that I am moving forward, even when I visit familiar territory.

I am grateful for my sobriety, my body. I am grateful for the abundance of love in my life. I am grateful for my life.

— JUSTINE, LOS ANGELES

## Recommended to S.L.A.A.

I met the person who would become my “Eskimo” (the person that brought me in out of the cold into S.L.A.A.), on a dating app when I was in full blown acting out mode. We didn’t exactly have a sober start; I came to his house the first time we met in person fully knowing I was going to have sex with him. There was chemistry from the minute we began to text each other but before that first date we didn’t talk on the phone. I vetted him online and felt comfortable meeting him.

We began to have a type of relationship that I can only describe as friends with benefits. Unbeknownst to me at the time, he started going to S.L.A.A. meetings a few months after I met him. We were both open about seeing other people as well and this continued for almost a year.

We became good friends and I had shared some of my story with him. He told me he was in a program where a woman had a story similar to mine and he recommended that I go because I was obviously suffering. Well, he didn’t just recommend it, he said he would stop having sex

with me if I didn’t go to at least one meeting and find a sponsor. So of course, I went! Around the same time, I had met a man whom I thought would be more of a real relationship rather than just friends with benefits. I also immediately identified with being a sex and love addict and although I didn’t want to be there, I knew I had to stay.

So, for these reasons, I never saw my lover again. Not outside the rooms anyway. We keep in contact through text messages, focusing on S.L.A.A. He was basically a temporary sponsor as I didn’t know anyone in the program yet. Soon though, we broke all contact, I found a sponsor and I threw myself into Step work and the process of going through an eight-month withdrawal from a lifetime of acting out. During my recovery process, I ended the relationship that I was in and remained single for a period of about six months. Quite surprisingly, after a year of no contact, my original lover began to text me. I didn’t think anything of it as we had always been good friends. Then the texts turned flirty. I was

shocked that he would want anything to do with me, but I was also happy. I had missed him greatly. We agreed to meet up at a coffee shop. He told me about the casual dating plan he followed under the guidance of his sponsor. I kept my sponsor informed every step of the way. We got STD and Covid tests and agreed to be exclusive.

Having program tools and recovery (we were both on Step 10 when we reconnected) helped greatly with communication and navigating the relationship. It was my first “sober” relationship, the first one that I didn’t cheat in and was monogamous in. I learned so much from that relationship. In the beginning it was so much harder than being single. I realized that sometimes I would get triggered from things that he did or said, and my reaction was way out of proportion, meaning the feelings were historical, caused by wounds inflicted way before I met my partner.

I really had to use ALL the program tools to get me through the hard times. I spent time with my S.L.A.A. sisters. I made outreach calls, I worked

the Steps, attended meetings, and talked to my sponsor on a regular basis. And I prayed to God about EVERYTHING. I took my higher power with me every step of the way. I learned how to ask for what I needed and got it. Eventually, though, after about seven months, I realized that we were not on the same page as to what we wanted from the relationship. I did the best that I could, but it became painfully obvious that I could no longer continue in the relationship the way things were. We talked and decided to take a break. We still cared about each other greatly, he saved my life when he brought me into S.L.A.A., but a relationship needs more than just love to work.

I don’t regret a single minute of it and I’m super grateful to have had the opportunity for a second go around with someone that I was attracted to and cared about deeply. I have been able to give him to God and I feel that with the lessons I have learned this time around, I am even better prepared for the next sober relationship that comes my way.

— ANONYMOUS

## Learning to Love and Respect Myself



**I**t took me 11 months of fully committing to this program — daily meetings, fellowship, service, and Step work — to finally go no-contact with the sexually and emotionally avoidant qualifier who was the catalyst for me joining S.L.A.A. Once I got through the withdrawal of letting that person go, I had a solid three months of sobriety and serenity under my belt before I met my current boyfriend, who is also recovering in this program.

Our courtship started off as strictly platonic, just two

recovering sex and love addicts who happened to have common interests and were hoping to practice healthy boundaries. After a few weeks of getting to know each other as friends, I realized I was developing an interest in this person that was unlike anything I had experienced before. I was not sexualizing or romanticizing this person. I was simply seeing him for who he was, and I was curious to learn more about him. Of course, this concerned me. I was knee deep in Step Four and not cleared to date. Also, I

was unsure if the new-found interest in this person was the result of healthy communication and shared interests or if my disease was trying to sabotage a sober friendship with this man, which it had often done in the past.

I spoke to my sponsor about it and shockingly, she was very supportive and encouraging. She reminded me that recovery is only fully realized when we put it to the test and have faith in ourselves (through the help of HP) to experience things differently than when we were living in our disease. We decided that it would be best to express my concerns with this person, so I disclosed my feelings to him.

To my surprise, he not only echoed my sentiments, but the feelings were reciprocated. I went into the conversation expecting to re-set boundaries and/or even discuss going no-contact to cool off but it ended up being an honest and thoughtful conversation about a sober dating plan.

After a few days of individual contemplation and conversations with our respective sponsors, we were cleared to sober date one another.

We established very solid ground rules for the first several months of our official courtship. We only saw each other a certain number of days a week for a certain number of hours. We did not set foot inside each other's homes for the first month. We agreed on specific calendar dates for our first kiss, first sleepover, and the first act of physical intimacy. We both committed to maintaining our sobriety and recovery in this program, and nearly a year later, we continue to do so to this day.

I did not expect to get the "cash and prizes" so soon. The reality of my disease is that I chased emotionally avoidant men. For me, working this program meant learning to love and respect myself, to see my worth.

After I achieved that, naturally the next step in my recovery was to share my authentic self with an emotionally available man.

The gift of this program is that I finally love myself enough to be loved and to give love to another. Every day I live in gratitude that HP has given me the opportunity to experience this shared intimacy.

— MIRIAM, LOS ANGELES

# Grateful for Serenity

I first came into S.L.A.A. in 2017 after a brutal break up. I was learning how to implement top lines and leaning heavily on friends to get me through withdrawal. I managed to get “over” my ex and was living a healthier life, attending meetings, doing my outreach and service and so on, and eventually I reached Step 4. It was summer and I was feeling more confident and carefree. It was at this point that I caught eyes with a male friend and felt a rush.

I tried to kid myself that I was being sober and responsible, but although I continued to attend meetings, do my Step work, outreach calls, etc., I started to begin a relationship with him.

In hindsight, I’d fallen straight back into love addiction — but at the time I was fooling myself thinking, “I am way more considered and sensible than I’ve ever been now I have been in the program.” Well that was so much horse crap.

It wasn’t long before I had quit my weekend morning meetings to sleep in later and I

was slipping on my Step work and then all of a sudden I was out. I had stopped doing the S.L.A.A. program and was consumed by the shiny new qualifier in my life.

Long story short, I spent a year and a half with this person, giving him magic qualities and twisting in the wind trying to make the relationship work. When it ended (he ended it, I was unable to leave even though I wasn’t happy), I realised I needed to get straight back into the meeting rooms.

I’ve been back in S.L.A.A. for a year, I’m on my Step Ten and I am so grateful that I have found some serenity and contentment through working the program and learning to love myself. I’m not ready to date again but I’m happy to be safe in my recovery enjoying the process. When I do decide to try again, you better believe I’ll have a dating plan, the blessing of my Sponsor and it will be a thoughtful and considered decision. Doing it any other way just wastes too much time.

— MIRA, UK

# Reflecting on the Past Year

I remember my first S.L.A.A. meeting very well. It was in West LA during the winter of January 2020, where a wonderful woman shared her experience, recovery, strength, and hope. It was a clear God-shot and eye-opening gift for me to receive. Her words stuck to me; I was intrigued.

I didn't know what an experience like that would feel like— to be in a relationship with my Higher Power, to validate myself, to validate my own needs, and to say the loving phrases to myself that I would want a future partner to say to me. From that day on, I knew I had to keep coming back to learn, listen and understand from other recovering fellows. I'm active in other programs, but since then, I knew I had found my home room and it was comforting to not feel alone — that there were others also sharing similar emotions, suffering and growth.

Three months into attending meetings daily and having found a potential

sponsor, that all fell aside too easily when I met a fellow during quarantine! The intrigue, fantasy, psychic connections, relatable character traits, relatable character defects, similar life situations and romance drew us together so quickly and the relationship escalated rapidly.

The awareness of red flags was there, though I didn't listen; plus, the stresses of Covid-19 intensified my belief that being in this relationship during these uncertain times was way better than being alone. My addict wanted this: that I could happily attend meetings, have a sponsor, heal my addiction AND still be in the relationship by living together, having sex, sharing intimacy, fantasizing, and romanticizing without having even finished the 12 Steps. My addict wanted to control it all. Well, I sure did get all of that for five intense months, and more - the overpour of painful consequences I was unprepared and unwilling to see, simply because I have been a codependent, sex and

love addict for 18 years. It's been nine months since I chose to end that relationship, and while I'm so grateful to have come back to program, and to have found a second sponsor during the breakup, I'm still coping, grieving and healing to this day.

The issues and concerns that came up during this process of love and hate, trust and distrust, and faith and doubt, highlights three experiences: 1) breaking my own boundaries, and learning what that disrespect of self felt like, because I had never cared or knew about boundaries before program; 2) going through withdrawal two times is debilitating and relentless; and 3) leaving program only to find myself relapsing and hitting another rock bottom a second time within the span of two years was pure insanity. It took me one year in S.L.A.A. to keep acting out and surrender my addiction.

Now it's 2021, and as I reflect on last year, I've seen what happens to me when I'm not wanting to deal with my own issues. There is so much atrophy I create internally and around me when I'm in addict mode. When my addict is at its

peak, it's so hard to tell in my mind what's real and what isn't because my intuition and connection to Higher Power are so depleted. The addict lives and feeds on the desire to add more issues of drama by entangling myself and my ego with others.

The result? Losing motivation and interest for my own passions, fogged memory, emotional eating, depression and the lack of creativity. Work and self-care practices disappear. I have seen this time and time again, and finally after 18 years, I'm wanting change and am willing to surrender.

How I dealt with these repercussions were discovered through trial and error — showing up and not showing up, slowly understanding that contrary action is a choice. I have to put in the effort. It's not handed to me. Nobody is going to remind me of how or when to practice contrary action. It's also building a muscle and replacing my system of old unhealthy habits with more nurturing ones. There are days where I barely make it through hour by hour simply because I don't want to sit with myself. Dealing with myself is not always pretty, but

I wouldn't change it for the world. I'm the only one alone with my Higher Power that knows how to love myself. On some days, I'll have a tantrum, a scream or cry by myself in the car.

I'll really feel the abandonment, grief and loss by dealing with it on my own, by myself, for myself.

On other days, I'll choose to be surrounded and supported by my kind, women, such as going to women's circles, meetings, support groups, outreach, and calling my girlfriends. I'm an artist, a creative person, so my environment makes an impact on my recovery, too. I'll have a self-care day out in nature or at home.

These practices involve baths, essential oils, candles, and smudging. I'll sing, play piano and write music, even if the practice only lasts for 10-15 minutes; at least I know I showed up for myself that day, even if that day was a grueling withdrawal.

I found that attending sound baths, yoga classes and practicing breathwork or

meditation really helped me feel where the pain, the longing, or energy that needed to move, was in my body. I stick with my program even if it means showing up to a meeting while laying down in bed. At times to avoid stalking or checking on my qualifier, I would turn my phone off all day. That turned out great!

I also found that creating a scene of what it physically meant to let go, helped me materialize the ending of the relationship — what it means to have closure for myself and to really let go. For example, I took a seed and buried it deep into the soil.

Before burying it, I vocalized thanking the seed for giving me a relationship that taught me so much about how I need to love Higher Power and myself more — that I was grateful it happened, not because it was over.

By watching the seed fall to the ground, I found relief and trust that through that act of letting go, the seed would cycle into something new, from love.

— FOUVER, LOS ANGELES

# Healthy Dating in Recovery



**D**ating as a recovering sex and love addict is exciting and scary. In a romantic relationship, I bring the very thing I can become addicted to back into my life.

I needed my Higher Power's help if I wanted to avoid the mistakes of my past. One mistake was whom I chose to date. Instead of dating women with whom I was fully compatible, I often let them choose me. If someone found me of interest, that immediately got my attention.

That is one of the reasons I ended up in a dysfunctional marriage.

When I met my now ex-wife, I thought she was a nice person. However, she was not someone I would have pursued on my own. But she liked me. Driven by my addiction, her interest in me was not something to be ignored. Before long, we were a couple, even though our incompatibility created conflict from the start. This conflicted and unhealthy relationship lasted

through two precarious years of dating and ten volatile years of marriage. I was a year sober in S.L.A.A. when the marriage ended.

My recovery carried me through the pain and challenges that came with divorce. This pain motivated me to live my life differently from that point forward. This included dating relationships. I wanted to do things differently the next time I dated. I promised myself that I would never again settle on someone just because she liked me.

This led to an important question: What did it mean to engage in healthy dating as a recovering addict? Our program and the relationship I'd developed with God showed me the way.

Since I am powerless over sex and love addiction and it makes my life unmanageable, choosing when to date was an important decision. My addictive pattern was to go from one romantic relationship to the next. It made sense to take some time before dating again.

Was that time without a romantic relationship easy? No, not always. But it was beneficial. I learned to be with me and enjoy my own company. Time with me also

meant quality time with my Higher Power. I found myself connecting more often with God, especially when I was by myself at home. This time away from romantic relationships also allowed me to spend more time creating and nurturing friendships.

Another important factor for when it was appropriate for me to date was my progress in recovery. I understood that I address the root causes of my addiction in Steps Six and Seven. Also, I felt it was prudent to begin cleaning up the wreckage caused by my character defects.

A year and a half after my marriage ended, I believed I was ready to date. I had made meaningful progress on my Ninth Step and had incorporated the maintenance Steps (Ten, Eleven, and Twelve) into my daily life. I prayed for God's guidance and checked in with my sponsor to stay accountable. What became clear is that some groundwork was needed if I wanted to have a different experience this time around. Preparation was important given my history of allowing women to pick me instead of my choosing someone who fit me and my needs. Step Four showed me the importance of a

personal inventory, and I used this approach as my guide. I created a dating inventory by dividing a piece of paper into four sections. In each section, I wrote down my criteria for potential dating partners. In the upper left were my Dealmakers, a list of my must-haves. The upper right contained my Dealbreakers, the list of my must-not-haves. Pluses were listed on the lower left. These were the additional positive qualities that would be nice to have. The last section on the lower right contained a list of Minuses. These were the negative traits that I preferred not be present in someone I date.

I started filling it out by listing my Dealmakers. I thought through the qualities that showed up consistently among the people in my life with whom I was compatible. The top three attributes on my list were a good sense of humor, a healthy lifestyle, and strong spirituality.

Next, I thought about the recurring attributes in my challenging personal and professional relationships. Those attributes become my list of Dealbreakers. The top three in that section were someone with a complicated life, active addictions, and a

victim mentality. After completing those two sections, I took a moment and reviewed what I'd come up with so far. I'd noted a dozen Dealmakers and about the same number of Dealbreakers. I was starting to get a clear picture of who was and who was not a fit. Next, I thought through my Pluses and Minuses. I imagined travel and cooking meals with a significant other and included those on my list of Pluses. Someone who lived out of town or traveled a lot for work were included on my list of Minuses.

When I'd finished my list, I knew who I was looking for. This gave me quite a bit of relief and a boost in confidence. As I began to date, it was easier to make decisions that were healthy for me. I compared each potential dating partner to the profile. As Dealmakers show up, I continued dating. If a Dealbreaker appeared, I kindly ended our interactions.

One of my dates showed me the real power of this Fourth-Step kind of approach. I met Michelle (name changed to fully protect her anonymity) on a dating site. After getting to know each other through emails and a few calls, it was clear she fit at least a few of my

Dealmakers. I asked her out on a date. Over coffee, we had an immediate connection and a lot in common. I liked Michelle. Immediately.

Unfortunately, I spotted a Dealbreaker during that first date. Michelle had a complex life. Mine wasn't complicated; my recovery was helping me lead a simpler and more peaceful life. So, there really wasn't room for someone with a complex life.

Did that stop me from moving forward with Michelle? No! I was attracted to Michelle and she clearly liked me. Even though a complicated life was a Dealbreaker, I negotiated it away for six months. I kept telling myself that my attraction to Michelle outweighed that one measly Dealbreaker. It did not. Her complicated life started making mine complicated too, which brought the relationship to an end.

That relationship was a gift. It demonstrated the importance of the inventory I had created. That inventory, when I used it, helped me keep in mind that a feeling is not a fact. Because I'm a sex and love addict, my feelings, including attraction, could become false evidence that someone is a

romantic fit for me when, in reality, they are not.

After Michelle, I took a break from dating. When I started up again, I doubled-down on using my dating inventory, committing to stick with what was on the page. That meant someone had to have *all* of the Dealmakers and *none* of the Dealbreakers. I had some nice first and second dates, but my interactions stopped after a Dealbreaker appeared or when it became clear that a Dealmaker was missing. Then I met Holly.

My first date with Holly was supposed to last an hour. Instead, we talked for three, after which I noted that she matched a number of my Dealmakers. A second date led to a third and then a fourth. Dating became a committed relationship, a relationship that worked because she matched all of my Dealmakers and had none of those pesky Dealbreakers.

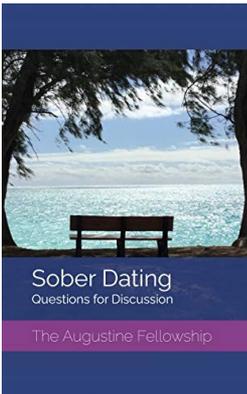
Holly also matched some of the Pluses and had only a few of the Minuses. Our three-year courtship became my now eight-year marriage — a beautiful relationship that is beyond anything I could have imagined. This healthy second

marriage isn't the best part of the story. It's the fact that I stayed true to myself and my Higher Power. I didn't settle for someone just because she liked me. Instead, I took time to build a relationship with myself and my Higher Power. Those relationships helped me understand that God wants me

to be with someone who is a good fit. I discovered that I could rely on myself, with the guidance and power of God, when I "practice these principles in all areas of our lives."

— SCOTT W., KUALA LUMPUR,  
MALAYSIA

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# Share space

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## No Estoy Curada, Sino Recuperada

*Editor's note: For the English translation of this article, see page 28*

**S**oy adicta al sexo, al amor, a la fantasía romántica, anorexica sexual y social. Llegué a A.S.A.A./S.L.A.A. en Noviembre 2010. Llegué quebrada, espiritualmente muerta, completamente desconectada de la realidad, sin la capacidad de terminar una relación por más destructiva que fuera. Llegué triste y desesperada.

Llegué con la duda de porque atraía, y me sentía atraída por el mismo tipo de hombre, el irrespetuoso, emocionalmente indisponible, irresponsable, machista, deshonesto, celoso, posesivo, y

sobre todo “infiel”? En el momento que un hombre me decía que no estaba listo para una relación, mi adicción se activaba y me decía “Tienes que ser generosa con tu tiempo, dinero, y cuerpo, tu amor lo cambiará, se volverá loco por ti”. Nunca trabajó, siempre me abandonaban, y me quedaba devastada, en una profunda depresión, hasta encontrar otro igual, excepto de cara y nombre.

En realidad, el hombre culto, amable, educado, respetuoso, sincero, **me aburría**. Al mes de haber llegado al programa le pedí a

una compañera que me amadrinara, ella hablaba con mucha paz, y serenidad. Trabajamos los pasos y trajeron a mi vida mucha claridad, poco a poco muchas dudas fueron aclaradas, era como si cada paso me daba un par de anteojos nuevos. Ví con claridad que soy impotente ante todo, ante los actos, sentimientos, y decisiones de otra persona. Me reconcilé con el Dios de mi niñez y descubrí que Él ya me había perdonado por todos los errores del pasado, la que no se había perdonado era *yo*.

Estoy eternamente agradecida porque los pasos me devolvieron esa Fe que un día perdí por mi rebeldía y desafío. La pg. 55 del libro de A.A. dice “en lo más profundo de cada hombre, mujer y niño, está la idea fundamental de Dios. Puede ser oscurecida por la calamidad, y la adoración de otras cosas”. Yo adoré al de turno y puse a todo lo que me diera esa dosis de adicción, en el lugar que solo le pertenecía a mi Poder Superior.

Gracias a la magia de los Pasos mi mentalidad de “víctima” desapareció.

Me dí cuenta que el auto-engaño me hizo creer que el mundo me debía.

Los pasos me demostraron que yo era egoísta, arrogante, grosera, controladora, manipuladora, exigente, deshonesto.

Con la guía de mi madrina, pusé manos a la obra, le pedí humildemente a Dios que me quitara todos esos defectos de carácter, hice reparaciones a los que había lastimado, empecé un mini inventario diario, rezo, y mantengo conexión con mi Poder Superior, amadrino mujeres que llegan al programa con el regalo de la *Desesperación* como yo, y es un privilegio verlas descubrir la verdad.

Hoy tengo un plan de citas, tengo estructura en mi vida, me quiero, sé que me debo “una relación sana, y bonita”. Amanezco y anochezco pidiendo que se haga La Voluntad de Mi Poder Superior, porque entiendo que no estoy curada, sino recuperada. Estoy soltera, en paz, tranquila, Feliz, y sé que Dios me tiene en la palma de su mano.

— VIVIAN, CA

# Not Cured, But Recovered

I am a sex, love, fantasy addict, sexual and social anorexic. I arrived in S.L.A.A. November 2010. I was spiritually dead, completely disconnected from reality, without the ability to end a relationship, no matter how destructive it was. I arrived sad and desperate.

I arrived with the doubt of why I attracted, and I felt attracted to the same type of man, the disrespectful, emotionally unavailable, irresponsible, dishonest, jealous, possessive, and above all “unfaithful”?

The moment a man told me that he was not ready for a relationship, my addiction was activated and it told me, “You have to be generous with your time, money, and body. Your love will change him; he will go crazy for you.” It never worked. They always abandoned me, and I was devastated, left in a deep depression, until I found another just like him.

Actually, the cultured, kind, polite, respectful, sincere man **bored me.**

A month after arriving, I asked a member to sponsor

me; she spoke with peace and serenity. We worked the steps and they brought a lot of clarity to my life. Little by little many doubts were clarified. It was as if each step gave me a new pair of glasses. I saw clearly that I am powerless over everything, over the actions, feelings, and decisions of another person. I reconciled with the God of my childhood and discovered that He had already forgiven me for all the mistakes of the past. The one who had not forgiven herself was *me.*

I am eternally grateful to S.L.A.A., because the Steps gave me back that Faith that one day I lost because of my rebellion and defiance. Pg. 55 of the A.A. Big Book says “deep down inside every man, woman and child is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, and the worship of other things.” I worshipped my qualifiers and put everything that gave me a hit in the place that only belonged to my Higher Power.

Thanks to the magic of the Steps my victim mentality

disappeared. I realized that self-deception made me believe that the world owed me.

The Steps showed me I was selfish, arrogant, rude, controlling, manipulative, demanding, and dishonest.

With the guidance of my sponsor, I got down to work, humbly asked God to remove all those character flaws, made repairs to those I hurt, started a daily inventory, prayed, and connected with my Higher Power, and sponsored women who came with the gift of

desperation like me. It's a privilege to see them discover the truth.

Today I have a dating plan. I have structure in my life. I love myself. I know that I owe myself "a healthy and beautiful relationship." I wake up and go to bed asking that The Will of My Higher Power be done because I understand that I am not cured, but recovered.

I am single, at peace, calm, happy, and I know that God has me in the palm of his hand.

— VIVIAN, CA

## An Invitation For You

Enlarge your recovery by allowing others to get the same benefit that you get from reading *the Journal*. It is a great way to carry S.L.A.A.'s message of hope and practice the Twelfth Step. The fellowship needs volunteers of all skills and levels of availability. Here's what you can do: 1. Become a Journal Representative for your intergroup or home group, encouraging the use of *the Journal* as a source of topics, letting people know that there are Journals for sale, and ensuring that plenty of Journal subscription cards are always on the literature table. 2. Visit a local organization that deals with sex and love addicts in your area, bringing copies of *the Journal* along with a few pamphlets. The institution may be a treatment facility, a judicial entity, a large recovery club that welcomes varied literature, or a hospital.

**Contact info: <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/journaleditor>**

# Birth of My Addiction

I have a private hidden underground world where all of my pain fades away. In this world I'm confident, bold and free. I ask for exactly what I want, and I usually get it. In this world, all my fear, anxiety, separation, loneliness and worthlessness melts away. In this world, I'm desired, I feel powerful and I'm wanted. In this world I am loved — at least that's what I thought for decades.

Our society doesn't like to talk about the things in my hidden world. We all know this world exists, but we turn our heads and hope this world will somehow disappear. This world used to only exist in the dark, in back alleys, in sleazy videos stores, or on the back pages of classified sections. This world now exists in the palm of our hands, it's accessible 24/7 and it's virtually free.

Some judge this world and assume it's filled only with bottom feeders, cheaters and lowlifes. Others have done a good job normalizing this world, celebrating its pervasive presence in our cultural zeitgeist and claiming victory

after a long-fought battle for freedom of expression. But at a very young age I started to inhabit this world because I was taught by my Christian community that I'm not worthy of love in "your normal world." I never wanted to live in this world, but I wasn't given any other viable options. I moved into this world in order to survive.

This world that I thought was helping me to survive ended up almost costing me my life.

I was introduced to my private world at a friend's house after school in grade four. Five of us crammed into an unfinished basement cold room as Tom opened his older brother's hockey bag. He dug under all the equipment and pulled out a stack of magazines. He passed each of us one of the well-worn magazines and we drank in the images.

Something magical happened that afternoon. I felt an intoxicating wave of danger mixed with goodness pass through my body. I knew what I was doing was wrong and yet I was completely entranced

with what I was seeing. Time stopped, all my pain and anxiety slipped away, I felt connected with my friends and a pulse of sexual energy surged through my body. For the first time in my life, I felt powerful.

Those magazines would later evolve into a secret collection of online images with the generous help of AOL. In this world I was no longer 'me', I was an alter-ego who was strong, bold, in control and free. In this world I didn't have to hide 'what' I was, I was free to desire what I wanted, and I could exchange with others just like me.

This world became my medicine. It was my anti-depressants, my anti-anxiety meds, my sleeping pills, my everything. Whenever I felt alone, overwhelmed or when I was scared; this world was the replacement for the protection I needed from my family, my church and my community. This world gave me the love, warmth and assurance that I could get through another moment.

At 13 this world became fully immersive and experiential. I was reading a newspaper article that was talking about a place where gay men went called a bathhouse. I

didn't have any idea of what a bathhouse was, but the article made it seem interesting to me.

These were pre-Google days, so I got out the Yellow Pages searched for 'bathhouse' and to my surprise there were several listings. I chose and dialed one of the numbers.

"Hello, Club \_\_\_\_\_.

"Um hi, is this a bar?"

"Yes, we have one."

"Are you a gym?"

"Yes, we have one."

"Are you a night club?"

"I guess so, we're busier at night. Listen, you sound curious, it's probably easier if you just come and check it out yourself. And you do know that it's an all-male establishment."

"Yes, thanks."

That's all I really needed. I took that as my personal invitation to check it out. The next weekend I made up an excuse that I needed to go downtown to the reference library for a school project and asked my parents if they would drop me off at the train station on Sunday afternoon after church. They agreed and I was off. Arriving at Club \_\_\_\_\_ I had no idea what I was doing. I opened the door and saw a small counter and behind the security slats was a man. I was

clueless and completely out of my depth and all I could think to say was, "One please."

He looked me up and down and replied with, "Locker or Room?"

I had no idea what he was talking about.

"Locker?"

I gave him some money and I heard a buzzing sound from another door.

Everything inside was so dark and as my eyes adjusted from the outside sunlight, I froze again as I looked around. I was dumbfounded and had no idea where to start or what to do in this place. At that moment I knew I had made a big mistake. I knew that I shouldn't have been there. I knew that it was time for me to go.

As I started to look for a way out, I was approached by an older man, wearing a towel who said, "You look lost, can I help give you a tour?"

I don't remember saying anything back to the man and yet my body started to move. I followed this man who was easily five times my age as he showed me the gym area, the sauna, the whirlpool, the outdoor pool and the lounge before he asked to see the key in my hand. I followed him up a level where he pointed out my locker and told me that he

would wait while I changed into my towel. I was trembling but I followed his instructions. As I locked up all my belongings all I could think of was the amount of trouble I would be in if my house keys were stolen while I was there.

I was still lost in this strange world and had no idea what to do next, but I was intrigued by a number of the men that I'd seen on the tour.

"One more stop, let me show you what one of the rooms looks like," said my tour guide.

Again, I mindlessly followed him up to the fourth level of the building. This time he gave me his key and asked me to unlock the door and go inside.

My tour guide invited me to get onto the cot.

I obeyed.

My tour guide started to touch me and position my body.

I was frozen inside my head as I watched what was about to happen from outside of my body. I was terrified but there was nothing that I could do.

Suddenly something inside of me came back online, I was back in my body and I realized what HE thought was about to happen. Adrenalin kicked in, I shoved my way out of the room, bolted down one flight of stairs to my locker, changed

as fast as I could, ran down two more flights and found the exit. Out on the street my heart was pounding and the thoughts in my head were spinning.

Then it hit me. I told my parents to pick me up from the train WAY later in the afternoon. I was terrified, ashamed and I had 3 hours to kill all by myself. To this day I still don't remember what I did with those 3 hours.

The next week went by with my usual self-flagellation (of the religious discipline type) and generally hating myself for orchestrating such a massive sin but nearing the week's end I told my parents I needed to go back downtown to finish up research for my project.

The next Sunday I made my way back downtown to Club \_\_\_\_\_, walked inside, was greeted with a, "Welcome back."

This time around I didn't need a tour guide. I knew what to expect and where to go. I found my locker and entered into this underground world like I owned it.

This underground world became my sanctuary. That Sunday morning, I started off at church as a closeted sinner.

Within the walls of my church, I believed that I was unlovable, unworthy and that people like me were dirty, evil and headed for an eternity in Hell.

That Sunday afternoon at the bathhouse I became a saint. Within the bathhouse walls I was desired, special, and adored. Within these walls I found people who accepted me for me.

Within these walls the fear, anger and frustration of living with my family, my fear of abandonment, the overwhelming anxiety of my mortal annihilation from God and the sadness, loneliness and terror of being bullied at school all disappeared. Within these walls, for the first time, I felt seen, I felt safe, I felt loved.

This world would get much deeper and darker and for the past 30 years this world has been the balm to whatever ails me. This was the world where I learned the crucial developmental tasks about 'love', sex, relationships.

This world became my drug of choice and overtook so many aspects of my life, damaged many relationships and hurt many people. Diving into this world at such a young age damaged my soul, inflicted

trauma and abuse and led me down a path to a distorted and harmful view of what I thought love was.

To this day, when I'm feeling stressed or overwhelmed a part of me starts up old memories, vivid flashbacks flood into my thoughts and infiltrate my dreams. I'm now learning that these are trauma responses and that after years of conditioning when my brain doesn't want to be 'here' in our world, it transports me back to a place where I felt alive and free.

What I thought was love was really my hiding space, a space I needed because I was afraid to let love in. In this world it was easy for me to survive because I had to give nothing. I only had to take. This world that I pretended to stand for liberation, choice and adventure was actually my prison and my executioner. I can now see that I was attracted to this world because of my pain, my low self-esteem and self-image, my fear of intimacy, my lack of trust and my need for control — all of these stemming from being

taught that I was not allowed to love. I wouldn't wish this world on anyone, but I never felt I had a choice. When you teach a child that because of who they are that they are not allowed to love, they will search for anything that could be a substitute.

By being taught that I wasn't allowed to love as a young boy, I ran to this world. Like so many LGBTQ+ youth growing up in the evangelical church I was robbed of the opportunity to learn from my parents or church community what healthy intimacy, love, dating and commitment looks like. I naively thought that my underground world was providing me with the love that was forbidden by my church. I now know that there was never any love there.

This was the love, acceptance, safety and community I thought I deserved. This was what I was taught I was worth.

It would be more than a quarter century later that I'd join S.L.A.A., find my Higher Power and start my recovery journey.

— JAMES P, TORONTO ON

# Love Sick

I thought about my life today,  
How my lies and fears got in my way,  
I almost lost friends so dear,  
But now I know the true ones will always be here,  
My love addiction created such a mess,  
I was filled with anxiety, depression, and stress,  
I made rash decisions based on emotion,  
Rational thinking was never an attractive notion,  
I walked through life confused and broken,  
My character defects were so real they had become a tangible  
token,  
One day I came to terms with the extent of my problem,  
That was the day that things finally seemed solemn,  
Now every day I hurt a little less,  
Because now I have the tools to strive to be my best,  
Through my higher power, my support network, and my clear  
thinking,  
I can finally fight the demons when I get the “acting out”  
inkling.

— TEDDY (A RECOVERING SEX AND LOVE ADDICT)



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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.

