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D A T I N G
A P P S

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 re-

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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.

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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,

Thank you to all the S.L.A.A. members who contributed stories to this issue. I enjoyed reading all the different perspectives on dating apps and online dating. I did an interview with 2 S.L.A.A. members (page 8) so I'm going to keep this letter short. Hope you enjoy reading this issue!

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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at its meetings.

In submitting such content to S.L.A.A., the member releases S.L.A.A., any other members of S.L.A.A. and S.L.A.A.'s officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the "Releasees") from any and all claims which the member may have against any of the Releasees in connection with the member's submission of content to the Journal.

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

Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, Dating Apps: “Have you met your partner with the help of a dating app (or online dating) and/or have you learned to deal with dating apps soberly?” Please share your experience, strength and hope. Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #177 — March/April — Finding S.L.A.A. — What was it like to first walk in the doors? Did you feel welcomed? What can meetings do to help Newcomers feel more welcomed?” The deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2019. And #178 — May/June Combatting Negativity — How do you quiet the negative voices in your head and have a more positive outlook? The deadline for submissions is March 15, 2019 Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Have you met your partner with the help of a dating app (or online dating) and/or have you learned to deal with dating apps soberly?

I met my partner through an online dating site. I knew right away that going online looking for dates was very similar to my acting out behaviors. With the help of my sponsor, I was able to set limits and learn safe behaviors to navigate dating sites.

— **Seth S., Boston**

I have used dating apps soberly. I set limits on how often to check-in on dating sites to prevent or minimize obsession or fantasy. I followed safety warnings very tightly. I met men midday in public places for short dates. I used a dating plan for any subsequent dates. I met a partner of 2 years on an online dating site. I met my current partner through friends.

— **Nancy G., San Diego**

I have stayed sober during the past 5 years of my online dating experience. I am 11 years sober from bottom line behavior and that helps. I stay connected to my top lines and bottom lines and my sponsor and sponsees. Grateful

— **Kara, NY**

I have not yet met a partner using online dating. I have learned to date soberly. Having a dating plan is critical. My experience is that the app can be addictive so I set guidelines: No using apps between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. No more than 3 people in dialogue with at a time. Less than 5 messages before I have to meet them (no living in fantasy).

— **Dave G., Los Angeles**

Starting to use dating apps has been a great step in my recovery. It helped me reflect on what I was looking for in a partner and overcome my anorexia by offering a less intimidating way to put myself out there for dating. I still don't enjoy it, but at least I try.

— **Anonymous**

I have met dating partners online but haven't found a long-term partner yet. Dating sites and dating apps are difficult. And I must keep accountable to my sponsor and recovery partners. It is also OK to take breaks. Most important is to turn my use and the results over to God

— **Chris, San Antonio, TX**

I haven't met my partner – yet! I use a dating app on my computer, not on my phone. At the top of my profile, I state that I'm willing to scare everyone away who isn't serious by proclaiming my desire to get married. It works! I'm only approached by men who want long term relationships.

— **Sarah E., Oakland**

Online Dating: An Interview



My husband Glen and I have been in S.L.A.A. for a number of years and have 2 really great friends named Kim and Jim who are also long term S.L.A.A. members. Kim and Jim got married the same year that Glen and I got married. Kim was a bridesmaid in our wedding and made the flower girl dresses. Glen officiated Kim and Jim's wedding. Over the years we have gone to meetings, parties, S.L.A.A. workshops, retreats and S.L.A.A. ABMs and conventions together. I met Jim at Los Angeles

Intergroup. He used to come to Intergroup every month from Orange County (about an hour's drive away). I don't remember what vote he was trying to get passed. I just remember his calmness in the middle of some very difficult personalities that were in LA intergroup at the time. I remember thinking "What a nice spiritual solid guy that he's not screaming at these people to try to get his way. He's going with group conscience and letting go of his ego." I saw real humility at work and hoped to emulate it someday.

I met Kim in Nicotine Anonymous and went to fellowship with her a lot and we became friends. She later became my grand-sponsee in S.L.A.A. When she started online dating, I got paranoid and let my PTSD get the best of me. "The only thing you'll find online is serial killers," I told her. I was honestly afraid for her life. But I reprimanded myself and didn't express fear after that. I decided to support her despite my fears and believe that her support system and God would keep her safe. One day she

came to me and said she was going on a date in Orange County with a guy named Jim. I thought *Jim from Orange County, I wonder if it's the same guy from LA intergroup*. What a weird thought! There must be thousands of guys named Jim in Orange County – I must be crazy to think it's the guy that I know, right?

After Kim had been dating him for a while I got a call from her. “I know you told me not to snoop but I was looking through Jim’s bookshelf and guess what I found? An S.L.A.A. Basic Text!”

“What does he look like- tall and skinny with brown hair?” I said. “Yes.” She said. Guess what? It was Jim from Orange County! What a God shot for me! So when this theme for *the Journal* came up I decided I had to interview them about their online dating experience. The transcript of the conversation follows.

Kim and Jim have been married 11 years, first marriage for both. Kim has been in S.L.A.A. for 16 years, Jim about 20 years. Kim sponsors 7 people, Jim 10.

Lisa: How long had you been in Program and sober before online dating?

Kim: It was a little over year.

Jim: 2 or 3 years before I started online dating.

Lisa: Did you have a dating plan?

Kim: Yes. It was very simple: No sex before a committed relationship. No relationship before 30 days. First date, no physical contact. Second date, we could kiss. Third date nothing below the waist (Kim laughs). I’m just laughing because this was so fast!

Lisa: (laughs) I know. Mine was that way also.

Kim: No sex before 30 days. In the beginning, it was suggested to keep it light emotionally.

Lisa: And your dating plan, Jim?

Jim: It was actually similar in

some ways. No sex outside of a committed relationship. No commitment prior to 3 months of dating. There was nothing specific as far as bottom lines around dating, But I had top lines. I had to know the person before we got too physical. Even just the heavy petting and heavy kissing could interfere with my ability to accurately assess compatibility. And also for me as an anorexic I had to make sure I didn’t find reasons to run.

So, I would bookend my dates with my sponsor. It was part of my plan because I would be emotionally “up in the air” after a date. Bookending about it would prevent me from taking off.

Kim: That reminds me, it was suggested that I don’t leave the relationship unless he started showing signs of being an axe murderer. (Kim, Jim and Lisa laugh.)

Jim: Little did she know that I have quite the collection of axes and chain saws. (Kim, Jim and Lisa laugh.)

I chopped a lot of wood with my axes, but I’m not an axe murderer! My dating plan wasn’t as detailed as Kim’s but it was about accountability and not jumping in head first because my sponsor and I knew I had a tendency to do that.

Kim: Should he talk about losing his time? It was a big deal, it was the last time he broke his bottom line.

Jim: It was a big deal for me. I was with Kim when that happened. At the time, I had a bottom line of no commitment prior to 3 months of dating. I had held that bottom-line sobriety for about 3 years. I broke it when I was dating Kim. We ended up defaulting to her bottom line of one month, which wasn’t a good thing for me. So, I had to acknowledge it and restart my time. I had to get much more serious with my Program. I didn’t

know whether I should stay in the relationship or not. But I stayed. Today, I believe that as long as I get honest and am using the Steps in my life a slip doesn’t necessarily mean that the person I break my bottom line with is an alcoholic drink for me. There were some former partners who were tequila or cocaine for me. There was no fixing it. It was not possible. This one didn’t happen that way.

Lisa: Do you think it would have been a sign of your anorexia if you had taken it that way and ran from the relationship?

Jim: Possibly, I don’t know. I looked at breaking my bottom line then and now as a mistake, but not a mistake based on who the person was, but a mistake in not being true to myself and my own process and in not trusting God. It was a mistake in not following my bottom lines and not trusting that my Higher Power would take care of me. So, I don’t know if leaving would have been a manifestation of anorexia or not.

Kim: I would have been bummed if you did leave.

Lisa: Yeah, me too. We wouldn’t have had all those years together and the beautiful friendship that the four of us have had together for 15 years now. I think it can work out as long as we have a structure around us and support

Jim: And as long as we acknowledge and immediately start to work on it.

Lisa: What were your fears about online dating before you started and how did you deal with them?

Kim: My fears revolved around dating in general.

Jim: I spent a lot of time online dating, so I had a lot of time to process this one and deal with this. In the beginning when it was first suggested to me, I responded that online dating is for losers and people who didn’t know how to get a date any other way. And it

was kind of ironic because I was a loser who didn't know how to get a date otherwise. It took 3 people suggesting it to me. When the third person suggested it to me I thought, "You know, this might be God talking to me." The truth is I was afraid I would meet somebody who would be present. I wasn't really worried about finding an axe murderer (laughter from Kim). That wasn't it.

But instead, I was worried about finding someone who actually was a real person. You can talk about wanting an intimate relationship all you want, but it's pretty darn scary to actually look at doing it. And so, again, I think I was very afraid of meeting people who are real. But I also deeply desired it. I had a lot of conflict about online dating. Like Kim said, a lot of it is just about dating in general. Online just happened to be what I chose. I didn't do only online dating but I did mostly online dating.

Kim: Thank you. That was a good answer. That helped me remember. I think I was more excited than afraid to date because I finally was able to date. Part of my dating plan was to wait until I had finished my Fifth Step before dating. I was in Program a little over a year when a friend of mine asked me to join an online dating site with her as support because she didn't want to do it alone. I agreed to join her. She never put up a profile up though. One night I decided I would start online dating anyway. I wasn't going to wait for her. I wasn't conscious of any fears about it. But I know that I had fear when I started doing it.

Jim: The reason I had to do a lot of bookending was that I had tremendous fear of rejection. If someone rejected me it would trigger old feelings of abandonment which would trigger the addict in me to want to numb that out. So, I had a lot of fears of rejection and what that would do to me. That was always a factor.

Kim: I had fears that whoever I dated wouldn't like me because I definitely had self-esteem issues.

Lisa: Were there any rules that you set to minimize triggers such as only dating 2 or 3 people at a time or not checking your online profile more than a few times a week or things like that?

Kim: That's a good question. I didn't have any boundaries about being online for a set amount of time. I didn't consciously set any of those rules. But if I noticed that I was spending too much time on the dating sites, I would pull myself back. I had a lot of help with that the whole time. I was only online dating for 2 weeks before I met Jim, actually. He was the first person I ever went on a date with online.

Jim: My experience was quite a bit different. I did sober dating primarily online. I call it sober dating because of the bottom lines and the top lines that I had. I did it for a good 3 years. I had a dichotomy — one part of me wanted to have nothing to do with it at all because it was emotionally demanding and it really triggered my anorexia. Another part of me wanted it because I think there's that God-given portion of us that wants to be in community and partnership. And so I had that driving me as well. So, it was very confusing. As far as the amount of time I spent on it, I didn't have those kind of boundaries.

But, I would periodically stop for a week or two and I would always book-end that with my sponsor. And I would stop for a certain specified amount of time. It would be a week or two weeks, an "x" amount of time. It wasn't open ended because that could be my way of stopping and never starting again. I would tell my sponsor about it and at the end of that time period I would start again. If someone emailed me during that time, I would respond. So that took some of the craziness out of dating. If I started feeling

too overwhelmed, I would step out of it and just have a breather for a bit. I would always have a calendar date that I planned to step back in so I could make sure that I didn't completely step out. As far as the amount per day, nothing strict, but I tried to keep it to about a half an hour a day and not every day of the week.

Once you're on sites for awhile, as a person you're not new. You're not really getting all of the attention. Most of the people on the site have been there for awhile. There's not as much activity after you've been on it for a few years.

Kim: For me, I had lots of attention because I was new.

Jim: I had no limitations on how many people I could date at once. In fact, part of my top line was that I could not put all my eggs in one basket. Which meant that I should at least be cultivating dating activities with multiple women. Whether it happened or not was just dependent on God's will but I had to at least be trying.

So I didn't get stuck in that mindset of "There's nothing else out there," which is something that happens for me. And when I get in that mindset, then I'll take anything and I'll try to "make" it work.

Kim: I was dating somebody before I met Jim. He wasn't on the dating website, but I had been on 5 dates. He was actually the first person I dated in sobriety.

I just remember being more afraid of meeting someone in person than meeting somebody online. I was excited to meet people online because it gave me a format that made me take it slower. I did go slower because at first we had the initial meeting online where we answered questions through email. And then we talked on the phone a number of times before we even met. So that took away a lot of the fears about going out with strangers.

Lisa: That's great because you don't have that energy right in

front of you

Kim: Yeah, and I really wasn't good at meeting people in person because I was just so anxious and shy at a party or social situation.

Lisa: Yes, I remember (laughter). I was there and probably feeling the same way!

Were there any difficulties you encountered with online dating like making excuses?

Kim: Jim had talked earlier about how he felt like a loser for online dating. I felt the same way.

Jim: In the beginning, yes. But over time one bit of awareness I had was that online dating is something that works well for people who like to isolate and have anorexic tendencies.

I'm someone who likes to isolate and has anorexic tendencies so it worked well for me. (Laughter.) So, it is what it is. But you hear a lot of horror stories about online dating. From personal experience, having been pretty dedicated to it for a number of years, I can say, "You get what you give." If you're honest and forthcoming about who you are and what you are looking for, you get that in return. If you try to hide or you're not necessarily forthcoming about who you are, then you're going to get whatever you get. So, my online dating experience was actually extremely positive. There were some people that I dated once and never wanted to see again, but every date I had was a good date. Every single one was a good date

Kim: I had a couple of conversations on the phone with people that I met online who I knew weren't compatible with me. They were kind of creepy. I was afraid that if I did go on a date with them, they would turn out to not be my cup of tea and I would feel like it was a waste of time as opposed to how Jim said every single one of his dates were good. I guess because he learned a lot. That's a good attitude to have. I

didn't really have time to foster that attitude.

Jim: I was on multiple sites and all my profiles were as identical as they could be based on the format of the site. I also let my freak flag fly (laughter). In all of my profiles, I said I was in 12-step programs, I said I was interested in a men's mythopoetic movement. I said that I loved the outdoors and I was living a spiritually-based, service-based and God-based lifestyle. Most people would find that last statement to be extremely off-putting. They would probably say, "A service and God-based lifestyle, oh dear." So, the people who were interested were very interested and the rest of them were not even remotely interested (laughter). Which is really honest. I think this process is based on being as honest as possible. And, I had a reference in my profiles to a poetry book, a mythical warrior, magician, lover, king like the 4 archetypes of masculinity. It's not like a dominate-the-world kind of masculinity but a healthy masculinity. Only someone who was into Jungian therapy or mythopoetic poetry would ever have gotten that reference.

Kim: I didn't get it

Jim: She didn't get it (laughter). I thought it was pretty cool. I liked it. But that was right at the top of every profile. They let you have a title to your profile and that was mine.

Kim: It was like a tagline.

Jim: Yeah. I had that tagline. Some people must have thought, "Warrior, magician, lover, king. What the heck?" But other people found it very exciting.

People were really interested or really not. There was no wish-wash. And I found that to be extremely helpful. You get what you give. I was very honest and forthright about who I was and what I had to offer. I knew that I was offering something pretty weird. "I'm a nice guy and I really

love movies," wasn't in my profile at all. I always got honest back. That's why all my dates were good, even if we weren't very compatible. I learned a lot and we were honest with each other. God came in every time.

Kim: The reason that Jim found me is because he did a word search and he searched for the word "spiritual" and I had that in my profile.

Jim: Many of the dating websites will have a way of filtering. You can filter by age, ethnicity, weight and some sites also have word searches. When it came to age, I was extremely open. I would go 10 up or 10 down. Ethnicity: any. Religion: any. But when it came to word searches, I was pretty specific. I did word searches on "spiritual, spirituality, spirit, program, 12-step, sober" - things like that. That's how I would find people who I thought I would have some connection with. It's my responsibility to be honest about who I am and to state my intentions and then God takes care of the rest.

By doing a keyword search for spirituality I'm telling God I'm looking for somebody who's spiritual.

What God brings back is really none of my business. It is what it is. My responsibility was to do that and in so doing I stay on my side of the street. That's how I found a number of women who I dated. I did the keyword search and so I had a lot of success with it.

There are too many people on the dating sites and I got overwhelmed easily. I could obsessively scroll through a search for age or ethnicity.

I would get these massive returns and I would get overwhelmed and obsessive. Keyword searches were a way to focus it down to a manageable amount and take me out of the obsession of taking hours to go through this stuff. I did the more

general searches in the beginning and it made me nuts. So, I had to really keep it limited

Kim: Yeah. I did that in the beginning too. After a few days of that, I let them come to me.

Jim: Here's the interesting thing with online dating — it seemed like more women were willing to initiate online than they did in other situations. So, I actually had a lot of initiating coming at me. I was very, very OK with that. And I would always respond because I just know that's the polite thing to do. And I felt like I wanted people to respond the same way to me. I never had a lot of people initiating outside the online platform in my everyday life. I think it was more about the platform because of the anonymity that's provided than it is about me personally.

Kim: I started to take that first step and initiating when I first

started online dating but then got overwhelmed by it.

Lisa: What do you tell other S.L.A.A. members when they are considering online dating?

Kim: I've heard people express their concern that online dating is just a place for people to go when they want to hook up. For a good number of us, those are old patterns that we want to stay away from. I simply share my experience that some people do want committed relationships. I encourage others to try it but be discerning, get to know a prospective date via email or phone conversations before meeting them in person. It is also a good way to practice boundaries and safety.

Jim: I get this question quite a bit and I strongly encourage sex and love addicts to get out there and have some kind of dating plan. But, to me, a dating plan

isn't just about how to stop ourselves from going too far. I tell them a dating plan is also about how we can get out there and engage. I think that online dating can be a very useful tool to show God that we are serious. Whether or not we ever meet someone through online dating, I think it's a good way of doing our part which is turning it over to Higher Power. I think you get what you give. People complain about online dating by saying, "I found this guy or girl who is all fantasy." So, I say to them, "What's your profile like? Be as honest as you can, as honest as you're comfortable with and you will get that back." I encourage people to do online as well as other types of dating. This is just one way but I think it's a good one

— Kim, Jim, and Lisa, California

Leaving it up to God

I most decidedly have not found a partner through online dating. It seems to work for many: as witness how many people in wedding announcements share that they found their partner this way.

I gave it a good try: several years. To tell the truth, it was pretty much a disaster. I communicated with one gentleman who seemed like a good possibility: environmental professor, bridge player, saw his parents Fridays. My heart leapt.

Then he asked if I would be open to "tying him up." I thanked him for his honesty and said I was not.

Another man who drove an ice cream truck weekends I had to stop seeing because I could not comprehend his English through his thick accent. In a compliment (which I am unsure if it's really a compliment) he told me that I looked better in person than online. I thanked him and said he did too. Then, I was scammed on the site. A responder said that he was an Army general who had lost

his family in an auto accident.

I went along until one day at work, it started to seem fishy. I did some research and found that while there was indeed an Army general by that name, his wife and three kids were very much alive. Gotcha!

I don't want this to be a litany of "My Worst Date" stories, but online just didn't work for me.

As far as my disease kicking in, I did find that an early respondent who had all the traits of my qualifiers sent me reeling into

fantasy. It was just that I thought I had found a “real” man who approximated my fantasy lovers.

I shared about it at a meeting and received congratulations from a member whom I held in high esteem. Needless to say, that

online connection didn't work either.

I have no intention of pursuing the online route again. Of course, that could change; but I don't think so. I'm leaving it up to God. If I'm meant to have a partner, I

will. I've finally reached a place in my recovery where I truly believe this...and it's also easier than 10 million coffee dates!

— Christina/NJ



Forty-Four First Dates

I have been online dating since the summer of 2013. I have been on forty-four first dates. One of those led to a lovely (now ex)-boyfriend, some led to three-month long dating periods, some led to active sex and love addiction insanity...

The whole time, I have had my trusty dating plan, sponsor and S.L.A.A. home group to “keep me in the boat” - the fantastic boat that is S.L.A.A. sobriety. I came close at times to losing my bottom-line sobriety (no pursuit of unavailable people - so no double texting or emailing; and no sex outside of a committed and monogamous relationship). However, I have overall really enjoyed the process of online dating.

I think it's fun to read about people - it's a way to learn more about New York City, about men, about myself, about culture. I am grateful that this technology exists. I have heard that 30% of marriages now come from online dating. I am glad I have the sobriety and recovery in place to help me navigate this world. What has worked for me: wishing the best for the men online, even when they rub me the wrong way in some way.

Bookending the dates with my sponsor. Sharing my profile with others in program. Taking my sponsors advice to “keep swiping” when I got addicted to certain guys in the rooms, my ex-boss, certain unavailable online men.... Asking men out for a date when

the back and forth texting has been sufficient.

Refraining from doing any messaging or swiping while on the job (didn't do that perfectly). Honoring my bedtime (didn't do that perfectly either!). And of course, working all the Steps and tools. Thank you, S.L.A.A. for a fun five years! I have the acceptance that it didn't lead to baby and marriage like I thought it would. But it did lead to continued sobriety, more experience, freedom from active anorexia and some good stories and jokes for me to tell on stage!

Thank you,

—Kara B., Brooklyn, NY

Learning Sign of Recovery #4

“We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.”

— S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

When I started recovery in S.L.A.A., I realized quickly that online dating was way too addictive for me. I could spend hours and hours at a time, going from one profile to the next, compulsively seeking – searching for the best one. However, there was an inexhaustible supply, so there was no end to the search.

There was always one more, then one more, and then one more.

There was also the addictive hit of validation when someone was

interested in me. And thanks to the easy, low-risk nature of reaching out to someone online, there were lots of men contacting me. So that supply, too, was seemingly endless. And yet it was never enough.

I could also spend hours obsessively combing through my OWN profile, reading and re-reading and re-writing my responses, poring over my photos, trying to achieve the impossible task of creating the “perfect” profile. But the definition of “perfect” was constantly changing, based on my idea of the kind of woman that each fantasy guy's profile indicated he might like.

All the while, I never had to actually be available to anyone. It

was all pure fantasy and obsession. And it was really self-destructive. I was reducing myself and others to mere objects. I could tell myself I was “looking for love,” but it was a hollow, empty, soulless exercise.

So, after two years of working the Steps in S.L.A.A., when I finally started dating again, there was no doubt in my mind that I simply COULD NOT date online. It was just way too addictive for me.

For almost a year, I sober dated only in the “real world.” And let me tell you, it was SLOW! In that year, a grand total of three people asked me out. It was really frustrating, but I can see now how incredibly valuable that time was.

I got to experience being open and available and surrendering fully to my Higher Power's will.

I was not in charge. I got to be completely present for each of those three dating experiences. I got to learn from them, and take the time to process what I had learned. I got to experience disappointment and rejection, really feeling my feelings, because I couldn't just numb out by moving on to the next person on the list.

Most importantly, I built my confidence and self-esteem. I learned that I could trust my instincts now. My sobriety was solid, as was my connection with my sponsor, my meetings and my fellows. I had experienced the "return of choice, sanity and personal dignity" that is one of the promises of S.L.A.A. recovery.

I started to discuss with my sponsor the possibility of dating soberly using online dating/apps. I had heard about a new app that limited you to only one match per day.

There was no browsing, no swiping, no unlimited supply. You just check out your match for the day, give them a yes or a no, and

then get on with your day. That seemed manageable, and my sponsor agreed, so I tried it out. Sure enough, it wasn't compulsive.

It was totally manageable. Eventually, that app did add an option where you could upgrade to get more matches, but I knew better than to put myself in that situation. I stuck with my one match per day. The only problem was that there just weren't many men my age on there. Within a month, it was running out of matches for me.

So then, with my sponsor's blessing, I decided to try a different dating site, one that gives you only a limited number of matches and doesn't let you browse without upgrading your membership. No browsing for me! My sponsor and I also agreed that I would only talk to one person on there at a time. Part of my anorexic pattern, before recovery, had been to date a bunch of people at once, to avoid getting too close to any one person. So we decided that it would be more sober for me to date only one person at a time, focusing on being fully available to each

experience. The second person that I met on that dating site turned out to be a really great guy, who's now been my boyfriend for the past three years. The entire process was incredibly slow and deliberate, sometimes infuriating, but totally conscious and sober. For the first time in my life, I am in a healthy relationship, with someone who's actually available and who's on his own spiritual path.

Is online dating the right choice for every recovering sex and love addict? I have no idea. I certainly never thought I'd be able to do it soberly.

Thankfully, my recovery has far surpassed my own expectations. I am so grateful that I met my partner online.

Well, actually... It turned out that we had already met once before, at a meeting of another 12-Step fellowship, back when I was only dating "in the real world." But it wasn't until we connected on that dating app that he finally asked me out!

—Mona

Online dating

Before online dating there were classified ads. I placed one free promotional ad and got about 5 replies. When I checked the message service, the third reply was so sincere and sweet that I didn't even listen to the rest.

That person ended up being an S.L.A.A. member who was following a sober dating plan. We met for coffee and two years later we were married. So for my lifetime, I am 1/1 with singles ads.

One date, one wedding.

Unfortunately, I can add one divorce to that record too.

A lot of things contributed to the failure of that relationship but a big part of it was that we moved away from Los Angeles and the 12-Step meeting community.

We were in an isolated county with no support.

Gradually we both emotionally left the relationship after several traumas and hardships and the recovery of some repressed memories by my wife of some childhood abuse.

At the time, I was convinced that if we had been in Los Angeles and had the support of friends and our programs, we would have made it through. But we chose to split instead.

I guess a lesson from my story to people online dating today would be to not abandon your program if you happen to strike gold. We never really graduate and stop being Sex and Love Addicts. A strong program makes a strong relationship even stronger.

—Tony

Share space

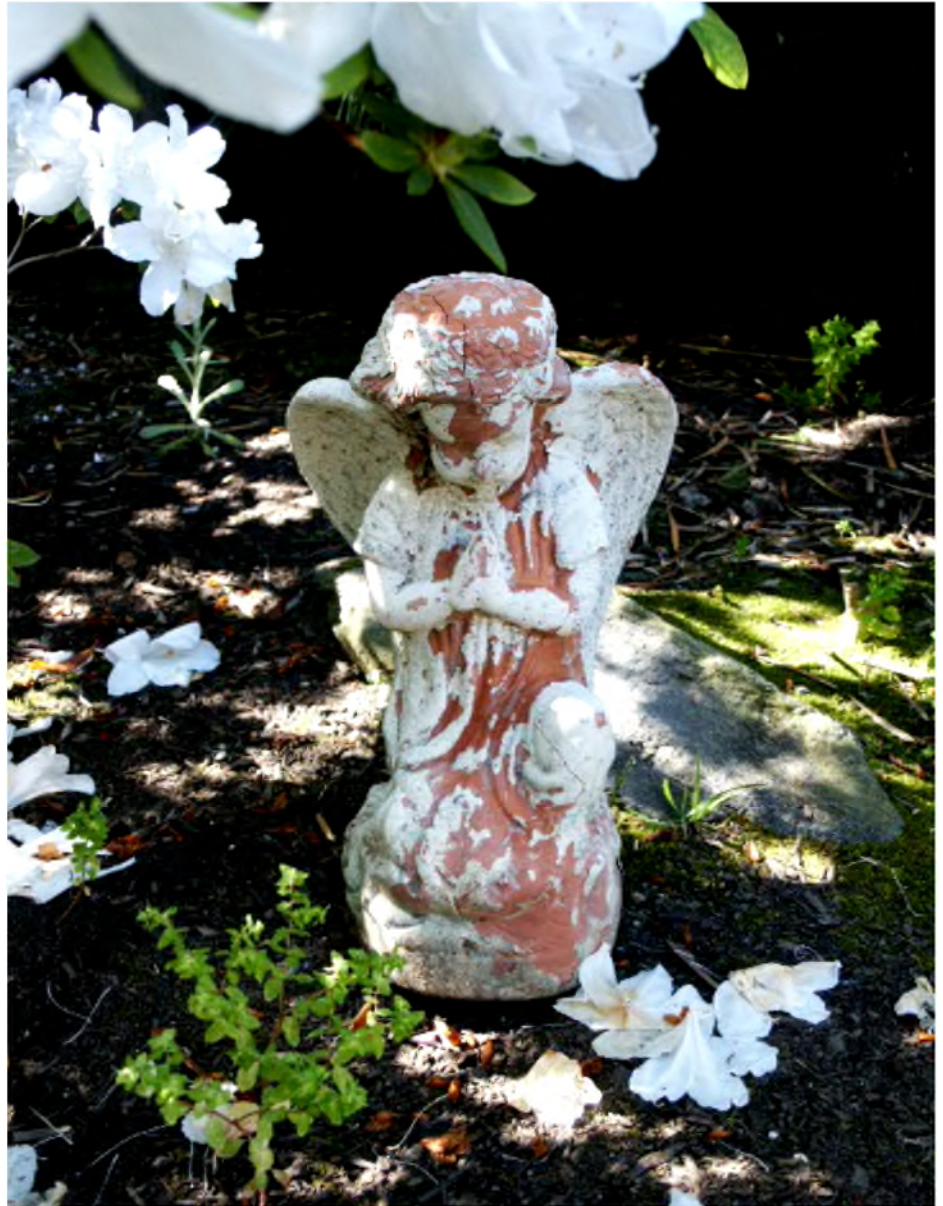
God Changed Me

When I finally surrendered, for sure I was at the: “one more strike would put us out of the game forever” place. There was no 2 ways about it. I was going to die, and I had decided that he was going to die. It was just that simple. You see, he was blackmailing me to stay in the relationship. My career was circling down the drain and I couldn't see a reason to go on. It was futile to fight against it.

I had always held spiritual beliefs, but never before had I truly surrendered. Just before I took that final step to end my life and his, I slid to my knees, in utter abject despair and I pleaded with Higher Power (HP) to change the situation. In a twinkling...He changed me, not the situation, me. My heart changed that day. My mind changed.

I realized I was out of the game forever if I didn't let someone else call the shots and so I gave HP my life. Suddenly and spectacularly, the man was gone. My career weathered the legal gauntlet, and I was not fired. Miracle after miracle happened. When I turned my life over to my HP in impossible circumstances, He did the impossible. He opened doors; He shut others. God changed my life...and He changed me.

I am a low bottom Sex and Love Addict. Perhaps others don't have to go as low as I did. But I couldn't have been spared that



bottom because that's what it took to get thru to this hard head! I'm so glad I'm here, and I plan to

keep coming back. Thanks for listening.

— Susan G.

Higher Power Blessings

I heard this Program saying that God doesn't make too harsh of terms for those who seek Him. In my experience, I've seen over and over how God meets us, wherever we are. Some folks may

come in, find out we are a spiritual program and split. This program is not for everyone, for sure. There are other non-spiritual programs, but in my experience, none that work as well as this one. My

experience was that I came in a bit crazy. I didn't know spiritual axioms when I first got into 12-Step Fellowship.

I didn't know how it all worked. I found out we don't espouse any one particular religion lest it divide us. Our number one tradition is that our common welfare comes first. Unity is so important. So wherever we are at spiritually is okay as long as it's a Power greater than ourselves. My concept of Higher Power has morphed over the years. There were some uncomfortable times in that for sure; times of growth, like a seedling, ever stretching towards the sun.

I believe that this stretching and questing has kept me here over the years. There is enough in this program to keep me ever growing and evolving closer to my Higher Power for a lifetime. This, ultimately, is what keeps me sober. May Higher Power bless us and keep us all.

— Anonymous



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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

Glad to Be Here

I've had many trips to the doctor lately for diagnostic tests and treatment, etc. I hate this. Anyway, my Higher Power, all of you, and my family sustain me. For me, over time, I've come to know that prayer is critical for me to stay sober and sane.

Yet still I struggle with it. I've studied it, written about it and shared about it with others, and still I'm seeing it in a haze; but it's becoming clearer. I've come to know that Higher Power does respond to my prayers; He is not silent. He speaks to me through others many, many times. He speaks to me through inspirational literature, usually read in my morning quiet time. He speaks to me through dreams, though rarely.

Sometimes, He speaks to me through doors that open, or others that close. But the one that's the hardest is the still small voice in my inner ear; that's the one I tend to doubt. I have been so fooled by my own selfish desires. It's hard to know some days if it's my wishes, or if it's Higher Power's will; but still I inquire and I'm willing to keep suiting up, and showing up so I can keep finding out more!

I love this program. There's enough here to keep me interested, learning and growing for a lifetime.



The Steps have given me a measure of peace, joy even, and this Program has given me my life back. I'm glad to be here today.

— **Anonymous**

Higher Power Sustains Me

I'm Lotus...a sex and love addict and anorexic. It's good to say that. I need to claim my seat often to remind me of how insidious and deadly this disease is. I've been realizing lately that most of my disease is between my ears.

My head is constantly going and I've concluded that it's out to get me. For example, I'm happily married, but there is this fellow at church. He is my "type." I find myself "thinking" about him. In Program I heard, "If I'm alone in my thoughts, I'm in enemy territory." More and more I see that this is true! The disease is so sneaky, I often don't realize I'm

caught up in it again.

But I'm recognizing it much more quickly now.

I'm praying, praying, praying - to Higher Power to release me from the bondage of my thoughts, and protect me while I'm in church.

I have to laugh at Higher Power's sense of humor though. Even if I arrange it so that I don't run into this guy at church, a picture of him will show up in the church bulletin :)

It reminds me of the Eskimo story in AA.: Even in the middle of the frozen wilderness, should the alcoholic sequester himself away in an attempt to avoid temptation,

an Eskimo will show up with a bottle of booze. It's a poignant reminder that though life is full of surprising twists and turns, Higher Power will sustain me through it all, no matter what. I'm developing emotional hardiness today, an ability to tolerate the distress that my head sometimes generates. As soon as I realize I am ruminating or caught up in my thoughts today, I do well to turn my mind back to here and now with the help of Higher Power. I'm glad I have tools today, and a way to have a measure of peace.

— **Lotus**



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