

# Beginning Recovery in Places Where No Meetings Exist

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*So, you've become convinced that you suffer from the same disease of sex and love addiction as we do and have made the decision to enter recovery only to discover that there are no meetings in your area. Now what?*

*We believe that one way of beginning your recovery may be found within the program of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous and its literature. Our literature represents the experience, strength and hope of a large number of us who have recovered from the same problems in our sex and love lives that you are experiencing. Since you can't get to a meeting, this section of our site will show you how you can use our literature and its wisdom to help you in your journey to a new life of sanity in the areas of sex and "romance."\**

*If you were able to attend an S.L.A.A. meeting, the first piece of literature that you would probably hear is the S.L.A.A. Preamble. It explains, in general terms, how we get and stay sober. It is printed below. First, read it entirely, then go back and click on each of the five major resources—"the 5 S's"—to find out more about how you can use each resource.*

\* "Romance" as noted in the S.L.A.A. pamphlet, An Introduction to Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous.

## The S.L.A.A. Preamble

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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 the 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.

## **First Major Resource: Sobriety**

Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.

**Tip: Study S.L.A.A. literature to understand the process of recovery.** The process of recovery begins with you but you are not alone. S.L.A.A. members have written literature to help you get and stay sober. A great place to begin is by reading the S.L.A.A. “*Newcomer’s Packet*” (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/NCP-001.html>) and our Basic Text, *Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous* (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/BO-004.html>), so that you can learn about the program of S.L.A.A. and how it works.

**Tip: Set your “bottom-line” and don’t “act out” on it “one day at a time.”** In order to begin to recover from our sex and love addiction, each of us must come to an understanding of what specific form our addiction takes and how we can know if we are “sober” or not. S.L.A.A.’s Basic Text is invaluable in helping us do this. You will find specific help by reading the Preface, Chapter 4, “The Twelve Step Program: A Path to Sexual and Emotional Sobriety,” Chapter 5, “The Withdrawal Experience” and Chapter 8, “Building Partnerships.”

In the meantime, here are some helpful definitions: Once you begin to see the pattern that sex and love addiction takes in your life, you will want to set your own **bottom line**—the behavior(s) which make your life unmanageable (the pamphlet called *Setting Bottom Lines* (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/PAM-017.html>) is a must for helping to figure out what your bottom lines are). As long as you do not engage in these bottom line behaviors, you are **sober**. If you engage in a behavior that is on your bottom line, this is called **acting out**. Should you cross your bottom line by acting out, you are no longer sober.

**Tip: Read or listen to S.L.A.A. literature on a daily basis**—keep them with you or in your CD or MP3 Player. In addition to the pamphlets you’ll receive in the *Newcomer’s Packet*, there is an audio book of the *S.L.A.A. Basic Text* (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/AUB-001.html>) as well as many other Audio Selections featuring speakers who describe their experience, strength and hope about various topics.

**Tip: Read the books recommended in the SLAA Basic Text on pg. 66 upon which our program is based:** *Alcoholics Anonymous* (especially chapters 5-7) and AA’s *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, substituting the words “sex and love addiction” and “our addiction” for “alcoholism” and “alcohol.” These books may be purchased from most book vendors.

**Tip: Check out a bookstore for other written material that might be of further help**

**Tip: Pick up and use the “Tools” of recovery:** practical tips for surviving periods of temptation.

Addicts thrive on chaos and anxiety. In fact, there are some of us who consider ourselves addicted to these as well. Chaos and anxiety only set us up to act out. We have learned that we must do our best to avoid these familiar states of being.

**A “Toolbox” for Recovery:** The following suggestions and slogans can be helpful tools for reducing the chaos and anxiety in our lives. This is a *big* toolbox! Most of us had very few of these coping skills in our personal toolboxes when we came into S.L.A.A. We encourage you to “borrow” these tools and learn to use them. You are even welcome to keep them—adding them to your personal toolbox.

Just as you don’t need to remove all of the tools in your toolbox when you need to tighten a loose screw, you don’t need to learn *all* of these tools immediately before you start to use *some* of them—so there’s no need to get overwhelmed by the number of tools offered here. Like all tools, these have specific uses. We suggest that you identify your need for one or two of these tools that could prove helpful in your life today and focus on using it **one day at a time** until you have learned how to use it effectively. Once you’ve begun to master the use of the tool—“added it to your own toolbox”—you can search for new tools to address different problems as they arise. You are always welcome to come back to the recovery toolbox to borrow a tool that you need. By the way, as you are learning to use these tools, be sure to keep up the positive self-talk. Acknowledge and congratulate yourself for your successes and even just for trying. Remember, we work for **progress, not perfection**.

## Tools:

- **Just for today.** Don't worry about how you will stay sober in the future. Take it 24 hours at a time (or an hour at a time, or a minute).
- **Keep it simple.** As you begin to observe your behavior in sobriety, you may realize that you have a tendency to make almost anything complicated. You are not alone! Learn to simplify your life and, **when in doubt, don't.**
- Remember **H.O.W.** the program works: through **H**onesty, **O**pen-mindedness, and **W**illingness.
- Change or remove yourself from the **people, places and things** that fueled/supported your addiction. This may feel odd at first but you are allowed to make unilateral decisions where your sobriety is concerned.
- **Avoid "catastrophizing" situations**—don't make a catastrophe out of every situation.
- **There is nothing in my life today that is so bad that acting out won't make it worse!**
- **Finish tasks** rather than leaving them half-finished. Deal with life's problems quickly rather than letting them build up and fester.
- **Live life on life's terms** by practicing acceptance rather than belligerence.
- Remember, "**When I got busy, I got better.**" When we stopped acting out many of us found that we had lost touch with our genuine interests because we had spent so much time on our addiction. Replace addictive behavior with healthy activities that are of interest to you and that benefit you physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Take a moment to stay current with yourself throughout the day. Ask yourself the questions, "How do I feel?", "What is the state of my body?" and "What am I feeling?" Be sure to **H.A.L.T.** what you are doing and correct the situation if you realize you have become too **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, or **T**ired.
- **Act as if.** Sometimes we don't know how a sober person might act in a situation, or we don't have the willingness or energy to make a call or take an action. In these cases, it helps to practice "acting as if" we had the knowledge, willingness or energy to take the action. Another way of saying this is **fake it 'til you make it.**
- Memorize and pray the **Serenity Prayer**: "*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Thy will, not mine, be done.*" You may discover that you spend a great deal of time trying to control people, places, and things over which you have no control. This constant frustration makes you much more prone to acting out. In recovery, we have come to understand that the only person we stand any chance of controlling is ourselves. The Serenity Prayer can be very helpful in coming to acceptance of this powerlessness over others.
- Observe the **Three-second Rule**: Whenever we are around someone who is especially attractive to us, we don't fight our attraction. Rather, we consciously observe and acknowledge the person's beauty and our attraction for three seconds, and then consciously choose to look away and turn our mind to spiritual matters by praying that there be someone in the person's life who doesn't objectify him/her.
- Remove yourself from the tempting situation and **do the next right thing.** Pray, asking God to help you get through today. Call your Sponsor or someone else you trust and "tell" on yourself. Another strategy is to "postpone" acting out until tomorrow. Just make the commitment not to act out today. When tomorrow comes you probably won't want to act out.
- When obsession strikes, **turn your thoughts to the action of helping another recovering person.**
- **Use the telephone!** Call another addict or someone in your support network and explain the situation.
- **Write about the problem.** Many of us find daily journaling to be of great value.
- Listen to Audio Recovery Stories from S.L.A.A. members. The FWS Online Store has a wide assortment of these inspiring shares about various topics in recovery. <http://store.slaafws.org/ctgy/AUD.html>
- Remember, **this, too, shall pass.** A temptation is not a command—you have a choice.
- Be aware that **success can be as powerful a trigger as failure**, and plan accordingly.
- Pray this shorthand version of the first three Steps, "**I can't. God can. I'll let God!**" and then remove yourself from the tempting situation. **When in doubt, get out!**

See: **In Conclusion on Page 8**

## Second Major Resource: Sponsorship / Meetings

Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.

### **The Supportive Fellowship Within S.L.A.A.**

You are not alone. There are over 12,000 members of S.L.A.A. It is critical to build a community of people who, like you, are sex and love addicts; people you identify with and feel safe around in an atmosphere of support and encouragement. It is important to attend as many meetings as possible, especially in the first months of sobriety. This is obviously the most difficult aspect of getting sober where there are no meetings. But there are important ways you can "reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A." even if there aren't meetings in your community.

**Tip: Attend online and telephonic meetings as often as possible.** You will find a list of these at <http://directory.slaafws.org/>.

**Tip: Substitute meetings of other Twelve Step Groups. Some examples of other Twelve Step groups are AA, Al-Anon, or Overeaters Anonymous.** You can locate local meetings by calling the local chapters of these groups and asking for meeting times or a copy of the local meeting list. Find meetings that are listed as being "open" – that is, non-members are welcome to attend. (Note: all Al-Anon meetings are open but some AA and OA meetings are closed – that is, only members of the fellowship may attend). Attend open meetings. Try to apply the principles of those programs to your sex and love addiction. It isn't appropriate (nor probably wise) to declare yourself as a sex and love addict but in open meetings it is not necessary to identify yourself by anything other than your first name. Some of us simply identify ourselves as "addicts." (*Please note that references to non-S.L.A.A. programs are provided for informational purposes only and are not intended to imply endorsement or affiliation with any of these groups.*)

**Tip: Attend recovery events** in other cities such as Step workshops, retreats or our International Recovery Convention. Find upcoming events at <http://www.slaafws.org/events>.

**Tip: Find and Work with a Sponsor.** Regardless of the availability of meetings in your area, you should get a sponsor to help you work through the 12 Steps and provide support. A sponsor is someone who understands the 12 Steps and possesses the spiritual qualities you desire but someone to whom you are not sexually or romantically attracted (for more information on sponsorship, study the pamphlet, *Sponsorship, A Return from Isolation* <http://store.slaafws.org/prod/PAM-005.html> ).

There are several ways to find a sponsor even if you have no local meetings:

- Ask someone at your online or telephonic meeting.
- Ask someone from the nearest in-person S.L.A.A. meeting. Even though they may live far away they can meet with you telephonically, through email or in person whenever possible.
- Ask someone at the open meetings of the other 12 Step groups you attend. Even though this person may not be a sex and love addict (and you *may* find someone who does have experience in one of the other sexual recovery fellowships), they *can* help you work the Steps of S.L.A.A. They will probably want to read the book, *Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous* and the S.L.A.A. pamphlets in order to help them to understand the disease of sex and love addiction.

**Tip: Get to a Meeting Some Way, Any Way!** Call the phone line of the Intergroup nearest to you. You can find a list of meetings at <http://directory.slaafws.org/>. Try to speak to someone there and, if at all possible, travel to the nearest meeting location whenever you can to attend a meeting (remember that we were willing to go to any lengths to feed our addiction, so we think we should not be afraid to go to any lengths for our recovery). Try to arrange to meet the local contact at the meeting and possibly spend time together after the meeting as well (many people go out for coffee after meetings). At the meeting, introduce yourself and ask for sober members' telephone numbers and call them, daily. Ask if they would support and help you to begin a meeting closer to your location.

**Tip: Subscribe to S.L.A.A.'s "meeting in print," called *the Journal*.** To subscribe, go to <http://store.slaafws.org/ctgy/JSUB.html>

**Tip: Start Your Own Meeting.** One of the best ways we get sober and remain sober is by carrying the message to others who are suffering. This is called “12th Step Work” or “Service Work.” There are countless others still suffering from our disease and we suggest you begin to look for others with whom to work immediately. You do not have to have a registered meeting to begin working with those who need our help. But starting a meeting is easy and it only takes two to have a meeting!

First, you will want to purchase a downloadable “Group Starter Kit” (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/ST-001-E.html>) Then, you will want to **find other sex and love addicts and to begin meetings**. Here are some ideas to help you:

- Place an ad in the local newspaper -- don't neglect weekly papers, especially those that run personal ads. You needn't publish a location--just a phone number, email address, or P.O. Box number.
- Post an ad on local billboard websites.
- Contact the Intergroup nearest you and let them know that you are trying to start a meeting. They may get inquiries that they can direct to you.
- Contact the local professional associations of therapists and of local clergy.
- Contact local chapters of AA, NA, OA, and Al-Anon and give them your contact information in case others are looking for S.L.A.A. meetings.
- Go to the F.W.S. website (<http://www.slaafws.org/register>) and register your group. Registering lists your group's contact information for others who are looking for S.L.A.A. meetings in your area and helps you to stay current with S.L.A.A. news and communications.

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## **Third Major Resource: Steps**

Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.

*The Twelve Steps were originally formulated by Bill W., a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, in 1938 . . . Their timelessness after half a century, and their applicability to a different specific addiction such as ours, are tributes to their psychological and spiritual insight and to the high quality of their writing. One thing is clear. The Twelve Steps, as originally set forth in Alcoholics Anonymous, do provide a comprehensive and thorough approach to the problem of dealing with addiction, including sex and love addiction. Our gratitude for the efforts of the early A.A. pioneers is very great. Our expression of it must necessarily fall far short of sufficiently honoring their tremendous achievements.*

*Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, p 66 and 67.*

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

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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.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — 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 Him.
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 Him 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 God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions does not mean that A.A. is affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only. Use of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which addresses other problems, does not imply otherwise.

**Tip: Work the Steps thoroughly and in order.** It is tempting to want to skim through or jump ahead to some of the later Steps (like making amends) right away. We find it wise to spend considerable time on the first three Steps to build a solid spiritual foundation. This work should be done with the help of a sponsor or an understanding member of the clergy, or if neither are available, a therapist.

**Tip: Purchase the “Newcomer’s Packet”** (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/NCP-001.html>) **and the Basic Text, *Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous*** (<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/BO-004.html>) and read them. It is also important to read the books upon which our program was founded, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (especially chapters 5-7) and AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, substituting the words "sex and love addiction" and "our addiction" for "alcoholism" and "alcohol." These books may be purchased from any vendor.

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## **Fourth Major Resource: Service**

Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.

If you are trying to get sober on your own (or even if you are around many meetings), one of the surest ways to get and stay sober is to help other sex and love addicts. This is known as “service work” or “12th Step work” because you are engaging in the process of “carrying the message” described in Step 12.

Doing service work accomplishes two obvious and important things: 1) it allows our Fellowship to grow by spreading the message of recovery from our fatal disease, and 2) it helps keeps the addict sober who is doing the service work.

An additional outcome of service work is personal growth. Sex and love addiction is a disease of relationships. Our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with a Higher Power (or “HP”—the God of our understanding) has been severely limited because of this disease. As a result, many of us find that we often have difficulty making and fulfilling commitments. Service work helps to combat this problem with relationships because it requires a commitment to be in relationship with others in working for the good of those still suffering from the disease of sex and love addiction. *Together* we explore our joint commitment to ourselves, to one another, to our Higher Power, *and* to other suffering addicts. Don’t miss this tremendous opportunity for personal growth through service.

**Tip: Start doing service work right away.** Service work takes many forms.

- You are already doing service work if you are trying to **start a meeting**.
- Service includes **opening up for a meeting, cleaning up afterwards** and **even just showing up at a meeting**.
- Any time you are **talking with another addict** you are engaged in service work because you never know how what you say may be impacting the other person.

- **Contributing money** to your group, Intergroup or Fellowship-Wide Services through the 7th Tradition is also a form of service.
- **Take on a service position.** There are various rotating service positions within every group (including online and telephonic meetings). If you are unsure how you can serve your meeting, just ask.
- **Be a sponsor.** You can begin to help others once you start to learn things about the Program. Sponsorship can be a great way for you to learn what you don't know and inspire you to take the opportunity to learn it in order to help your sponsee.

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## **Fifth Major Resource: Spirituality**

Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

*"We are not cured of [sex and love addiction]. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition."*

*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition 2001, p. 85  
The quotation of non-S.L.A.A. literature does not imply endorsement or affiliation with these programs.  
The quotes were chosen for what they say, not for who said them.*

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a spiritual program. It is not group therapy or sex therapy and offers no treatment of any kind. It is a spiritual solution to a spiritual, emotional and physical disease.

What does this mean? If we truly make the admission of Step 1, if we are willing to admit complete defeat, then we must surrender to the idea that when it comes to sex and "love," the power to make sane choices does not reside within us. So, then who or what can we trust or rely upon if we cannot trust ourselves? We must find some Power greater than ourselves, some God of our understanding that can assist us. We don't have to work out exactly who or what this Higher Power is—it can even be our S.L.A.A. group. We just need to trust that there is something bigger than we are that can help us to stay sober today.

**Tip: Begin incorporating spirituality into your daily life through prayer.** Resign from the debating society and just do it. In the same way that we don't need to know how the internet (or electricity or a toaster) works in order to use it, the same is true with the Higher Power. We only must have the willingness to suspend disbelief and try prayer. It works. Some helpful ways to do this:

- Begin the day with prayer (perhaps on your knees) by admitting you are powerless over sex and love addiction, acknowledge that you cannot manage your life, affirm your belief that a loving Higher Power can restore you to sanity, and ask that Higher Power to take control for you—*just for today*.
- Stay current with your Higher Power throughout the day. Check in with your HP before and after doing difficult or stressful things.
- Say a prayer of thanks at the end of the day if you have been able to stay sober.
- Most of us have ignored our physical and mental health while pursuing our addiction. Be sure to consider visiting your physician and dentist. Taking care of your health is an important step in sobriety. We find it important to get plenty of sleep, good nutrition and physical exercise. Many of us enter counseling at this time. While a therapist can help support us to work our program, they do not take the place of sponsorship.
- Learn and use the Serenity Prayer. *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Thy will, not mine, be done.*

## **In Conclusion: Regaining Dignity of Self**

We hope that you find some hope and inspiration in these pages. Although you may feel afraid to begin this journey to a new life in sobriety, you probably realize that you have no other choice but to try the program of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. Remember, even if there aren't meetings in your area, you are not alone. Many of us have achieved a sane and fulfilling sex and love life through the program of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. You can, too.

*The truth is, we feel we are "on to" something big. We don't know where it will lead us. We just don't know what the upper limits of healthy human functioning are. In any event, our hunch is that we are but newcomers to this larger experience of living, this wider arena of life. If all we are capable of doing here is to convey to you our sense of hope, and our conviction that a new life of fulfillment, richness and mystery surely awaits you as you move into sobriety, then we are meeting our task.*

*May each of you, as you embark on this adventure, discover your share of the golden braid; that unfolding wonder of which we are all a part. We are with you. We are all joint travelers on destiny's path, and we all have much to learn from each other.*

*Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, p. 159*  
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We leave you with these promises that follow S.L.A.A.'s 9th Step and assure you that they will be fulfilled within you if you work for them. This is our hope for you!

*Now we were truly feeling some sense of deep release from the past! We were free of much guilt for our misdeeds, from the shame of having fallen short of our inner values. In many instances, the values we had thought were ours had turned out to be someone else's and we had shed or changed these to allow the seeds of our own personal wholeness to take root and grow.*

*We were indeed living new, positive, unfolding lives. Whether in partnership with others or in solitude, we had truly been granted a spiritual release from our sex and love addiction. While vigilance was still important, the choices we had to make now seemed easier. We felt increasing confidence in our developing partnership with God, and were full participants in the fellowship of S.L.A.A. We enjoyed solitude and were unafraid of honesty and openness with others. We could comprehend what it means to have dignity of self.*

*Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, pp. 95-96*