

# theJournal

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Dealing with Triggers

# 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

There are some really useful tools for avoiding triggers revealed in this issue of the Journal. I didn't want to leave anything out, so I apologize if some of the pictures are small! (They won't be on the digital issue).

I found everything helpful, and wanted to keep it. I'm grateful to everyone who wrote articles and answered the question of the day. Triggers can be difficult to handle. To guard against them, take this issue of the Journal with you everywhere!

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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The Augustine Fellowship,  
S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. 1550 NE Loop 410,  
Suite 118 San Antonio, TX 78209

1-210-828-7900 Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT except for  
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(fax) 1-210-828-7922. [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org)

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Managing Editor Lisa C.

Art Director Fiona

Proofreaders for this issue

Andrew K.

Beth L.

# Question of the Day

## & Answers from Yesterday

“HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH TRIGGERS IN YOUR RECOVERY?”

**When** I am triggered I might say the Serenity Prayer or the Third Step prayer and call my sponsor or a recovery partner. I allow the trigger. If it's loneliness, I will embrace it and know it will pass. I move on with my day. Talking to others takes the power out of triggers. Having a daily spiritual connection will help us avoid being triggered.

— Diane

**Admitting** that I am powerless over my life, addictions and obsessions. And turning my will and my life over to the care of God.

— Carlos, Berlin

1. I try to rationalize the situation I am in and to understand the pathology of the trigger. 2. I try to turn to God and ask for help.

— Harald, Berlin

**Text** my sponsor. Make an outreach call. Pray: “Help me to stay sober, just for this moment!”

— Minka, Berlin

**Commit** to my present relationship. NO porn. NO masturbation. Pray to my Higher Power to prevent me from acting out.

— Guillermo, Berlin

**I** try to hand it over to my Higher Power and use the serenity prayer like a mantra — repeating it over and over. Additionally, I outreach with other fellows.

— Frieder, Berlin

**Acknowledge** the feeling. Talk about it. Surrender the feeling to my H.P.

— Danette S., Seminole, FL

1) Clarify facts of my current triggering event with myself and sponsor. 2) Work through anger, sadness, fear, guilt. 3) Look at unrealistic/realistic expectations of myself. 4) Work with realistic expectations to reinforce my recovery with my sponsor and meetings

— Nancy G., San Diego

**Call** Call my sponsor!

— Christiane, Frankfurt

**I** bought a booklet for advice. I share in the meetings. I talk with my sponsor.

— Roberto, Frankfurt

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “How do you deal with triggers in your recovery?” — Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #160 — S.L.A.A. in the Senior Years — “How are we making our lives enriching for ourselves and others? How do we practice the principles, and what wisdom can we offer to the younger among us who may come into this time of life?” — The deadline for submissions is 3/15/16. Issue #161 — ABM issue\*\* Attitude of Gratitude — What tools do you use to get into and stay in an attitude of gratitude? — The deadline for submissions is 5/15/16. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

**First**, be aware of what they may avoid if possible. Pray. Tell myself 1-2-3 (for those Steps and practice them). Talk to sponsor or other supportive person.

— Anne K., Tampa

**Prayer** and gratitude.

— Tim C., Cincinnati

**Breathe.** Positive thoughts to the Fellowship. Acknowledge trigger and revert thoughts towards the programme. Prayer and meditation.

— Paul T., London, U.K.

**If** someone says something, wears something or does something “innocently,” it’s not their fault. I can talk to them. But it is up to me to handle my issues.

— Wil C., Plymouth, MA

**Ask** for guidance from Higher Power whether it be to remove me from the situation, to help me cope by removing a character defect, or by simply accepting that which I cannot change.

— Amy G., Austin, TX

**Accept** that I am triggered. Ask myself, “and then what?” Keep asking that question until I reach a theoretical rock bottom. Then I know it’s not worth it.

— Jase, Monterey, CA

**See** how I can remove myself from the trigger. Can I leave the room? Limit contact? Then I pray to Higher Power for relief and help in my actions to step away from the trigger.

— Trevor, Seattle, WA

**I** H.A.L.T and check if I’m hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. And if I’m any of them, I stop and go into self-care and often that relieves my triggers. Or I take space and remove myself from the situation.

— Jaki Jo, London, UK

**In** a meeting, I close my eyes, I can leave for a time or for the meeting that day. I can ask for changes in behavior in my meeting when appropriate. In life I use the A.C.E. principle: • Avoid the trigger. • Cope w/ the situation as possible. • Leave the area/situation.

— DJ, Houston

**It** depends on the trigger level. Level 1, I say to myself, that’s triggering and maybe reflect on what is going on (stress, worry, emotional upset) that amplifies the trigger. Level 2, I do the above and make outreach calls and get out of the situation that triggers me. Level 3, do the above and send a group text one person will check in at once, and others will check back throughout the day.

— Dave G, Los Angeles

# Question of the Day

**I**f I'm on guard, I try to be conscious of the triggers around me. If needed, I take distance or call or app someone as soon as possible. Sometimes it's enough to pray or remind myself what I am doing here.

— Maarten, the Netherlands

**Triggers** are a signal that something is awry, that it is time for me to pause and check in. Even when nothing apparent is wrong, there is usually something to pay attention to.

— Anon, Seattle

**I** always look at triggers as something I have experienced in the past so therefore it gives me an opportunity to accept the reason why I'm triggered.

— P.A., Houston

**I** acknowledge that a trigger for me is an inappropriate reaction to a person, place, or thing. I get in touch with my body and check in with how I feel. I call someone, pray, meditate or journal.

— Ashly M. Houston

**I** allow triggers to be opportunities for growth. I share my realizations about the triggers with my support network. If I am having a day where everyone I see is a "10" it is an indicator of my spiritual condition. I get to choose to turn toward HP for help and support, then take the actions necessary to strengthen my condition/connection.

— Anonymous

**I** make outreach calls to other members (H.O.W. Program). I meditate. I pause and pray. I make more outreach calls, then call another sick and suffering member.

— Jane, Sydney

**I** check my trigger boundaries by bottom line, middle line, and top line behaviors. I counter my triggers with top line behaviors. I call my sponsor or recovery partners.

— Liz D, Dallas

**I** try to avoid them.

— Angela A. Fort Lauderdale

**First** I try to minimize them. I realize that HALT (hungry, angry, lonely, and tired) is the main trigger so I try to avoid it. The main thing here is feeling lonely: I try to go to a meeting or call another member of the group regularly. Especially if I'm triggered, I use my phone a lot. And I organize steady hug buddies.

Healthy vicarious parenting acceptance is communicated thru conscious non-sexual touch. Secondly, I try to accept some feelings that used to trigger me as less distressing - as part of life. For example, it is okay to get horny if I do not follow up into acting out. And minor slips simply do not count. (These are individual - for me it is fixating on some body part) It is just part of my set-up and so I try not to get upset by them and I go on. I do not try to simply suppress them by prayer or meditation. (I pray and meditate but do not think they should be used as a suppression tool.)

Geo, Budapest, Hungary

**I** usually take a deep breath, let the bad feeling flow through me, and I try to give it to God. I sometimes run to him as a child runs to the arms of his mother. When I don't feel well, I even take measures to avoid triggers, i.e. taking off my glasses or crossing the street when I see an attractive lady coming in my direction.

Greg, Budapest, Hungary



# Triggers Have Roots in Childhood

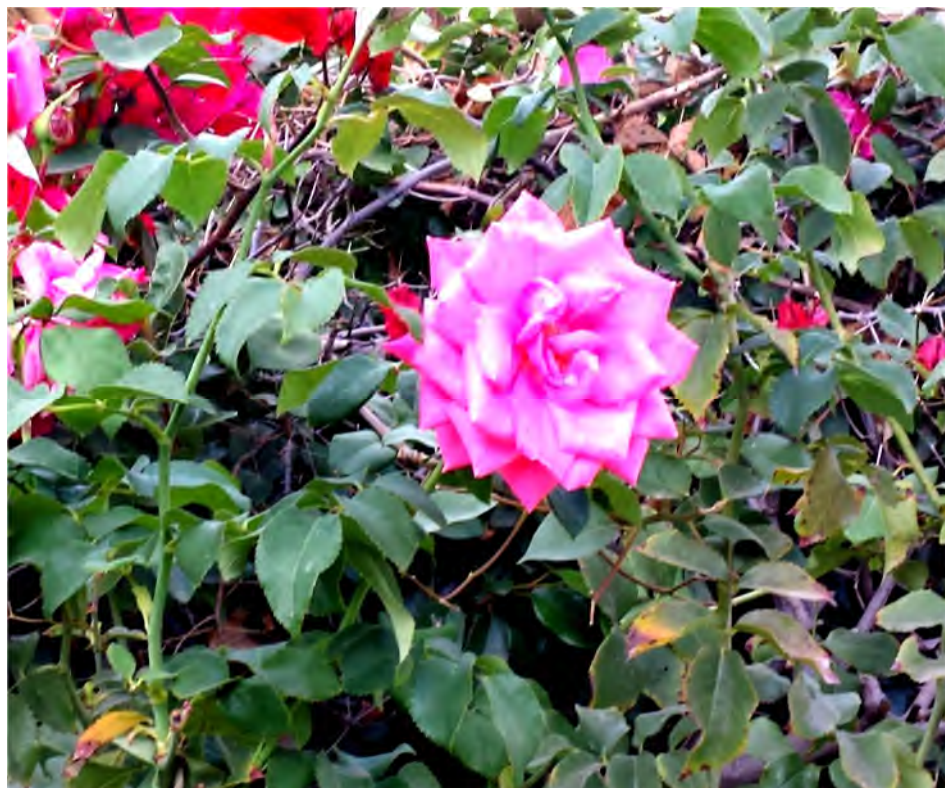
**M**y sponsor forwarded me this Journal question and suggested I write about it. She knows that exploring these kinds of topics in writing helps me in my recovery. I take her suggestions seriously, so I decided to make an attempt to address this weighty issue in my life.

Triggers. Here's the problem: Many of the things that trigger me in adulthood have roots in childhood emotional and physical trauma. Thus, it's not always clear to me what is getting triggered, my trauma or my sex and love addiction. They are so intertwined that I finally realized that they have to be dealt with together.

When my traumatic memories get triggered, I experience unpleasant and unsettled sensations inside me. I become aware of feelings of shame, fear, and sadness. Sometimes it seems like the ground opens up beneath me and I'm being sucked down into darkness. These feelings are so painful that I quickly suppress them.

In trauma therapy I learned that suppression was a necessary childhood survival strategy. Unfortunately, it is no longer effective in adulthood. Now I'm doing the hard work of learning to accept and stay with my feelings, no matter how uncomfortable they are. This learning process is going very slowly. It takes a lot of time, practice, and patience. But I am committed, because I have lost so much by not feeling my feelings.

When I get triggered, I've learned it's important to pause, to take a moment to deal with the feelings right away. If I don't, I can so easily be led into acting



out or acting in. Literally in seconds, I can find myself intriguing about some male colleague at my job, or plotting to go downtown and pick someone up for anonymous sex, or completely shutting down and locking myself away in my house for several days.

The longer I let the unsettled feelings linger, the more likely I am to slip, and the longer it takes for me to bounce back.

What triggers me? This is also complicated. The more obvious things are someone speaking to

me aggressively, someone trying to control me, someone not respecting my ideas, or someone violating my boundaries.

I also get triggered by being in the presence of certain unpleasant people, like some family members, friends, or colleagues. I get triggered by certain situations like going to parties and anticipating that I won't know how to interact socially. I get triggered when I make mistakes and witness my imperfection.

As I mentioned, my kneejerks

response to shame, fear, and sadness is to suppress the feelings.

But the tension of having unexpressed feelings locked inside me creates an urge to do something physical about it. I usually feel an impulse to have sex. Before I joined S.L.A.A. and began my recovery, I took many sexual risks in response to that impulse.

I relate well to one of the Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction: “We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.”

One top line behavior I try to use to calm the sexual impulse (besides masturbation, because I am not in a healthy partnership right now) is exercise. I wish I naturally liked to work out, but I don't.

My therapist encourages me, just do 5 minutes of cardio activity. So when I am able, I set a timer for 5 minutes and get on my elliptical trainer. I end up feeling better and don't have the guilt that I didn't do more. Plus, if I can get myself to do 5 minutes, I often end up doing 10 or 20 minutes more.

The more subtle things that trigger me can often be the most troublesome. Sometimes at the end of summer, when the smell of autumn is in the air, painful memories of middle school get stirred up and I find myself crying for no reason.

Sometimes the light at dusk triggers a deep irrational fear; if I'm driving, sometimes I have to pull over to the side of the road to calm myself down.

One technique I use to address these inexplicable feelings is called “orienting.” Wherever I am, I look around very slowly, resting my eyes on each object I

see. In my mind, I identify what it is and move on to the next object.

I tell myself that I am safe, that there is nothing in my environment at this moment to harm me. And I start to calm down.

The hardest emotion to deal with when I get triggered is

**Anger is dangerous. I got so good at suppressing anger that I stopped being able to recognize when I was angry. I turned anger against myself and it developed into depression and despair.**

anger. I was a victim of my father's rage when I was young, yet I was taught that I was not allowed to express my own anger.

Either way, the message I got was that anger is dangerous. I got so good at suppressing anger that I stopped being able to recognize when I was angry. I turned anger against myself and it developed into depression and despair.

Recently, certain unjust situations at work triggered me, and I became both agitated and paralyzed.

Through talking with my sponsor and therapist, I soon realized that I was experiencing

anger. I felt like a deer in the headlights. I felt shock. I had no idea.

Then I felt excited because I realized I had enough recovery, felt safe enough, to start looking at my anger.

I also learned several exercises to release anger rather than inappropriately direct it at someone. One exercise involves straightening my arms, leaning into a wall, and pressing my hands as hard as I can.

The most harmful thing about not dealing with triggers right away is that I have seriously damaged some of my

relationships with people I care about.

For instance, I can get triggered by someone not using the “right” words to reflect back what I said to them.

When they get what I said “wrong,” I often become emotionally upset, and cause them to pull back with a look of “I'm outta here.”

I end up reliving the cycle of abandonment I experienced as a child.

Then I feel even more pain, knowing I am pushing people away but feeling powerless to stop it.

I have learned that there will always be things that trigger me. What's hopeful is that I can learn how to manage those triggers so I won't act out or lash out.

The key is to stay present for myself, to accept and feel my feelings, and to release my emotions in healthy ways.

The more I am present for myself, the more I can build a healthy relationship with myself, and the more I can trust and maintain healthy relationships with others.

**— Anonymous, Arizona**

# Trigger Only Has Power That I Give It

**W**hat is a trigger? For me it can be an image, a sound, a word, a smell, a touch of a hand, or object, a person or a thought. Any of those can bring back a memory, or a desire, the rush of excitement over a potential intrigue or a hit of adrenaline as my body reacts to the chemical changes in my brain. Yep, it pretty much has me boxed and screwed.

You might think that I should feel hopeless and overwhelmed, that I might just give up, that I am totally outmatched by this disease. Maybe I should throw in the towel, maybe I'm destined to continue acting out sex and love addiction for the rest of my life. That was exactly how I used to feel before I found S.L.A.A. and a Higher Power that works for me.

But that was the end result of a process or cycle, if you will. The truth is that a trigger has no more power than I give it. How do I avoid giving it power? Maybe I should start by explaining the cycle of my disease. I am what I believe. My beliefs shape my thoughts and my thoughts shape my actions and reactions to stimuli.

My beliefs depend on my relationship with a Higher Power and from that flows my belief concerning the physical world and its people that I come into contact with daily.

If I believe that I'm in this alone and that escape from the cycle of sex and love addiction depends on my will and efforts, I am vulnerable to triggers because I am already disheartened by my previous failures to "control" my thoughts and actions as well as the world around me.

That kept me trapped in sex addiction for decades. There was always the belief that if I tried harder, found the right mate or partner, or the right situation I would be "cured". What a setup for despair. But I had to take it to the bitter end and "never give up".

Well the end was bitter and adversely affected the rest of my life. I can't own a gun. I can't get a passport. I have to be conscious of how my interactions with the opposite sex appear to others. Once I was convicted of felony sexual assault it became a different world. I'm not complaining, just admitting some of the cost of my disease. I spent all my savings, lost my job, and was unemployed for 2 years after my release.

Do you want to know the first thing I said to myself when I was arrested? "How did I end up here?" I can tell you today how: Lack of a working relationship with a Higher Power was the fundamental cause.

I was a member of two other 12-Step fellowships and working Steps and sponsoring. I kept my sexual behavior secret, in a closed room in my heart, so to speak. I could never find the courage to talk about it with any of my sponsors; I tried mental health professionals but was even more reticent and dishonest with them.

I was sure that if I opened up I would be hated, reviled and ostracized forever. A severe mental twist told me that although I desperately needed help and wanted help, I wasn't worthy of it because my behavior was unforgiveable. I incessantly asked God to heal me, but I wasn't willing to

walk through the fear, pain and the shame.

The good thing is that arrest and incarceration gave me nothing more to lose. The worst had happened and now nothing was stopping me from sharing with others the secret I had so long held. I got a new sponsor, my previous one dismissed me and most of my fellowship friends turned their backs on me. My new sponsor and a mental health group of others like me gave me hope and courage and the will to apply myself like never before to the Steps, which are the key to a working relationship with a Higher Power and the rest of the world. I learned that I need to be conscious of my spiritual condition. I learned how to recognize when I'm experiencing a trigger. I turn to my God and ask for relief from obsession which is the primary result of it. I call or visit a fellow addict or get to a meeting if possible and get current. The result of true surrender and union with God and my fellows is the solution for me. I'll do it every time and as often as necessary. Without that connection I'm already lost and vulnerable to my disease.

The result of not doing so is to set my feet on a path back to that spiritual darkness that led me to harm others to satisfy my need or desire. I have spent the last 20 years making amends, carrying the message, doing service in and out of the rooms of recovery and most importantly cultivating and nourishing my spiritual health. The result has been a life worth living and of better quality than I have ever known. I am not materially wealthy, but in love, hope

and fellowship, I'm a millionaire.

If you're troubled by triggers and feeling besieged, share it, consult your Higher Power whatever that might be, and turn to the Steps. We get only a tempo-

rary reprieve a minute, an hour, or a day at a time but right now is the only time allotted to us. It's the only time that counts. I have a golf coach who says "Practice doesn't make perfect; it makes

practicing permanent." Practice the Steps and practice them again. Your life and your relationships will be better for it.

—Anonymous

## Combating Triggers With Honesty

Recovery in S.L.A.A. is similar to any other addiction in that, at some point, you are likely to experience triggers. A trigger for me can be a bad review at work or a positive review at work, a life change or a small bump in the road of life.

Triggers are an ever present threat to my sobriety and require a multiple-prong approach to prevent me from engaging in slippery slope activities. When I am triggered, my immediate goal is to find accountability partners. So my first response to a trigger is to find a way to be honest with a program friend or my sponsor.

When I'm honest with another person in recovery, I am less likely to create a secret compartment in my thinking and it takes some of the "magic" out of the possibility of acting out. My addictive thinking likes to create a fantasy version of what acting out would be like, what will happen, what I will get to feel and how that will make things better. Program friends are a good counterbalance to my addictive thinking and help to remind me of the costs of non-sobriety.

My second response to a trigger is to check my spiritual fitness and overall life balance. A trigger, whether it's a sexual intrigue invitation, an inappropriate fantasy about an

acquaintance, a dream about an ex or a thought of acting out brought on by life stress, is usually easily dismissed when my connection to my Higher Power is solid and my life supports me. It is an entirely different story when I've allowed my daily contact with a power greater than myself to become more like a weekly check-in or when I'm under pressure. That's when I'm in the most danger of losing all of the self-respect, dignity and serenity that 8 years of recovery and 5 years of sobriety have given me.

One of the things that makes sobriety difficult in the S.L.A.A. program revolves around the fact that sex and love in and of themselves are not activities that the addict gives up—rather the addict must define the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behavior and attempt to maintain healthy relationships with both love and sex.

Through the grace of my Higher Power, my sponsor's guidance and the power of the Step work, I've set and maintained bottom lines. My bottom lines are to stay out of intrigue and fantasy, zero contact with qualifiers and not making anyone/any job my Higher Power. I know that if I engage in any of those behaviors, it is a

certainty that I will be back to the affairs and risky sexual behaviors that I am so glad to be free of today. So for me, a trigger can be an opportunity to assess my recovery behaviors and shore up any weak areas.

Sobriety definitions and bottom lines are intricately entwined with triggers during early recovery. For a lot of us, I think that the boundary-setting process is not a "one and done" deal. And triggers frequently lead to acting out in the early stages which leads to a new sobriety date as well as a new understanding of what can cause relapse. Paying attention to what triggers a craving, or how a trigger can start a snowball that releases an avalanche, provides me with valuable information regarding my disease. Sobriety in S.L.A.A. can be tantalizingly elusive because a trigger thought is so quickly introduced and so easy to entertain and yet so difficult to pin down as addictive, so every new awareness is essential to my continued sobriety.

I think that creating a list of responses to triggers and a willingness to use them, allows me to maintain sobriety—and I'm looking forward to adding to that list via the Journal.

—Anonymous

# Awareness Helps Me Deal With Triggers



I deal with triggers with great awareness. I let them be (instead of wanting to addiction them away). Many times they can be very uncomfortable.

I acknowledge this, say “hello” to the pain or fear or loneliness or anger or whatever might get triggered.

I then sit with the triggered feeling. It might happen in the car, at home, at the beach, in the toilet at work, even if it is just for a few minutes.

Most of the time it takes quite a while to become aware of it.

In the beginning of recovery, triggers stayed for days if not weeks. It was hard work to pay attention to them for a long period of time. I need my solitude and my Higher Power to be with me when I process the triggers. Sometimes I know the source of it. Sometimes I have no idea what makes me feel so down.

Most of the time I will greet it,

in a very kind and curious, gentle way: “Hello. Is it okay for me to be with you?” I treat them the way I would have liked to be treated by my emotionally unavailable parents or partners.

Most of the time it is allowed for me to be with the pain or grief or whatever the feeling might be and then there is a gap.

I am not my feelings; The slogan, “I am not my thoughts” teaches me recovery.

It feels very different being *with* the pain instead of *being* the pain.

Give it a go if you choose to. See what it might feel like for you.

Relating this all to the Steps: I am powerless over the triggers, what brings them on, and how long they stay. Sure, my life becomes unmanageable.

I turn to Step 2, perhaps I can be restored to sanity. Step 3, I turn my will and my life over to the care of a power greater than myself.

Step 11, prayer and meditation, ties in with what I shared about being with the triggering feelings. For me, that is a kind of meditation.

Bringing it to service work: I can be there for others to hear their triggered feelings and hold that space for them to be with their feelings instead of acting out. I can perhaps even bring the presence of the God of our understanding into the process.

May the God of your understanding be with you on the magnificent journey of recovery, remembering that you are never alone, progress not perfection and one day at a time.

The promises do become reality. They did for me, thanks to all of you who supported me, heard me and the feelings that were triggered.

Blessings in service.

— Maria, Sydney, Australia

# Triggers Make or Break Healthy Lifestyle

**W**hen it comes to recovery from sex and love addiction, triggers can play an important role in making or breaking a healthy, “normal”, lifestyle.

What I mean to say is, “what we do with triggers, will determine how strong or weak our recovery is.” Let’s examine this question for a moment: Have you ever been triggered by an event or by someone else’s actions and not realized it until later on?

That’s happened to me on many an occasion. I might see or hear something that is not so blatantly triggering at that moment, but later on I am still thinking about it. That’s what I call delayed triggering. That sort of triggering gets me into the addict mode and then can set me up for acting out.

The trick I have found here is

to recognize triggers as they occur, and to realize that they are external forces that do not have to control my actions of the moment. What I have also found after years of recovery, is that I have to be like “Teflon”, and not allow the triggers to stick.

Triggers are everywhere in today’s world. You really can’t get around them. Television, movies, the internet, and just everyday life can be overwhelming at times.

What we do with all those feelings is what recovery is all about. In the past, I kept my feelings to myself. That was never a wise choice.

Today I reach out. I will call, and call people, until someone picks up the phone. Sooner or later, someone does pick up. If not, the fact that I’ve dialed a few numbers takes the bite out of the trigger and it no longer bothers

me. The power of a phone call is unbelievable.

As addicts, we almost always feel like our situation is different, that no one else understands what we are going through, that no one else has the same triggers.

Well, I have found that while we are definitely all different, our triggers have the same impact on our lives. They can jeopardize our recovery if we let them, or we can use them to strengthen our recovery by not letting them take us to those dark places of the addiction.

Personally, I acknowledge that my triggers will always be there, but what I do with them is entirely up to me. And as always, if I can’t handle them, I look to my Higher Power for help and guidance.

In Service,

— **Michael S**

## Self-Care Is Key

The truth is no matter how careful I am; I will always be faced with reminders of the deep need that fueled my addiction.

**T**hat is how I define triggers.

My tools for handling triggers are limited, because there are no meetings in my area. I’m also anorexic, so looking to long-distance program friends for help can be

a struggle. I have had to accept that the one thing that will make or break my ability to withstand those daily threats to my sobriety is self-care. I need to hear this even as I am writing it.

When I feel triggered, my perception of myself is a key to

how I will react. Self-care directly influences that perception. In the Basic Text, Rich calls it being on “good spiritual ground”. When I’m on good spiritual ground, staying in reality (by telling myself the truth) can help dispel the



trigger. It only works when the “truth” is the real truth that comes from connection with God.

If I’m on poor spiritual ground, my perception of the truth becomes distorted, and I believe the lies of addiction, which gives power to the triggers.

My perception of others is another key which is directly affected by self-care.

If I feel whole and cared for, I’ll view people as human beings deserving of their own happiness.

If I feel uncared for, all I can think of is myself. I will long for attention and “love” from others. I will take from anyone I

can and hate those who seem to have what I don’t. Really, for me, triggers have little to do with the subject matter and everything to do with me.

A person is just a person and a picture is just a picture. On their own, they have no power.

The power they have to trigger me, I give them. That power lives and dies with self-care. This whole endeavor is an uphill battle for me. When my house is unkempt, I’ve slept too much, work has piled up, and I’m avoiding God, it’s all too easy to stay there.

Not caring for myself is both a cause and a symptom of my emotional state. When I don’t practice self-care it leads to the

belief that I’m not worth anything.

The more I feel this way, the less I take care of myself, and the worse I feel. Only when I push myself up the hill can I approach daily life with sanity.

I need to talk to God and ask for His help. I need to reach out to others. I need to keep my environment clean and do things I enjoy.

Ultimately, I am in control of my own recovery. I obviously can’t avoid every trigger, but my ability to walk away is only as good as my level of emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

— **Beth S., Pennsylvania, USA**

# An Excuse by Any Other Name

**H**ello, family of choice. I am a sex and love addict, living in the solution one more glorious day.

I entered this program years ago because my compulsive cheating and lying were coming to a close, leading me to consider prostitutes as a viable option. Sensing that would lead to incarceration and my early demise, I found a sponsor and worked the Steps. Honesty in all areas blossomed. I was a serial monogamist for a while, but now consider monogamy as just another in my long list of strategies.

Today I have a growing level of acceptance of myself as an aging heterosexual bachelor. I attend meetings, sponsor, and read the literature, including our Journal, which can at times be a tad more graphic than I expected, but remains the one periodical that even attempts to make sense of our curious condition.

When I read that our topic was 'dealing with triggers', I felt compelled to share what my sponsor said to me.

It went along the lines of "You weren't triggered to act out. You used that situation as an excuse to act out." His logic was compelling, for it pointed out that I was responsible for my choices.

I haven't given the topic of triggers much thought since

then, but I now believe that perhaps my sponsor's words were a tad myopic.

Keeping in mind that there are as many variations of this addiction as there are members, I would like to write about 'triggers' as situations that I recognize I am considerably less able to cope with. For me, three situations remain:

1) Dealing with unavailable yet attractive or provocative women, such as those who are married or below the age of consent.

2) Commercial sexuality in its varied forms, such as pornography, strip clubs, massage parlors, websites offering services, and even sexually charged mainstream movies.

3) Being alone with unavailable women at inappropriate times, such as late night, or in secluded areas, such as quiet corners or automobiles.

4) Exploring sustained communication with women during stretches of time when I am in a committed relationship.

The way I deal with those jarring situations is to do my best to avoid them. An apt comparison might be to that of a compulsive overeater.

I imagine he would have to be

careful about what he purchased at a grocery store or ordered in a restaurant, making the God-directed choice long before the food ever has a chance to be placed before him.

Since I have worked the steps, I continue to do the morning meditation and daily inventory as well as service, sponsoring gentlemen who are willing to live by the principles of our program.

Dedication to these steps keep me aligned with Higher Power and continually feeds my awareness. My prayer is that I make the healthiest choices, for which I am ultimately responsible.

Have I mentioned that I am grateful to be a sex and love addict?

I am, for it was that Gift of Desperation that spurred me into the flow of Good Orderly Direction and has provided a faith that works.

I commit to another twenty-four hours of living in the solution: honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, self-discipline, and love for others, including you.

Thanks for reading my experience, strength and hope.

— I.B., California



# Seeing Two Sides to My Triggers

My name is Terri, I've been in S.L.A.A. formerly since April 2010, but attended some S.L.A.A. meetings a few years earlier to try the programme, after it was suggested I was a sex and love addict from someone in A.A. I'm in Orange County, CA. During the time around 2006-2009, there just weren't many S.L.A.A. meetings and definitely no recovery for me to model myself on.

As a new person to the 12-Step life, I was trying to figure myself out and see which programme I belonged in. I never had an issue with drugs and alcohol, only codependency, sex and love. Along the way, in my introduction to 12-Step meetings, I found myself triggered a tremendous amount of time, because my love relationship at the time was so tumultuous.

The more my boyfriend left me for his dark world of drug addiction, the more I spiraled into my dark world of sex and fantasy and therefore acted out

and kept getting triggered repeatedly over the years. At the time, I never saw the correlation between the two.

I'm also dual diagnosis and what has helped me battle triggers are a few different approaches that I have learned and applied in the past two years. CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing) and GET (Gradual Exercise Training). These three techniques have helped me tremendously. It does help to have a psychologist who has also helped me use these methods, but isn't a necessity.

As far as "triggering places" go, I would drive by them periodically to allow my brain to know I was triggered and not look at the places. Then after a few times I would drive by slowly and look at the building/place/location and remind myself of the negative experience I had there. I would then ask myself, "What's going to happen to you

by replaying the story in your head? Are you going to die/get sick/lose your job/fall off the deep end, etc.?" I did that a few times and found the trigger lost some of its edge, because I was rationalizing the trigger.

I would also keep asking myself the question, "What was your part in playing a role in this trigger"? Each time I'd come up with something different until I could drive by the place and not feel that sickened feeling in my stomach. Don't get me wrong, these methods took me months to overcome. It was not easy. I was just willing to change.

From the exercises I was doing, I found myself seeing two sides to the trigger and then I found the trigger lost most of its effect. What I'm actually doing is submerging myself in the trigger and allowing the anxiety to come down to a manageable level. Hopefully these tips have been of help. Good luck in your recovery.

— Terri

## Spiritual Fitness Is the Answer

I have learned in recovery that I have triggers. I never used to know they existed. Today I know I can be triggered by all kinds of things, including media messages, certain people, music, certain opportunities,

memories, and places. Identifying triggers is a good place to start. I do not feel judged for having triggers by people in S.L.A.A.. I have to be careful of trying to get support for triggering issues from people

who are not in recovery in this program. They are usually unable to be supportive or understanding with this issue.

I find this subject is best handled by the A.A. literature. I will tell you what I have learned



about triggers. If you're not sure where the message about handling temptation is in the Big Book of A.A., I would suggest familiarizing yourself with the material. The book contains the original program that has led to

the formation of S.L.A.A. and so many other programs.

Thank God! The first time my sponsor used the Big Book to explain sex and love addiction, replacing the word "alcohol" with the words "sex and love," it really

opened my eyes. I had never used that method to understand this addiction. It worked for me.

In my understanding, the way to overcome temptation as described in the Big Book is to know that shielding ourselves

from temptation is not the cure. We must be spiritually fit. Now you may wonder in what part of the Big Book this type of explanation can be found. I wonder. Step 12, you say?

So, my spiritual fitness, which is what keeps me sober, has to come as the result of working all of the steps, in order?

What a concept. And after all, if the book says “shielding ourselves from temptation is doomed to fail,” how can we be in a world full of triggers and maintain sobriety? I guess it depends on what your triggers are. If they are like mine, and can involve random people, songs, pictures, and places, then I am in trouble if I go around avoiding all that stuff because it’s everywhere.

Of course, I can choose to look away, walk away or avoid certain people, places and things. But I can’t live a full life and stay in hiding forever. I can tell someone safe that I am triggered, get the obsessive secret out and don’t let it overcome me. Eventually, the book tells us that spiritual fitness as a result of working the 12 Steps leads us to “recoil” from triggers; something that used to pull us in can now repel us.

Ok, I ought to use “me statements”. I am paraphrasing the book. I will say that from what I understand from the book (and I believe this applies to sex and love addiction as well) that sex and love addicts can go to all sorts of places that people say we shouldn’t go as long as our motive for being there is right, and that we are in fit spiritual condition.

Motive? Yes. We need to check our motives. For me, when I choose to keep an online “friendship” status on social media with the person with whom I have a newly severed relationship (someone who I can identify as being a trigger) I can

choose to “unfollow” that person, so their material does not show up when I log in. My motive for keeping the person in my circle is spiritual and personal. And this may change. I am new to social media, and this person is newer. But for now, my motive for logging in is to stay connected to my fellows. Period.

I don’t visit the pages of exes as a rule. As someone I am no longer connected to, I honor this person’s presence, but I don’t seek connection. However, this person is part of my life in a spiritual sense, through prayer and history and a bond that was in part sick and in part well, and that’s where I am at with that.

My motive for logging in is not to intrigue, obsess, check on, or look to see if I’m being checked on. Thank God I have not used social media for those purposes while I have been in recovery yet. God willing. My addiction takes all sorts of forms and seeks new outlets and I have to be careful.

I am saying that the goal of living in a world full of triggers is to first, identify, second, admit, and third, use recovery tools (including the understanding that “no human power can relieve us”). People, in my opinion, are an extension of God, especially when they are the kinds of people in recovery, working on getting better; those are the best people God can use. But he can really use anybody. I have learned to go to God first when seeking support, and he will lead me to the right people, person, book, activity, feeling I need to process, or what Step work I need to do.

I am a relationship addict, and sometimes jumping into an outreach call can keep me from seeking my Higher Power. I have to change my pattern. This is a spiritual program and I am familiar with making people my Higher Power. I need to make

outreach calls secondary to seeking contact with God through Steps Two, Three, Eleven, and the rest.

The Steps are there to build and strengthen the relationship that I have with my creator, my Higher Power. People are the icing on the cake. This is not a program of turning my will and life over to anyone but a Higher Power. I have yet to see a person, whose Higher Power was another person, have much recovery (including myself).

Please know I am learning as I write, and I have not always practiced what I am preaching. I learn by teaching. I have studied the literature and I think this concept is sorely lacking in recovery circles – that avoiding temptation is not the sole means of recovery. It is a 12-Step program, not a one step program. I get frustrated by this “avoidance as recovery” concept.

It can be painful when people in general and people in this program change, drift off, move, disappear, become dysfunctional, and the relationships I “depended” on no longer become “dependable”. It is up to me to keep seeking. Thank God for people who are consistent with meetings, who make and return calls, who listen and share, who are available to meet for coffee or a meal, who do service and provide recovery opportunities for us. Thank God! Maybe I can seek to be one of those types of people.

The Steps are super important, and Step One is foundational! I have to do a thorough overview of what I am powerless over and the insanity I am living. I need an understanding of just what I am doing in my addiction in order to turn it over to my Higher Power and let him, God as I understand God, take care of it. I am unable

to stop on my own. I can only do so much. I must have faith that God could and would if sought. And I see other people do it.

I have the same computer I used to act out on. I have not used filters. I have made a decision to stop acting out – that is huge! It will be two years of sobriety for that particular way of acting out this month, after a total of nearly three years in the program. I have an idea of the date I stopped, so when I have been tempted, I am able to say, hey wait, I don't want to start over.

But more importantly, I don't want what (in my impulsiveness I am thinking of being "just once") to lead into God knows how many hours, days, months, or years of doing the same thing over and over (and expecting different results). I have been accountable to people in program consistently. Now, this is by far not my only acting out method. If I could only apply this recovery to the relationship stuff. I am recovering more slowly in the relationship arena.

As a sex and love addict and social anorexic and a person who

is by my very nature built for relationship with others, it can be more complicated to apply recovery to my connections to people. I am a work in progress.

Lately, I get triggered by my phone. It is how I was in contact with my previous romantic partner, a primary tool for making connection, getting and receiving attention, and staying involved. And I can use other tools on this same device that train my brain to go to for healthy things, for spiritual things.

Call others. Read literature. Change the sound of my alerts, so it trains my brain that this is something new. I can rearrange the home I invited this person into.

I can invite pets in. I can do the things I know that person disapproved of or wasn't interested in, things that are healthy for me. I get to fill up those spaces that the triggering events used to stir up.

I read a lot about recovery, trauma, abusive relationships, codependency, self-esteem, and God. I know that I have an inner child and I can be my own

present, supportive, caring parent. I love my family of origin, but I am more aware of the boundaries I can choose to have with them in order for me to not get triggered and seek relief through addiction. I get outside help with other programs. My taste in entertainment has dramatically changed. I am doing the inside work, so the outside looks different, and things that used to seem shiny and pretty can appear dull and lifeless now, or even poisonous. The things that now appear shiny and pretty are more in line with the wholesome, innocent, original me, a me which by a dramatic set of life circumstances became, at an early age, a sex and love addict.

I am triggered very heavily by people who I used to be like. I know now that it is more about me than about them. I cannot bear to go back to that way of life, but it is a groove I am familiar with, that I can catch myself jiving with. I am a work in progress. I still have a long way to go, but I need to see how far I've come.

— Anonymous

## Political and Theological Triggers

My political and theological upbringing and tradition is in the minority in our meeting. While this can be annoying when people unwittingly (or in some cases intentionally) bring their remarks, opinions, and biases into the rooms, for the most part our fellowship is based upon our

common problem and common solution.

But we did go out to dinner as a group once when the meeting door was locked and as is common in social gatherings, the conversation drifted towards the potent issues of the day and the rightness of one's outside associations over another.

Suddenly, we were adrift in the things that divide us and the things that trigger our deepest hurts and fears. I felt defensive against perceived overgeneralization and lack of interest in understanding. I felt the societal pressure to take a stand knowing that whatever stand I took I would inherit a punitive label of



bigot or sell-out or less-than or racist or ignorant or homophobic.

I left the meeting stirred and agitated. Were the criticisms of my tribe fair or unfair? Should I have spoken up instead of remaining mostly silent? Were the things I said even heard or were they summarily ignored?

This can only mean one thing: I should go online and aimlessly wander the Internet hoping to find some banality that will make me feel better. Unfortunately, this didn't work and I went to bed later than I should have feeling discouraged and defeated.

I talked to my sponsor the next day who laughed that meetings are supposed to keep me from acting out, not trigger the other way around. We too are in different camps politically and in how we approach our faith tradition. However, he had more of a solid view of boundaries in the meeting.

The reason he doesn't go to such dinners with the Fellowship is he believes the reading, "We

are not a social club." Further, he quoted, "We have no opinions about outside issues."

In meetings and in our fellowship, we have no opinions on the statements of prominent Evangelicals, the Pope, progressive churches, or articulate atheists. We have no opinion on the seemingly life-or-death issues that divide our country. We have no opinions on whether this church seems more tolerant, whether that church is more true to the gospel, or whether one should or shouldn't align with a religious tradition in the first place. We have no opinion over whether one political cause is more moral than another.

We are actually closer together than we may think we are. We were brought together because we identified with a common struggle, powerlessness, and unmanageability. We looked to one another to find hope, a Higher Power, and a solution. We supported one another in phone calls, were a voice of sanity in our

depression and despair, were an ear where we could share anything (even those things we couldn't share with our family and friends), and drove together when we needed to get an STD test.

My most important job is my sobriety, not to fix the epic problems of a world I didn't break or address sins that I don't have. My primary task is to work my program and stay sober - share in meetings, take inventory, talk to my sponsor, be gentle with myself, avoid my triggers, meditate, pray, and serve others.

As I do, perhaps another small seed of authenticity is added to my little sack of experience, strength and hope. On occasion as God allows, I can share what is in my little sack with another on the journey and this seed takes root in her heart. I wonder if this is how the kingdom of God grows.

**— Anonymous, Boone, NC**

# Continue, Improve and Practice

In today's society we are surrounded by things that could be "triggers" for a sex and love addict. Peoples' dress, visual images, media and music surround us with things that can trigger sexual or romantic impulses at any time, in any setting.

I find that the solution cannot be to avoid all possible triggering situations, it is simply not practical and, moreover, not nearly possible. I am in recovery to live life fully, not to avoid much of what life has to offer because of possible triggers.

I see my triggers in two categories: sexual/romantic triggers and emotional triggers. The emotional triggers are those things which affect me mentally and emotionally that make me want to act out in order to "mask" the uncomfortable feelings or emotions.

It could be a hard day at work, an argument with my spouse, or a million other things that trigger my feelings of fear, self-doubt, self-pity and resentment. If I am triggered emotionally, I am much more vulnerable to sexual/romantic triggers.

In fact, when in active addiction, the emotional triggers would cause me to seek out sexual or romantic triggers or at least be very open to their presence.

It seems to me that the key to my long-term sobriety depends on much more than just having tools to deal with romantic and sexual impulses.

I found out, early in recovery, that such "white knuckling" (i.e., only maintaining sobriety by finding ways to avoid acting out after becoming triggered) was a

very uncomfortable, and unsuccessful, way of approaching recovery.

This is what the Steps are for. After admitting my powerlessness, learning to trust my Higher Power, cleaning house and clearing the wreckage of my past, I still had to take the business of maintaining my spiritual condition through prayer, meditation and personal inventory very seriously.

In a sentence, recovery to me is that change in perspective ("spiritual awakening") that permits me to honestly take responsibility for my own actions through discerning the truth from my addictive thinking.

That discernment, and the willingness to exercise it, is an indispensable part of maintaining my spiritual and emotional strength.

This can be an elusive concept for someone like me who came into the program with no clue that I had a "thinking problem." Cutting through denial and self-centered thinking takes practice, and often input from an outside perspective.

Realizing that this practice of inventory taking is such an elusive part of the program, I and a few others in my home group decided to start meeting, on a weekly basis, to practice together our Tenth Step by writing and sharing about the emotional, romantic and/or sexual triggers that we were dealing with. We get together, pen and paper in hand, and work a written inventory that we share with our fellows. Listening to others and identifying with their struggles and emotions has helped us deal with our own.

Anyone can meet and work

personal inventories together and there is no "right way" or "wrong way" to do them. At minimum, it takes recognizing things for what they truly are, accepting our part in things, and deciding what sober actions we can take. I would like to share the questions that we use and have found helpful, below. We also keep an extensive list of feelings (e.g., shame, self-pity, resentment and etc.) as well as a list of character defects handy for reference. We start the meeting by reading an excerpt from pages 96 and 97 of the Basic Text which discusses the 10<sup>th</sup> Step; question 3.a., below, is a reference to part of that reading.

This meeting is not the only thing I have to do to maintain my spiritual condition, but I found it helps me tremendously. In Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, we are instructed to continue, improve and practice. Becoming better at taking our personal inventory is a crucial part of that process.

## WRITING EXERCISE

### • Part One — What happened?

Think back over the last week or so. Has there been any recent incidents where you had troublesome feelings or reactions? Has something happened to you recently that you are still "carrying around in your head?" Is there somebody who has left you feeling resentful or hurt? Something that triggered you emotionally and/or sexually? Something you did that was a mistake or misstep? Describe the situation(s), person(s) or incident(s).

• **Part Two – How did it leave you?**

For each situation or circumstance, describe your emotions and spiritual condition before it, and then during it. Describe how that situation, person or incident has left you feeling.

• **Part Three – The Turn Around**

Now comes the time when we take responsibility for our part in it:

If it was a conflict: (1) Put yourself in the other person(s)' shoes. Does that help you gain an understanding of how they acted? (2) Now imagine if you saw someone else react as you did. Does that help you gain

perspective on your own behaviors?

If it was a triggering situation, (1) did you do anything or have any motive to receive a romantic or sexual "hit" out of the situation? (2) Did you not do something you could have to avoid it?

If you contributed nothing to cause the situation, have your feelings been made worse by your reactions?

If it was an error or misstep on your part, have you reacted to it by "beating yourself up?" Feeling shame/embarrassment?

Are you carrying the incident or situation and can't let it go? If so, why?

• **Part Four – What Defect**

**(s) Come into Play?**

Now choose the character defect(s) involved and how these caused your part in it or your reaction to it.

• **Part Five – The Solution**

Now you have identified your part and defects, what do you need to do to move on?

a. Make an amends? b. Take some action? Pray about a particular thing? c. Change a behavior? d. Meditate for a solution or serenity?

• **Part Six – The Good Part**

Describe something good you have recently done, that you are proud of or that was a success of your program.

— Steve B.

# Overcoming Triggers by Refocusing Energy

We have a term here in the Sacramento area fellowship affectionately coined "The Skin Show." What, you ask, is the Skin Show? Well it's the show that starts as the sun re-emerges here in sunny Northern California after winter and people find it necessary to don as little clothing as possible to survive their day: cleavage at the coffee shop, bare backs and legs at the deli, short-shorts at the supermarket. You get my drift.

For me, the start of the Skin Show is a trigger, for the sudden and unasked-for appearance of scantily clad bodies immediately and detrimentally alters my mind state without my permission, which leads to all sorts of



unwarranted pursuits, destructive relationships, and spiritual separations.

The way, however, that I have learned to overcome the trigger is to mentally, sometimes audibly, remind myself this of one simple line: “When (s)he put that on, she was probably not thinking of me.” Until now that simple one-liner has kept me out of pursuit of, and beds of, by extension, complete strangers. Thanks be to God and the S.L.A.A. Basic Text for revealing this tool to me, for I am almost instantly restored to sanity.

Yet the re-emergence of great weather and the start of the Skin Show isn’t my only trigger (after all, what self-respecting addict has only one trigger?).

I am often triggered by too many women in tight spaces such as conferences, meetings, (yes, ours too), concerts, and the like. What happens to me is that my attention is distracted by the

speaker or performer at hand which, as I get older, is more of a nuisance to me. The overcoming of the “tight-spaces trigger” for me has, again, turned out to be a simple, two-fold process.

First, I lift my head high. I have found this to be important because sometimes the energy being sent my way is, in fact, more than my imagination. By lifting my head high I have found that it lets the sender know that I have received the energy (which I believe keeps me away from anorectic behavior). Then I reposition my chair/body away from the sender, kindly but deliberately, and do not return my attention that way.

Second, and most importantly, I thank my God and refocus my energy to the speaker or performer at hand with renewed vigor. Again, I do not take credit for the actions. My response to this particular trigger is a result of a Power

greater than myself and regular attendance at meetings.

Before, I was screwed (both literally and figuratively) (can I say that?) whether I was indoors or outdoors because I had no tools, or design, for overcoming things that triggered me. Thanks to S.L.A.A. that has not been the case for 3 years and running.

— Anonymous



# Triggers Are a Blessing

When I first came into recovery I was at a complete loss with how to deal with triggers. I now look back and realize I wasn’t dealing *with* triggers, I was living *in a* triggered state with the occasional moment of relief. I basically lived in Triggerdom and my addict ruled the roost. But I can now share that after a year and a half of program work guided by a wonderful sponsor, working the steps, I am now BLESSED with occasional trig-

gers. Yes, I said it, triggers are a blessing!

In my sober experience, my triggers have tended to come in slow-motion waves. For example, an emotional event may happen on a Tuesday and I may not experience the fully realized triggered feelings until Friday. This emotional time delay can be confusing and often requires a personal inventory and/or outreach sponsor call. It requires that I connect with my feelings. What becomes meaningful to

my recovery is that I link the initial or “true” trigger to the unclaimed resulting emotional upheaval.

Also, I’ve read in our literature that it’s not *always* necessary that we identify the source of our triggers. However, for me, there are some “old faithful” triggers I simply *KNOW* are going to bring about some reactions, and luckily, I’m at the point in my recovery where I can now use these unavoidable situations to my benefit. For exam-





ple, the holidays trigger a lot of people and I am no exception. Spending even a limited amount of time with my family and especially my mother, in her home, challenges my emotional sobriety in a way that I know makes me quite vulnerable.

Using this example, here are the steps I took to deal with this trigger—taking these steps gave me the corrective experience of *being* triggered, being aware that I was being triggered, but not acting on it.

1-Identifying the true source of a trigger/confirmation that I'm being triggered.

2-Rigorous honesty with myself/my sponsor about my feelings when they are happening (do

not go into denial).

3-Not acting out on bottom lines OR accessory behaviors.

4- Accessing my support networks.

**External:**

My external support network has grown immensely over the past year and a half. At first it was a meeting here and there. Then it was a meeting once a week and our main text. Then it was a meeting, the main text and one bottom line. Now, it includes, a sponsor I love and trust, sponsees, an S.L.A.A. home group, the 12 Steps as a way of life, bottom lines that protect (not punish) me, trusted members to call for fellowship, The S.L.A.A. Inspiration Line (Calling

the S.L.A.A. Inspiration line and leaving a message will give me at least 10 minutes to re-think any potential bad decision and it has **SAVED** me many times.), daily meetings, and service commitments.

**Internal:**

I think of internal support as the tools I have developed in the program that I can access from within, from anywhere, no matter where I am in the city, province, country or world. These are the greatest gifts of recovery and the most liberating gift came at Step Three when I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of a Higher Power. At times, to diffuse a triggering situation it can be as simple as to re-

peat the serenity prayer over and over, or breathe deeply and calmly until my body or mind remembers that “this too shall pass.” Small things have a great capacity to comfort now that I know I am not alone.

Throughout my sober journey my perception has totally shifted in the way I both experience and perceive triggers. I

now see them as wonderful opportunities to exercise my recovery muscles and gain further momentum into a life of spiritual serenity. I am grateful to feel my feelings and being triggered is a reminder that I am not numb and that as an emotionally sober person, I am supposed to feel things. What I’ve come to learn and accept is that I can’t

stop a trigger from happening—and my spiritual well-being on any given day can make me more or less vulnerable to my triggers, but that EVERYDAY, no matter my vulnerability, that a Power Greater than myself protects and loves me and for this, I am blessed.

— A, Quebec, Canada.

## Pause, Filter, Accept

I’d never heard the word “trigger” much at all until I reached S.L.A.A.. I didn’t really get it at first. It seemed like a cop out and seemed to make people look like victims in a program where we stop being victims and step into positions of power and accountability in our lives. It appeared to me that it was a way of blaming someone else for our personal problems.

Well, that’s what I thought until I was about two years into my sobriety and about six months into my first sober relationship when I had an emotional outburst that about blew the doors off the house and I didn’t even see it coming. That is when I realized I’d been triggered by something my then-boyfriend had done. I was staggered by how angry I had instantly become over something that was pretty insignificant. I was also shocked how I could go from zero to bomb-squad explosive in sheer seconds. Fortunately I knew that with S.L.A.A. there was a solution. I

didn’t have to be at the mercy of my emotions the rest of my life.

I realized that it isn’t my fault that I was triggered but I had to learn how to figure out exactly what the trigger was and how to handle it before I exploded against my will again. I knew no one would ever want to be in a long-term relationship with me if I didn’t master this mysterious explosive character defect of mine.

I would never want to act like the rageaholic my mother so regularly demonstrated throughout my childhood. But there I was flying off the handle for what looked like a small thing to someone else.

I knew I had to learn how to unplug the involuntary chain reaction that took place. I’d like to share with you how I’ve made tremendous progress in this area.

First of all, what does the word “trigger” mean exactly in our context? Here’s how several different dictionary versions read. They all have a special nuance to them that creates a deeper understanding for us as

sex and love addicts.

Merriam Webster’s short version: “Something that causes something else to happen.”

Merriam Webster’s extended version: “Something that acts like a mechanical trigger in initiating a process or reaction”

Dictionary.com: “Anything, as an act or event, that serves as a stimulus and initiates or precipitates a reaction or series of reactions.”

I certainly related to all of these in one way or another. Here’s what I’ve done to change in addition to adding “No emotional outbursts” to my bottom lines:

1. I realized I needed to identify the trigger feeling. What was the feeling I had immediately before I got upset, hurt, or angry?

In my case the trigger feeling centers from my core issues of feeling insignificant, unimportant, and disrespected by my family. Instead of treating me like they loved me and like I was special to them, most of them treated me like they hated me or could care less about me.

My brothers, 10 & 11 years older than me, were allowed to order me around and beat up on me all the time. They were allowed to call me their slave and I was expected to do what they asked. I felt incredibly insignificant, unimportant and completely disrespected by everyone in my family. My father would stand by and quietly watch all this horrific behavior and eventually if my mother was beating me he would step in, but I frequently thought she was going to kill me she beat me so badly.

So it is understandable that now as an adult I want to be around people, and especially be in relationships with men, who make me feel significant, important and make me feel respected.

2. Identify the trigger action. Exactly what happened that caused such an abrupt and almost instantaneous change in my feelings?

In this example, the scenario was too complex to describe but it involved a series of times where my boyfriend did not take my calls when we were planning to get together. He did not return my calls and texts in a timely manner and came to my house very late for a date all with no good explanation or apology. Unfortunately, I've realized the triggering feelings aren't always logical or rational, they just are. I continue to give grace to myself as I learn the circumstances and situations that trigger anger in me.

Nonetheless, I felt those awful feelings that were so hurtful and exploded. I've also since learned that it is frequently easier for me to feel anger than it is for me to feel hurt. So I've tended towards going into rage rather than feel the tender, vulnerable feelings of hurt.

3. What does this kind of

painful situation remind me of? What could be the origin of this being such an explosive feeling?

In this example it was far too reminiscent of the manner in which my parents repeatedly made me feel insignificant, unimportant and disrespected. One of the most painful moments was when I was in college in Texas, a four-hour drive from our home in Oklahoma City. It was my birthday and my parents had told me they were going to drive down and visit me. They were early risers so when it became noon and they had not arrived or called yet I phoned them. They'd decided not to come and didn't even tell me so. It was my birthday. I was devastated. How could they make me feel any more unimportant, insignificant and disrespected?

4. I knew I had to learn how to separate the past from my current reality.

Yes, I was raised in a very dysfunctional environment where I was consistently treated disrespectfully. As a result, I frequently felt insignificant and unimportant to my very own family. These kinds of situations were repeated and these feelings were very real. However, every current situation where I feel these feelings is not the same. It doesn't mean that the people who are currently in my life think I'm insignificant or unimportant to them.

5. I had to learn how to communicate my feelings calmly and carefully.

Here's where working the steps really come into play. I needed a transformation. It is easy to come to meetings and get relief. But relief isn't recovery! I had to learn how to press the "pause" button on my mouth before I exploded. Working the eleventh step really helped me do this. As my meditation practice

has deepened, it has been easier and easier for me to feel my feelings and release the need to express them immediately. I know I can sit and feel the pain and that it will pass. During this time is when I "filter" through the feelings to determine what I need to share and what I don't. Talking with my sponsor and many recovery partners really helps with this. I'm able to tell them all the gory details and work through the old feelings to get to what's current.

The final part of the pause, filter, accept process is really the Serenity Prayer. If I respectfully share my needs with someone and they ignore my requests or are unable to meet them I have to accept it. I cannot change others and others are not going to change for me. That was part of the fantasy world I used to live in, but not anymore.

I've found that accepting the reality of people and situations is paramount in recovery. I've got to deal with the real world as it is, not what I wish, want or hope it will be.

I feel like these five steps have truly helped me enrich my recovery and deepen my connection to my Higher Power. They've helped me become easier to get along with. My sex and love addiction made me difficult for others to get along because of the unpredictability of my emotions and then the actions I would take based on those emotions.

I'm so grateful for sobriety and for the opportunity to look my triggers square in the eye and do things differently today. I no longer have to worry about the next unexpected and instant explosion that will take place due to my emotions. Today, I have the dignity of choice. Today, I choose to pause, filter and accept life on life's terms.

— Alicia, Orange County, CA

# Meditation Book Project

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE:

1. PERSONAL SHARES FOR MEDITATIONS.
2. POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS/PRAYERS.

PLEASE EMAIL SHARES TO THE *JOURNAL* WWW.SLAAFWS.ORG

## Triggers

**QUOTE:** *Circumstances which can trigger this erosion of our awareness of our sex and love addiction are so frequent and numerous that we need to be able to “ground” any sexual and emotional ambiguity which has started to undermine our stable functioning. No matter how far we have evolved in sobriety, we are never beyond reach of temptation’s siren song. S.L.A.A. Basic Text, Page 127.*

**SHARE:** I used to watch a television program that was popular with everyone I knew. I started to identify with one of the main characters and wanted to live a “free” sexual life like she did. I realized it was opening the door to my disease and making me think I should leave S.L.A.A. I had to put that television series and any like it on my bottom lines. I was embarrassed to admit that after years of sobriety, I was unable to watch a popular TV show because of the way it triggered me. But anything that erodes my serenity has got to go. I don’t need to become anorexic and cut everything out of my life, but I do need to recognize when something isn’t necessary. We ground ambiguity by getting current in meetings and fellowship. We share our daily trials. Others can see if our disease is speaking to us. Like the Basic Text says, “from meeting to meeting we need to get current and stay open.” If I am triggered, I can get support and much needed tools to help pull me out of my addiction.

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**AFFIRMATION:** Today, I will recognize and avoid triggers by going to a meeting and getting current.

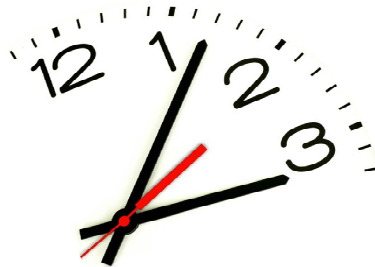
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