

# the Journal

Issue # 167

Single Issue \$4



What Makes a Person  
Emotionally Available?

# 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.

© 1990 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved

## 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.

© 1990 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved

# Table of Contents

---

**4** Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

**4** The Twelve Steps

**5** Letter From the Editor

**6** Question of the Day

## **Theme: Emotionally Available**

**9** Growing Towards Connection

**9** Sharing Time and Attention With Another Human Being

**10** Learning to Recognize When Someone Is Not Available

**11** Unavailability Opens the Door for Sex and Love  
Addiction to Creep Back In

**13** A Sober Dating Plan Helps Me Recognize Unavailability

**14** Sharing Healthy Vulnerability

**15** Clues to Distinguish Unavailability from Availability

**17** Higher Power's Grace Makes Me Available

**17** Emotional Availability Comes from Living from the Heart

## **Share Space**

**20** 12 Miracles

**21** S.L.A.A. Is My Lighthouse

**22** Might as Well Face It, I'm Addicted to Love

**24** Healthy Relationships    **25** Blessing and a Curse

# 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.

©1985, 2003, 2012 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

## 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.

\*©1985 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved. The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that A.A. is affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only. Use of the Twelve Steps in connection with programs and activities, which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, does not imply otherwise. **THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS** 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

The theme of this issue is Emotional Availability. S.L.A.A. members were asked, “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?” When I read this *Journal* question of the day out loud at my S.L.A.A. meetings, I heard nervous laughter in response. I identified. It’s difficult to be vulnerable, open, fearless and clear. I found that God protected me until I was in Program long enough and sober enough to have the strength to, with His help, take on such an endeavor (becoming emotionally available).

The stories in this issue of *the Journal* give some really great tools to help us along that path. They share warning signs to watch for along with a way out of the fear. Enjoy!

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.

© April 2017. The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Stories, interviews, personal testimony, and other content contained herein are authored by members of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. The opinions expressed in *the Journal* are not necessarily the opinions of The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc., F.W.S. office, Annual Business Conference or any other Conference committee including the Conference Journal Committee or *the Journal* production staff. Motions adopted at the 1989, 1990, and 1991 Conferences chartered *the*

*Journal*, but it is impractical for all of the content of a periodical such as *the Journal* to be Conference-approved. Each recovery group can determine its own position on the use of content from *the Journal* at its meetings.

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 holidays (fax) 1-210-828-7922. [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org)

For subscription concerns, please visit: <http://www.slaafws.org/subscriptionhelp>

Managing Editor	Lisa C.
Art Director	Fiona
Proofreaders for this issue	Andrew K. Beth L.

**COVER PHOTO:** THE VILLAGE OF LUSS ON LOCH LOMOND, SCOTLAND

# Question of the Day

## & Answers from Yesterday

“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?”

**Being** more available to others means melting my walls with friends and my partner. I don't need to be better or mysterious. I can share my doubts and vulnerabilities and trust them to care for themselves and me.

— **Sascha, Los Angeles**

**I** make a point of mentioning my wife and that I am married to anyone that might be triggering. I also keep proper distance when talking to women.

— **Tim P**

**The** answer to this question is rigorous honesty as a foundation! No other physically intimate relationships, marriages, or significant others.

They need to have processed old relationships or been willing to look at them.

They need to have other interests / friends.

And most importantly, my own connection with my Higher Power and program must be strong so I can check in to see if both of us are available.

— **Ann**

**Unavailable:** The person does not call you back. They repeatedly are apologizing for not getting back to you. You don't feel good about the interaction. It feels one-sided.

Making yourself more available: Checking in with yourself and Higher Power. What are the feelings that are coming up? Fear or avoidance? Ask yourself, “Would it be good for me to slow up?”

— **Dirk, Granada Hills**

**I** recognize someone is emotionally available when they don't evade questions about their life, they make concrete plans with me, and they are open to being vulnerable with me about things that have happened to them. I have both dated unavailable people and I've been unavailable. When I was unavailable, I avoided making plans with the person, didn't kiss them when they approached me, and I rejected gifts from them. When someone was unavailable to me, they never opened up, were codependent with their feelings and mine, and became resentful when I spent time with other people. In the manual that health care professionals use as a guide for diagnosis of mental disorders, unavailability could be seen as “avoidant personality disorder” if it becomes a pattern of social inhibition mixed with feelings of inadequacy and being hypersensitive to negative evaluation. If you ever notice someone spending more time focusing on your actions than sharing their feelings about themselves, they're most likely unavailable.

— **Anonymous**

**When** they don't speak of the desire to stop and to work the Program and carry the message.

— **Mick B., Dublin**

**He's** wearing a ring.

— **Glenn S.**

**Unavailable** people will not call back. They will take more energy away than they bring. They will talk about themselves and not listen to my stuff. My availability is about boundaries and balance.

— **Rick B., Largo, FL**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “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?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: #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. And #169 — S.L.A.A. and Mental Illness — How do you find support with mental illness (bipolar, depression, schizophrenia)? How and when have you disclosed your illness to fellows in S.L.A.A., and/or how and when have you disclosed that you are a member of S.L.A.A. in mental health

**He** no longer reaches out to me. Rather, I continually reach out to him. The fear is that he wouldn't want to contact me.

— **Eileen, Boston**

**A** person who is not available emotionally or is unable to connect physically will communicate their position both verbally and with body language. When my love-addicted side is filtering data, I receive an altered message that my disease warps to tell me what I want to hear and keep me in denial about what reality truly is. Through this lens, I can keep chasing a hopeless cause long after a healthy person would have read the signs and moved on.

Making myself more available in a healthy way involves spending some time with the feelings I am having and not sexualizing them away. In the past, I would sexualize feelings and relationships. This eventually devolves into a cycle of “sex-argue-makeup-sex.” When I use the tools of the program, I forgo those intense highs and lows but end up having a much healthier centered existence both alone and in the relationship. Sometimes I do miss the high but I know now that the downside is just not worth it.

— **Tony B**

**Signs** are personal and since finishing the Steps, I recognize when someone is not available. That electric surge that I would get from being around an unavailable person was attractive to me. The more I work on my availability, the more I attract availability.

To make myself more available: the characteristics of sex and love addiction say we won't stay in or return to painful destructive relationships, not that we won't ever come across unavailability. I learn to trust and become more vulnerable and work on Steps 10, 11, 12. God will provide when I'm ready.

— **Paul T., London, UK**

**With** body language and eye contact or the lack thereof. If it's someone I know, I will ask, “How would you like me to support you or be available to you? Shall I listen? Would you like feedback, or is there something else?”

— **Gabriel, Sacramento, CA**

**Aloofness**, no eye contact, disconnected and non-cohesive conversation. Be present. Listen. Eye contact.

— **Earl D.**

**I** have no idea if a person is available until I ask them. To me, it means I am practicing spiritual principles.

— **Anonymous**

**Since** I have difficulties with emotional availability, I have to be aware that the emotionally unavailable person may actually feel comfortable to me. Availability is about overcoming fear through God's help.

— **Steve B., Sunrise, FL**

**When** I ask deeper “getting to know you” questions about family, past relationships, spirituality, etc. and the answers are shallow and quick. I know that person is not willing or able to be vulnerable- for me, this is a red flag.

— **Amy G., Austin, TX**

**When** getting to know someone, I listen to what they are saying and not just what I want to hear. I give myself time to see if their actions match their words. When they tell me about themselves, I believe them. Being more present means being more available to others.

— **Suzanne D., Los Angeles**

**She** is not interacting with me.

— **David, Dublin**

# Question of the Day

**I** am still working on this in my life. It can be hard to see lack of availability in others, but I can work on my level of availability.

— **Beth S., Johnstown, PA**

**I** don't recognize those signs so I act in my anorexia and assume the person is not available. How I make myself available in a healthy way is still an issue.

— **Gunilla, Sweden**

**I** am only as attracted as my healthiness allows or disallows me to be. If I am still sick I will be attracted to an unavailable person, or not be attracted to a healthy person. But to the degree that I am healthy, I will be attracted to a healthy, available person, and I will be an attraction to them. My job is to stay available to this.

— **Anonymous**

**Relationship** status- single, in relationship, married. I think listening to others and showing empathy towards others makes me more available in a healthy way.

— **Becca M., Rhode Island**

**Sign** of unavailability: if another is not listening, if they always talk about themselves and don't care about anyone else's feelings or about what's going on in someone else's life. Signs I am available – listening, responding with consideration.

— **Faye, Dublin**

**Person** exhibits signs of anger and ambivalence. If they're not available the way I want them now it does not mean they don't love me with all they have at this time. If I let go and get interested in people and situations beyond the relationship that I want, I find so much love in all areas of my life. And I find more serenity and love with the one person that I want and I am able to become more available or I am at least able to be in the same place with the relationship that they are.

— **Dion M. Orinda, CA**

**They** tell me they aren't available. They don't respond to texts, calls, or social invites. They don't equally engage in person. I make myself more available to others in a healthy way by hanging around after meetings to give support to newcomers or to have friendly conversations with peers. I answer phone calls. I say, "Yes" to social invites. I say, "Hi" and smile. I intentionally work on my self-care so that I have more to give.

— **April, Houston**

**When** he is unresponsive, does not answer emails, phone, etc. I am available when I respond and am reliable.

— **Amalia, Boston, MA**

**I** recognize when someone is not available – let me count the ways– They are: 1. on electronic devices all the time. 2. reacting to me rather than listening with curiosity. 3. non-stop talking. 4. overly critical and shaming. 5. people pleasing. 6. caretaking me 7. physically distant.

When I'm available in a healthy way:

1. respectful of others by listening- respecting the body and personal space of others.
2. communicate my truth with messages, hopefully without shame, blame, or criticism.
3. in conflict – being present, making partner feel heard without reverting into my people pleasing and care taking tendencies.

— **Nancy G.**

**Others** unavailable: no eye contact, no emotional related statements no overlapping interest, values – no accepting invitations.

To be more available: self-disclosure, empathetic responses, make invitations.

— **Anne K., Tampa**

**I** sat down with my sponsor to create a list of what availability means to me. Signs of availability range from geographical proximity to me to being on some sort of spiritual path. For myself: I find I am more available to others when I am connected with my Higher Power.

— **Sarah C., San Antonio**



# Growing Towards Connection

I find that the more comfortable I get with myself, my feelings, and the world as it is – the less I need to escape. The more I can feel pain, sensation and safety, the more I can feel love and connection too and the more available I am for other people. When I am not allowing the Truth to exist in me – I cannot help but use and control and neglect or abuse myself or others. It is not bad. When I or others are in that place, it is because we feel threatened, afraid, unloved – somehow unsafe. I judge myself less and less for my ‘bad’ behaviour or when I am shut down, or shutting people out. I know and trust that there was/is a reason for it, but that my true nature is love, and so I ask for strength and power to open more to Love and then let go.

I find that the healthier I get,

the less I need to work out if others are healthy. I am in touch with the aliveness of being – and I don’t have to figure it all out so I can control it as I did before. I can accept people in pain and love

The more I can feel pain, sensation and safety, the more I can feel love and connection too and the more available I am for other people.

them. Then when people are in pain, instead of making them wrong or ‘unavailable,’ I see that I can maybe bring a little kindness or encouragement or love to their lives. No one wants to be unavailable. It helps to remember

that. We are all just doing the best we can do.

I also can accept my genuine need for love and connection and feel that as a good thing, rather than something to fear or be ashamed of as I used to. Things are more straight forward. I am now realising that a lot of my behaviour as I was so desperately wanting ‘love and connection’ was because I was actually scared of real love, intimacy, connection and so I was seeking substitutes. If I judged myself as bad, I would be stuck in that place still. I am grateful for the support of the fellowship and the journey of finding a new ground – a new basis of life – that naturally just keeps opening my heart to learning about who I am and who others are.

— Elise

## Sharing Time and Attention With Another Human Being

**What makes a person emotionally available?**

I think someone who is present to others is emotionally available. Who is not – as I was for so many years – thinking of their next binge (I am a recovering food addict) or their fantasy lover/husband (I’m also a recovering romantic fantasy addict). I was never present with others – always off in my “secret” little la-la-land. Being emotionally present is listening fully, and not

just thinking of the next thing I want to say. It’s being open to relationship, to doing things with others, to sharing time and attention with another human being. It’s placing a value on human relationships, on socializing, or even just chatting. It’s giving somebody else my full attention and being open to wherever that may lead. Finally, it’s saying “You matter to me,” and reflecting that in manner and action.

**How do you recognize signs that a person is not available?**

My primary life relationship is with my mother, who is not emotionally available. To begin with, just about the only acceptable “negative” emotions to her are anger and rage. She doesn’t evidence sadness or despair or even boredom. I could never understand how she didn’t seem to have emotions except anger and rage.

If you don't have or don't allow the whole broad range of emotions, how can you identify and empathize with other human beings? You won't "get it," and won't be able to share with others the vital human communication about feelings. A narcissist, as I believe my mother is, thinks only in the "I."

There's no room for another person. She can always tell you what her life experience is, but will rarely inquire about yours. She's not particularly interested in yours, except as a springboard to telling you about hers.

You can't share things because she's so tightly wrapped in her own life experience. It truly is "all about her." There's no room for you or me.

### **What does it mean to make yourself more available to others in a healthy way?**

It means listening closely and asking questions. It means making time in your schedule for socializing, dates of all types, gatherings of people with similar interests, phone calls and e-mails just to chat or catch up.

It certainly means not being actively addicted to **anything. It means seeking out new friendships and** maintaining old ones. It could be as simple as knowing your neighbors.

It means sharing time, activities, interests, meals, good days, bad days, the whole panoply that is life, with others. It means sharing your journey with them.

— **Christina,**  
**recovering romantic fantasy addict from NJ**



## Learning to Recognize When Someone Is Not Available

**H**ow 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 truth is that I ask myself this question all the time. Especially when I am not connected to my Higher Power, myself, or my Program. I believe that I am utterly powerless over sex and love addiction. And as a

result, I have needed a Power greater than myself to find the answers to these questions. I am learning these answers as I show up in the dating world (and life) and bring my Higher Power into it.

I have learned that when I am able to meet my own needs, I am more able to recognize when someone is not available for the kind of relationship that I want.

When I am not meeting my own needs, I am obsessed with changing the person I am dating into the kind of person who can participate in a relationship the way I would like them to. (When I say "like" I actually mean "demand.") When I am meeting my own needs, I am able to accept that I cannot change another person. I can state my needs, and I can walk away when someone is

unable to meet those needs. I am also able to look at myself and practice my Tenth Step, which is one of the ways I show up for a healthy relationship.

I believe someone is available when they are able to set boundaries without making barriers, when they're able to talk through difficulties or conflicts (which also means they let me know if they need a time out and when they're available to speak about the topic again), and they're able to share their needs with me. Even when disagreeing, we can still interact in a positive way.

There are also more subtle signs of availability, like committing to plans in advance, the way they treat the waiter at a restaurant, how they introduce me to their friends, or how they treat me around others.

The subtle signs make the biggest difference, but are crazy

making when I am not taking care of myself. When I am not doing my top lines (a major one being prayer), I am obsessed with dissecting the relationship. I get so invested in the relationship that I think I need to make this person be different. When I am taking care of myself I am able to say, "Hey, I've noticed that we have some differences in the area of X, Y, and Z. My needs in these areas are A, B, and C. Can we talk about that?" And someone who is available is able to talk with me about it, even if it means we aren't compatible. Someone who isn't available, isn't willing to have this conversation! And I am shown I can trust my intuition.

Here are some signals that someone is not available: They say, "I don't like to think about those things," when asked what their needs are; They postpone conversations without setting an

actual time to address the issue, especially if they want to postpone it for more than a day; Expressing my needs causes retaliation; They have trouble committing to an exact time to show up; They make a lot of promises and very little plans.

Everyone has different needs. Some people need a lot of affection, others may need an open book policy on financials in the house, and others may need a lot of alone time. What "available" means to me is probably different from what "available" means to others. I have learned all of this through the journey of sober friendships, fellowship, and dating. All I can do is bring my Higher Power with me in my journey of discovery because I need a lot of help!

— Anonymous

## Unavailability Opens the Door for Sex and Love Addiction to Creep Back In

As I write this, I am in the midst of a withdrawal that has hit me harder than other withdrawals before, which surprised me and destabilized me.

What was surprising with this withdrawal is that with two years in the program and over a solid year of sobriety under my belt, I thought I was past a lot of these feelings and a lot of this heartbreak. I also was surprised how I felt my sex and love addiction slowly creep back into my life, day-by-day, week-by-week, and month-by-month by

being involved with a person who was not emotionally available.

I decided I would write to *the Journal* about my experience over the last six months or so being in relationship (not in A relationship, just relating and being IN relationship) with someone who was emotionally unavailable. I would like to provide some real life, hot-off-the-stove, insight into emotional availability.

### Five Ways to Tell if Someone Is Emotionally Available

1. They say they are emotionally

available. This might seem simple, and may not come up as clearly as I am writing it here, but the first step to someone being emotionally available is them saying they are emotionally available. And here is another point, if they say they AREN'T emotionally available, then that is a huge giant billboard too that says LOUDLY they are not emotionally available. And if they aren't saying whether they are emotionally available or not, I'm not afraid to ask. Because asking and having a conversation on emotional availability can give me



a lot of information on whether someone is emotionally available or not. I'd rather find out sooner than later.

2. They act like they are emotionally available. Congruence between what one says and what one does is really important for me as a sex and love addict. My sponsor always says, "look at the actions" and "what are the ACTIONS saying." Is this person acting like they are emotionally available? And let's put it into use - what does one do when they are "acting" like they are emotionally available? What do I do when I am acting emotionally available? The actions that immediately come to mind are as follows:

communicating regularly, not just about surface stuff but about deeper stuff; spending time with someone, not just activities and dates, but real quality time with someone and getting to know that person; sharing intimacy with someone, and this doesn't need to be sexual or romantic intimacy, but maybe intimate thoughts and characteristics of a person; and someone who sticks around when the going gets tough and rough emotionally. These are just a few, but the person needs to act like they are emotionally available.

3. There is little to no ambivalence to how someone feels about me. An emotionally available person will not bring

ambivalence into the relationship (and this includes friendship and family relationships as well). I look back at my relationships with unavailable friends, family members, and romantic partners and so many times the relationships that activated my sex and love addiction were relationships full of ambivalence. In fact, in our Basic Text in the withdrawal chapter, it says, "We have found that wherever ambiguity is present, the potential for reactivating sex and love addiction is present also" (110-111). If I don't know where I stand with someone, and I communicate and ask, and I still don't know where I stand with someone, that

person is not an emotionally available person and that ambiguity can definitely activate my sex and love addiction.

4. They aren't emotionally tied to any other partner or past/present/future relationships (or are working on getting untied). A person doesn't need a blank slate in order to be emotionally available, although I know early on in my acting out days I thought that THAT was the problem: that if only I could find someone who had never loved anyone else before (or that had never BEEN loved before), then my sex and love addiction would be quiet. But I don't really want that. I want someone who has loved, and lost, and moved passed those feelings and can love again. I want someone with experience on heartbreak and longing (God knows I have MORE than enough experience). But an emotionally available person is someone who

has already resolved those feelings and relationships, and has done the work on themselves so they can be as available as possible for the next possible person in their life. An emotionally available person has done the work they need to do to move past what came before so it doesn't interfere with being present in what is yet to come.

5. Emotionally available people set and maintain boundaries. Boundaries... like a four-letter word with more letters for extra measure. Boundaries are good, healthy, and amazing, but sometimes in relationships, one person's boundaries can feel to another person like a lack of emotional availability. Boundaries are essential for a healthy relationship and show a sign of emotional availability, provided they are set and maintained with the best interest of others and oneself in mind. If a person says

they will call me after 10 am, do they? That's a boundary, and what I look for is if they set a boundary (I'll call you tomorrow) do they maintain the boundary (call me tomorrow). I don't always LOVE boundaries, especially when I can twist them to make me feel like its abandonment or rejection. An emotionally available person who wants to date me needs to fulfill the first four on this list, and if that is the case, I can probably get myself out of that hole of abandonment and rejection with a little support and gentle reminders.

I could go on and on about what an emotionally UNAVAILABLE person is like, but that's not the point. These are just a few things I've learned over the last six months about emotional availability.

— Rhiannon

## A Sober Dating Plan Helps Me Recognize Unavailability

Thank God for my sober dating plan! I don't know how else I could possibly stand a chance of being able to recognize when someone is unavailable. Following my dating plan gives me the time and space that I need to be able to see clearly.

When I dated prior to S.L.A.A. recovery, I would plunge ahead so fast, with my sight so focused on the fantasy of who this person was or what this relationship was supposed to be, that I was literally blind to the reality of who they actually were. If information surfaced that didn't fit with my

plans, I'd just disregard it, rationalize it, or explain it away.

He's got a girlfriend? Yeah, but their relationship is on the rocks. He's not interested in a long-term relationship? Yeah, but he's only saying that because he's been hurt before.

He just took a job that's transferring him out of the country? Yeah, well, it's not like that's set in stone. And if I was able to ignore these really big signs of unavailability, then there was no way I was ever even going to notice the smaller, more subtle ones.

When I follow my dating plan,

on the other hand, the amount of time that I spend with someone is very limited. I'm forced to go very, very slowly. In the beginning, I don't see someone more than once a week, and I don't talk or text with them more than what's necessary to set up the next date. So, there's a lot of space in between dates. That space is the key, I have found. It allows time for that post-date (or pre-date) excitement, the "high" of the fantasy, to fade. And then I get to look at the reality.

The reality is, how is this person actually showing up for me? Even before the first date, is it

hard for me to get them to commit to a specific time and place?

Are they willing to make advance plans? (My dating plan requires at least 3 days' notice.) Do they return my text/call in a timely fashion? And on the date, do they seem to be present? Are they listening? Do they have good boundaries, not over-sharing or talking all about their past relationships? I have found that I can't really get clarity around these questions without that space.

I'll share one of my early sober dating experiences as an example. I went on several dates with this guy whom I'd been interested in for some time. He was sweet and funny, and there seemed to be some chemistry. There were a couple of moments where I wasn't really sure if he was truly listening to me, but they weren't enough to keep me from making another date with him. I liked him. I told myself that he was probably just nervous.

We went on several very nice dates. And he made it clear that he was really into me. But in that space in between the dates, I couldn't quite shake the sense that he just wasn't quite present, that

he wasn't really seeing me.

Now, I can PROMISE you, without my dating plan, I would have absolutely plunged ahead. I wouldn't have taken that space. I would have stayed in the fog of the post-date "high," extending it from one date to the next by staying in constant contact with him, texting, calling, checking his social media,

I also would have plunged ahead into physical intimacy, getting drunk on the chemistry, which of course only thickens that blinding fog.

etc.

I also would have plunged ahead into physical intimacy, getting drunk on the chemistry, which of course only thickens that blinding fog. In the end, I had to conclude that even though he was really pursuing me, he just wasn't emotionally available for the kind of true connection that I'm looking

for.

Having been through a few situations like this now, it's pretty clear to me that I absolutely WOULD NOT have been able to recognize this guy's unavailability without the time and space that my dating plan affords me. However, when I *do* give myself that time and space, I have found that it becomes almost easy to spot those signs. I've also found that it gets easier with practice.

That's not to say, though, that taking the space isn't hard as hell. It is. I couldn't possibly do it without constant contact with my sponsor, my fellows and especially my Higher Power, every step of the way. Following my dating plan is a spiritual experience.

It requires that I am constantly turning my will and my life over to my Higher Power. Just like with my bottom lines, I try not to think of my dating plan as a set of "rules" that I must obey.

I think of it as a set of guidelines, the purpose of which is surrender, to help me to stay out of my own will. And if I can just stay out of my own will, my Higher Power can reveal to me everything I need to see.

— Mona

## Sharing Healthy Vulnerability

I consider someone to be emotionally available when they are willing to be both vulnerable about themselves, and open to my vulnerability without judgment; it's a two-way street. This is healthy when established boundaries and mutually-earned trust are both in place. Without

them, it can be unhealthy.

For example, when active in my addiction I've been guilty of "too much availability too soon" which usually comes from a place of intensity, neediness and/or poor judgment and can result in the recipient of my emotional availability walking away with a

"vulnerability hangover!" Ick.

Largely due to my own past addictive behavior, today I can more easily spot healthy vs. unhealthy emotional availability in others. Now, rather than the giver of "too much too soon," sometimes I'm the recipient. It's a red flag when I notice that pattern

in others, but it reminds me to maintain my own boundaries. Just because someone else is gushing all over the place doesn't mean I am obligated to return the behavior in kind.

"Gushing" early on is not true emotional availability anyway, and in fact may be a sign that someone is not or will not be emotionally available further into a relationship, which is when it really counts. To me, what makes a person truly emotionally available in a healthy way is courage combined with vulnerability; courage because the

very nature of vulnerability means risking pain or loss.

It means risking judgment, ridicule, rejection or criticism, and these things only hurt when we're invested enough in a relationship to care. Whether a family, friendship, or romantic context, if I'm invested in a relationship with someone and we both trust one another enough to let our guard down in order to better love and support one another, that's true emotional availability.

On a final note which may seem obvious, to be emotionally available a person also has to be

able to access and feel his or her own emotions - they must be emotionally accessible to themselves! Yet, so many of us have spent years avoiding our feelings that we're not even sure what they are. If I'm hearing more judgment and intellectualizing vs. what someone is actually feeling, that's another red flag that the person may not be able to access his own emotions, let alone have the vulnerability and courage to share them with me.

— Karen, FL

## Clues to Distinguish

# Unavailability from Availability

**“We** avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.” I sensed there was a powerful message in our ninth characteristic but did not understand those words until 15 years of working the program.

My love addict resume is as follows: My first husband smoked pot daily for our 9-year marriage in which I had several affairs that he had agreed to- well, most of them anyway (clue). I left that marriage and my young children to join a sexually permissive commune where I experimented casually with people I didn't get to know first (clue).

I have been treated for STDs

(clue). I was arrested and jailed for destroying the possessions of a person who had an affair with my ex-con “fiancé” (clue). I was in a 7-year tumultuous relationship with my twin flame who unfortunately happened to be married and polyamorous (clue). My second marriage at age 42 was to an emotionally dependent narcissist (clue). I was a newcomer in pain and he was a long-time member in S.L.A.A. who displayed arrogance, belligerence, had never sponsored any one, and left the program one month after our marriage (clues). My last addictive relationship was a passionate love affair with a powerful alcoholic, womanizing sex addict drug dealer (clues).

In the throes of painful withdrawal after my second

divorce, I was bemoaning my plight to my therapist, saying, “I just need to find an available man who can be emotionally intimate!” She leaned towards me and said, “Are you emotionally available?” I pondered this question for years. What would that mean? What would that look like?

Through S.L.A.A., working the Steps and other modalities, I healed layers of dissociation that had been a cherished childhood ally. I learned to identify what I was feeling and communicate my emotions responsibly, reach out for support, set boundaries and learn functional dating and relationship skills.

I learned to value and care for myself. I learned men distracted by other relationships or active



addictions cannot be available. I learned codependent men can focus their attention on me in a seductive way but deceptively they are avoidants not owning their power. I learned to disengage or not engage with people unable to be present with me in a wholesome way.

I met my sweetheart, who was also my age (good clue), when I was 56. We shared an intention of creating a long-term relationship, both were active in personal growth, had studied communication/relationship skills and he had been in a 12-Step program and valued them highly

(all good clues). He had, without hesitation, agreed to no sex for three months to get to know each other (great clue).

When our courting was young, he stood tall (good clue) in my living room on a sunny spring day. He was arm distance away directly facing me (good clue), centered in his body (good clue), looking at me steadily but with not too intense eyes (good clue). His arms were relaxed at his side, his chest was open and I sensed his emotional heart was also (good clue).

I was looking up at him and could sense he was fully there with

me. “This feels terrifying,” I stammered looking up at him shyly. For the first time in my life I was completely conscious of my fear of intimacy (yeah!) and was being vulnerable and truly honest (good clues).

He smiled gently (good clue) and reached out to hold me in a nurturing, validating and appreciative way (good clues).

This has been the greatest gift of my relationship with him. Knowing what true (authentic, not pseudo- (fake, inauthentic) emotional availability looks and feels like.

**— Submitted by a love addict**



# Higher Power's Grace Makes Me Available

**T**aking time in prayer and meditation, time alone and in stillness, I am able to be filled with Higher Power's grace. Without this fulfillment from my Higher Power, I am just another dry pit.

I can't give to others without manipulating or holding onto unrealistic expectations (for myself and others). I need to get attention, people-please, work without stopping, pushing my body and my mind to distraction so that I don't have to come to terms with the fact that I cannot

do life alone.

When I take time with Higher Power, the fellowship, and the things that connect me to peace and slowness, I can do life. I can do life really well, listening attentively, giving my job 100%, involving myself in artistic activities, exercising and enjoying simple activities. Having heated water for a warm shower or finding a pair of matching socks without holes is enough to give me the energy to be loving and emotionally available to others. I know I am not alone and I am not

going to need to "get well, get over this disease, or get it together." I will always have Higher Power there to handle my ugly, heavy baggage — my heartaches, my scars, my wounds, and my character defects. Connected to this love, I can be available to others and give them a glimpse of what Higher Power has to offer so that they have the chance to develop their own tap-root to our great source of love and light.

— **Anonymous, Texas**

## Emotional Availability Comes from Living from the Heart

**I** am an emotional anorexic. So suffice to say, sensing my or another's emotional availability is not a strong suit. I live in my own little world walled in by FEAR. Often, even I am not available. So, how am I to "sense" how emotionally available another person is? Most of the time I don't even know what's going on with me.

Lack of emotional availability and the inability to express my emotions is why I am a sex addict. I have felt so isolated from life due to my insane fears and feelings of inadequacy that I escaped to an

addiction to take the focus off those painful feelings.

I am realizing that one of my greatest gifts is my sensitivity. That sensitivity was aching to be expressed, but I was immobilized by fear. There was a battle going on inside me. I so much want to be acting with love towards others but I have so much fear and feelings of inadequacy that instead I act in with isolation and act out with my sex addiction.

Recovery naturally spurs us to take risks. It can be like a pendulum-swinging wildly one way, then the other. Currently, I

have really let go of fear and have surrendered outcomes. At times the pendulum swings wildly because I am recklessly vulnerable and prone to oversharing. I don't have the skills to sense what is appropriate to disclose. I find that being vulnerable is intense, plus I am a sex addict, so I have a natural inclination towards intensity. So often when I extensively share, I later panic, as fear rears its ugly head. I feel so vulnerable after the fact, like the one I shared with is now judging me and plotting to reject me.

Once again, I start to make



myself crazy. But I'm in recovery-I know how this works. I know I need to be vulnerable and risk a reality check of my thinking by directly inquiring if this is the case -by asking the other person point blank, are you going to reject me? It is very difficult to be that vulnerable with someone. But once again I find that it is my own mind that is behind this feeling that I'm about to be brutally rejected. My own mind has been the problem all along; I am my own worst enemy.

So, I'm learning that sometimes I need to stop talking. Sometimes I need to ask heartfelt questions, be empathetic and listen to what others say to gauge their level of emotional availability. I accept

where they are and try to adjust my emotional intensity to what they can handle. This is still difficult for me to do, as I'm realizing that I can get high on dopamine dumps from emotional oversharing almost as much as by acting out (nothing like being a multi-faceted addict).

My heart yearns to connect. When I act from my heart, the fear vanishes and it feels so right! My goal is to always be living from my heart. Because it is all too easy to fall into my old patterns of avoidance and self-sufficiency, I have to continuously ask myself, "What is going on?" It is critical to have quiet time where I can slow down and write in my journal. When I write about what is

happening in my life, I get such clarity. God communicates with me when I reflect and write.

Currently I am embarking upon a new relationship. In the past, when I changed relationships, there was no such thing as dating. I was in control. I made the decision to change relationships and my new partner was completely on board - just the kind of black and white thinking with no uncertainty that an addict craves.

But my new boyfriend wants to "date." I quickly ran into an emotional buzz saw over the inherent uncertainty in dating. I wanted him to commit right then and there to our relationship and when he wouldn't, I was insanely

upset. But I have enough recovery to recognize that strong emotional manic responses are usually pointing towards something big. When I reflected on it, I realized that I had controlled the transition of every relationship I'd ever been in, so I never had to face any uncertainty or possibility of rejection.

So now, as I face the uncertainty of "dating" for the first time in my life, I'm terrified. This emotional anorexic is certainly opening himself up to the possibility of being hurt, but I often remind myself "control" is no longer a word in my vocabulary.

My new boyfriend divulged that he struggles when his love is rejected. Hmmm. Here he is now in a relationship with an

emotional anorexic-this could get interesting. I have to just let go of the fear and let my heart do the next right thing. It is amazing how my heart spurs me to ask things like, "What do you need from me to feel safe?" It is like my heart realizes it has another beautiful soul that is vulnerable and can be hurt.

How can I show him how much I love him and give him what he needs? My heart wants to love and never hurt anybody. I need to let my heart rule my emotional life. When I am in my heart, I feel so connected to everything.

It is like the fear has literally evaporated. I feel so nourished when I'm acting from my heart. That feeling goes a long way towards keeping me focused on the present so I don't revert back

to auto pilot. When I feel connected to others and to life, it is amazing how my sex addiction and anorexia are completely neutered. They no longer have a place in my new life of emotional availability and living from my heart.

I'm learning to follow the 3<sup>rd</sup> Step of emotional availability. I turn my will and my life over to the care and protection of my heart. My heart intuitively knows how to handle situations that used to baffle me. My heart is doing for me what I could not do for myself. Is this an extravagant promise? I think not. I find deep emotional connections will always materialize if I live from my heart.

— Craig G

# Single issues of the e-journal



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

\$3.50 each

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. Topics now available:

#154 — Ready for Sponsorship? — #153 — Secrets Versus Privacy: How Do We Tell the Difference? — #152 — Strengthening Healthy Boundaries — #151 — Sober at the Holidays — #150 — Program Crush: Sexual and Emotional Intrigue at 12-Step Meetings — #149 — \*\*ABM issue Diversity — #148 — Breaking Up... with a Sponsor — #147 Fantasy Versus Reality — #146 After Sober Dating — #145 Addiction in the Age of Technology — #144 Sex and Love Addiction: What is Real? — #143 How Do Newcomers Become Old-timers — #142 Safety in Meetings — 141 Developing True Intimacy — #140 Cross Addictions — #139 Working with Character Defects — 138 Family Issues — 137 Sex and Love Addiction in Today's Society — 136 Recognizing Red Flags — #135 Soberly Dealing With Tragedy — #134 Secrets Stalking and Shame — #133 Spirituality in Recovery — #132 Emotional Anorexia **Step 6 Focus Issue** - S.L.A.A. members share their experience strength and hope in working Step 6. **Anorexia Focus Issue**- S.L.A.A. members share their experience strength and hope around anorexia. **#60-Tenth Anniversary** - Stories about sex and love addiction written by S.L.A.A. members in 1999.

# Share space

## 12 Miracles

**M**y Higher Power has granted me at least 12 miracles “before I am half way through” my first set of 12 steps. I am now a sober, healthy, and caring person. Sometimes, I feel like I have literally been raised from the dead.

1. Physical: I used to weigh about 53 kg. God has made me put on half of my body weight in mostly muscle and I now weigh about 68 kg. What a change!

2. Health: I used to be sick once per month. God has given me a healthier body and I have had only one bad sore throat in nine months. What a blessing!

3. Legal: I committed sexual crimes and I almost got arrested for them - My psychiatrist had the dilemma of reporting me to the police when I did a partial disclosure to her. God made her compassionate and I am still a free man. What a divine intervention!

4. Medical: I used to have unprotected sex with strangers. I visited testing centres for sexual diseases multiple times and in various countries. God protected me from HIV. I have now started to volunteer to help at a testing center. What a mercy!

5. Financial: I used to overspend on dating and ask my parents for money. After changing my financial manager to God, I

spent all my money to go to rehab twice. God refunded my entire investment by giving me generous insurance and I now have savings. I eagerly donate part of this money to charities. After all, this money is not mine - it's God's.

What a mind-blowing gift!

6. Domestic: I used to live alone to act out. God found me a new place to share with an old religious lady who likes to bake cakes. What a peaceful house that she blesses every week!

7. Professional: I used to have a job that I hated but that I believed made people love me because of the prestige. God gave me the courage to quit it and He found me a job that fits my values and my skills. What a wonder!

8. Social: I used to be so self-centered that I didn't know I was. God gave me a strong wake-up call in Step 7 and I am now caring and warm towards others, which makes me have friends! What a relief!

9. Spiritual: I used to rely on myself. When I left rehab, I had no job, a few thousand dollars and no house. But God had given me faith, and He didn't disappoint me. All of those were granted to me. What a miracle!

10. Sexual with computer & smartphone - porn: I used to spend hours watching porn, day and night, looking for increasingly abusive materials. I spent money

to rent a porn DVD. I even recorded my own pornographic pictures and videos of myself and of other women. I haven't watched porn for almost three years and I now fund the fight against porn. What a pride!

11. Sexual with self & fantasies — masturbation: I used to masturbate thousands of times, even when it caused pain, with violent fantasies and while neglecting self-care. I am now sober for over 22 months from masturbation. What a miracle!

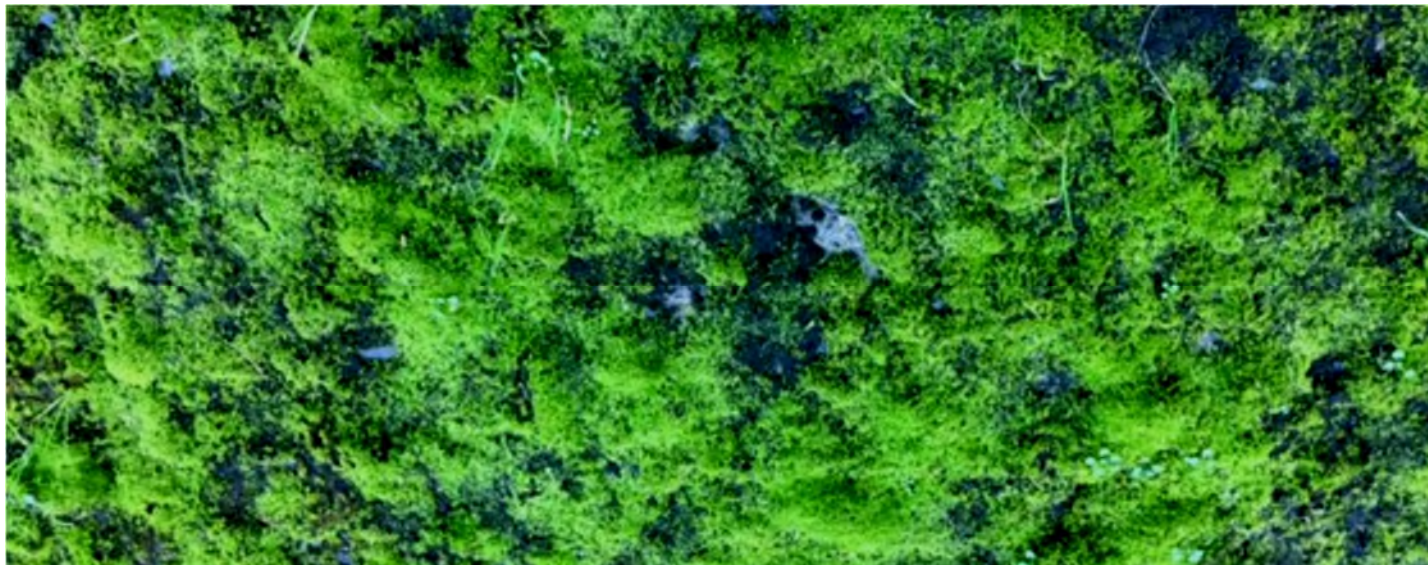
12. Sexual with others: I used to have violent, exploitative, humiliating, dominating sex with strangers. I am now sober for over 3 years from sex. I am single in the true sense of the word: not married, no girlfriend, no romantic dating, no sex, no masturbation, no porn. I might never have sex again. Perhaps I have used all my “sex credits” in this life. I leave that up to God to decide. Maybe He will call me to a religious life. Who knows? What a leap of faith!

God shows that He has changed everything except my name. I have faith God has not brought me on this recovery journey without a bigger plan, and that He is not finished with me yet.

What are your 12 miracles?

— **Anonymous**

# S.L.A.A. Is My Lighthouse



**S**.L.A.A. has been a lighthouse for me. I came to S.L.A.A. through other 12-Step fellowships, and found that I could not maintain chemical sobriety without addressing the pain and dysfunction I felt with romantic relationships. I am working my 5th series of the 12 Steps, and I still struggle with my qualifier on my grudge list.

S.L.A.A. has helped me feel so much less shame about myself, so that I can feel comfortable in my own skin. When I am in the other rooms of 12-Step programs, I rarely go through a meeting where struggles with romantic

relationships aren't brought up. I don't understand what it is about our sexuality, but I realize that it is at the core of so many other problems.

S.L.A.A. helped me get to the root of those problems. For me, unrealistic expectations was the biggest character defect I had to face. If I had gotten my way, I would have been playing God to my qualifier and my qualifier would have let me play God to him. I have heard people say that "ego" stands for "Edging God Out."

Even though separating from my qualifier was more painful

than any other withdrawal I have experienced, I am so grateful that it did occur, because it gave me a chance to live a life with a real God. I still feel like God does not show up for me the way I want him to, or that he may not make good on the promises I see others enjoying in the Fellowship, but, I am out of Hell. I am out of relapse. I am in a state of "trudging the road to happy destiny" as the Big Book states. And I am glad to have hope today.

— Liz B, Texas

---

The S.L.A.A. Basic Text eBook  
**IS HERE!**



amazonkindle  
iBooks

# Might as Well Face It, I'm Addicted to Love

**O**f all the addictions I could have fallen prey to – heroin, alcohol, gambling, sex – I had to get addicted to the most precious feeling any of us will ever know. In my forties, I'm finally facing the fact that my life has been ruled and devastated by the worst of all drugs: love.

Love addiction may be one of the least understood addictions, but anyone who has experienced it knows how painfully real it is. For people like me, love won't just break your heart. Love could end your life.

My last relationship ended over three years ago, and I haven't been able to let go or move on since. This isn't normal. Our three-and-a-half years together, off and on, were the best and worst of my life. It was like being strapped in to an endless rollercoaster of epic highs and crushing lows. She was my drug, my best friend, my one true love, my sexual obsession, my worst enemy and my fatal flaw all rolled into one.

We loved each other, but that was the problem. For us that meant we were addicted to each other. Like two shipwrecked survivors in a vast, hostile ocean, we clung on for dear life and then consumed each other piece by piece. She couldn't leave me, and every time I tried to leave her I came running back again. It's supremely ironic that we met while performing in a play, because from that moment our obsessive, deadly drama had a life of its own.



When I left her for the last time, I thought I'd finally jumped off the merry-go-round, but a familiar thought soon returned: I was nothing without her. Yet this time, when I declared my undying love she very sensibly ignored me, which left me stuck. I couldn't be without her and I couldn't get her back, so I did the only thing left to me: I lived my life for a ghost.

It took me a long time to understand that I was obsessed. Every day was the same. I dreamt about her, woke up with her voice in my head, talked to her all day as if she was next to me, planned holidays that would never be, stalked her on the internet and pored over every picture, email, letter and text. This became a

sacred ritual, one that's familiar to any jilted lover, but it lasted for more than two years. I gave up on sex, joy, ambitions, relationships and myself. I existed in a grey underworld of work, TV and the internet, with nothing in between except the obsession that had taken over my life. Then, just as I'd given up hope that she'd ever call, she called. After fantasising about this moment for so long, I suppose it was always going to be a disappointment. Unlike the climax of a rom-com, she wasn't coming back to me. Instead, she'd called to help me change my life, for which I will be forever in her debt.

She said that after we broke up she'd probably have killed herself

without a twelve-step program called Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (S.L.A.A.), which had given her the strength to turn her life around. For the first time, she could see a future. In my epic selfishness, I was crushed that she could be happy without me, but when she suggested I try S.L.A.A. for myself, I agreed. After all, nobody knew me better.

Being a love addict, I went to my first S.L.A.A. meetings thinking I'd complete the Twelve Steps and she'd be waiting for me at the end, with a smile and a round of applause. But real life isn't like that. After a year of hard work, setbacks, grief and surrender, I'm allowing a new thought to appear for the first time, a tentative and frightening new ending to this story. Maybe I don't get her back, and maybe, just maybe, that's OK.

### **The Roots of Addiction**

Unsurprisingly, my childhood was shit. I wasn't sexually abused, starved or tortured; I was ignored. Nobody said they loved me and nobody listened to me.

I felt like a burden to my mother and a disappointment to my father, so I blamed myself for her unhappiness and for his bitterness. I was lonely and desperate for the love my parents couldn't give me.

I began my career as a love addict at the age of seven. As soon as I became aware of girls, I knew they were something special. The rush I felt when a pretty girl smiled at me was my first taste of the drug that I called love. It wasn't particularly sexual, not then and not now. It was spiritual, transcendental and magical, with the promise of transformation. Just like in a fairy tale, I was the frog who craved a kiss from a princess to turn me into a prince.

I've fixated on princesses ever since, mostly from far away. Although flesh and blood, these girls weren't real to me. They were better than real. I wanted to put them on pedestals and adore them. I couldn't tell them how I felt, because my self-loathing, shame and fear of rejection was too great. Yet all my life, until recently, I believed that only falling in love would make me complete.

S.L.A.A. has helped me to see that all my obsessions and relationships have followed the same pattern. Most women I coveted were unavailable, and my relatively few relationships have been with partners who were damaged, or love addicts themselves. Addicts attract each other, but what I really wanted was to rescue my princess and to be completed by her love in return. I couldn't love myself, so I wanted someone else to do it for me. It's taken half a lifetime to realise that I was chasing something that isn't real.

Real love, I'm discovering, isn't about romantic highs and sexual fireworks. It's not about poetry, love songs or romantic holidays. Love is a decision. It's a considered commitment. It's ordinary, which is anathema to everything I was chasing. I wanted magic, but not anymore. Now I crave the ordinary. I'm neither a frog waiting for a princess, nor Prince Charming on a white stallion. I can't stand horses anyway, and I look terrible in green.

### **You Can't Do It on Your Own**

Twelve-step programs are spiritual. They just are. Recovery only works when you admit that you're powerless over your addiction and turn your life over

to something bigger than you; a Higher Power of your own understanding. As a lifelong atheist with contempt for organised religion, I thought the God stuff would be tricky. But I was wrong. I've done such a bad job of managing my life that I'm more than ready to let someone else have a go.

So, I've started talking to God. I get on my knees and pray twice a day. I surrender. I have no idea what God is, and I don't care. It's certainly not in any religion's holy book, but it's outside me, it's bigger than me and it knows what it's doing when I clearly don't. The more I hand over, the more I let go, the better my life is. It's that simple. God exists because I need him to. (Or her. Or it.)

### **Light at the End of the Tunnel**

Addiction doesn't ever go away. The whole house of cards could come tumbling down at any moment, so I live one day at a time.

Prayer, meditation, making calls, attending meetings and working the 12 Steps with my sponsor gives me the strength to live by a new set of rules. My life is already very different. In another year, it will be transformed. Every day is still a struggle, but I'm starting to feel comfortable in my own skin for the first time.

I'm breathing easier. I smile more. I sleep at night.

I don't know what the future holds, but I no longer expect anyone else to fill the emptiness inside me. That's my job, and with the help of God, my sponsor, the 12 steps and my brothers and sisters in S.L.A.A., I'm doing it. After all, this isn't a fairy tale or a fantasy. It's better than that. It's real life.

**— Steve R, London**

# Healthy Relationships

The notion of a healthy relationship for one plagued by addictive behaviors can appear and feel like a remote if not impossible reality. However, with the right attitude of unconditional friendliness to myself, I realize that it is not just possible but it is one of the key aspects of the spiritual path towards which the 12 Step process guides us.

Unconditional friendliness is a characteristic of love and love is my Higher Power.

So being unconditionally friendly to myself is not only okay, it is a pre-requisite for healthy relationships.

I say that because my experience is that if I am not healthy in the way I relate to myself, how can I expect to have healthy relationships with others? So, for example, if I am always judging myself as good or bad, right or wrong, I am habituating myself to be judgmental of others, all the time (a decidedly unhealthy way of relating).

My experience is increasingly that healthy relationships with others, starting with myself and those closest to me are about accountability, attunement, gratitude and empathy, all within the cocoon of love.

By accountability I mean constantly taking the lead in open communications and taking responsibility for clarity. So, even when it could be that the other person didn't listen, I endeavor to give them the benefit of the doubt and say something to the effect of, "I am sorry for my miscommunication and this is what I meant to say."

It is an extension on the Step 10 theme of "when we were wrong promptly admitted it." Also, I

understand this as not having any tit-for-tat expectations from others. In other words, if I say, "I love you" and my family doesn't say it in return, I continue to say it because it is how I feel even if they don't feel the same or don't communicate their feelings the same way. In my life, the fact is that my wife and children actually do tell me that they love me regularly and I must say, it feels great to hear it!

By attunement I mean continuously getting better at reading both verbal and non-verbal cues from my wife, family, friends and colleagues so I get better at responding to their moods and needs and am better able to serve them sincerely and joyously.

As my recovery has progressed, my wife and I have come to joke about my being attuned to her; recovery can be light and fun. And I have this lightness and fun with a person who suffered the effects of my addictive behaviors and felt humiliated, degraded, disrespected, and unloved – a fact I will always regret with every fiber in me.

Gratitude speaks for itself. I feel grateful to my wife and my family for giving me a chance to recover from my addictive behaviors and be a sober person who strives for a more spiritual life, a life imbued with love and tenderness, joy and inspiration. The gratitude I feel wells up in me from time to time and I feel blessed.

My sense of healthy relationships is that they always contain empathy, my ability to walk in another's shoes, to feel what they feel. This is easier said than done. However, when it



My sense of healthy relationships is that they always contain empathy, my ability to walk in another's shoes, to feel what they feel. This is easier said than done.

happens I know it and it makes me feel like I am achieving integrity, that dimension completely absent from the addictive me.

Having empathy enables me to be more compassionate, more understanding, more tolerant and thus healthier in the way I relate with myself and others.

Healthy relationships are the cornerstone of a healthy life. Here I have addressed them in relation to myself and others, especially those close to me.

However, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that healthy relationships do not stop at people. They include everything. I am a fuller human being when my relationships with animals, nature and life itself are healthy too.

— Anonymous, Santa Cruz, CA



# Blessing and a Curse

**M**y addiction was somewhat functional which was a blessing and a curse. I was in program for 2 and a half years and decided I was not a sex and love addict.

I was in the rooms with people who were spending thousands of dollars on prostitution, or spending countless hours on the internet and they were clearly powerless and their lives were unmanageable.

And I was clearly not as bad as they were so, hence, I must not be a sex and love addict. With the cunning, baffling and powerful nature of the disease taking hold of this rationalization I gradually left the program. Many years later, I returned having hit a significant bottom. I was scared and felt I was facing the abyss.

The fight had gone out of me and I was now ready to admit that I was powerless over sex and love addiction and that my life had become unmanageable. Though my patterns were not hard-core sex addiction, my acting out had brought me to demoralization. I quickly got a sponsor who had what I wanted- many years of abstinence and experience working the steps.

He got me started on my 1st Step. The template he chose was simple- draw a line down the middle of the page creating two columns. One column was titled powerlessness and one unmanageability. What followed was an exhaustive recollection of all the places in my life where I lose choice, where I am confronted with a person place or thing that triggers my sex and love high.

It included intrigue, fantasy, masturbation, porn, inability to

use birth control, as well as avoidance of beautiful women and love.

After getting all that down, it now was important to write the resulting unmanageability that was a consequence of my acting out. This was a key component to the Steps, for without it my addict voice would convince me that "it wasn't that bad."

I needed documented evidence, that was true and from my own

experience, that detailed how my acting out was harming me and others.

I needed to see the progressive nature and my utter inability to make any lasting changes to this behavior. I have also done first steps on writing a biography of my life as it relates to my sex and love. This was a very instructive way to see that my addiction manifested from my family system.

— Anonymous



## THE INSPIRATION LINE

Your 24-Hour Sponsor

215-574-2120

**CELEBRATES**

**200,000 CALLS!**

Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup, originators of the Inspiration Line want to thank Fellowship Wide Services and the Journal for supporting the Inspiration Line. GDVI wants to acknowledge the 15 volunteers from all over the US & Canada that leave inspirational messages on the Line and credit them for making this huge milestone possible: Alicia, California, Alyce, Montreal Canada, Alyson, Pennsylvania, Bob, Pennsylvania, Brenda, Maryland/Florida, John, Florida, Kip, Connecticut, Leah, New York, Mark, New Mexico, Matt, Pennsylvania, Michael S., Pennsylvania, Mike M., Pennsylvania, Natalie, Pennsylvania, Rich, Massachusetts, Sean, New Mexico, Shelly, New York, Steve D, Pennsylvania and Zoe, Pennsylvania

