

# theJournal

Issue # 166

Single Issue \$4

“Thirteenth Stepping”

# 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

Dear Reader,

I fell into thirteenth stepping by telling myself that I was just helping a fellow S.L.A.A. member quit smoking. He was married and we were both trying to get sober in S.L.A.A. so I thought that would prevent me from acting out. It didn't work. Acting out with someone who went to all the same S.L.A.A. meetings made it very difficult to stay in Program. Once in reality and withdrawal, I saw how dangerous it all was. S.L.A.A. was a small community and finding meetings that he didn't attend was difficult to say the least!

Now I remember the pain of that time and I check my motives and my spiritual center. The stories in this issue are great reminders that our primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery. Newcomers are important and we can all do our part to keep them and ourselves safe.

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

“HOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE/AVOID THIRTEENTH STEPPING?”

**I** pray and ask God for what the next indicated step is, talk to sponsor, talk to fellows. If the person is available and sober and recovered, and I have worked my program around it — I can choose to date with my dating plan.

— **Anonymous**

**I** asked a woman to sponsor me in another Twelve-Step program and she declined. Two years later, she became my girlfriend. I have many female platonic friends who I hang out with away from meetings. I do not reach out or access these friendships until a woman has one or two years in S.L.A.A.

— **Dion M., Orinda, CA**

**My** normal pattern would be to always find someone and hook up whenever I joined a new group. I avoided this as a newcomer by having a dating plan that forbid dating for a year. I formed friendships with women in the group but they always remained non-sexual and free of intrigue. That was new and felt healthy. Now that a year has passed, one of those friendships has progressed into a budding relationship. We had a simple dating plan to keep things non-sexual for at least 2 months and this period has helped me avoid repeating old patterns of sexualizing a relationship right out of the gate. I did not foresee this happening but it has been good for my recovery and I am excited and hopeful as I enter this new phase of my development.

— **Tony**

**I** made a decision to not date within any of my programs. So, this is easy. I can have intimate discussions with sisters in Program without it leading to romantic thoughts. If I see any thirteenth stepping starting to occur, I feel I can talk to the experienced member of the group and ask that they watch behavior/motivation.

— **Anonymous**

**I** have good boundaries. I like myself enough to know what is good for me and I stay close to my Higher Power.

— **Faye, Dublin**

**I** think encouraging honesty in relationships with newcomers has helped. For example, I ask my sponsee to let me know if she ever feels that her own boundaries are being crossed. I must reflect upon my own behavior in my own Step work.

— **Becca M., Rhode Island**

**I** try not to interact with people who trigger me. It's just not worth breaking my sobriety.

— **Joseph R., Philadelphia**

**Never** objectify in the rooms — realize that people are there for help.

— **Michael S., Philadelphia**

**I** don't come to S.L.A.A. meetings to prey on women — now I'm in recovery.

— **David F., Poland**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “How do you recognize/avoid “thirteenth stepping?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: #167 ABM issue\*\* What Makes a Person Emotionally Available? — How do you recognize signs that a person is not available, what does it mean to make yourself more available to others in a healthy way? — The deadline for submissions is May 15, 2017. And #168 — Prayer — How/why/when do you pray? Please share your experience strength and hope with prayers and praying. — The deadline for submissions is July 15, 2017. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

**My** belief is that thirteenth stepping is something that happens between a newcomer and an established member. Defined that way, I recall how much I needed the safety of this Program when I was new. That keeps me in line.

— **Jason S., Sacramento, CA**

**My** thirteenth step is the step into the abyss — falling back into the darkness of addiction. I have worked to avoid that step by connecting to others either by phone, meetings or face-to-face contact. Meditation helps too.

— **Seth, Boston/Newton**

**I** have not done this. I try to follow the old Native American saying, “Don’t shit where you eat.” (I know. Not very spiritual.)

— **Tim C., Cincinnati**

**I** remind myself that this person is here for recovery. I alert, avert, assert and remain, with God, in honor of their and my best intentions.

— **Anonymous**

**I** remember how vulnerable I was when entering the Fellowship for the first time. I also remember why I am here and it is not to take advantage of people.

— **David R., Ireland**

**This** one I struggle with...

— **Gunilla, Sweden**

**One** day at a time, stay connected to my Higher Power and check in with myself frequently to make sure my energy is directed in a clean way, holding my personal boundaries and not keeping secrets. I’m able to feel good about the way I’m showing up in meetings.

— **April, Houston**

**Sane** sex-accountability partners to keep me honest and open about my actions with others.

— **Earl D., Houston**

**My** first impulse is often to look at the attractive women in a group. I have learned to keep distance, to make contact with people that are less attractive to me and to focus on what I am here for.

— **Maarten, the Netherlands**

**Serenity** prayer.

— **David S., Cleveland, OH**

**I** recognize if my mind is going to something else while I’m involved in a conversation with a lady. I avoid thirteenth stepping by owning my recovery.

— **Jack S., Seminole, FL**

**I** make sure I’ve taken care of my spiritual, physical, and emotional needs before interacting with others.

— **Anne K., Tampa**

**I** pay attention to my thoughts. If I am trying to build intrigue or go into fantasy it is my responsibility to take care of myself around that.

— **Ashly M., Houston**

**This** means I’ve been triggered! I stay as far away as possible from the person I’m triggered by. If not, I share my feelings with someone safe in order to take the power away from the addiction. I pray for that person!

— **Danette S., Seminole, FL**

# Question of the Day

**M**y meetings have fortunately not had much of these issues. When they have come up, we take it on together. We then address it at a group level by reading the booklet, “Triggers as a Resource.”

— **Sarah C., San Antonio, TX**

**I** would be breaking my bottom line if I thirteenth stepped someone; and I have a “no dating in the Fellowship” bottom line. This program is my safe place. When I break this bottom line I run the risk of it no longer being a safe place. I’m harming a new person in their safe place, making me an unsafe person to be around when I thirteenth step someone.

— **Anonymous**

**When** two people in a meeting setting act inappropriately, it makes the meeting feel unsafe. If the meeting is healthy, the issue should be addressed, but it is also wise to use a thirteenth stepping statement in the readings.

— **Beth S., Johnstown, PA**

**Make** a commitment to myself, my sponsor and God not to enter a relationship until I complete the Steps. No outreach with women who are less than 1 year in S.L.A.A. and done Step 9 and not until I have also done Step 9. It’s all about healthy boundaries and solid bottom lines.

— **Paul T., London, UK**

**I** have written boundaries and recognize, in humility, my powerlessness. I avoid triggering people.

— **Tim P.**

**When** I see someone in a meeting that I find attractive, I avoid them. This has worked so far. But I would like to be able to interact more normally with all people at some point.

— **LH, Los Angeles**

**I** relied on the direction of senior members to make me aware of thirteenth stepping – that if a man approached me, I had to be conscious of what the motives might be. Today, as a senior member, I feel responsible to the newcomer to tell them to be aware of thirteenth stepping. I guide them to develop bottom lines and top lines to protect themselves and to protect against thirteenth stepping.

— **Liz D., Dallas**

**I** know today that if I were to get into a relationship with someone that is in program, they also need to have sobriety. It is also necessary for me to work with my sponsor in any relationship I decide to pursue.

— **Rich K., Worcester, MA**

**To** recognize/avoid thirteenth stepping, I believe it is important for women to stick with women and men to stick with men and to practice carrying the message in all areas of my life.

— **Anonymous**

**I** go to yoga and the gym.

— **Pia, Sherman Oaks, CA**

**Share** and listen to your sponsor. I kept it away from my sponsor and it hurt me. The woman was crazy!

— **David, Los Angeles**

**By** creating a bottom line to not date or romantically/sexually pursue anyone in S.L.A.A.

— **Greg S., Los Angeles**

**I** have had experience with thirteenth stepping in the past. I thought I was exempt because I told the person that I was attracted to all about thirteenth stepping. But then I continued to seduce. I thought it was alright if they knew what I was doing.

— **David S., Pasadena, CA**



# Taking Responsibility for My Sobriety



**T**oday, as I write this submission, I am celebrating my 365th day of sobriety in my S.L.A.A. program. One year. One whole year. Honestly, I never thought I would get here (when I first joined the program, I never thought I'd get a week, a month, two months, and so on). But here I am, a year sober and ready to start sharing my story with the world.

Recently, while working my program and increasing the service that I am committing to, I

decided to do something different than the traditional service opportunities available to me. I consulted with my sponsor and we both agreed I wasn't quite ready to sponsor someone just yet, and I was searching around for the perfect service opportunity and came across a *Journal* issue that I got from the annual convention last year. And in that issue, I saw that I could submit something for *the Journal* as an act of service to the fellowship. I searched around in my stacks of paper from that

conference and found a schedule of *Journal* themes for 2017. And wow, does my Higher Power work in incredible ways. When I found out the theme for the next issue was "Thirteenth Stepping," I knew I had chosen the right act of service for my program.

I joined S.L.A.A. almost two full years ago, and yes, if you do the math, it took me about 9-10 months to actually GET sober in the program, and that is because, almost immediately after withdrawal from my qualifier, I

thirteenth stepped my way through the first three months after withdrawal.

Tom (name has been changed) was a veteran member in another 12-Step recovery program and presented himself as a thoughtful, intelligent, committed, and sober person in this other 12-Step program but was attending S.L.A.A. and struggling with the concepts of the program.

He was super smart and engaging, and controversial and provocative, just like me, and I was attracted to him, despite a variety of characteristics I look back on and think to myself, *wow, I was so sick*. He fit my sex and love addict pattern: I didn't really like him, but just assigned a few magical qualities to him. I idealized him and pursued him. He was not necessarily

physically attractive, and he was wounded. Very wounded and sick with a variety of mental health issues. And my sex and love addict just LOVED those things about him. Like the good sex and love addict that I was, I confused love with neediness, pity, and the need to rescue and be rescued.

In fact, as I reflect on this, we bonded in the program over getting his previous acting out partner pregnant and having to take her to an abortion clinic. Like, *Why would I think this would be a good relationship for me?* But having few healthy boundaries, I became sexually involved with and emotionally attached to him without knowing him.

The relationship was doomed

from the get-go, and ended once when I was on my way to my grandmother's funeral. He broke up with me 2 hours before my flight. I ended up with no ride to the airport just because I did something that upset him. But fearing abandonment and loneliness, I returned to and stayed in this painful, destructive relationship, shortly after I returned, concealing my dependency needs from myself and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and



loved ones, myself, and my Higher Power.

The final time it ended, it was Christmas Eve. The details don't matter except this was truly a turning point in my life, my sobriety, and my recovery. I knew that this person (illegally) carried a gun on him everywhere he went. I upset him, probably using sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control him, and he flipped out. He lashed out by name-calling (the worst names imaginable), screaming at the top of his lungs, and cursing me out. It was the worst verbal and emotional abuse I have ever endured. I asked him to leave and he wouldn't, and continued to berate me and abuse me. I knew this whole time that he had a gun

on him and tried not to escalate the situation and I prayed I would make it out safely. I kept wondering why the neighbors hadn't called the police yet. Ultimately my Higher Power protected me and I made it out in one (physical) piece.

This moment, this incredibly wounding, painful, awful, destructive, unforgettable moment was the most important moment in my recovery. This is the moment that when I share my story at a newcomer's meeting, I

think back and say, "I think if I had one more relationship before getting sober, the next one would've killed me, because the last one could have." Wow. What a statement. What a bottom. My sickness had led me to a crossroads where I literally had to choose life or death. And I chose life.

This is one of the most shameful acts that I ever committed as a sex and love addict.

Thirteenth stepping is still something that I feel a lot of shame and regret over. I respect and value this program so much, and I am incredibly shameful that I wasn't able to resist the advances of a more veteran member and avoid acting out with him. In looking up the definition of "thirteenth step" on the S.L.A.A. FWS website, I found that we define thirteenth stepping as "manipulating another person in recovery, especially a newcomer, into a sexual, emotional, or romantic relationship." However, as much as this may ring true in my situation, I am choosing to take responsibility for the role I played in avoiding responsibility for myself by attaching myself to someone who was emotionally

unavailable and for fearing emotional and sexual deprivation so much that I compulsively pursued and involved myself in one relationship after another.

I made the choice to thirteenth step with this person. I stayed enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, and compulsive sexual activities. I used sex and emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care and support. I played a role and I want to take responsibility for that.

And speaking of nurturing care and support, my recovery partners and my sponsor WERE wonderful during this time. They did not necessarily approve of the relationship (I don't blame them), but they were supportive of me and helped me learn this

incredibly valuable lesson on the journey I needed to walk. I appreciate them for wholeheartedly supporting me and standing by me during this obvious lapse in sobriety. Their support is what helped me to get strong enough to become sober and stay sober.

In taking responsibility for myself, I am careful in co-ed meetings. I do not communicate with very many males in the program, do not hug or interact with males in the program that I have not been able to establish boundaries with, and if I feel like there is some intrigue being passed to me by another member (or on the rarity, me to them), I stay in same-sex check in/getting current groups or take a break from co-ed meetings. I am taking

responsibility for myself.

I've chosen to remain anonymous, not because of the shame, because I would happily share my identity because of the pride and gratitude I feel in this Program, but because this individual continued to stalk me and harass me for several months after we ended.

But despite my anonymity, today I hold my head high, knowing that with a year of sobriety under my belt, I commit to my program, my serenity, and my self-worth and self-respect to never thirteenth step again. Some lessons you just learn the hard way and survive to tell the story.

— **Anonymous, Austin, TX**

## Addiction Only Considers Itself

When I saw the Journal topic of thirteenth stepping, I knew I had to share an unfortunate experience that taught me an important lesson. Several years ago, I attended a weekend S.L.A.A. retreat where I met a nice Jewish man. I'm fascinated by the culture, so I struck up a conversation with him. I saw it as a simple opportunity to ask a few questions. It never occurred to me that this might not be the proper place.

We talked in the breaks between workshops, sat together at several meals, and he seemed glad to tell me about his traditions. By early evening of the second day, he was gone. When I returned home, I received an email from the organizers of the

retreat. They said the man I was talking to was a newcomer; he left early because he felt triggered by my interest in him, and other attendees had also felt uncomfortable with the situation. They suggested that in the future, I refrain from "singling out" any one person at S.L.A.A. events.

I was angry and embarrassed. How could they think I would deliberately do something like that? I'd done nothing wrong! I had several years of sobriety by that time and would never jeopardize that by being inappropriate with someone. There was no flirting, only simple conversation. If this guy didn't want to talk to me, he should have said so! It was just ridiculous. I was never going to that retreat again.

Some time passed. When my righteous indignation cooled, I gradually began thinking about what really happened. The night my new friend left, I was waiting for him to walk through the door, to come and just sit by me, like he said he would. When he didn't show up, I felt the loss, and I couldn't enjoy the evening's activity. I had an idea that he probably left because of me, but I only cared that he left. In one moment of clear thought, I knew.

When I realized what I had done, that I had stolen what surely would have been a great retreat experience for this newcomer, I felt terribly sorry. That was never my intention. When I got the email from the organizers, the selfish anger I felt so entitled to should have been empathy and

remorse. Did he slip because of this? Did he quit recovery? I may never be able to apologize to him in person, but I sincerely hope that he is sober and healthy today.

I learned from this humbling mistake that what we call thirteenth stepping doesn't have to be malicious or deliberate. I used to think it was both. In

reality, what may seem innocent enough to me could be dangerous territory for someone else, especially someone new.

Avoiding Thirteenth Stepping isn't about my intentions, it's about respecting someone else's vulnerability enough to know when to leave them be. The nature of addiction is that it considers

only itself.

As the result of this experience, I now strive to be more aware of how my actions could affect others. I am grateful to have grown from this, and I am looking forward to attending the retreat again this year.

Thanks for reading,

—Anonymous

## A Desire to Help the Addict Who Still Suffers

For my own personal recovery, I have my own policy of not dating within the Fellowship. Early in my recovery, another person in the room had been a model that I had recognized and had fantasized about 25 years prior.

I became friendly with her and probably started to intrigue with her. At that time, I was still married and trying to save my marriage, so the contact was inappropriate. In addition, she started asking my advice on personal issues. I cannot honestly say if I gave her the best advice for her recovery or to improve my 'standing' with her. In other words, I was selfish, dishonest and self-seeking.

By creating the policy of not dating within the Fellowship (I am divorcing now and open to dating) I can feel that any advice I offer is motivated by my desire to help the addict that still suffers and not from a place of selfishness or self-seeking.

As for recognizing and preventing thirteenth stepping in others, sometimes newcomer women approach me or other men in the meetings (perhaps they are looking for father figures). I will



try to watch one on one contact between me and newcomers. If I feel triggered I will try to bring another person into the conversation.

I am not against relationships between members of the Fellowship. I believe people who have been in the program long

enough to get through withdrawal and have some recovery should be free to enter into a relationship.

The main proscription against thirteenth stepping is to prevent predatory behavior against the newcomer who may still be active in their addictive behavior.

— Dave G

# Lessons from My Affair



I prided myself (if pride is the right word for acting out) that I had never had an affair. All my acting out was anonymous except for some exploration as an adolescent. Most of my acting out was with women through various adult venues and street pick-ups.

When I was new to Twelve-Step Programs, a guy contacted me under the guise of struggling with sexual acting out. We got together a couple of times and talked about the Program even though it was way too soon to do this. I didn't really accept that he wasn't making any steps towards recovery.

He then invited me to come over to his cabin to hang out (cabin was a bit overstated - it was his rental house up the street from where he lived). I knew this wasn't normal behavior for guys to just

invite a stranger over to "hang out" in seclusion. Yet, I knew this was what I wanted to do. It tapped into my fantasy and obsession.

I went over to hang out and sure enough, we had sex. I then went into therapy to find out what the hell just happened.

Though I didn't learn as much about my disease as in meetings and with my sponsor, I did come away with important insight.

I realized that this man was a predator — he was after me. Granted, I was a very willing victim. Certainly I was in the role of predator when I was picking up women on the street.

The therapist asked what attracted me to him and I shrugged my shoulders. He was a dumpy middle aged man like me. But he was available. I realized that the thing that attracted me

was not sex or physical attraction. Rather, the fact that someone was passionately pursuing me put me into a euphoric high. This revelation put me on a path to learn what healthy intimacy looks like and how I can cultivate it even if it doesn't involve sex.

Sometime later, I went to a 12-Step conference. The topic was same sex attraction. The speaker addressed the cultural demand to attach a label to his actions and to decide which parade to march in. "So, what am I?" he asked, "Am I gay? Am I bisexual?"

His answer resonated with me. In the end, I am a sex and love addict and my addiction will take me anywhere to get what it wants if I let it.

**— Anonymous, Western North Carolina**

# Avoiding Thirteenth Stepping

I don't remember when I first heard about thirteenth stepping. But I do remember the circumstances that triggered me and even affected my health and serenity.

When I joined the Fellowship, I learned about going into withdrawal from bottom-line behaviors. Because cheating on my partner was the behavior that got me into S.L.A.A., I knew it was important to avoid entering into any relationship.

I was the only woman in my regular meetings, so I wasn't completely free of emotional confusion in the Fellowship.

There was a man at many of the conventions that I went to who triggered fantasy because he looked like my qualifier. Even quite recently, despite over 12 years of recovery, I experienced a short-lived emotional intoxication from a man who'd been in S.L.A.A. for a long time.

At first, my diseased mind interpreted his respectful and friendly behavior as a sign of sexual interest in me. I needed to use program tools – particularly outreach calls – to get me back on track.

I've always had the conviction that I'm recovering for myself and that stopped me from getting into an addictive relationship. I also kept my boundaries intact.

I was in a committed relationship which had survived in spite of my addiction. Because we are both working a program, our

recovery continues to grow.

Also, the chapter from the Basic Text about building a healthy relationship was very important to me. Everything important is written in that chapter. It protects me from entering unhealthy relationships and helps me to build on what I have.

The issue of thirteenth stepping affected me greatly when I began service at the Polish national level. It was around 2007. I never liked the term thirteenth stepping. I wanted to focus on the Twelve Steps, which are my path to recovery and growth. If there was going to be a thirteenth step it would mean that the other steps were leading to it, and that's not the truth. But a lot of people were bringing up the subject.

At that time, a one-page flyer was published in Poland warning about thirteen stepping. It seemed a lot of the Fellowship's energy was going into that warning, and that people were being stigmatized.

At the same time, I witnessed a situation of the misappropriation of funds belonging to members of the Fellowship by a person with a service position in S.L.A.A. It seemed like abuse and manipulation – something I might have called thirteenth stepping, even though that expression usually refers to intimate relationships.

Later, at the national level it was decided to withdraw the flyer

and replace it with a caution to be read in meetings that "S.L.A.A. is not a place to seek a partner or sexual contact."

After several years, the term thirteenth stepping was no longer in general use.

As I continue to recover, I feel there is a lack of people who have entered relationships and are still active participants in S.L.A.A. (both people who've started a relationship with somebody outside the Fellowship and relationships between two people who've been recovering in S.L.A.A. for an extended period of time).

I know that there have been examples of that, but never heard how they developed and don't know if the relationships have survived. It helps to know that S.L.A.A. is open to any addict who's still suffering and wants to stop acting out.

I would like for us as a Fellowship to help people who've entered a destructive relationship, particularly people who feel harmed by another person at a meeting.

I know I have no control over who takes advantage of recovery resources, but it matters to me that the message carried by the Traditions, in particular Traditions One, Two and Three, is strong and reaches everybody who is recovering from sex and love addiction.

— **Dosia, Poland**

# Digging Deeper Into a Pit of Despair



**H**ow do I recognize and avoid thirteenth stepping? I came in to S.L.A.A. to get help in the hope of getting well. I still have work to do. I came in four and a half years ago, feeling desperate for solutions to my gnawing obsession and uncontrollable behaviors. I knew my way was not working and I was digging deeper into a pit of despair.

The clarity I get from having a group of people who understand me and who I can be accountable to and using the tools of the program have helped me to recognize and remember my motives for being here.

I tend to act out. Acting out for me involves fantasy. I plan scenarios that may or may not be acted upon.

I have used public places as pick up spots. I found hook-ups at school and night clubs when I was young and I found them in my own work places when I was

employed by strip clubs. Later, when I got chemical sobriety, I searched for acting out partners in 12-Step meetings. Sex and love addiction caused me to lose my ability to control myself when I was around triggering people unless I actively sought recovery.

Recovery and healthiness requires that I look at myself, something that can be very uncomfortable to do. It is much easier to fixate on someone else and what I believe they could do for me: They might be able to help me work out old issues, escape from reality, or feed my obsession with sex, love, and lust.

I lose myself and break my moral boundaries. These are the motives that have come out of hiding when I allow them to.

I started going to 12-Step programs seven years before I started attending S.L.A.A. Meetings became my new pick up spot. I allowed myself to be thirteenth stepped (I had less than

a year clean and sober; the thirteenth-stepper had 4 years clean and sober, and had a girlfriend).

The quick spiral down into having a mortifying secret, knowing I would have to do a Fourth Step inventory on it, and the obvious fact that this person did not love me, but was using me, brought me out of this situation quickly.

I continued to get into different relationships in these meetings year after year.

I did not do enough work on myself; I had not yet dealt with the core issue of sex and love addiction. But eventually I was able to confront it because I had a new foundation of chemical sobriety. Drug addicts and alcoholics are inclined towards addictive behaviors involving sex and love.

I got back with the thirteenth stepper several years later, only to find myself quickly caught up in a

very codependent situation. Within weeks I had agreed to pay his car payments and care for his son in exchange for a borrowed vehicle.

Here I was, sharing openly at meetings about my struggles, unaware there was a predator there waiting in the wings for me and my type.

I had not surrounded myself with healthy women or accountability partners. Again, I realized he didn't love me and I got out.

I was involved with his sponsor within weeks. After I realized he was not right for me and broke up with him, he began to stalk me. It was extremely traumatic. I wrote in my journal about everything.

I finally succumbed to getting a restraining order. That meant I had to let him go to our meeting where I'd gotten sober and I had to stay away. I didn't want to ruffle feathers or cause myself further trauma. As the saying goes, I had to surrender to win.

What a process. The day I planned to fill out the papers at court, I shared my plan about it at the meeting one more time. A woman offered her attorney services pro bono. She'd asked me to sponsor her years before, which turned into just one phone call.

This was a God shot that told me I was doing the right thing. I attempted to do the paperwork on my own, but it was too complicated. I accepted her help.

I spent over two hours with my attorney reading my journal entries that listed the incidences of stalking behavior. My attorney asked me what took me so long to file a restraining order.

I had wanted to keep my meeting. It had been a short 2 or 3 months of stalking, but the effects lasted and some remain.

I needed much therapy and still

struggle since this episode, but a determined faith in God to help me overcome the trauma has brought me some healing. But I was a mess for a long time.

I thought time would cure me from choosing another stalker, so I swore off dating for a year.

Then I realized I needed to learn how to date and was reminded of S.L.A.A. from a friend. On the day of what was supposed to be my first S.L.A.A. meeting, instead I lingered outside of an A.A. meeting place, making it known I was available. One stranger took notice and this started the last relationship I got into before finally joining S.L.A.A. I hung out with him instead of going to the meeting and completely forgot my S.L.A.A. plan. I pursued him.

I got sexually involved. After several weeks of this, I knew he didn't love me. I called it off, he agreed, and I crawled into the backseat of my car, laid down and cried hysterically for an hour. Time had not healed my wounds or my love addiction.

Since being stalked and recognizing my tendency to cruise in 12-Step meetings, I continue to choose safer meetings - those that have less of a nightclub atmosphere and more recovery.

I seek out more women in recovery and mostly attend women's meetings. I can find myself slipping back into patterns when I go to some mixed meetings.

I go to one on my lunch hour sometimes. My old pattern was to go to a meeting because the man of the day was there and I would always lose focus. In my addicted mind, the sole purpose of being at a meeting was to connect to a new sexual and romantic prospect; today I realize that is acting out.

Recovery is checking my

motives and relying on meetings where this opportunity is taken off the table.

My social anorexia is also heightened since the stalking, so this adds extra fear of triggers. Also, aging has dampened my pride, so I have less bravado about putting myself out there.

Some S.L.A.A. meetings have a statement that says we are not here to meet prospective romantic partners.

It is a relief to know that I am not alone in this risk. I have anorexia as well, so when opportunity arises for fellowship, there is a delicate balance between acting out and acting in. I'm trying to treat triggering people as likeable humans instead of completely avoiding them. It is a challenge. I can be accountable with my fellows.

Today my S.L.A.A. recovery comes solely from outreach calls, reading literature, and meetings of other fellowships. The opportunity to write an article for *the Journal* is good for me.

This week at a meeting a man walked in who had less than 60 days clean and sober. He was living on the streets.

We had enough in common that I introduced myself and talked to him after the meeting. Fellowship and outreach are good, but I must take precautions because I am a sex and love addict. I told him about a meeting he may like. I paused when he said he could go with me. We talked more, and I finally explained that I didn't know him well enough to give him a ride.

When I left, I proceeded to imagine picking him up at the library where he hangs out and rescuing him for a while. I had been having problems at work and was granted a few extra days off. I had stuff going on that I didn't



want to look at.

How much easier it would have been to see the opportunity he offered and run with that. I quickly made an outreach call to an S.L.A.A. member and told on myself.

And I didn't go find him at the library, one day at a time. How nice to have people who understand this behavior and agree it is not healthy. Having and using accountability is recovery from my addiction.

I am grateful for my recovery, even if it is on the outskirts of S.L.A.A. My motives today for

going to meetings can change depending on the day.

Do I crave attention? Or do I need to hear experience, strength, and hope? Or is it both? I continue to have trouble totally ignoring triggering, attractive people.

Just because a cute newcomer that I've had my eye on has a year sober now, doesn't justify me pursuing him. It is like dating where you work - if it doesn't work out, will it affect the job/meeting? I've dated my way out of too many meetings. I try to treat them as sacred places today and let the attraction simmer and pass. I

don't have to act on them today. Not at meetings.

People are not objects to be used for my gratification. I don't want to ignore nice people, unless I have a good reason to. I do want to be able to share my experience, strength and hope with them, when I can be useful. But I must always check my motives. I am the addict and the meetings are my stage. I can be there for recovery or to feed my disease. I must remain accountable to keep myself in check.

— Anonymous



# The Need for Guidance

Growing up, I learned about sexual norms in the past generations and the conservative values held by many cultures today that emphasized the role of the community within romantic relationships.

Didn't each culture seem to have its own version of "Romeo and Juliet", which brought ruin into their own lives and their families' lives by taking things into their own hands?

And yet, I found myself growing up Millennial, where promiscuity was a sure-fire way to become popular.

As my peers seemed perfectly capable of picking out "the right one" and taking their love lives into their own hands, I felt like this task was completely beyond my capabilities.

I felt a need for those Victorian chaperones or overbearing parents that would make sure the match would work out properly. With modern- sensible parents who had no interest in assuming this role, I was forced to face these challenges on my own. Rather than start dating at a normal age, I isolated deeper into my school work, an eating disorder and rigorous physical activities. This way, I had no ability to think about love or intimacy. I barely had enough energy to make it through the week. Depriving myself of rest and emotional support left me vulnerable to a lot of destructive things that cycled in and out of my 20s.

The only males I found myself attracted to were as sick, damaged and unavailable as I was. And in retrospect, these relationships gave me the same thrill and purpose as an interesting project

at my job. The idea of building a partnership with someone, having them see the real me, being capable of giving without expectations terrified me.

Or they just seemed so impossible, that I could not entertain the thought of ever entering a relationship for those reasons. Until joining this 12-Step Fellowship, I stayed isolated in my various outlets of work, exercise and food-obsession.

I stayed lonely, and where I thought I would eventually get used to the loneliness, I just became more self-destructive, less productive at work, and more erratic in my behavior. Coming into the 12-Step Fellowship, I discovered I was capable of true intimacy, and that this intimacy could be found with relationships that were loving and not sexual.

With a sponsor and other woman in the Fellowship, I could share my most shameful moments, and I could return acceptance of other people's past too. This is the pure love that I find in each meeting and each person of my gender that has come into the rooms needing freedom from the bondage of loneliness.

This is the love that heals me and frees me from the need to seek romance from others in the rooms. When I am seeking out companionship from a person of the opposite gender, I need to recognize my own capacity to return to those old habits of filling "the hole" with a fantasy. In my meetings, I do not generally talk with members of the opposite sex without others present to chaperon, just like in the Victorian times.

There is not a lot that I think was healthy about that era and very little that I believe my Higher Power would apply to my "sexual ideal." But involving the accountability of the community of 12-Step fellows is something that I believe is healthy.

I can't trust my own motives or my own interpretations today, even if I am praying and meditating faithfully. I can't trust my filter on its own to keep all the selfishness and self-centered fear out when I pray about others. I need to rely on the guidance of my sponsor and other trusted fellows in S.L.A.A. to help me understand healthy ways of relating to others.

This fellowship has helped me practice setting good boundaries so that I do not get hurt or hurt others. It has freed me from the pressure I expected of myself to "figure it all out on my own," especially when I would see a lot of my peers or family members getting into relationships and somehow "getting it", but then realizing that, for me, what they had was never what I wanted in the first place. I admire the relationships that fellows in S.L.A.A. have taken years to cultivate.

They have gotten well. They have followed "Good Orderly Direction" and they reap the benefits.

By immersing myself in the fellowship I can identify my tendencies to thirteenth step others and watch out for being thirteenth stepped early on, so no one gets hurt and the Fellowship stays strong.

— Elizabeth B., Texas

# Avoiding Thirteenth Stepping - To Thine Own Self Be True

When I first came to S.L.A.A., I was deep in withdrawal and romantic obsession from being involved with yet another anorectic female partner. I was feeling despair, powerlessness and living an unmanageable life. I looked at the S.L.A.A. website meeting list and prayed for an all men's meeting.

To my disappointment, all the meetings in my area were mixed gender or for women only. I was convinced that a mixed meeting would not be a safe place for me. My addict would surely use what women said in their shares to his advantage and tell them what they wanted to hear in an effort to hook up with them.

Sure enough, when I walked into the room at my first meeting, a woman came up behind me and reached for the same chair as I grabbed it.

These kinds of subtle clues were not something I tended to ignore in my acting out.

I saw them as indicators of interest and would seek to escalate them. There were other subtle and more blatant episodes of intrigue with this woman and I was finding it very hard to not be triggered.

I was already in crushing withdrawal and acting out was not going to make that go away. It would just postpone my having to deal with the pain of my underlying issues. I had been in an addictive cycle for decades already and I knew it didn't work.

If I went down the path of intrigue and seduction with someone in the meetings, I was abandoning all hope of finding the

help that was available in S.L.A.A.

I focused on my recovery and my desire to heal gave me the resolve to resist temptation. I learned about the tools of recovery and used all that were available to me. The most important tools for

**There is a lot at stake for myself and my fellow addicts. Awareness of this responsibility keeps me focused on recovery.**

me in that early stage were attending meetings, and having fellowship with my fellows both male and female.

If I was tempted to act out with someone, I would share about how I was feeling with one of my trusted fellows and my sponsor.

Their feedback would bring a dose of reality into the mix and help to dissipate my obsessive thoughts.

I attended every meeting available in my area on a regular basis and went to fellowship after meetings whenever possible. The process of recovery became the center of my non-working life.

Nothing was more important to

me than relieving myself from the bondage of this addiction.

Over time, being around women addicts was helping me achieve my recovery goals because I was seeing the commonality we all shared.

We were so much alike, from family of origin issues to childhood emotional and sexual traumas. This addiction affects all genders equally and in much the same ways.

Today, over 18 months later, I am close to several women in the program. I can be around them without sexualizing them.

It is an important part of my recovery to have interactions with women that I am sexually attracted to without seeking to escalate the situation. I even call the woman I was once intriguing with a friend in recovery today.

I have managed to not cross the line because I know that recovery, both theirs and mine, must come first. If I were to act out within the program, I would be undermining their recovery and mine.

My actions may also affect bystanders who may be triggered by what they see or hear. Newcomers need to feel safe.

Seeing people with time in the program exhibiting poor boundaries is likely to show them that there is no hope for recovery and cause them to leave, perhaps forever.

There is a lot at stake for myself and my fellow addicts.

Awareness of this responsibility keeps me focused on recovery. "To thine own self be true."

— Anonymous

# Guidelines and Lessons Learned

No matter what I do or where I go, I am bound to meet people I find attractive. It's natural. It's going to happen, and S.L.A.A. meetings – except possibly men-only or women-only meetings – are no exception. Finding someone attractive is one thing, but acting on that attraction is inappropriate at S.L.A.A. meetings, and especially dangerous when it involves a newcomer. I've never thirteenth stepped anyone, i.e. tried to form a sexual or romantic relationship with a newcomer. I'd like to share some guidelines and lessons-learned in that respect.

My first lesson on this in S.L.A.A. was an understanding that attractive people in S.L.A.A. are in pain because of their addiction and treating them as potential partners adds to their pain. It takes away from their recovery, it takes away from my recovery, and it makes the meeting difficult for everyone else. I first learned this lesson when an attractive newcomer came to a meeting.

My first thought was, "Oh boy! Maybe we'll get to talking and she'll realize what a great person I am and she'll want to date me and

I'll have this beautiful girlfriend!" Fortunately, she shared her troubles at that first meeting and I could hear in her story that she was a sex addict in a lot of pain. If I treated her as an object of fantasy, I would hurt her and drive her away from getting help.

If I find someone in S.L.A.A. meetings attractive, I try to talk about it with another person. It's not to take personal inventory or to examine why the attraction is there or to confess the shame of having this attraction. Talking about it keeps me accountable. I want some trusted S.L.A.A. members to know so that they can stop it if I ever act on that attraction.

Ironically, the fact that we're sex and love addicts helps guard against thirteenth stepping. We understand how sex and love addicts think, so we're quick to recognize thirteenth stepping and try to prevent it. It's partially a desire to see the newcomer treated with respect and partially selfishness that says, "I see what you're doing, and if I can't thirteenth step him/her then neither can you!"

I also try to examine my motives around S.L.A.A. members

that I find attractive. There are people in my local meetings that I find attractive and I have a desire to try to get their attention. I have to ask myself, would I do this for a man? Would I do it for someone I am not attracted to? Would other S.L.A.A. members think it's appropriate? Would I be comfortable letting other S.L.A.A. members know about this, e.g. giving a program crush a gift, asking her to dinner or coffee? Me asking an attractive newcomer, "Would you like to join me for coffee, alone?" is not appropriate. But if there's a group of us going for coffee, it's appropriate to ask any newcomer along.

I'm reminded of what the Basic Text says about attractions to people in meetings:

*Being around very attractive people within S.L.A.A. has forced us, within this sanctuary, to begin to learn how to interact more humanly with those who would have been cast as "types," on the outside. Like us, these people are now, within S.L.A.A., also intent on getting sober and finding a stable recovery. – S.L.A.A. Basic Text, Chapter 7*

— Anonymous

## Single issues of the e-journal



The Journal is a meeting in a magazine. It can be used: To read at meetings, To find experience, strength and hope while on vacation, To read with sponsees, To stay connected to the program.

Available at [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org)

\$3.50 each

# Things We Lost in Thirteenth Stepping, Thirteenth Traditioning, Thirteenth Concepting



**I**t seems to me that the reason we have thirteenth stepping is because we have thirteenth traditioning; and the reason we have thirteenth traditioning is because we have thirteenth concepting.

What is this all about? Thirteenth stepping, or a (supposedly) 12-Step longtimer preying on a newcomer in the rooms (whether sexually, emotionally, financially, etc.) is a colloquialism, really a fake step: the non-practice of the 12 Steps, or perhaps the thirteenth stepper is really a two-stepper...someone

who jumps from Step One to Step Twelve, but there is no evidence of the ten Steps in between.

Healthy boundaries on the part of a home group are important.

There would be no thirteenth stepping if there were no thirteenth traditioning, and also no thirteenth concepting.

The practice of “thirteenth traditioning” (a colloquialism referring to insider fake practice of the 12 Traditions) can lead to thirteenth stepping when the home group:

— fails to do regular Group Inventories with Safety in the

Rooms a topic, especially for newcomers;

— fails to be vigilant toward newcomers when they may be preyed upon by thirteenth steppers;

— lets Tradition 4 end with a period after autonomous; forgetting or denying that except in matters affecting other groups or S.L.A.A. as a whole is an essential part of a healthy group;

— fails to address healthy sponsorship, addressing the diverse (individual/neighborhood/cultural) needs of the home group.

The practice of “thirteenth-concepting” can occur especially when the Six Warranties of the 12th Concept are reversed:

— Instead of NO to perilous wealth or power, a home group may pile up money or let a “bleeding deacon” become a group owner;

— Instead of YES to a prudent reserve and sober planning of financial resources, a group, may become lax in this matter;

— Instead of NO to authoritarianism, a group may fall under the spell of a “charismatic” leader;

— Instead of YES to substantial unanimity, a group may forget about the minority report, and lobby for a (sometimes) unhealthy majority;

— Instead of NO to punitive measures, a group may regress to former sacrificial, shunning, exiling, aka scapegoating practices;

— Instead of YES to growing in the likeness and image of a Higher Power, with mutual respect, a group may forget all about the counsel of PRUDENCE: prudence in personal relatedness, prudence in money matters, prudence in our relations with the world about us. (A.A. Service Manual, Concept XII, p.63)

### **Safe sex and safe rooms**

We hear a lot about safe sex in S.L.A.A. In terms of thirteenth stepping, we may need to speak (more) about safety in the rooms.

Hospitality is the welcoming

special care for the newcomer in the room. This word contains the word hospital which originated in 1867 in France when the nuns began to take the sick/dying off the streets and into what was known as “Hotel Dieu”, or House of God. Some hospitals in francophone areas are known as Hotel-Dieu.”

The hospitality of the S.L.A.A. circles of love and service includes not only compassion, care and vigilance for the newcomers, but also for the short-timers, intermediate-timers, and longer-timers: we are all vulnerable to falling back into our old patterns.

This is a spiritual program, not just neurological or psychological.

We are responsible.

— **Beth L., Canada East**

## Recognizing and Avoiding Thirteenth Stepping

I have been sober for a year and seven months, and in the past few weeks my addict has been preoccupied with a fellow member at my local S.L.A.A. meeting. This is the first time this has happened to me since I have been sober.

As my Higher Power would have it, about ten days into this predicament I received an email from the Journal Team announcing the topic of the upcoming publication: “Recognizing and avoiding thirteenth stepping.” God sure does have a sense of humour.

Thinking (and sharing) about this topic for this article really helped me get honest with myself. What kind of people trigger my addict and how can I deal with them? How does my addict try to

trick me into acting out? What can I do to stay sober and not quit going to meetings altogether? How would I deal with attempts at thirteenth stepping were I to be on the receiving end?

My addict’s taste in men is predictable. As an adult child of an (active) alcoholic, my addict finds alcoholics attractive. Because S.L.A.A., as well as other 12-Step fellowships, are often full of recovering alcoholics, this is something I must learn to deal with. Other traits my addict finds appealing are introversion and sullenness. My addict’s curiosity is piqued as she senses a challenge (“could I *make* him like me?”). This, for me, is a meeting point of my sex and love addiction and co-dependency: addiction to the unavailable and making any

excuse to shift my focus from myself to someone else.

In sobriety, my addict has become shrewd and subtle. My home group partakes in some recovery-related activities that might not be right for me depending on my motives. Why do I want to go for an after-meeting coffee?

Why do I want to join a recovery chat group that everyone else in my meeting is participating in? Whom do I give out my phone number to? My addict will tell me, “Go for it – it’s for your recovery!” However, if I share and pray about my motives and feelings, I can usually tell if my motives are fishy or not.

Thinking too much about what I am going to wear to meetings is another red flag, so is anything

else related to my appearance (hair, makeup etc.).

Again, sharing and praying are my friends here as they expose the addict's ulterior motives.

When I first became aware of this challenge a few weeks ago, I went back and forth between denial and trying to force solutions: not understanding how being at a meeting can be *bad* for me versus swearing only to go to online meetings where I can't see other people.

I also considered going every other week instead of every week or wearing purposefully unattractive clothes.

One tool that has helped me handle this is the three A's: *awareness* (for example, recognising that I find alcoholics attractive), *acceptance* (I might not be able to change this) and

*action* (in this case *non-action*; not acting on the urge).

I have recently read something crucial in the S.L.A.A. Basic Text that helped me enormously: "being around very attractive people within S.L.A.A. has forced us... to learn how to interact more humanly...we come to see through the addictive potential of individuals, breaking the illusion so that the human dimension can come into focus."

And this is exactly what happened last time at my local meeting.

When the person my addict was attracted to arrived that night, I felt this insane attraction. However, as he started to share and I looked at him, I realised he was just another person, another human being.

Still, I must be vigilant; I avoid

talking to him too much or hugging him after the Serenity Prayer.

Being on the receiving end of an attempted thirteenth stepping has so far been easier.

I often go to online meetings where in terms of interaction with male participants, I just follow my sponsor's instruction: "Don't do it."

As for face to face meetings, when I notice that a fellow member is being a bit too friendly, I try to keep my side of the street clean by being polite but also by protecting my boundaries.

I also try to remind myself that avoiding triggers, setting boundaries and remaining sober is *my* responsibility, not someone else's.

— Anonymous

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## Service opportunities for *the Journal*

*The Journal* is a basic recovery tool for S.L.A.A. groups and individual members, and it is a key outreach tool into areas that do not yet have an S.L.A.A. presence.

We're looking for people with writing, drawing, and outreach skills to assist in the creation of the new, deeper, more refreshing publication.

Please assist us in creatively carrying the message of recovery.

Please go to <http://www.slaa.fws.org/journalsubmit> to submit your writing.



# Share space

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## Dating – Letting Go of Anticipation

When I started dating, I had to use all the tools of the Program, as the dynamics of online dating are so similar to the hookup apps that had brought me to my knees with obsession, mania and despair. If I am going to survive dating, I am going to need help.

I literally do not have a clue about what I'm doing, and the pitfalls are many. I also really want to control the outcome, as in I need a life partner – NOW! So, having no clue and full speed ahead is surely a recipe for disaster once again.

One good thing about recovery is that the inherent introspection and honesty teaches me to recognize when I need help.

The stakes are so high around finding a healthy compatible life partner, that I definitely need help from my Higher Power and others in the program.

So as I got on the dating sites, I adopted an attitude of letting go of outcomes, of not letting anything that happens disturb me, so my serenity stays intact.

The dynamics of the dating

sites are so much like it was on the hookup sites - I text them...why aren't they responding? Wait...they just read my text...why aren't they responding? What are they hiding?

Why am I not important? The anticipation is starting to make me manic. I like what they said in their profile... they are very attractive.... damn, I'm starting to pick out drapes...why aren't they responding?!

This needs to happen! I need to meet them! Will they like the color of the drapes?... and down the rabbit hole of obsession I go once again.

Once I recognized the insanity of the anticipation angst, I embraced an approach of surrendering it all to God.

So now I message them, then let it go. I don't let the thoughts get going of what a cute couple we would be. So I have taken a matter of fact, surrendered approach to online dating. I message them in a sane friendly way, then let go of the outcome. I don't let myself get swept up and intoxicated by the anticipation.

I take the attitude of, if they respond to me-good. If they don't, maybe it wasn't meant to be. It is all up to God anyway. These people popped up on my screen because it was God's will. So, if I make myself crazy with anticipation, that would obviously not be God's will. That is me making myself manic by once again trying to control the uncontrollable.

In many respects, the creation of that so called "killer" dating profile is all about my will and pride. I was driven to create the perfect profile – pick out the perfect photos. Notice that word "driven," not inspired. When I have so much self-will and pride wrapped up in something, I've learned it just ends up making me crazy.

So, I'm letting go. God is the director of this dating game. I'm happy to let him work his magic. It is going to be good. It always is when my Higher Power runs the show.

— Craig G



# Discomfort Is Part of Sober Dating

**A**re you ready to experience excruciating discomfort? Get ready for sober dating! Sober dating is another opportunity to rewire all those dysfunctional neuro pathways. But doing things differently is extremely uncomfortable and seemingly unnatural.

I don't want to get into all my past behaviors that landed me in S.L.A.A. We all have our pasts. I will say that I have had my turn as addict, and I have had my turn as avoidant; my go to was my addict. So, my first time on the sober dating scene, I thought I was in a race. I thought, "I can have at least one date a week. How do I make sure that I see the person I like every week?" And I ended up rushing into my first sober relationship. It was far from my idea of the "perfect relationship" (p.s. everyone, perfect relationships don't exist.). I was far from perfect and I felt sloppy. Learning how to show up when I didn't feel like it was hard. Learning how to communicate in a healthy way was difficult and I felt vulnerable most of the time. But I kept showing up, honestly, in my program. I kept all my commitments. I finished my Steps. I kept working the Steps daily. And in the end, I found my needs didn't match with my then partners. So, we ended the relationship. It was the first time I had ever been in a relationship that wasn't ending because we had

engaged in shitty behavior. We just simply weren't compatible and we were able to recognize that and walk away!

It was a little bit of a bummer not meeting someone who was more on my page, but I am so grateful for the experience. The real purpose (I believe) of sober dating is to bring me closer to myself. Through my imperfect experience and the challenges of navigating my first sober relationship, I had to learn how to really show up for myself. Every time I fell, I picked up a new tool of recovery. Most importantly, I gained a psychic shift. I was finally figuring out how to meet my own needs before coming to my partner. And it was painful in many ways. It was my first experience of dating without enmeshing with my partner. And I constantly wanted to run away. Instead, I kept showing up and doing my best.

My experience was filled with a lot of triggers, sitting with that feeling, journaling, meditating, talking with fellows, being honest in program, and really getting to the core of my feeling. I would (and still do) ask myself, "What was my original wound? How did I get that wound? What did I need to do to take care of that wound? How can I take care of it now?" I started meeting my own needs in that way.

It was also my first time keeping the complete life I had

when I started a relationship. Not only did I keep my complete life, but because of showing up for myself throughout the relationship and asking myself what I needed, my life got even bigger. I started going on self-dates more often. I started signing up for classes I had always wanted to take. Swing dance? Yes, please! Scuba diving? I love being in the water. Love letters? I love receiving affection on a nightly basis. Love letters are the biggest commitment I have made to myself so far. I started writing them to myself 5 months ago, and have made the commitment to write one every day for a whole year. I have forgotten a day here and there. And I am allowed to be imperfect. But I recognize that love is a committed choice. So, when I make a mistake, especially when I make a mistake, I keep showing up for myself.

Now I am dating again, at the start of a new dating process, and I have already picked up several more tools for meeting my own needs. I am finding more peace and acceptance and showing up more compassionately, one day at a time. Dating is providing me with opportunities to love myself unconditionally. I am still making mistakes. But I am showing up honestly through them. And that is all any of us can do on this sloppy, messy journey.

— **Natalie**



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