

theJournal

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Ready for Sponsorship?

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

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

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Letter From the Editor

“A sponsor is a person who gives us individual support and guidance in applying the S.L.A.A. Twelve-Step Program of recovery to our lives. A sponsor is neither a parent, a therapist, nor a confessor. Accordingly, a sponsor is a person with whom we have no ulterior motive, whom we do not pay, and from whom we seek neither absolution nor judgement. Our sponsor is, in fact, a fellow addict. As such, a sponsor does not counsel from a pretense of higher moral ground. Sponsors are not ‘perfect’ people working ‘perfect’ programs. Sponsors are human, too, with struggles and confusion, just as anyone else in the Fellowship. Indeed seeing the imperfections in our sponsors helps relieve us of our own compulsion to be perfect.” — From the “Sponsorship: A Return from Isolation” pamphlet. Copyright © 1990, The Augustine Fellowship.

S.L.A.A. members share their experience, strength and hope around sponsorship in this issue of *the Journal*. I hope their stories help with this very important part of the S.L.A.A. Program.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

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

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“WHEN DID YOU BEGIN SPONSORING AND HOW DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE READY?”

I began sponsoring when I felt a perfect peace come over me and I knew I was finally done. Before that, I was relapsing over and over. When I finally got sober, I knew I wanted to carry the message instead of the mess.

— Anonymous

My sponsor and I made that decision together. I started sponsoring later in my recovery, when I was ready.

— Anonymous

Just recently did I start sponsoring. Having worked with a new sponsor for awhile myself, seeing people in need, I asked my sponsor if he thought I was ready. Getting the affirmative I then proceeded to start working with my first sponsee.

— Stephen F., CT

As soon as I finished Step 5. I was ready because my sponsor said it would keep me sober.

— Elizabeth, Houston

When delivering my 5th Step, my sponsor suggested I begin to sponsor two women. The thought was that I helped two qualifiers cheat on wives, so I would be of service to at least two women in hopes to help heal two future relationships as a way of amends.

— Suzanne, Los Angeles

I started sponsoring one year after I entered the program and did so because I felt I was ready. However, it was not an easy thing to do for an anorectic addict.

— Denise, China

I began sponsoring after a few years in the program, when I had some experience working the steps.

— Steve L., Cincinnati

I do co-sponsoring. It started a year ago, after an annual meeting, when I met my co-sponsor.

— Anonymous

After I had worked up to Step 8, my sponsor said I was ready, as long as I stayed ahead of sponsees on the steps.

— Kelly H., Austin

I began sponsoring after I had finished my Step 9 in program, as suggested by my sponsor. I wasn't 100% sure I was ready, but I trusted my guidance.

— Deborah, Sacramento, CA

I started sponsoring after completing Step 7. My sponsor suggested I was ready after Step 5, but an inner voice said to wait a little longer.

— Walter V., Los Angeles

I do more co-sponsoring which is based on equality and healthy relationship building, boundaries and reasonable expectations.

— Nancy G., San Diego

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “When did you begin sponsoring and how did you know you were ready?” Please share your experience, strength and hope.” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #155 — ABM issue ** Benefits of Service — “What blessings/benefits have you received from service?” — The deadline for submissions is 5/15/15. Issue #156 — Character Assets — “Describe your experience with character assets. Are there program tools that you use to help you discover/develop your character assets?” — The deadline for submissions is 7/15/15. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

I began outreaching to newcomer males and offered guidance on the S.L.A.A. program. I was asked and I knew from working the steps that God thought I was ready.

— **Edward, San Fernando Valley, CA**

Quite simply. My sponsor told me to begin raising my hand at meetings when asked for available sponsors. Despite my fear/doubt, I did. Higher Power didn't send me a sponsee until some time after. Then, I felt I was truly ready.

— **Matt, Los Angeles**

I started sponsoring when my sponsor told me that he and his sponsor thought I was ready. I was sponsoring in another program and was grateful for those gifts and looking forward to S.L.A.A.'s version of the miracle of sponsoring.

I was asked to sponsor someone after leading a meeting shortly after. It has been great to share what worked for me, ask questions, listen to my sponsee and listen to what I'm actually saying — hearing what I need to hear as well.

— **Nik, Los Angeles**

Since I am in the HOW program, I started sponsoring after the 37 questions. I did so because a member mentioned that people were more likely to continue with the program if they started sponsoring. This made sense to me, though I had no doubt I would continue. I do have a sponsor and am glad that I decided to get one right away for two reasons. One, it does keep me connected to the program and two, because I learn so much from my sponsee and am reminded of the original questions for myself.

— **Ann, Oregon**

I knew I was ready to start sponsoring when I felt this incredible peace inside. All the struggling had ceased. All the sense of being in withdrawal had ceased. I was “on the beam” so to speak, and I had something that was worth passing on.

— **Anonymous**

I began sponsoring when someone asked me and I finished step 6. I felt ready and willing.

— **Maaïke, Amsterdam**

I started sponsoring after being some time clean and abstinent and after working steps with my sponsor. I felt that I needed to give back what I was getting in recovery.

— **Humberto, Amsterdam**

I began sponsoring after I finished Step 12. My sponsor gave me the flyer about sponsorship and encouraged me to. There has been a great need for sponsors here.

— **Claire, Amsterdam**

March, April 2014, after a major slip, going over the 30 days/30 questions, picking up a sponsor and stepping up.

— **Guillermo, Berlin**

In a depressive crisis during my 4th Step I had the insight “I need a sponsee.” I prayed to my Higher Power to send me one. She sent her a few months later. Leading her through the bottom line questions and the first 3 steps in 37 days was a great experience, a really helpful tool to bring me through my depressive episode.

— **M., Berlin/ Germany**

Knowing When the Time Is Right to Sponsor

Right after I shared my Fifth Step with my first sponsor, a newcomer asked me to sponsor her. I talked to my sponsor, and she suggested that I might be ready to sponsor. I had not yet worked all twelve steps with a sponsor when I first started sponsoring. Looking back I can see that even though I had made a great deal of progress for the time that I had in the program, I certainly was not yet ready to sponsor.

Why was I not yet ready to sponsor a newcomer? Because I had not yet worked, practiced, and lived all twelve steps. Without practicing and living all of the steps, I was unable to share with newcomers how working through all of the steps worked for me.

I believe in having a sponsor who has a sponsor who has a sponsor. I also believe that my sponsor needs to have worked through the twelve steps with her sponsor, just as I worked through the twelve steps with my sponsor. Only when I worked through the twelve steps with my second sponsor, and began practicing and living the steps, did I feel really competent and confident in sharing with another sex and love addict the process that worked for me.

I knew I was ready to sponsor after I worked the steps, and began practicing the steps and living the steps in all areas of my life. In addition to practicing and living the steps, I read literature regularly and utilize suggestions from literature in my daily life. It benefits sponsees when I am familiar with literature and am able to suggest readings that help them in their program. I continue to set boundaries and uphold/defend boundaries – boundaries are essential in sponsor/sponsee relationships. Another important factor in my ability to sponsor is that I keep an honest, open relationship with my own sponsor. I contact and check in regularly with my sponsor, just like I ask my sponsees to do.

I constantly remind sponsees that I don't really have anything original, that everything that I say can be found in the S.L.A.A. Basic Text, A.A. Big Book, the 12 Steps & 12 Traditions, or in the slogans. I ask sponsees how they have worked the steps on their problems and if they have prayed on their issues. I share my own experience, strength, and hope, and



how the steps have worked for me. When sponsees present questions that I am uncertain about, I consult my sponsor. For me, sponsorship requires humility, willingness, consideration, and time. All of these needed to be available to me before I was ready to sponsor.

The 12th Step tells me that we will have a spiritual awakening as a result of working the steps, and that we are to practice the principles in all areas of our lives. Only after I had a spiritual awakening and began to practice the principles in all areas of my life was I ready to sponsor.

— Hope



Saying 'Yes' to Sponsorship

Entering my first Fellowship, I didn't know about S.L.A.A. even though, looking back, it's easy to see it was this addiction that brought me into the rooms.

In the next Fellowship that I attended, I found my first sponsor who told me that whenever somebody asked me to sponsor them, say, "Yes." My sponsor said, "This is a person in need of you."

As you can see, I had a sponsor when I was saying, "Yes" to sponsoring another. Also, I went straight to starting my step work as soon as I got my sponsor. Thereby, that made me at least a bit further along in program work than the person asking me to sponsor them. It confused me that someone asked me to sponsor them even before I reached my 12th Step. I wondered if it could then be okay to say, "Yes." It says in the 12th Step that I have to have a spiritual awakening and this awakening has to be a result of the steps. Well, I don't know if it's okay. I've seen and experienced many ways of doing the steps, some quickly some slowly.

At meetings I always tell people that if you have only been to one meeting, you're still a meeting ahead of the newcomer who is at their very first meeting. Never hesitate to say, "Welcome." You might not have anything else to offer than saying, "Welcome," but this is important to show newcomers the very important message: "You're not alone."

It's important for me to say to be aware of two-stepping (i.e. to

only make a 1st and a 12th Step having done no other step work) and certainly not making a 13th Step (i.e. manipulating another in recovery, especially a newcomer, into a sexual, emotional, or romantic relationship. This unfortunately happens from time to time in the fellowships including S.L.A.A.).

When I came to S.L.A.A. the Fellowship was rather new in my country. Therefore most of us had the same sponsor. At that time, I didn't understand why we had to use the A.A. Big Book together with our own S.L.A.A. Basic Text. So I skipped that sponsorship. Today I'm grateful for the study of the Big Book. Later on, I've tried other literature in my step work and that has also been very inspiring. I bring all of the literature I've read and used with my sponsors both in S.L.A.A. and other fellowships to all of my sponsees (the Big Book and S.L.A.A. Basic Text being my platform for the rest). Over time people came to S.L.A.A. from other fellowships who suffered from other addictions.

It was very inspiring and humbling for me to talk to those persons sponsoring me in other fellowships about S.L.A.A. and I could give my years of experience to them. Because we were a small Fellowship, many of us had co-sponsorship with one another and we had Step workshops. As the Fellowship grew bigger, there were more sponsors available with many ways of doing the step work with different literature.

The history of how I became

ready for my last sponsee is quite fun, I think. It shows me how God can work in many ways beyond my reasoning. I'd been away from S.L.A.A. for a couple of years so I wasn't sure I could be a sponsor right away. Soon after I returned, this person asked me to be her sponsor. When I came back, I was inspired by her recovery. When she asked me, I didn't think I could add anything more to her recovery, so I turned her down. Later, she asked me again. And she kept on asking from time to time. Finally I said, "Yes." I told her I 'gave in' so to speak and that I didn't know what more to give her than what she already had from earlier sponsors.

She replied that she didn't know either but that I had all these years of experience before leaving S.L.A.A.; I lived the Traditions in all areas of my life. She pointed out that I had voluntarily come back for maintenance and out of wanting to give back to the Fellowship of all of my knowledge. I didn't come back to program because of a relapse that brought me to my knees.

Having no more arguments against sponsoring her, I saw it as God's will for me to be ready again for sponsoring. Thank you so much for this opportunity to share because I really can see that sponsoring is the best way for me to see how God works through the program. And it's the best way to keep me believing in it.

— S., Denmark

Discovering When I Was Ready

In college, I was part of a Christian ministry where our hope was to bring people to our faith and train them in the basics. The latter was called discipleship.

All the kids with potential were discipled by others. I tended to get the left overs – those who were socially inept (perhaps like I was) and wouldn't amount to much anyway.

Nevertheless, this bug to help and guide others bit me at an early age. It was a part of my thinking and orientation long before I heard about Step Twelve.

My first step into recovery was in a church-based twelve -step group. Unlike traditional sponsoring, which passes one's experience, strength and hope through a kind of oral tradition, this group went through work books. I was even a leader in this group, but it seemed that the stronger and more capable brethren caught the sponsee fish. The few attempts I had eventually stalled.

I subsequently found myself in the rooms of S.L.A.A. I got a sponsor and we began discussing the tools and the steps. He was there for my triumphs, fears, slips, and tears. At one point, I spoke of my desire to sponsor someone, but he said that that would come when I was ready.

Over time, I lost interest in being a sponsor. At times, when a newcomer attended who seemed intimidating or who had a personality that felt contrary to me, I kind of looked away and prayed they wouldn't look to me for help. Perhaps there was healing in this – getting over my need to be needed or feeling that I am of value if I am doing something significant.

Further, I had this growing notion that sharing in meetings and making phone calls was part of twelve step work even if it isn't part of a formal sponsor relationship.

One day, out of the blue, someone asked me to sponsor him because he related to my story and how I approached recovery. I was shocked. I thought he had a sponsor but the guy apparently vanished. I guess I was ready, or so says my Higher Power.



Photo by Anonymous

So far, so good. Our conversations seem helpful and I hear the voice of my sponsor coming out of my mouth as I encourage a guy who is still raw from the consequences of his addiction and needs to hear that there is a solution that is obtainable but will take time. I have literature that helps me with good questions but mainly it is taking what I received and giving it to another.

It is one sex and love addict helping another sex and love addict. It is one beggar telling the other beggar where to get bread.

— David S., Boone, NC



It Is a Pleasure to Sponsor



Photo by Anonymous

I started sponsoring early last year — I knew I was ready when I asked my sponsor whether I could be of service by walking other female S.L.A.A.s through the steps. My sponsor felt so happy that I asked her about sponsoring — in fact she gave me a referral for my very first sponsee who lived in another state! Funny how Higher Power works - my recovery at that time was headed towards a slippery, dark place (didn't see it at the time though). Goddess/Higher Power knows exactly what I need when I needed it - working with my sponsee kept my recovery from slipping further into an even darker abyss. Recently my sponsee decided that she needed another program to recover so we needed to part ways as sponsor and sponsee. I felt a little sad when she told me the news, but I understood her decision. I could only take her so far in her recovery path. It's okay to let go. We'll still keep in touch though - I can't imagine my life without her. I'm crying a little as I write this.

I have two sponsees I'm working with now. I do the best I can to share my experience, strength and hope with them. I listen to their struggles and share

suggestions if I have them. In my addiction I attracted unavailable partners - in recovery I learn how to be available by showing up for my sponsees. There are moments (a lot of them) where I feel incredibly insecure and uncomfortable with the feedback or suggestions I make to sponsees - I'm learning that I don't have to be perfect and that humbles me.

I'm a real A.A. Big Book thumper - for me there's a lot of wisdom in the pages of that book. I leave you with a quote from "Doctor Bob's Nightmare", pages 174-175:

"I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in so doing I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."

Thanks for listening. Peace.

— Lynda L, Los Angeles

Share space

Letting Others Help Us

On a stretch of rural highway one day, my engine started smoking. I pulled off and got to the closest gas station to check under the hood.

This had happened before, and I knew that my car needed oil, although I'd never had to do it myself. (Previously an attendant or others had helped me.) Even though I knew it would be ok, it was stressful. I was alone, in an unfamiliar area and had no experience resolving this myself.

Hood up in a bustling travel plaza, I think (with some entitlement!), "Doesn't anyone want to help me?" But since no one came, I said a prayer and asked Higher Power to guide me.

I figure out what type of oil I need, pay for it, grab one of those little cups and head out back to my vehicle. I am about to pour in

the last bottle of the oil when all of a sudden, a car pulls up next to mine and the driver gets out. Kind and friendly, this person asked me "Excuse me, would you like some help?"

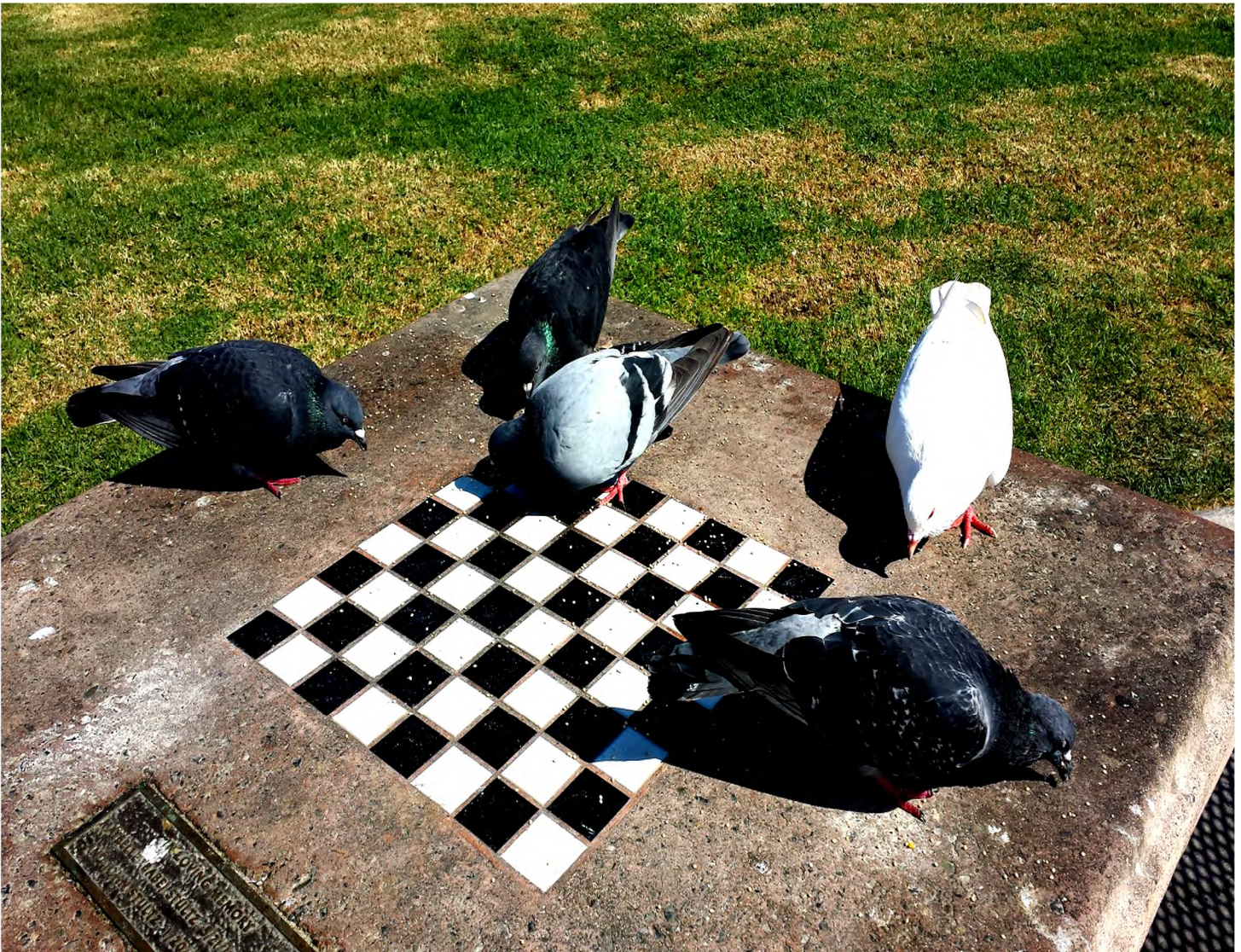
Almost done, I can feel, like an old muscle memory, my brain start to formulate the phrase "oh, no thanks, I've got it-" but instead, with that pause between action and deed which we get as a result of working this program, I responded differently.

"That would be great!" I said and offered them the bottle of oil. They finished it off, checked some things on the car and in the end, confirmed my intuition about the situation. It was fun! We made some jokes and laughed about the situation. I could feel myself relaxing. After some pleasant small talk, we said goodbye and parted ways.

Getting back in my car, I

reflected that this was a beautiful metaphor for partnership – I am capable of taking care of myself, getting my needs met, and I can survive without it, but it is so much more pleasant to share this experience with someone and receive their support. (Also, it was so much fun!) And when I receive, I allow someone else to give – probably letting the other person feel good about themselves in the process! The whole thing was so much easier because (with G-d's help) I chose to let someone help me. Even if only for a little while. Driving away with a big smile on my face, I said "THANKS, G-d!!" musing that if this was a sneak peak of partnership, I look forward to a feature presentation.

— Anonymous, IN



The Love Addict – Love Avoidant Trap

I am a love addict. I always have been, and despite my recovery from endless hours of therapy, support groups, reading self-help books, blogging, and yoga, a part of me always will be a love addict. Now, it's important to understand what love addiction is.

It's far more common than you'd think and most people don't even know they have it. It can take on a variety of behaviors across a broad scale.

My love addiction is considered on the milder end of the spectrum, but still interferes with my happiness and overall satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Until recently, I thought my experiences and thoughts about finding love were normal. I told myself I was having a streak of bad luck with men but that one day I would find "him," you know "the one." I believed he would take away the void that resided within me, making my

life complete.

I had everything I wanted in life except that one thing- I was a sophisticated, professional woman in her early 30's living in San Francisco-enjoying all the positive aspects of being single. But I also wanted to get married and start a family.

Last year this time I was with the man I thought I would spend the rest of my life with. I had never loved and connected with another this way. We had a beautiful relationship that

pulled me out of the darkness and into the light. This man adored me and showed me the kind of affection and emotional safety every woman dreams about. We made promises and plans for the future- we wanted to get married and have children. We looked forward to spending the holidays in his hometown of London and having a vacation home in the Hamptons. Finally, I thought, my prayers had been answered, life couldn't be better and I was grateful to the universe every day for bringing this beautiful person to me.

Little did I know-- this man would turn out to be a huge love avoidant and we would do nothing but activate each other's anxiety system, ultimately pushing each other away.

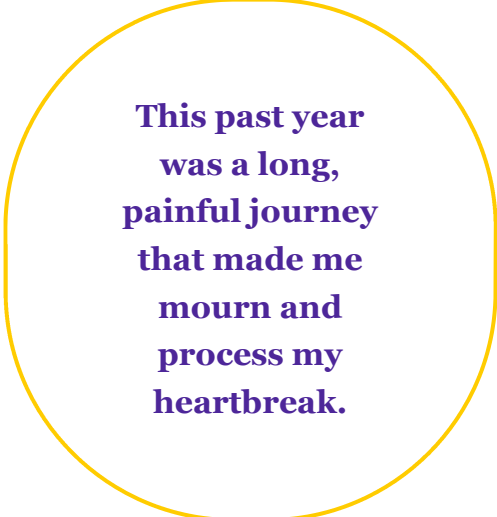
Sometime after meeting his family and traveling to New York City to visit his friends, the relationship shifted where the fantasy was fading and the promises and expectations were becoming a reality, in other words the honeymoon phase was ending. I was committed and ready for the "real" relationship stuff- the ebb and flow, ups and downs that all healthy couples go through. This was my person and there was nothing I wouldn't do for him and for us.

However, as the intimacy grew, so did his fear and anxiety - followed by distancing tactics. At first it was subtle, but enough to trigger me and cause my sense of security in the relationship to fade. People told me I was crazy and that it was all in my head; this man loved me and would never leave me. I just needed to manage my anxiety and stay in the present moment. Everything was fine.

Fast forward a few weeks later- I found myself unceremoniously on the receiving end of the "breakup talk". My life was crashing

before my eyes and everything inside of me shut down. I no longer recognized this man before me. There was nothing behind his eyes. This warm, loving, compassionate person that once cherished me was now a cold, heartless stranger. The conversation was a total blur but I clearly remember hearing the words, "I don't think I love you anymore."

The months that followed had to be the most excruciating time of my life. My love addiction had kicked into full gear and I was experiencing a painful withdrawal, similar to a drug addict cutting his substance cold turkey. In addition to the constant crying,



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anxiety/panic attacks, obsessing, and not eating, I had physical pains all over my body- it was pure agony. The shaking, sweating, vomiting, insomnia was unbearable. I had lost weight and my health was deteriorating. It felt like I had died. There were times I wish I had.

I didn't understand how my life suddenly turned upside down. I was left with so many questions- I needed answers but no one could give them to me, not even him. The best he could do was say something was "all of a sudden missing" and he had no idea why. So I started blaming myself, carrying

enormous amounts of shame and guilt for ruining my only chance at happiness. I had decided that everything was my fault and I must have done something wrong to make this person abandon me.

I replayed every moment, interaction, conversation that took place in the final weeks of our relationship- trying to pinpoint exactly where I messed things up, but it was futile. At this point he had already moved on to the next girl, displaying a chaotic rebound pattern. I saw a photo of the two of them vacationing in Paris and it felt like a razor blade slicing my heart. Just as expected he dumped her a week later.

This past year was a long, painful journey that made me mourn and process my heartbreak. I was able to clearly see myself and this addiction that stood in the way. Looking back I realize how I lost myself in the relationship, putting his needs before mine.

I was willing to do anything to make things work and quietly put the red flags away. I had to keep the relationship afloat, even if it wasn't serving my needs- it was better than being alone. I had stopped loving myself, placing my value and self-worth in his hands. My addiction made me believe he was my everything, and as a result it felt as though I had lost everything when he left.

The truth was, our breakup wasn't my fault. Sure, I wasn't perfect and had my own flaws, but ultimately it wasn't what caused the dissolution of our relationship. It was his fear, unhealthiness, and anxiety that made him leave. As an avoidant, he was unable to truly open himself up and become vulnerable with me.

He could only go so far, and once his boundaries of closeness were crossed, he fled. Like all avoidants, he desired to be in a

relationship but didn't have the capacity to sustain one. As relationships grow, and the rose-colored lenses come off, a person's true character comes out, both good and bad. The charming, charismatic, perfect partner image goes away and the real person comes to the surface.

It is for those reasons avoidants are unable to stay in healthy relationships. They believe once their partner sees who they truly are, they will stop loving them and leave. As a protective mechanism, they make sure to be the ones who leave first.

Love addicts and avoidants are magnets for each other. Their attraction is extremely powerful and intense. This is how they get "swept" away with one another and instantly feel like they've finally found the one within days of knowing each other.

Healthy boundaries are not maintained and the relationship moves very quickly but always ends up toxic. This type of couple is unable to cultivate long lasting genuine love and happiness; the outcome is always misery for both sides,

even if they remain together.

The avoidant will always keep their partner at arm's length, while the addict is constantly trying to break through their walls in attempts to develop greater levels of intimacy and connection. This cycle can continue endlessly or until one of the partners decides to move on.

Today I'm much healthier and realize that no one can make me feel complete other than myself. Finding a life partner doesn't mean filling a void or putting the other person ahead of myself. A healthy relationship requires two people, who want to grow and continue inspiring one another while maintaining their independent lives in separate, yet parallel lanes. It's about interdependence not co-dependence.

This relationship was the happiest and saddest time of my life. Albeit being so painful, it has taught me a very important lesson. This man ended up being my greatest teacher- he forced me to collapse and recalibrate. I simply couldn't keep my head in the sand; I had to face my love

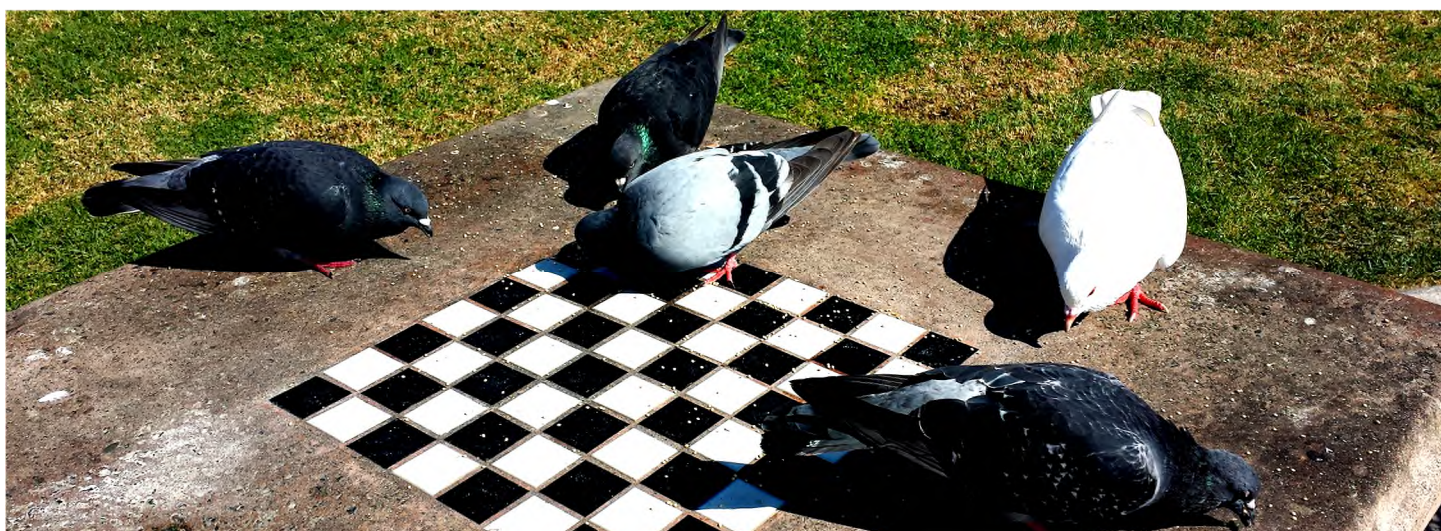
addiction and work towards becoming emotionally healthy.

Otherwise, I would have just continued making the same mistakes, never having a true shot at an everlasting, loving relationship. As for him and most avoidants the prognosis is poor, most never get better and end up living very lonely and sad lives.

Those that do improve have invested in many years of intensive therapy, but this is a rare occurrence. Avoidants have a hard time acknowledging that they have a problem to begin with. To them, the failure of every relationship was somehow always the other person's fault.

They continue on their quest to find the "perfect partner" and end up leaving a trail of broken hearts in the process. Even so, there is a part of me that believes avoidants do realize one day that one of those hearts they left behind was in fact "the one"- and that it was truly their own fear of vulnerability that got in the way. Sad thing is, by then it will be too late.

— Anonymous



Answering Step Questions

Step 2 Question: What makes you think your next relationship will be any better?

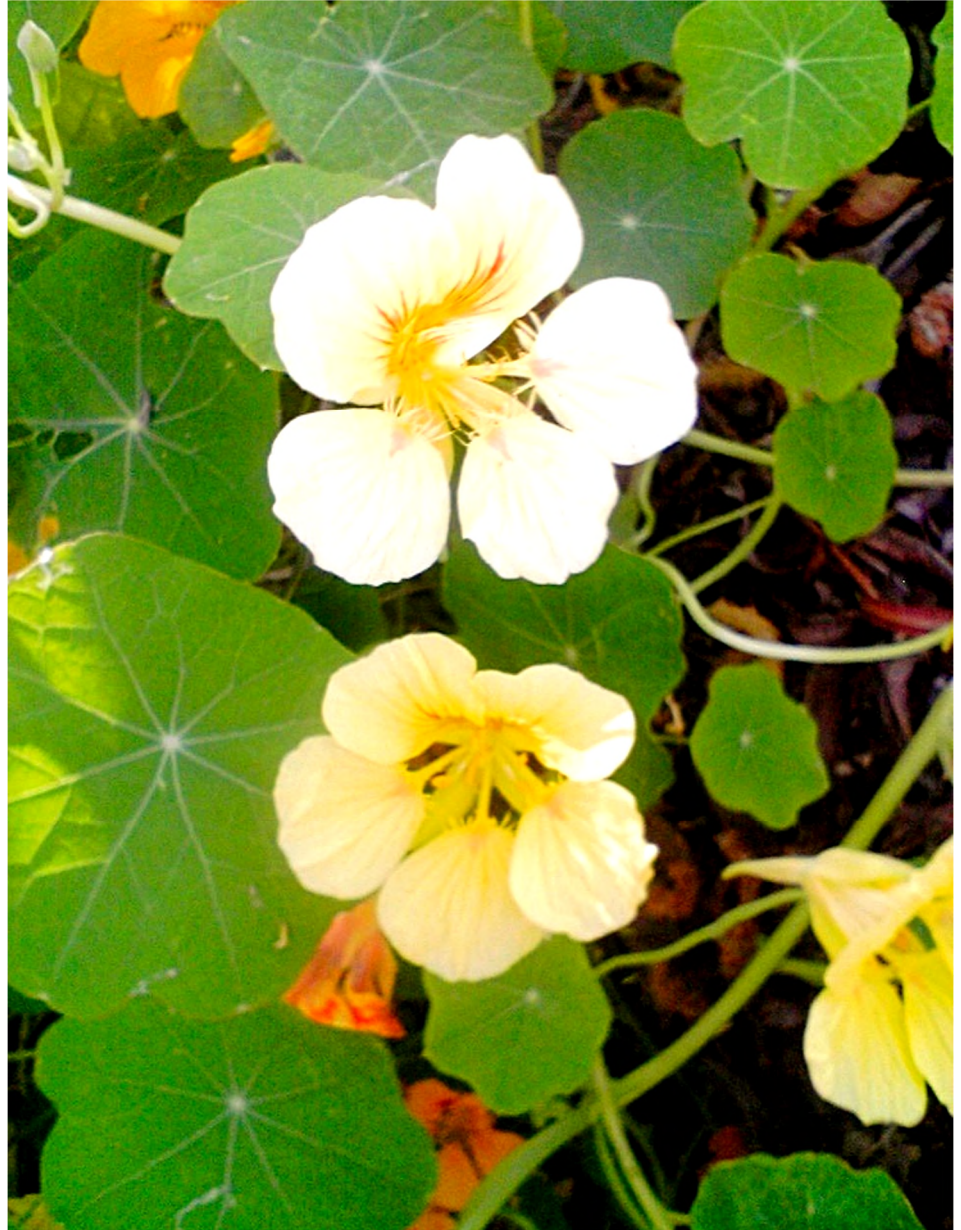
Though it's not certain whether or not I'll ever be in a relationship again (I'd prefer not), I guess hypothetically, it would be 'better' because it would no longer be between just me and some guy and no-one-else-in-the-whole-wide-world. I would have a support team, consisting of my Higher Power, my sponsor, my S.L.A.A. fellows, and my therapist.

God would be invited into the relationship from its inception, and continuing to work my program would mean that I would need to be sharing about the relationship, throughout its lifespan, with my sponsor, in meetings, and during calls with recovery partners.

This would serve several purposes: first, I would be seeking God's will for me and for the relationship, instead of dictating my own will and ensuring that it came to pass. I would be able to trust that God had put this person in my life, for some undetermined amount of time, and I'd be able to look at the connection as a gift from which I was meant to learn certain things and have certain experiences.

Secondly, sharing with program people would help keep the relationship transparent and non-secretive.

My fellows would be as benevolent mirrors, gently helping me to refocus my gaze when choosing to stay blind to any glaring character defects of mine that might be poisoning the relationship. As well, the transparency would allow others



to see red flags that I might be missing, such as a significant other treating me disrespectfully or acting in an unavailable or uncaring way.

By the time I might be ready to date again, I would no longer feel it necessary to rush into a relationship with someone, and to assail him with charm and

compliments. I would be able to love myself enough that I would not be desperate for another person to do it for me.

Therefore, there'd be a diminished or eliminated need to hook my significant other into an addictive dynamic by wearing my various masks, via acts of smoke and mirrors, and/or by

demonstrating what I considered to be romantic or sexual prowess.

I would be able to trust myself to be my authentic self, and know that someone else's evaluation of me should not determine my degree of lovability.

As well, having worked through some of the shame from my past, as well as childhood trauma and family of origin issues, I would also no longer need to push my significant other away, or open the relationship up and encourage him to get interested in other women, in order to hasten my inevitable abandonment.

By that time, I would have been able to come to some kind of terms with intimacy, with myself and with God, and I would be less distressed at the thought of experiencing it with another person.

Having some degree of self-awareness, finally, whereas before there was truly none, I would no longer be doomed to repeat the same sad story over and over for the rest of my life.

I wouldn't need to put myself through re-creations of childhood experiences of loss, sorrow, and disconnection – and if I were to catch myself doing it, I'd be able to recognize it for what it was (either on my own or

with the assistance of others), to examine it closely and to do something about changing it.

I would not have to deal with relationship conflict, or any complicated emotions that may arise in me, on my own anymore, either.

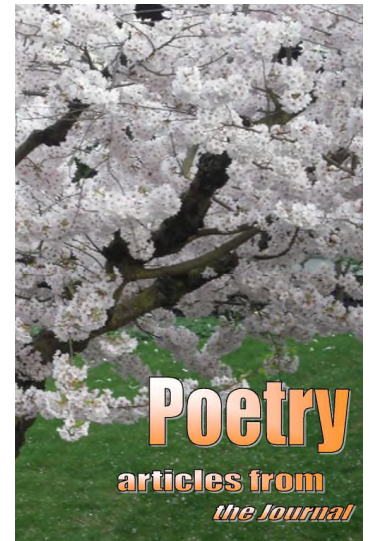
I would have already had the opportunity to practice open, honest, and nurturing relationships with my recovery partners and sponsor over several years, and so would likely feel less fear at having to be vulnerable and honest with my significant other.

— Laura, WI

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To Learn How to Play

The sky was dark
The clouds were grey
As a six year old child
tried to learn how to play

It should have been easy
This lesson in play
No tuition needed
Or so you would say

What should I do Dad?
What would be fun?
How can I please you?
Plagued the thoughts
of this Son

Careless abandon
Free-flowing joy
Were concepts unlearned
By this little boy

What stilted the river?
What stemmed the flow?
Tell me oh Lord
I feel I should know

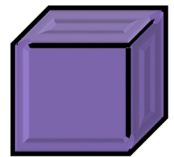
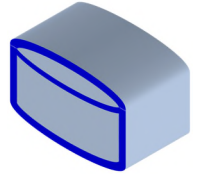
I saw it in others
Unselfconscious glee
A feeling I envied
For I longed to be free

Were pieces left out?
Did construction go wrong?
Did god have an off-day
when he taught me this song?

The tune's unfamiliar
The cadence is strange
But the words seem to call
as I search for the range

To know that it's missing
To sense it's not right
To long for acceptance
To search for the Light

The sky was dark
The clouds were grey
As a six year old child
Tried to learn how to play



— David A., UK

I Want to Be “Us” Not “Me”



My name is David and I am a recovering Sex & Love Addict and I am 47 years old. I am just over 2 years sober from my core bottom-line behaviours and 28 months in recovery. Until 2 years and 4 months ago, I had no idea I was ill. I believed I was just bad. 2 and a half years ago, I tried to take my life as my double life had come crashing down around me. I could not carry on acting out, nor could I stop.

To me, it seemed that a permanent solution was the only way to keep me from hurting those I loved. My sex addiction

was, as I saw it, the major issue because it seemed to have led me to where I was. Now, with sobriety, I see Love Addiction as my core issue. I make another my Higher Power—assigning them the magical ability to *fix* me. (My default is the “I am not enough but *we* are”; “I am worthless, *we* are worth everything.”) This pattern extended beyond romantic attachments into family, friends and work.

In my romantic relationships my unreasonable expectations were not met. Often I would drive the other person away by making them “my everything,” my one

reason to be – that is too much for anyone to carry. When this person crashed down from their deified position, I would blame and resent them and spiral off in search of oblivion through my sex addiction.

I guess it would be useful to speak a little about my early life. I cannot say I had a terrible childhood. I did not. I went into treatment believing my family of origin was perfect and that it was me who was wrong. I was not good enough and a disappointment despite all the advantages I had been given.

This is, in essence, the

problem. This is my default and this was the script I had picked up as a child – David is not enough; It is not safe to be David; David needs to try to be what his father wants him to be, then maybe he will be enough. These messages were sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle.

My father is a macho Rugby player. I am not. I was a sensitive little boy who hated getting dirty but liked to write poetry. My Dad wanted to “toughen me up.” But I took it as code for, “You are not good enough as you are.”

My father did not achieve academically due to dyslexia and he felt a failure as a result. His sporting achievements were unrecognised by his ambitious mother. He was determined not to pass this on to me. Sadly, he did the opposite and appeared to place no value on my academic abilities. Instead, he pushed me to do more than I was capable of in other areas. There was no malice in it though – he did the best he could with what he had.

Every child deserves to feel “perfect” just the way they are and I have never felt that. My response was to strive for my father’s approval (then that of male society) by being “a good boy.” This really didn’t work.

I inherited a distorted view of what was normal in terms of relationships too. My parents were/are “desperately in

love” (with the emphasis on desperate). My father is full of grand gestures. He would surely die without my angelic mother etc., etc. So this Romeo and Juliet, chocolate box, poetic image of a relationship is what I aspired to. The reality is somewhat darker and more sinister.

I had failed to see that when we were children, my mother would devote hours to us. But each night we had to be fed and ready for bed when my father got home from work because from that moment the only thing that mattered was his mood, his day, his food etc., etc. There was no room for anyone else to have needs. My father’s emotions were also over-powering, massive, and without boundaries. There was no room for anyone else to feel anything. If he was depressed, you could not be happy because that would be insensitive. And if he was happy being sad would “ruin” his happiness. If you displayed any other emotion than the permitted ones, the result was a sulking, depressed and angry dad. So I learned very young that it was not safe to feel my own feelings. I looked for permission to feel, and to be told what I should feel. I learned to absorb the emotions of others and to feel responsible for their emotions. Yet the outward image of a “chocolate box” family was

preserved.

Despite the pressures and cracks, I became convinced that my family was perfect. Others would tell me they wished they had my dad. If I objected to any behavior, I was reminded how lucky I was and that to feel differently was ungrateful, insulting and shameful.

I began to equate sadness with self-pity and above all else “self-pity” was shameful. So sadness brought me shame and I learned to displace sadness with rage. So began a lifetime of masking emotion and changing an unacceptable emotion into a more acceptable one – anything but feel the feelings – after all, my feelings were “wrong” anyway.

I desperately sought my father’s approval, but never was this given unequivocally. It was dangled tantalizingly close, but never given.

I grew up feeling isolated. I felt everyone else had the inside track on life and somehow I had missed the induction class. I wanted to fit in. I tried to fit in. I desperately sought to mold myself into acceptability, but for the most part I failed.

However, there were one or two special friends who seemed to see the good in me. I lavished all my hopes and dreams upon these individuals. Surely giving them the unequivocal approval I



had so desperately sought would secure theirs in return. Yet, I was always certain I “loved” them more than they loved me.

This was of course true for they were not sick. They did not assign magical qualities to me. They did not look to me to fix them. And they were not dependent upon me for their entire sense of self-worth. So because I felt less than, I determinedly sought to be enough for my friend to love. I would bestow greater and greater power upon them. They would retreat and I would panic because I would be lost and alone without them. I would cling tighter, and in doing so, I would make my own fears a reality.

I had one friend from childhood whose pattern was to proclaim friendship privately but deny it in public. We would sleep over at each other’s houses and at age 11, he brought a certain level of sexual activity to our relationship. He was 12. This confused things for me. I began to see sex as a way of fixing things and it blurred the boundaries of friendship. Also, I stayed in a relationship that was painful.

While he was unkind to me in public, in private we would masturbate together so in my mind I thought, “We must be friends.” He also used this to manipulate me knowing I felt shame around the behaviour. While this only carried on into early teenage years, the effects have hung around all my life.

I would seek to sexualize friendships as a way to hold on to them. I was confused about my sexuality, but I read books that said every teenager was confused. However, shame became a prominent driving force in what I now see was a blossoming addictive cycle: Become love addicted to a friend, assign magical powers, they

retreat, I panic and cling, they leave and I then use fantasy and masturbation to hide from the pain until the next person comes along who I seek to enmesh with.

When I was 19, I met my future wife. I attached to her instantly. We were friends at first. However, it rapidly became clear to me that it was ok to sexualize this friendship. “So this is the answer that will fix me,” I thought.

12 months after we met, we were married. We were

**I learned very young
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feelings.**

“blissfully happy.” And, indeed, there were really happy times. There was intimacy. However it was in my response to any discord that the illness showed its self initially. At any hint of a problem, I would react in terror at the perceived prospect of abandonment.

I would seek to make things right first with charm. But if that failed, I would resort to emotional blackmail — threatening to harm myself, to leave or make some other dramatic gesture. At some point, I would succeed and my wife would smooth things over and irrespective of how unreasonable I had been or how badly I had behaved everything would be “perfect” again.

We were the perfect family, with a perfect home, two perfect

daughters – everything looked perfect and woe betide anyone who intimated that it was not. Then one day, not long after our “perfect” 10th Wedding Anniversary in Rome, my deified wife came crashing down from her pedestal. There had been weeks of discomfort as she was unusually distant and uncommunicative.

I was frantic and eventually I dramatically packed to leave explaining that clearly I had done something wrong and she obviously no longer loved me. It was a ploy, of course. Though even I was, as usual, convinced that I would carry out the threat. She broke down and revealed that on a business trip she had had a little too much to drink. A man had shown interest. She had kissed him and messed about a little, though they had not had sex.

I was devastated. My world came crashing down. I am not clear in my mind about the next two years other than to say that I did not truly forgive, though I made dramatic shows of forgiveness. We had massive arguments. Things were not good and there was a great deal of drama. I am aware that I felt justified in retreating and holding back on my love but I now see that this behaviour was simply me refusing to be present and I believe “fixing” on the pain and grief.

Eventually we decided to make a new start and moved to our dream location – a remote island that we had always loved. Our perfect surroundings merely served to emphasize the distance between us and my wife was desperately lonely.

Money problems followed as my business in the UK collapsed. My wife began to work for a local millionaire business man. I was still mired in self-pity over our financial plight as well as the state of our marriage. The

inevitable happened while I was feeling sorry for myself — she ended up having an affair with her boss. He didn't need her, but he did want her and that was the complete opposite to me — totally dependent but also avoidant.

Now, I had no illusion of my wife having the miraculous ability to fix me but I was unable to leave. She begged forgiveness and I granted it, unable to leave. We stayed best friends but I was not present. I got no addictive hit from our relationship. My sex addiction came to the fore.

The Internet figured strongly in my sex addiction, taking me back to my teenage obsession with men. At first I convinced myself that it was just a natural desire to find out if I was physically inadequate, though I knew this was not the case. I broke one personal moral boundary after another, even though I desperately wanted to keep my boundaries.

I would try to control my behaviours vowing to stop. Every time I broke another moral boundary, I would pray for help, delete email accounts, chatroom accounts, and set up greater security on my computers. I could stop, but I could not stay stopped. Each time the addiction restarted, I sunk to lower levels of what I saw as depravity. I would get caught, but explain it away, beg forgiveness and emotionally manipulate my wife to accept the unacceptable.

After one especially long period of abstinence, I was in London on business and randomly took my addiction into the real world going to a gay club. I rationalized that as long as I kept it apart from my family and out of my home (now I was not using computers) it would at least be under control. It was not under control. It progressively delivered less and less return while demanding that I breach more and more of my core moral

values. This led to greater and greater shame and an ever more urgent need to find oblivion from these feelings.

However over the next two years of visiting gay saunas it became increasingly difficult to find oblivion as the shame became too great for the hit to wipe out. I became increasingly unproductive at work. I would lose swathes of time in these places and turn up to business meetings ill prepared using a recent family tragedy as cover.

Fortuitously, just when the sex addiction was failing to deliver I met "the one". I became love addicted to someone other than my wife for the first time since our marriage. We had been married 23 years and the last 10 had been devoid of the "assignment of magical qualities" because of the affair. I resented her, but could not leave. I used the children as the reason for staying, but now I see I was simply terrified of being alone. I believed that this other person and the alternative lifestyle he represented could fix me. But still I could not leave my wife. He assigned *me* magical qualities, gave *me* the unequivocal approval I had never received from my Dad, made me feel enough. He accepted whatever I had to give, demanding nothing in return. It was like giving a machine gun to a monkey — and I was hooked.

My wife found out. It was heartbreaking to witness the consequences of my actions. She was devastated and confused. My children were devastated. My parents were heartbroken. My community of friends were shocked. I was removed from the religious group I had grown up in and I was the talk of the small town in which I live.

I parted from him and vowed never to see him again. But I couldn't stay away irrespective of the cost. I hurt my wife

repeatedly and him too. But each time he would take me back similarly unable to say no.

By this time, I am pleased to say that my wife had decided she could not accept my behaviour and we were separated. The inability to stop seeing him and the need to seek affirmation from other guys when he was unavailable led to my suicide attempt. Unable to stop, but equally unable to carry on acting out, I felt stopping life was the only solution. I very nearly succeeded. After 5 days in intensive care, I was admitted to a psychiatric unit, diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder (which can look a lot like addiction with massive highs and desperate lows).

Eventually, after 12 weeks, I was diagnosed as an addict. Initially I believed recovery was not the only answer and that accepting my homosexuality would fix me. So I set about arranging a life once again with him.

He accepted my addiction. But despite my belief that he was the answer, in the first few days of being "officially" together I reverted to my sex addiction and cheated on him. He was hurt but forgave me citing years of repressing my sexuality as a reason. History appeared to be repeating itself, only this time at a fast forward pace.

I now saw the writing on the wall; if he was not enough, (he is 12 years my junior, intelligent, articulate and devastatingly handsome) then being gay was not the answer and recovery *was* the only chance I had. I broke all ties with him and entered a 12-Step addiction treatment facility. Withdrawal was agonizing, but helped me see this as a very real illness, take my behaviour outside the realms of morality and recognise that I was ill trying to get well, not bad trying to get good.

I got a sponsor and have

worked the steps ever since. I have been painstaking about this phase of my development, and I am amazed. I am working Step 10 and have 3 sponsees. My wife and I are back together and the relationship displays healthy qualities. We are deeply committed and are working both our own programs (me in S.L.A.A. she in CoSA) as well as a joint program in RCA.

My life, now over 2 years on, is unrecognisable. It has not been easy. Withdrawal was agonizing, but I have not had any contact with my qualifier in 30 months and the best amends I can make to him is to never contact him again and to pray that he too finds recovery and happiness, for he deserves it.

I have come to value those feelings of withdrawal as a touchstone telling me when I need to move away from a pattern of behaviour even though it may appear innocuous. Sobriety has grown as I have seen how accessory behaviours have permeated my life and how humbly letting these go simply allows more room for my Higher Power in my life. The less I operate on self-will the more influence Higher Power has in

my life.

It is not always comfortable facing reality but it is always rewarding. Ultimately, I see addiction as hiding from myself and reality and recovery as meeting myself. Acceptance and faith seem to be the watchwords of recovery for me.

Anyway, this has taken a while to write and my recovery is a work in progress. My wife has been remembering childhood sexual abuse. Over the past 4 months, the nightmares that she has been having are heartbreaking.

Thanks to recovery, I am staying present and standing alongside her in support without disappearing into her pain. I still frequently want to run from the pain. But it is about progress not perfection. In writing this, I can see how far I have come in the last 30 months.

One additional thing I want to add is about my relationship with my wife. It restarted well as we were both fully aware that we had a choice. I felt that I was able to be without her and her without me.

However, based on my recovery and the fact that we liked each other we both agreed

that 24 years of marriage and friendship were worth something and so we *chose* to give it a go. The rewards have been immense but it has not been easy. I have had to recognise that at times she will feel insecure. However she has learned to recognise the honesty of recovery and accept that she hid from the truth in the past. In accepting this she has a touchstone that allows her to recognise my sobriety and also when I am struggling.

We have boundaries in place. It would not be fair to tell her explicitly when I am struggling and what with. However she is aware when I am reaching out more intensely and encourages me to do so and she also sees when I am isolating and encourages me to reach out more.

We have a good life, not a perfect one, and I am looking forward to the future as we walk the road of life together but as two separate recovering individuals. Recently, my wife said she has never felt as loved as she does now, not because of glamorous romantic displays but because of a quiet openness and acceptance we share.

To my amazement she described me as a quiet strength standing alongside her - never in a million years would she have described me that way in addiction - I was a total drama queen!

I hope I have been able to share my strength, hope and deep gratitude as well as my experience.

For what it is worth my humble opinion is...it works *if* you work it so Let Go, Let God. I am certain that he is infinitely better at God stuff than this addict. After all, it is in his job description and it is not in mine.

In fellowship,
David a very grateful recovering sex and love addict

— David A, UK



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Social Anorexia

“Some of us feel overwhelmed in social settings. Others of us get high by socializing with a great many people in order to keep ourselves from intimacy with any one person.”

— ANOREXIA—SEXUAL, SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL PAMPHLET

Before S.L.A.A. I thought my ability to be outgoing was an asset. I was unaware that it was also a distinct facet of my disease. The concept of getting “high” or getting a “hit” off of socializing shocked me. At first I thought it was absurd. I eventually learned that the “high” I got from socializing came from the attention of others that I longed for to fill the emptiness I felt inside. I let sobriety, the steps and my Higher Power heal and fill this emptiness so that I am able to experience true intimacy with others.

AFFIRMATION: Today, I turn to my Higher Power to fill the emptiness I feel inside.

— A.A.

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