

# theJournal

Issue # 183

Single Issue \$4

*Extreme Self Care*

# 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.

## Table of Contents

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble	<b>2</b>
The Twelve Steps <b>3</b> Letter From the Editor	<b>5</b>
Question of the Day <b>6</b>	

## Theme: Extreme Self-Care

Self-Care: An Interview	13
Learning to Listen Instead of Trying to Fix Others	23
Balance and Taking Care of Myself	25
The Greatest Gift of Program	26
Extreme Self Care with Guidelines for Dating and Sober Self-Pleasure	31

# 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

# 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.

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.

© 2020 March/April. 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.

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*.

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
Outreach Director	Becca
Proofreaders for this issue	Andrew K. Beth L.

## Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

We got a lot of interest in this topic and a lot of answers to the question of the day. That tells me Program works! There are such great ideas for self-care in this issue that it makes me want to practice all the tips for taking better care of myself. The positive nature of the responses lifted my spirits.

I think the main idea that stood out for me was letting fellows and Higher Power love us until we could love ourselves. Self-care and self-love can help us get and stay sober.

I hope the articles in this issue help you as much as they helped me! Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

## Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Has the Program helped you learn to love and take care of yourself? Please share stories of how you

learned to and/or how you

engage in self-care for your recovery.” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #184 — May/June — “Have you gone from living alone to moving in with a partner? Please share about the challenges you faced and how you dealt with them and/or any special stories about moving in.”— Deadline for submissions is March 15, 2020. And #185 — July/Aug. — ABM Issue\*\* Dealing With Fear — “How do you deal with fear in recovery? Have you had a particularly fearful situation that Program tools helped you overcome? Please share your experience, strength, and hope and any coping skills.” — Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2020. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

“Has the Program helped you learn to love and take care of yourself? Please share stories of how you learned to and/or how you engage in self-care for your recovery.”

The answer is definitely! But, still a work in progress. Learning more and more layers - like making self-promises to do what's healthy for me and setting boundaries to take care of me, nothing to do with the other person (as it never does). Focusing on what I need to do — loving and protecting my inner child. Plus, lots of acceptance of myself and compassion for me!

— ANN

---

Having fun contributes to my extreme self-care. This can be as simple as going for a walk, watching a movie or spending time with a friend. Fun can also be grander such as going on a cruise (I'm on one right now), traveling, or attending S.L.A.A.'s International Recovery Convention at the end of July and beginning of August 2020, in Sacramento.

— ANONYMOUS



## Question of the day

Absolutely. How? The big one is sobriety. There's no better way for me to take care of me. My bottom lines helped clean up a whole mess of a life. After that, the toplines really helped me. Nature for me gives the best care, the best metaphors. It's an endless river. :) Being with my family in nature feels very healing. And even if it's just looking at the clouds, birds and the sun in my Brooklyn neighborhood, that's healing. My toplines also include writing my comedy and working on my novel, keeping in touch with my family, maintaining a day job, getting to museums, responding to all appropriate suitors, meditation and prayer.

— KARA B., NYC

Yes. Definitely. I went from self-centered fear to practicing self-care and having intimacy with myself. I learned to care for my inner child. I do more sport and for the first time, do really care for what I eat.

— CHRISTIAN, TOULOUSE, FRANCE

---

French: oui, j'ai toujours voulu plaire aux femmes parce que je voulais qu'il me regarde de l'exterieur, depuis 7 ans, jeprend soius de moi et jeme respect, je respect les femmes avec serenite

English: Yes. I always wanted to please women because I wanted to look good to them. For 7 years now, I have taken care of myself and I respect myself. I respect women with serenity.

— MARC L., MONTREAL,  
QUEBEC, CANADA

The Program has taught me how to love myself because I now no longer think of myself as fundamentally broken or unlovable. I no longer put myself in unhealthy situations due to my fear of being alone. I am okay to be myself, and I love the man I am today.

— ANONYMOUS, LOS ANGELES

Going to a treatment center for two weeks was a great way to start to learn about self-care. A lot of the time, it has been trial and error learning.

— JACLYN, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

“Has the Program helped you learn to love and take care of yourself?”

S.L.A.A. helped me grow up! I began to purchase clothes that fit, and I feel good about myself and reflect how I want to be seen. I now look people in the eyes and show up for fun and for free!

— KELLY R., SEATTLE WA

I can now be comfortable (most of the time) in solitude. I love myself and the growth and care I have for me. I have a relationship with God (my Higher Power) that I did not know existed.

— ARI F., NJ

I first had to get in touch with me and learn what I need and want. I had to be alone with my Higher Power to do that because I was overly sensitized to others. When possible, I have my spiritual alone time before contact with others. At a meeting I heard someone say, “Because I am Higher Power’s child, I want to treat me as Higher Power would and therefore look to Higher Power frequently for guidance.”

— ANNE K., TAMPA

The program has taught me that I am worth taking the time to take care of my mind, body and soul. It also benefits others when I do this.

— SEAN H., SACRAMENTO

The program has led me to realize the necessity of self-care to maintaining boundaries and ensuring that I can be available to the healthy relationship partners in my life. It also led me to rethink what constitutes true self-care in my new way of living.

— SCOTT F., CHICAGO

## Question of the day

The direction to go on various self-dates helped me to get in the habit of self-care and it is now much easier to take actions in self-care and top lines when I am struggling or having a hard time.

— KIRSTEN C., REDLANDS, CA

---

My second sponsor strongly suggested I start each day with a spiritual reminder and a meditation and make my bed. I find those essential for my self-care. The reading and meditation help me start my day grounded and settle my mind. Making my bed gives me a sense of accomplishment each morning.

— DAVE G., PASADENA, CA

I have my first cup of coffee on my deck with “State of Grace” (S.L.A.A.’s meditation book), “Answers in the Heart Daily Meditations,” and a spiritual meditations reader. It sets up my day with some clarity and a spiritual attachment to my Higher Power. It is a moment to carry with me during the day.

— RICK S., PHILADELPHIA AREA

My sponsor continually reminds me as I navigate my work through the Steps, as a 52-year old man with “old world” mentality around masculinity, self-care was a foreign concept. Stretching my edges, I will often take gentleness breaks and my most recent one — I actually went and got a pedicure and took myself to the movies!

— DAVID M., AUSTIN, TX

“Future tripping.” In my more than 3 years of recovery, I still do this. But I have learned to regulate and stop future tripping from becoming out of control and affecting regular functions in life. This has become a great help in controlling anxiety and triggers.

— GREG G., SEATTLE, WA

---

What I have learned is that I am responsible for my own self-care. I can involve other people but cannot rely on others. Sometimes the best self-care is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

— ANONYMOUS

“Has the Program helped you learn to love and take care of yourself?”

Before S.L.A.A., my habitual way of handling personal feelings of disappointment, discouragement and frustration was to isolate, not talk with anyone about my feelings, and seek to assuage my pain through sexual acting out, internet porn, masturbation, and intercourse. Through ongoing recovery, I am practicing different behavior: Admitting my feelings, talking with supportive friends and having non-sexual activities for enjoyment – poetry, music, and memories.

— DOUG P., CLEVELAND, OH

---

Through this program, I have learned how to say, “No,” when I need to. I have learned I deserve to take up space in this world and that I am a precious child of my Higher Power and deserve no less than others. I have learned boundaries and that that includes remembering my needs.

— ANNA F., WACO, TX

This question brings to mind many examples of how I learned to practice self-care since joining the Program. Most importantly, I remembered to go to the doctor. In my addiction, I had forgotten to take care of my health. Now, I regularly (and religiously) go to all of my doctors and therapists.

— SAM E., NY

As an anorexic, I have spent too much of my life hiding from people – both individuals and groups. The Program has helped me to learn the simple matter of making sure I talk to at least one-person face to face every day. One of the ways I do that is through service work for S.L.A.A. – sponsoring, being an Intergroup representative, attending the S.L.A.A. Annual Business Meeting (ABM) and other such work.

— HAROLD K., DALLAS, TX

---

I used to think that the lies I told the rest of the world were my biggest deception. But it was the lie that I was not worthy of self-love that was the biggest lie of all. Today my number one priority is my own well-being.

— NED J., PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL

## Question of the day

My morning routine is the basic foundation of my entire day. I find that it has become a daily practice of a half-hour walk, 20 minutes of yoga and 10 minutes of meditation. I begin my day centered, focused and in the present moment. These acts of self-care set the tone for my entire day.

— SETH S., BOSTON

As an anorexic, deprivation has been a struggle for most of my life. S.L.A.A. is where I have learned that I am deserving of anything. That includes saying, “No,” to things and being able to set boundaries. My self-worth has skyrocketed thanks to S.L.A.A.

— P.A., HOUSTON, TX

In the Program, I had to learn to stop beating myself up. I was harder on myself than anyone else could be. So, I had to redefine my relationship to myself as loving and compassionate.

— ANONYMOUS

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” This means I am allowed to love myself. And I am obligated to love myself and others.

— ANONYMOUS

Since coming into recovery, I have taken better care of myself. I started seeing doctors and dentists on a regular basis and sought help and advice when I felt that there was something wrong.

— RICH K., WORCESTER, MA

---

Yes. Having been abused as a child, I have a knack for not listening to my own body. As I have gained a length of sobriety, I wake up more to life. As a result, I am growing more in tune with my body. I am learning to be kind to me as an act of my Higher Power’s will. By acting my way into a new way of thinking, self-love is growing within me.

I can look in the mirror and like what I see. As I love myself more, I want to be more loving to myself and treat my body in a more loving way. Instead of being stuck in a vicious cycle, I get to live in a virtuous cycle.

— ANONYMOUS, LARGO, FL

“Has the Program helped you learn to love and take care of yourself?”

The Program has given me back my attention. My focus is now on my life which means I now take care of myself. At first this was overwhelming. Over time it has become a great source of support and happiness.

— FIONA, LONDON

I engage in self-care by, a) not acting out and b) maintaining balance in multiple areas of life: prayer and meditation, healthy eating and a sleep regimen, exercise, family, work, play and meetings!

— MARC S., TORONTO,  
ONTARIO, CANADA

Yes. Absolutely. The Program has helped me in that respect. Coming to believe in my own personal concept of a loving Higher Power helps me to learn to love and better care for myself a little more each day.

— CATE B., WASHINGTON, DC

The S.L.A.A. “Anorexia Recovery Tools” booklet has changed my life. I strive now for balance in my physical, mental and spiritual health. I take tender loving care now of myself and am able to do the same more and more for others.

— CELIA G., MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

My program, as someone currently anorexia-dominant, is about top lines – i.e. self-care. I learned to love myself as equally valued to all others in this program. I am forever grateful.

— JENNY K., SAN FRANCISCO, CA

---

---

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



amazonkindle  
apple iBooks

# Self-Care: An Interview



*Editor's Note: I spoke with my sponsee for this issue of the Journal. An edited transcript follows.*

Lisa: Thank you for doing this.

Monique: You're welcome.

Lisa: What is your sobriety date...

Monique: Wait, wait, wait. Can we say the Serenity Prayer?

Lisa: Oh, yeah definitely. Sorry I forgot!

Lisa and Monique: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Thy will not mine be done.

Monique: Awesome.

Lisa: How long have you been a member of S.L.A.A.?

Monique: I've been in S.L.A.A. about 18 years now.

Lisa: What did self-care mean to you before sobriety?

Monique: It may have had some of the same meaning. I may have seen, for instance, getting a haircut as self-care before or after sobriety. But I think before recovery self-care was externally motivated, whereas in recovery I've learned to engage in self-care as motivated by a spiritual connection to my Higher Power.

Lisa: For me, it was like I only took a shower, did my hair, or did things like that in order to catch a guy, you know?

Monique: Yeah. Yeah.

Lisa: Now it's about what makes me comfortable and what does feed that spiritual experience. I'm

glad you mentioned that because I wasn't thinking about that before. But that's really what the whole thing is about.

Monique: Yeah. Motivation.

Lisa: How has the Program helped you learn to love yourself?

Monique: Well I wasn't aware of it at the time, but having a sponsor who was willing to show up for me without criticism, who generously offered her time and experience, strength and hope – that she was willing to do all of that-- helped me realize that I was worth showing up for.

And doing service in the broader sense meant that I had a sense of belonging that was spiritually- motivated. My reason for being in the group was not to be popular or to stop being lonely but to have a spiritual purpose that brought me joy. I was able to identify that I was capable of being there for other people without harming myself. Also, by sponsoring I would hear myself in the step work of the women that I sponsored. I remember being with a sponsee and realizing that she was a very lovable person and worthy of love. And seeing that I had so much in common with her made me realize that I, too, was worthy of love and concern. So, my sponsor showing up for me early in recovery and me showing up for other women helped me to love myself- both giving and receiving support.

Lisa: Yeah. They loved us until we learned to love ourselves.

Monique: Yeah. Exactly.

Lisa: How has the program helped you learn to take care of yourself?

Monique: There are many tools that the Program offers for me if I'm willing to make use of them. Some of the tools that help me to take care of myself have been working through the steps with a sponsor. Through step work I learned that I often disregarded myself for the sake of my addiction. As I moved away from addictive behavior, I started to see how I could better take care of myself and meet the needs that I had that I didn't even know about until recovery.

Lisa: It's like we looked to our relationship -the guy- to take care of us instead of taking responsibility for ourselves. I was thinking of adding to this question something about dealing with character defects.

Monique: Through Step work I was able to identify character defects that had kept me from taking good care of myself.

Lisa: And made us self-destructive.

Monique: Yeah and nearly killed me. Also, Program helped me identify when I needed to care for myself rather than depend on others. And when I needed to ask for help rather than be avoidant. S.L.A.A. helped me understand the



difference between being responsible for myself and being self-reliant or disregarding responsibility and asking for help.

Lisa: One of my biggest character defects is being immature and not being who I authentically am because I wanted to impress a guy. I wasn't the real me. Program taught me how to be the real me.

Monique: Yeah. Exactly.

Lisa: You and I learned self-care together at S.L.A.A. meetings and going out to S.L.A.A. parties, fellowship after meetings and events. I remember going to the mountains to watch the shooting stars with a group of S.L.A.A. fellows and the party that I wore a sign that said, "Confront me if I don't ask for help." We danced like little kids without a care in the world. Who would have thought that an S.L.A.A. dance party would have been so innocent and healing? How has support in S.L.A.A. reminded you to take self-care actions?

Monique: I have found a lot of support over the years through meetings. In those meetings I've heard others share about their experiences with self-care and the choices that they make to take care of themselves. Honestly, asking for and receiving support was always a weakness of mine. It's something that I've had to grow towards over time. As I opened myself up to hearing the experiences of others

but also receiving personal support, I've become more comfortable with both showing up for myself and with asking others to show up for me as well.

Lisa: It makes me think of the fact that sponsorship is free. We are there for one another.

Monique: Yes. And that reminds me of another way Program helped me learn to love myself. When I came into S.L.A.A., I did not immediately get or stay sober. In fact, I repeatedly relapsed for the first three years of my membership. The fact that S.L.A.A.'s only requirement for membership is a desire to stop acting out patterns of sex and love addiction helped me find acceptance and I was able to let go of a lot of shame and self-doubt. I learned to stop beating myself up for relapsing but instead spend my energy learning how to follow the program to get and stay sober. It really helped me because it didn't matter how many times I showed up to a meeting with yet another bottom line crossed. It didn't matter. No one shut the door in my face. The solution was never denied to me if I showed up for it and allowed myself the love and support that you all gave me.

Lisa: The love that you showed me through all of my struggles... I did the same thing for four years and just kept showing up.

Monique: The solution and support of S.L.A.A. was never

taken from me. It was always there for me if I showed up for it. Some members specifically encouraged me to take care of myself or would accept that I was unavailable if I was taking self-care actions. They were encouraging. They didn't shame me for taking care of myself. They verbally encouraged me to do so and in some cases some members would applaud me for taking care of myself knowing that I struggle with saying, "No."

Lisa: You have been of service at a high level through the years, which is self-care because it furthers your recovery and keeps the Program going strong. But I've also noticed you have needed to step back in order to stay in self-care. Can you tell us a little about this? How do you find balance?

Monique: Simply put, many times I found balance through pain (laughter). Hearing the experiences of others has inspired me to go seek some balance in my life. But pain has also been a great motivator as well. When my life is out of balance because I'm not taking good care of myself or I'm avoiding being there for others and isolating, I found that I was in pain. And the pain was a signpost that showed me my limitations both with compulsive behaviors and with avoidant behaviors.

So, I wanted to talk a little bit here about how I was doing a lot of service. I said, "Yes," to every service request. I was doing many hours of service every week. I

found my limit when one day I realized I didn't want to do service anymore or when I could finally say, "No," to things when I already had too many commitments. Though being of service was a great part of my recovery, it wasn't everything. Things that I had been neglecting in my life piled up and I realized that I needed to find a balance. So how did I find a balance? Number one by realizing I needed a balance (laughter). I found balance by pushing myself to a limit, hitting a wall, and recognizing my avoidant behavior, whether it was avoiding asking for help or avoiding emotional intimacy.

Lisa: Has a need to be rescued or the need to rescue others ever interfered with self-care? How did you overcome this? How do you find balance?

Monique: Absolutely. I've been learning to overcome the need to be rescued through participation in the Program: doing Steps, calling my sponsor, sharing my feelings and letting go of shame. I'm learning to refrain from beating myself up when I make mistakes. I've learned the difference between needing to be rescued and needing support or help. I did know the difference before, but as I grow in the Program, I'm seeing there's a huge difference between needing to be rescued and asking for healthy support – and accepting healthy support when it's offered. The

need to rescue others is an old pattern for me that definitely stems from childhood. And through doing service, I started learning the difference between offering support, doing service in a healthy way with boundaries and with trying to make someone do recovery my way using character defects like manipulation. As I took on more sponsees and more service, I realized that offering to do a service commitment simply because someone else wasn't willing or able to do it was in a way fear based. I feared that if that service commitment was not done it would be detrimental to a person or to the fellowship and therefore it was up to me to step up and do it. I've learned that that's not the case. The Program is bigger than I ever will be. It was here before me. And it will continue after me. Showing up for service was not about fixing a problem or doing something that others wouldn't do. It was about participating in my recovery and an invitation to be part of the solution rather than the one to find a solution.

Lisa: Yes. That makes me think of the idea of playing God versus being a worker among workers.

Monique: Absolutely.

Lisa: You've had some really intense grief in the past year. I've seen you be strong and take care of yourself through it. How do you handle the grief and still manage to do service, take painting classes and take care of responsibilities?

Monique: Well, thank you for saying that I have been strong and been taking care of myself because many times I don't see my own progress. I don't see my own recovery. If I were to base my perception of myself and my self-care on my feelings, my feelings would tell you I'm doing a terrible job. So, I'm glad that I'm able to look at my progress through the perspective of the love my Higher Power has for me rather than through the eyes of my character defects. Yes. I've lost my life partner of 13 years, Chris, about three months ago. I handle the grief by not expecting myself to feel anything and accept all of my feelings as they are. I've learned to accept that my feelings are neither right nor wrong. This allows me to stay present. The tools that have helped me handle grief have been some of the tools the Program teaches. Slogans like "let go, let God," prayer, asking for help, and self-acceptance. Another thing that has helped me get through grief has been to have a dedication to abstaining from playing the "what if" game and torturing myself with regrets or beating myself up for not being a perfect partner. My brain was trying to tell me that I should've known that he was going to die. That's not true. Reeling in my thoughts has been very important. My feelings have full reign. I can feel anything I feel. However, my thinking - I've had to be really stringent in my thinking.

If my thoughts go to the “what if” or the “should’ve, could’ve, would’ve” or wants to beat me up...

Lisa: I hate to interrupt but I wish I had heard you say this six weeks ago. This helps me so much. I put my cat to sleep. She was with me for 17 years. And ever since I’ve been beating myself up about it. I should’ve taken her to the vet more often, I should have changed her eating habits...

Monique: Meanwhile she was a 17-year-old cat. She had one of the longest lives a cat could have.

Lisa: Yeah, yeah.

Monique: Yeah. It’s not rational and it hurts deeply. I’m sorry for your loss. I really am.

Lisa: Thank you.

Monique: I did that with my dad’s death. I did the whole beat myself up thing. I didn’t mention that I had learned the hard way from losing my dad. I’d lost my dad two years prior to losing my partner. I let myself wallow in regret and found it to be incredibly damaging to my recovery. So now, with the loss of my life partner, I’m trying to take what I learned from my previous experience and put it into practice in this experience. It’s kind of like a way of making amends to myself, I guess.

When I first came in to S.L.A.A. the God topic was a very painful one for me. Many years later, I’ve experienced my Higher Power supporting me and guiding me through the process of recovery

and through my life in general. Something that has helped me in my grief has been relying on my Higher Power for guidance, direction and strength and knowing - really knowing - that my Higher Power’s there for me. I don’t have that doubt that I had when I first came into Program. That’s really helped me with my grief.

And the part of this question that asks how I still manage to do service - actually since my partner’s accident, I’ve stepped down from actively sponsoring. Some of my sponsees already had recovery partners and years of sobriety and found that transition wasn’t easy, but they were able to make that transition without a huge upheaval to their recovery. I’m still doing service. I’m just not doing service in S.L.A.A. at this time. I was of service to my partner who I had to stay with in the hospital, whose funeral I had to arrange. I’ve chosen to show up for his family and friends even though showing up for myself is also difficult. I don’t have local S.L.A.A. meetings with women in my area so I do go to more A.A. meetings. I’ve chosen to take a volunteer shift at the local senior center. It’s an opportunity for me to be of service - to be around other people many of whom have lost loved ones and understand what I’m going through. I’ve learned that service is not always Program

related. Sometimes service can just simply be doing something for other people. It can be going to a meeting. It can be making someone smile. However, I do know that in order to maintain balance in my recovery I do need to step back up and do service.

Lisa: It's a great example of self-care to know when to do things and when to step away.

Monique: Having to let my partner, Chris, go – let me tell you - that was not me. Chris was in a coma and accepting that I had to let him go was purely out of the knowledge of his last wishes. If I had my way, he would've recovered of course. So, sometimes being of service is just accepting God's will and not imposing my own will. I mean I would've done a huge disservice to my partner if I kept him on life-support with no chance of recovery. I had that option. But I didn't take it. So, service is becoming a broader term in my life. I'm finding how the tools in the program help me with recovery but then I can use them in all areas of my life. I'm looking forward to continuing to learn.

Lisa: You're being of service doing this interview and I think it will help a lot of people.

Monique: Because I've had incredible spiritual experiences doing service in the past, when I was asked to do this interview I knew this would be a really good

opportunity for me to show up for others but also to show up for myself without taking on a commitment that was a lengthy commitment. Not all commitments have to be long in duration. I don't think it's a coincidence that the topic is self-care when I've been more aware of my need for self-care than I have been in many years.

Lisa: And I think it deserves mentioning that you do keep up your hobbies.

Monique: As far as painting classes specifically - I found that any creative outlet has been incredibly important to my recovery and my serenity. I find I'm a lot more serene and at peace when I am engaged in a creative project whether it is a painting class with other people or in solitude. I also do needle work. I'm just being creative in general. In fact, I bring my needlework to my local A.A. meetings. They let me sit in a meeting and do my needle work because it helps me concentrate on what I'm hearing people say. I'm less likely to wander off in my own thoughts, especially things like self-pity or how sad I am.

Lisa: And also, you've had to take care of yourself and your responsibilities

Monique: Now with Chris gone, I have all of the domestic responsibilities on my shoulders. I

have acquired new chores like cleaning out the cat box but also hiring someone to fix a house that normally he would just fix. Attending to my own personal needs in addition to my new domestic responsibilities have been a challenge. The only way that I've been able to keep going and take the next indicated action is by asking for and receiving help.

I've asked neighbors that I barely know for support. I've hired people I didn't know. I've accepted support from the people at the senior center.

I've accepted support from friends of my loved one. The only way I'm okay is because not only am I willing to ask for help, but I refuse to do this by myself. This is a huge spiritual change for me because many times I was more likely to try to use my own self will to get through circumstances.

The loss of my life partner has been such a life-changing experience that it couldn't help but change me spiritually and change me in my recovery. My sponsor says we don't get it until we get it. And, yes, it took someone dying for me to really change. I think that's why they call it progress not perfection.

Lisa: How do you engage in self-care when dealing with difficult, selfish people and with resentment?

Monique: In order to engage in self-care regarding my feelings about other people, I first have to

acknowledge that I probably feel fear and resentment. If I'm unaware of my feelings and my distorted perceptions I will most likely make a choice that is not to my benefit or the benefit of others.

However, if I first admit to myself through inventory or through perhaps speaking to my sponsor and telling her that I have these feelings, I can then use the Steps to filter those feelings, find my character defects and calm down before engaging with others. Perhaps then I can find a choice that includes integrity.

Lisa: That's essential to staying out of self-destructiveness.

Monique: Very specifically, what helped me get through difficult situations and deal with difficult people when my partner was dying was remembering the reason why I was even around these people was because of something he needed from me. He needed me to see him through this last chapter of his life. I had to remember my purpose.

Why am I engaging with these people? If I have to engage with these people because it serves a larger purpose, then I try to remember that's why I am doing it. In that case, the resentment and fear are very small in the context of my greater goal.

Lisa: That's totally principles before personalities.

Monique: Oh well, there you go.

Lisa: In a nutshell that's what it is.

Monique: In a nutshell, principles before personalities. You've always had three words when I've had 300 (laughter.) I'm really trying hard not to ramble. I usually just ramble and then I'm starting to talk about motorcycles and tornadoes when we're supposed to be talking about self-care. It doesn't take me very long to get off topic (Lisa laughs).

Lisa: Humor, I think is one of your great self-care abilities. You have great insight. We've always had that ability to laugh together, haven't we? We laughed hysterically sometimes.

Monique: And you know the difficult selfish people also includes me. Principles before all personalities including my own. Usually mostly my own (laughter). Being able to laugh at myself- the laughter not being laughter of humiliation but laughter of joy that I am letting go of my will and accepting that no matter the outcome, everything's in God's hands. I can laugh at the fact that I have character defects because I know that my Higher Power has my back.

Lisa: I'm amazed at the insight that you have. So many pearls of wisdom – it's amazing.

I know you know that I can definitely relate to this next question: How have you engaged in self-care when dealing with an anorexic partner and your own anorexia? Did S.L.A.A. give you

tools for this?

Monique: I would have to say my anorexia and my opinion of the actions or inactions of my partner that I consider anorexic – I have to admit that it's my perception of them... It says right in the A.A. Big Book, if sex is a difficulty, throw yourself into service. That's what I did. I threw myself into service and it really helped with letting go of expectations of my partner and I learned about getting some of my needs met through the spirituality of the program. If I'm thinking about service, I'm less likely to fantasize or get lost in negative thinking.

S.L.A.A. has more tools for recovering from avoidant behaviors and anorexia than I've taken advantage of or that I've incorporated in my recovery. That being said, being of service was a tool that I used to get out of my shell and find a sense of belonging rather than isolating. It helped me fill the need for a purpose. I have made a lot of friends who genuinely care for me. So, it filled the need for real love in my life, not just romantic love. So many of my needs are getting met in service and in the fellowship that I actually found that I needed very little from my partner to make me happy and joyful. When I had that revelation, my happiness in my relationship increased incredibly, yet he was still the same.

Lisa: Yes. It seems like you really worked on your social anorexia. You reach out to people. You stayed in touch even after you moved. You went to Texas for that reunion that was all the generations of S.L.A.A. sponsors and sponsees.

Monique: Yes. That was wonderful. And that was all because of service. I would not have met any of those women had I not done service 8 years ago. I didn't realize it before I moved from California to Arizona that the service that I did many years ago was going to be the very service that would save my life. There aren't any S.L.A.A. meetings in my area. For the first time, I went from one of the largest S.L.A.A. intergroups in the world to barely any meetings nearby.

So, engaging in self-care with an anorexic partner and my own anorexia... I would say it is the simple admission that my priorities have changed since before recovery and being in S.L.A.A.- that I no longer prioritize sex and romantic entanglement above everything else. Putting my recovery first was the only thing that even gave me the opportunity to be in a relationship with anyone

at all. And recovery gave me an opportunity to be with a human who has his own character defects, his own self will and his own journey.

S.L.A.A. gave me the tools to deal with my own social, emotional and sexual anorexia. However, I admit that there have been many more available to me that have not been incorporated yet into my recovery.

I think I can just summarize by saying that some of the tools that I've relied on to help me grow through my anorexia and avoidant behaviors have been: service because it has gotten me in contact with other members and helped me be part of the "we" of the program; Step work -specifically inventory - has helped me address anorexia because many times my anorexia can be triggered by resentment and fear and not being in reality; Seeing others recover has helped - it has always inspired me to see other people in their recovery especially with a sponsee who comes in when her life is a train wreck and then she gets her stuff together and you're like, "Wow!"

Lisa: I agree. Thanks again for doing this interview!



# Learning to Listen Instead of Trying to Fix Others

I'll preface by saying that although I've been in the program a number of years, I have really only been committed to a path in S.L.A.A. and recovery since August of 2019. So I'm not an expert on the 12 Steps by any means.

That being said, I have been fortunate enough to have accepted a Higher Power and establish a meaningful spiritual practice. Part of that practice is doing several daily readings and copying any words of wisdom I find from them for review at the end of the week. Frequently I can see a theme, or one or two messages stand out for me to think about.

Sunday morning is the time I sit with a cup of coffee and reflect on

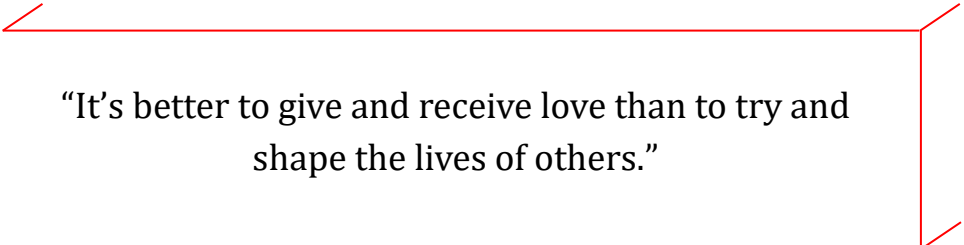
the ideas I've copied during the week.

One of those snippets that stood out for me during today's review was, "It's better to give and receive love than to try and shape the lives of others." I'm the oldest son of three boys who grew up in a family that demanded perfection.

I was to be the perfect son, the perfect student, and present an image to everyone that everything at home was, well, perfect.

Of course, this was far from the case. Much of family life was spent appeasing a demanding and punitive parent.

As the oldest, I saw myself as "the fixer." I deemed it was up to me to make sure the seas of family life were calm and seemed so to



"It's better to give and receive love than to try and  
shape the lives of others."

others. Carry that to the present. I have perceived myself as the one who offers solutions, even when not requested. Someone tells me his or her troubles, and I almost immediately try to tell them what to do.

One of my first indications that perhaps this was not the best avenue to take was when I started attending S.L.A.A. meetings. The policy of “no crosstalk” MADE me sit and just listen. It made me sit and hear what others were saying. Sometimes they wanted answers; sometimes they were expressing pain, guilt, or frustration. Often they expressed joy or hope in a recovery that was going well.

In any case, I was forced to sit and listen: not comment or try to fix. I fell away from the Program and came back last August after being caught by my husband engaging in sex chat. I realized that this was my wake-up call. If I didn't commit to the Twelve Steps, I would not recover and probably ruin a marriage and relationship I was working hard to make succeed.

Coming back to meetings, now more than just one per week, I found myself really listening to what others had to say. I began to hear their feelings in dealing with our addiction.

However, seeing myself as an addict whose life had become unmanageable, I began to realize

that what they wanted was not an answer from me.

I could offer a handshake, a hug, a kind word, an expression of understanding. I could offer love and support. But I didn't have to solve their problems. Really, I was having a hard enough time solving my own.

And I have also been learning to hear myself in the words of others. Lots of what others say resonates with me.

I can appreciate their kind words or gestures that help me to feel supported and validated. I understand that they are not there to solve my problems. “It's better to give and receive love than to try and shape the lives of others.” Being in recovery is a lesson in humility.

As an addict, I need to step back and listen to others. I need to respect that though I can sometimes help, I am not required to fix every problem I hear about. And really, in all honesty, I can't offer everyone solutions, but I can offer kindness and support.

And conversely, it's important that I accept the support, kindness, and love of my fellow addicts in recovery. I need not solve every problem, and I need not always find a solution. An important part of recovery, to me, is opening myself up to giving and receiving support.

— TOM

# Balance and Taking Care of Myself



I am taking care of myself. I am taking preventive measures so that I do not overheat at home today and do not await being rescued.

I turned on the fan and AC to levels preventing temperatures from rising to uncomfortable levels.

And I am noticing it when I am at the boiling point like I was yesterday.

Last night I turned on a fan to regulate the temperature at night and sleep through the night without waking up at 3:30 a.m. like the night before.

I am making changes in my life as I am committed to self-care. I am changing my patterns from waiting to be rescued to being proactive and preventing situations that would require rescuing me. I have also recognized that my tardiness had

to do with selfishness and lack of focus. I am making changes and changing my behavior patterns. I am placing myself in service to others and that eliminates selfishness. I am working on keeping focused and being mindful.

I concentrate on one thing at a time. When I am trying to be at a certain place at a certain time, I think about the people I will be socializing with and I make it a priority. This takes care of the tardiness pretty much, and I feel good about it.

There is an abundance of love and abundance of time out there if I make others my priority and I focus on service. It is quite miraculous and simple. I am working my Steps and when I work them, they work for me. Easy does it.

— Bo

# The Greatest Gift of Program



**H**as the program helped me learn to love myself? This is probably the **GREATEST** gift I've gotten from the program. A friend who is not in program once said to me half-jokingly, "When are you not doing self-care?" But for me, it was

honestly self-care or suicide. I didn't realize how low my self-esteem was, or how much self-hate I had until I finally made it into the rooms.

Right before discovering S.L.A.A., I had just gone through another breakup (a nice way of

putting it) from a love-addicted, super toxic, all-consuming relationship. The withdrawal was bad. The negative self-talk tape was so loud in my head at night that I couldn't fall asleep. It kept saying "You're unlovable. When any woman gets to know you, they all see how unbearable you are. You will die alone." This was always on repeat. That's the thing about this disease; it lies to us, and in our own voice too. The negative self-talk tape was unbearable at night. I have quite a few years sober in the beverage program so I knew I wouldn't drink or take a drug to quiet the voice so that's when suicide ideation came into play.

Luckily, I found the rooms shortly thereafter. It took me about a year of coming around the rooms until I found a sponsor and started working the Steps, but I loved the language about self-dates, self-worth, self-esteem, self-love. I realized I had none of that, so I set out on a journey of self-care.

At this point I had been so co-dependent that I couldn't even imagine going to a movie, or even lunch by myself. If there was a concert I was interested in, I'd buy two tickets in hopes I'd find someone else (a woman) to go with. And if I couldn't, I just wouldn't go. I was so desperate to

not be alone that I'd even spend time with someone who annoyed me if it was my only option. But as I found out, we can only combat the crisis of loneliness once we are able to stand alone.

Something else I heard in the rooms early on that I carried with me was "leaning into discomfort." I realized the acting out wasn't the symptom for me as much as a "cure" to not feel discomfort.

I started this journey into self-care very gradually. First, I started doing "self-date Sundays." On Sunday afternoon, I would walk around the farmer's market then see a movie at the theatre across the street, then have lunch at the vegan restaurant next door, then browse records at the record store down the street. I did this for about two months. I really got comfortable going to the movies and to lunch by myself. I started realizing that I didn't need another human being to validate the experience for me to be worthy of enjoying it. This was a huge revelation.

I live in Downtown Los Angeles. On Sunday mornings, I started taking a book with me and riding the train from Downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica (a 45 min train ride) then I would Uber to Venice (2 miles away or so) to a breakfast burrito spot I liked, and

then I would put on my headphones, play an album I love, and walk along the beach back to Santa Monica to take the train home. I realized so much of my hobbies were centered around doing things that I thought would make someone like me that I really didn't even know what interests I had. I soon discovered that the walk along the beach felt great. I loved walking and feeling connected to nature.

This new discovery of enjoying walking & nature then made me seek out botanical gardens and parks where I could walk. Which soon brought me to going on hikes. I would go on a hike by myself and enjoy the sunset. In my 30 some years on this earth, it never occurred to me to enjoy a sunset just for myself. But to allow myself to enjoy beauty and not have to have another person there to validate the experience gave me so much self-worth, so much self-value. I was not only becoming comfortable in solitude, but I was really enjoying my own company. I was not only gaining self-esteem, I was beginning to love myself.

This discovery made me want to explore what other interests I had but wasn't aware of. There were a lot of things that I knew I was interested in but never pursued cause it's not anything a woman I was dating would want to attend, such as going to see live jazz. At first, I would show up right before

the performance so I wouldn't have to wait around feeling awkward before the music started.

But I learned I really liked sitting in the front at live Jazz shows so I could really see the players play. I wanted to see the pianist's fingers as he played the piano. So, I started showing up early. Sometimes, I was even the first person in line. This was so powerful to my self-esteem. I was sending the message to my brain that I'm worth feeling discomfort or awkwardness when the end result is that I get to experience something that brings me joy. It didn't stop at jazz shows. I would show up to live readings at bookstores by myself and get there early so I'd get a good seat. What's more awkward than getting to something like a live-reading early and just sitting there? But again, I'm leaning into discomfort. I'm no longer running from it. I think intuitively most humans resist discomfort. It's a muscle that we have to flex.

It's been three years now, and I could honestly say that I not only like myself, I LOVE MYSELF. And self-care is the foundation on which my life is built. And this is all a miracle of the Program. Even as I write this, we are two weeks into January. Just over the New Year's weekend I took a drive by myself up the coast from Los Angeles to Big Sur, a gorgeous drive. Then stayed a couple of

nights in Big Sur. I don't need to wait for the girlfriend or the perfect travel-companion in order to take a beautiful trip. I am worthy of taking a trip and enjoying the beauty of this world by myself and for myself.

This even carries into my work life. I work for myself in the music industry, and as an entrepreneur it's very easy to never be "off the clock." Especially because I've used my "cool job" as my sense of value. But that sense of self-value won't come from a romantic partner or a job. It's called SELF-esteem not girlfriend-esteem or work-esteem. So now I have very strong boundaries around work. On the weekends I absolutely do not even open my emails now. The weekend is all about my authentic-self and doing things that I enjoy outside of my work-self. What an amazing sense of self-esteem this has given me.

I'll end this by just sharing my morning & evening routine which is very much rooted in self-care.

First, I like to wake up early in the morning, so I have a few hours to myself before I jump into the day. I use this time to move slowly and invite pause in. I once heard an analogy about how the surface of the ocean is restless, waves crashing, but if you go deep into the ocean's center everything moves slower and there's a calmness. That's how I feel in the morning. At the surface I am restless, so I move slower and find

that calmness. I make a pour-over coffee which takes a good 10 minutes. Also, every Saturday I buy fresh flowers for my apartment. So, every morning I wash out my various flower vases, change the water, cut an inch off each flower stem. Then I sit on my couch with my cats and enjoy my coffee. I read from a daily reflection book and will journal on the daily reflection. Then I'll read some poetry, or perhaps read a little from whatever novel I'm reading. I just really make the morning all about me. I am literally beaming with self-esteem and gratitude by the time I really start my day.

And the way I end my day is no different. I like to think of it as being romantic to myself. I light some candles; let me digress first by saying even lighting a candle is an act of self-love for me.

I used to buy nice candles but would only light them if a girl was coming over — as if I wasn't worthy enough of burning the wax and having a pretty smell for myself. So, to continue, I'll light a candle, put on a jazz record, and cook myself a really nice dinner. I used to always fantasize about, if I was dating someone, putting on a jazz record and cooking dinner together. Now I do this almost every night for myself. And I am literally BEAMING with self-esteem while doing it.

I once read that the best partners come to us when we

neither seek nor avoid the possibility of finding someone. We simply live in accordance with our deepest needs and wishes while also noticing the people we meet. But the first step is taking care of ourselves.

We are hardwired for connection, so much so that we'll abandon ourselves and who we are to achieve it. That's why practicing self-care is so important.

Once we're comfortable in solitude and truly love ourselves, that need to connect and feel a sense of belonging no longer

comes from a desperate place. When the need for connection is coming from a desperate place, we'll often be inauthentic to get people to like us. The paradox is you could be around people all day but if you're being inauthentic then when you get home, you'll still feel incredibly lonely. But if we have self-love and are truly comfortable in solitude, it then allows us to be fully authentic when we do connect. I'm so very grateful for this program and this new way of living. Thank you S.L.A.A.

— ADAM

## An Invitation For You

Enlarge your recovery by allowing others to get the same benefit that you get from reading *the Journal*.

It is a great way to carry S.L.A.A.'s message of hope and practice the Twelfth Step. The fellowship needs volunteers of all skills and levels of availability. Here's what you can do:

- Become a Journal Representative for your intergroup or home group, encouraging the use of *the Journal* as a source of topics, letting people know that there are Journals for sale, and ensuring that plenty of Journal subscription cards are always on the literature table.
- Visit a local organization that deals with sex and love addicts in your area, bringing copies of *the Journal* along with a few pamphlets. The institution may be a treatment facility, a judicial entity, a large recovery club that welcomes varied literature, or a hospital.

**Contact info:** <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/journaleditor>



# Extreme Self Care with Guidelines for Dating and Sober Self-Pleasure

*Note: Some S.L.A.A. members have “no masturbation” on their bottom lines. This article contains a discussion of sober self-pleasure. It is up to the individual to decide if this is a triggering topic for them.*

Extreme self-care is about the whole self and that includes boundaries and learning self-love and healthy connection to myself and others. Part of that is being honest that I am human and as a sex and love addict, I have to learn how to do things differently and integrate new ways to do the things that were addictive in the past such as dating and masturbation.

When I started dating, I found that having a list of what I was looking for in a partner was important. My family of origin pattern was codependency and trauma such that if you smiled at me, I had to go to bed with you. I learned that I had choices and could make a list of what I wanted

in a partner plus develop deal-breakers. (If someone had a cat/dog or smoked, I could not date them as I am allergic, and why would I ask them to give these up?) This was part of boundary-setting and extreme self-care.

Then I developed dating guidelines. What I needed in place before dating; e.g. I had worked my 12 Steps of recovery, I had a sponsor, I had a daily connection with my Higher Power, I was willing to pray, listen and follow suggestions. And, I needed guidelines for a first date; e.g. no kissing, one-hour in public during daylight hours paying my own way, and no over-disclosure. Finally, guidelines after the date; e.g. no contact for 24-48hrs so I could get

right-sized and determine if I was triggered and/or if I wanted to see again for a second date. These guidelines kept me sober and safe and were examples of extreme self-care.

For a time, I was abstinent (no sex with self or others) in sobriety. The suggested time was 90 days. Before having sex with someone else, I wanted to know more about masturbation. I did a Pros/Cons Exercise (aka Clarity Exercise; another set of guidelines) asking the question, "Am I ready to self-pleasure in a sober way?" After sharing my motivations, expectations, fears and consequences with my sponsor, plus waiting 24-hours, I was ready. Then I developed guidelines to help me not act out and stay sober with masturbation.

### **Sober Self-Pleasure/ Masturbation Guidelines**

Questions to ask before:

- Do I have a sponsor?
- Have I gone through withdrawal?
- Am I sober from my bottom-line behaviors 3 months?
- Have I worked the first 3 Steps with a sponsor?

When ready or becoming ready: Do the Pros/Cons exercise and share with sponsor

### **Masturbation Guidelines** (review with sponsor)

- Frequency – consider once a week to start (will also depend if in a committed relationship)
- Cannot masturbate if in H.A.L.T. (hungry, angry, lonely, tired) or having negative thoughts.
- Pray before and after
- Remember to breathe and bring self into body (stay out of fantasy)
- Concentrate on the 5 senses (touch, smell, hearing, etc.)
- Bookend with sponsor first few months; normal to feel shame/guilt but it is part of sober self-care
- Am I S A F E (borrowed from Out of the Shadows – P. Carnes 2001); not a secret, not abusive, not avoiding painful feelings and not empty but taking care of sexual needs/instinct?

By putting guidelines on paper, I can stop the hamster wheel in my head. Guidelines keep me in the present moment and out of obsession/addiction. I still need to make conscious choices with my Higher Power and support community. Guidelines allow me to learn new behaviors in a safe and sober way especially when feelings come up that feel like old addictive feelings and keep me from hurting myself. And, I learn to love myself. This is extreme self-care.

— RITA, MONTREAL

# *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.



theJournal