

**TRADITION QUESTION SUMMARIES – LISTING OF TOPICS**

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## ABUSE ISSUES

### **Q – Are discussions about abuse and trauma or surviving abuse and trauma topics within the experience, strength and hope of this fellowship?**

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While abuse is a very real issue for many of us in the program, this is a difficult question. I have sexual, mental and physical abuse in my story and I do mention it when I am telling my story, but it is a brief and casual mention. I cannot rely on the things which gave me a predisposition toward what was to come in my life as an excuse for what I did in my addiction. I cannot blame the other person, because that would amount to being in denial of my responsibility in my addiction. These are things which I had to deal with and release in order to truly begin to find recovery from my addiction.

In the spirit of Tradition 4, each group can decide for itself as to how much can be mentioned regarding the subject, just as it could in regard other addictions.

To take it one step further, if we are talking about discussing abuse issues and trying to solve the problems relating to abuse, then I would refer the inquirer to Tradition 10. "S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues..." These issues are better dealt with in a professional setting with a counselor. To spend time discussing these issues would detract from our primary purpose "...to carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers", (Tradition 5). We are gathering together at our meetings to provide for "mutual aid in recovering from sex and love addiction...", (Tradition 3).

These are all matters better dealt with in a clinical setting and do not belong within our realm of experience.

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Since we are a group who focuses on sexual issues, I can see where the issues of abuse and trauma might be a legitimate part of our experience. However, one thing that comes to mind for me is a statement I heard a long time ago regarding what to share

in meetings. "Take your mess to your sponsor and the message to the meeting." If a person has a positive message regarding abuse issues, I would welcome hearing that.

However, I think the messy details would best be shared with a sponsor or trained professional. I do not mean to discredit these issues because I have dealt with my own and I know their significance.

Whether or not there should be a line or two in the meeting script regarding this issue brings us to Tradition 4: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.L.A.A. as a whole. I interpret this to mean that each meeting may take a group conscience and decide how to handle this issue.

I think we must also look at Tradition 5: Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers. If a person suffered or is suffering from sexual abuse and is now a sex addict, the abuse is part of that person's story. I do believe the abuse and trauma element is usually better handled with a therapist or treatment center, but it is still a very real part of the sex and love addict to whom we carry our message.

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Yes I think discussions about abuse and trauma or surviving abuse and trauma topics are within the experience and strength of this Fellowship.

Additionally, I think meetings are autonomous and can decide what issues they want or do not want to have opened for sharing and discussion in their individual meetings. Whereas some meetings might want to set limits - for example - about graphic and sensational descriptions - I think it is helpful to carrying the message for those who have experienced abuse to let others know, so that they can talk at other times outside the meeting about these common experiences.

I also think it can be very helpful to have special meetings where abuse or recovery from abuse is one of the suggested topics. For some people sharing in a group is safer and healthier than sharing in a one on one relationship - no matter if the relationship is sponsor sponsee or therapist patient or not. Some members do not have resources that provide therapists. Some members are too sick to be in a one on one relationship with a sponsor or cannot find a sponsor who can deal with abuse issues. For some a group is safer than a one on one relationship.

Meetings are autonomous and Intergroups should support and list special meetings which focus on these and/or other topics

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I am an incest and rape survivor. I do not believe it is appropriate to share abuse issues in the rooms unless it is exclusively same gender. And even then sharing on the topic of surviving abuse should only be shared to the extent that the person sharing does not

trespass managing their own safety. What I mean by that, is that, regardless of what gender is listening to the share the member sharing abuse may realize that they have endangered their ability to feel safe in the meeting. I believe managing our safety is crucial to ensure we continue coming back. A sponsor or therapist may not be able to lend experience strength and hope with helping members navigate safely "getting current" when they are a survivor of abuse. For me, my recovery has included going

outside the rooms and speaking with advocates specially trained in understanding victims of all varieties of abuse. It was/is a powerful phenomenon to practice getting current with others with my exclusive commonality in a safe environment where my anonymity is assured. Having this layer of recovery to augment my recovery in our rooms enabled me to establish / "restore" what it felt like to "feel safe" while sharing the most vulnerable experience(s) of my life. It allowed me to participate in SLAA meetings and share my experience, strength, and hope where it could be of service to other members seeking recovery without being inappropriately graphic. For me, it is appropriate to share in meetings from a "recovered life" vs. still being a victim/ survivor. Does that make sense?

Is the member's therapist or sponsor the ideal person to share abuse issues with? I would not want to publish that as an idea that could be consistently reliable. Is there a way that each SLAA meeting can utilize the tradition of a group conscious meeting to thoughtfully cultivate a statement that could be included in the preamble / format / or principles of the meeting that would pro-actively address recovering from abuse? If it is possible I would imagine that communication / support / guidance would need to be provided from SLAA FWS level. Nobody helped me put the plan of care in place that I needed. I just realized I needed support outside of the rooms in order to fully recover within the rooms. Maybe meeting by meeting, there could be a member that voluntarily speaks, one on one, outside of the meeting with meeting participant's that inappropriately share about abuse. It is a big question and I respect that there are most likely a wide variety of ways to soberly facilitate a solution. Thank you for listening to my perspective

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Tradition one states the vital importance of unity within the fellowship to individual recovery: Tradition 5 reminds us of our primary purpose in carrying the message of recovery from sex and love addiction; Tradition 10 warns us to avoid giving opinions on outside issues.. These were the primary basis for the guideline from the General Service Office of AA, reflecting a decision of the Conference Delegates that individuals should attempt to focus their sharing to experiences around alcohol, rather than other addictions. In SLAA we generally try to follow the guidelines used by the original 12 Step fellowship.

Also, the Fellowship discourages naming therapists and treatment programs, and methods of treating our addictions and related issues that are not related to the 12 Steps, such as those involving medications, hypnosis, acupuncture, trauma recovery groups, etc. Our experience, strength, and hope as a Fellowship is about using the 12 Steps and Fellowship of other sex and love addicts to recover from our addiction to sex, romantic relationships, fantasy, and rigid avoidance of sexual and emotional nurture and experience (anorexia).

However, discussion in a meeting might be something like "using the 12 Steps to recover from the effects of abuse and trauma that still affect our lives today". That is, just as



## ATTRACTION/PROMOTION

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### **Q – WHAT IS ATTRACTION? WHAT IS PROMOTION? WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN THEM?**

Tradition 11 speaks to the fact that our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion... In order to be attracted to something we need to have some knowledge of what it is. We can easily use anonymous means to increase the attraction for S.L.A.A. These can be through outreach mailings sent out to the professional, religious and legal communities with general information regarding S.L.A.A. These people can be a great asset in providing us with new members coming into our meetings. We can also use things like Craig's List or even public notices in publications which would be targeted to various areas of the population of our areas. We also have the electronic medium of websites, which can be valuable in getting the word out to those who are in need of recovery. We do not have to go out and purchase announcements; providing spokespersons or identifying ourselves as members of S.L.A.A.

Another way that we can use attraction is in our practice of Step 12; "practice these principles in all areas of our lives." If we are living Step 12, those around us will notice because we are living in a different manner than we used to live. There are those with whom we come in daily contact who might be suffering from this addiction and knowing that we used to be involved with it and now seeing the changes which have come into our lives, they can be attracted and even ask us what is different.

We do not need to resort to glitz and hype in order to attract members, we just need to go about living our lives in a sober manner and people will be influenced.

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The simplest part of this question to me is how we deal with family, friends, co-workers, etc. in our lives who seem to have a sex and love addiction problem. It would be promotion to give them pamphlets, or to talk about how much S.L.A.A. helped you even though that person had never confided in you about his/her problems, and you were working on gossip only.

Attraction is, first of all, living a life based on the spiritual principles of the program. When and if the subject of that person's misadventures in the sexual and romantic arena came up in conversation you can identify, and perhaps share an example or two about your own addictive history, and express gratitude for the change in your life

today, again giving a concrete example or two. If that person asks how you did it, you can talk about S.L.A.A. and the program of recovery.

Promotion in the media is using attractive actors to "sell" people on trying the program with promises or examples of recovery, and pictures of people enjoying withdrawal in luxury. Attraction is giving true (but anonymous) stories of people who have recovered, or numbers of people across the world who have found recovery, with true statements about the difficulty of recovery, but the help S.L.A.A. can give in terms of support, etc. while people go through the difficult process of turning their lives around.

Promotion is using famous people in recovery as media spokespersons. Attraction is one person making themselves available to invite people to a meeting, and using their own story as a way for the other person to identify.

Attraction is twelve step work with humility, one on one. Promotion is twelve step work designed out of ego and "bragging" about the advantages of recovery to others who may or may not have a problem.

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I think the line is drawn based on information. If something is done or said to educate others about our program, I don't think that is promotion. Promotion is like a commercial, it tries to sell something. A person has to understand S.L.A.A. before he or she can be attracted to it, so anything we do genuinely to inform more people has a basis in attraction. However, we cross that line when we push the program or "sell" it, if you will. A campaign ad (ugh) promotes, but a documentary gives us information and may or may not attract us.

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## PAID WORKERS

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**Q – What is your opinion concerning service rotation of paid S.L.A.A. members who work in the service office? And, is it better to employ non S.L.A.A. members as to avoid rotation related problems? (This issue could arise in the FWS office or in international offices.)**

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As I studied the Traditions to help formulate an answer to this question, I discovered that in the early days Al-Anon relied on dedicated volunteers to help out in the office. These volunteers did such a good job at spreading the message that the organization grew, which required hiring paid workers to keep up with the workload. This dilemma encompasses Tradition 7...Every S.L.A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contribution. From what I read, that organization uses a combination of paid workers and volunteers. This reduces expenses for the organization. The volunteers most likely rotate more than the paid workers. This honors both the spirit of rotation of service, while still providing much needed continuity.

For the paid workers to rotate frequently, the organization suffers a loss of stability. I think paid workers should be evaluated like in any business and replaced if their job performance does not meet the needs of the organization.

The problem we have at the FWS (our International headquarters) office in San Antonio is that with no functioning S.L.A.A. meetings, there are no volunteers available. My own belief is that a business system such as ours would function best with a combination of S.L.A.A. members and non-S.L.A.A. members as well as both paid workers and volunteers.

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The staff members who are employed by the FWS office are paid employees; special workers as defined in Tradition 8. On the volunteer side of service it is important that we have a rotation of service so as to not have one member who has served in a given capacity for so many years that they might, whether wittingly or not, seem to yield undue influence and power in that position. For examples of this we need look no farther than our BOT. A BOT member is elected for a certain number of years and is restricted from serving more than the specified number of consecutive terms. We also see the same example being carried forth within the Conference Committees, where

chairs and vice chairs are elected each year and usually after a couple of terms they voluntarily step aside so that others might assume that "leadership" role. This is also important so as to avoid burn out within committees. ABM Delegates are chosen for 2 years terms by their Intergroups and it is suggested that they serve for no more than 2 consecutive terms. That being said, volunteers who might help out or do work in the FWS office ought also to rotate in order to allow room for others to serve.

However, when it comes to paid employees in the FWS office, whether members or not, we have a different situation. These are no volunteers or trusted servants who are working with either the BOT, a Conference Committee or even as an ABM Delegate. They are hired and paid to perform certain support tasks for the Fellowship. To require a rotation in these jobs would make it difficult to maintain consistent service to the fellowship in the support areas which they provide. It would also require a hiring and training of new personnel every few years which in turn would give those employees little job security.

As to whether or not it would be better to employ non-members in these positions, I would suggest that it is very difficult to have non-members providing these services because they do not have a good understanding of what S.L.A.A. has to deal with in ways of recovery and the needs which have to be met. Although we have done this in the past and it is possible that we will have non-member employees in the future, I would personally prefer that we have at least one S.L.A.A. member working in the office in order that the needs of the Fellowship could be met in a timely and appropriate manner. Having employees with some type of 12 Step Recovery experience could be helpful due to the fact that they do have an understanding of the Steps and Traditions which guide us.

These are my feelings and opinions on this question.

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## SAFETY IN MEETINGS

**Q -Do you have any guidance or suggestions around setting boundaries for safety?**

**A female member was followed to her car by a new comer that had identified himself as wearing an electronic monitoring ankle bracelet. Any experience, strength and hope you can lend to our group would be greatly appreciated. I am announcing a group conscious meeting on the subject of safety tomorrow night but we will not conduct the meeting until next month. Thank you for your kind help.**

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 Editor's note: you are reminded that this was a discussion held between several people and that there are varying thoughts and perspectives regarding this very real question. The discussion is presented in its entirety, with only non-related writing omitted. The reader is encouraged to consider ways to keep our meetings a place of safety.  
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This is a great question since it does involve the safety of a member attending a meeting. Unfortunately, there are predators who will attend a meeting from time to time in an effort to pick someone up or possibly to attack an unsuspecting member. It is advisable for women to not walk to the parking area alone, especially in the evening, but in a group of either other women or even near or in a group of men who are leaving the meeting. Another alternative is to ask someone to watch if you are parked at a distance from the door. Although it is sometimes difficult to get a parking space near the door, but I would also suggest parking as near to the entrance just in case you need to retreat to safety. As much as I dislike car alarms, this is one of those situations where it could come in handy, since many of them also have a panic alarm which will repeatedly flash the lights and sound the horn to draw attention to what is happening.

If the man were to make inappropriate remarks, try to grab the woman or even worse, try to get into the car, I would suggest (and I know some might bristle at this suggestion) call the police. I realize that this could require the woman to give a reason as to why she is at that location, but a simple explanation that she was attending a meeting (not identifying the type of meeting) and was going home. This is one of those issues where personal safety would have to override anonymity. This would fall into the same type of

category as someone sharing in a meeting that they were engaging in illegal activities with a minor. If at all possible, getting a license plate number for the vehicle which the man is driving would also be very important.

There are also times when a man might ask for a ride home. And, yes, I have seen men ask a woman for a ride and vice-versa. This can be a very uncomfortable situation for the person who has been asked for the ride and I would suggest that unless you know the person well and feel totally comfortable that you decline the request - make sure that you have somewhere else to go.

I have, in the past, seen a newer man walk to the parking lot behind a woman. Because some of us were uncomfortable around the man and were unsure of his motives, we watched very carefully to make sure that she would make it to the car safely.

I do believe that the meeting should, at Group Conscience, address this issue to make sure that everyone can feel safe coming to a meeting. If the man who followed her to the parking lot continues to attend the meeting, I would suggest that some of the men approach him and let him know that what he is doing is inappropriate and making someone feel uncomfortable. This would be at the digression of the Group Conscience.

These are my personal thoughts regarding this question.

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Others have detailed excellent suggestions about dealing with someone who is causing concerns about the safety of those who attend the meeting. I can only say "ditto" to all of it. I would like to add my voice to the suggestion that the police be brought in, but first I would have two members, preferably men, approach the individual and acknowledge the likelihood that the behavior really shows how unmanageable our addiction can be. I would assure the person that the group wants to help him with recovery, and will do so. However, it needs to be said with caring: "This behavior is unacceptable. We want to help you, but if the behavior continues, we will have no choice except to report it to the police. Everyone who comes to our meeting, sincerely looking for help will get it. Both men and women must be safe. Please consider carefully what we have said before you come back to another meeting."

My point is that I believe we should give anyone a chance to change, even while we send a clear message. In my mind it is not even a matter that needs group conscience: Just as we would turn the merely curious away from a closed meeting, a group always has the right to turn someone away who is behaving in a way that makes it clear there is something other than recovery on his/her mind.

My guess is that changing the preamble is adding a warning that is not needed in a very large proportion of meetings. The warning itself may communicate a message that the risk is far greater than it really is. Clear, timely action that includes the realistic warning to the offending person that illegal behavior will be something to be reported to the police and pursued by the group, is much more likely to have an immediate effect. I have been in groups with similar problems, one time and unwanted physical approach, and the other, someone who collected phone numbers to which he made obscene phone calls. Without proof, just the description of the action that would be taken toward anyone who was suspected of that inappropriate behavior was enough to cause the offending person to stop coming to the meeting. I do believe that intervention and prevention are preferable to confrontation, which requires some group intrigue to discuss that individual without the person having an opportunity to be present.

I want to add that I think it the responsibility of volunteers from the group to handle this as trusted servants on a timely basis.

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I do not think it requires a "formal meeting" to acquire a formal "group conscience." I would go further to say that the offender might enjoy getting lots of attention and therefore a simple communication by two members of the same gender might be better. Yes, one person should not take it upon themselves to handle this alone. Some of the leaders of the group, three or more, current and former officers and/or long timers in program, not necessarily at this meeting, could help. Help from outside the meeting from sponsors or long timers from other meetings could also be requested.

Although business meetings and group conscience are very important for very many decisions, some things are better dealt with discreetly by a few trusted servants, than by drawing lots of attention and time of newcomers, into an extensive discussion and focus on inappropriate activities.

Putting things in the format can be very helpful. However, in some situations like stalking and inappropriate clothing attire, quiet discreet communication may be more helpful and less harmful.

Personally, I have sometimes felt the attention to choice of clothing read in the format at every meeting distracting, negative, and bordering on triggering. I have been triggered by what someone wore to a meeting of a different fellowship. Hearing about sexually intriguing behavior at the start of every meeting sets me up for fantasy addiction behavior. I can sit in the meeting and fantasize about how others might dress, rather than listen, pray, or meditate.  
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If need be attend a different meeting. I carry a flashlight, mostly so I don't fall on my face, but this can add a safety factor. Ask for help from the guys that are safe, it's great recovery practice to learn to stick up for ourselves. If not close to the building, park by a light. Carry mace, stun gun etc... Look up online for ways to protect ourselves in this situation. Ask other "S" groups their opinion. Ask local police if they have ideas. I don't need to put myself in harm's way. I'd feel most safe having someone walk with me to my car. Stay in reality not denial of the extent of the situation (don't minimize). BUT stay out of the drama. These are some issues I deal with in stressful times.

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