

theJournal

Issue # 187

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Reconciliation

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

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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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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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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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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

When I saw the topic of this issue, I thought it would be all about reconciling with past partners. But a lot of the stories tell of S.L.A.A. members who are finally able to reconcile with themselves, and find much needed self-esteem. The positive energy of these stories really helped me. I've had COVID blues lately and am always helped by the stories in *the Journal*. But for some reason, many of the stories in this issue felt particularly uplifting to me. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day for this issue is, Reconciliation — Please share your experience, strength, and hope around reconciliation.

“How do you deal with expectations and lay an entirely new foundation for cooperation, trust and intimacy?” Here are some insights that were submitted in service from fellow S.L.A.A. members. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #188 — Jan./Feb.— Anonymity — “Anonymity: Do you feel different about anonymity than when you first got here? Please share your experience, strength, and hope around breaking your anonymity to help another or any experiences around anonymity that have helped you grow in recovery.” — Deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2020. And #189 — March/April— God Shot— Describe any experiences that have proven to/reminded you that a Higher Power exists. How has this helped your recovery?— Deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2021. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Please share your experience, strength, and hope
around reconciliation.

It is apparent to me that reconciliation and the ability to “lay an entirely new foundation” of any relationship will be based on the very new experience of knowing myself which has only come through the gifts of sobriety and working the Steps.

— DAVID M., AUSTIN, TX

Question of the day

After all the drama and pain was over, I worked on myself and processed through my feelings. Then I worked the Steps and did a thorough 4th Step inventory. I looked at my defects and learned from life. Then and only then was I ready to move on. At some point during dating, I got reacquainted with my ex. After time and work, we found that we were ready to start a new relationship. I am grateful to the Steps and recovery.

— ANONYMOUS, TAMPA, FL

Today, I have been married 21 years. The reason I still have this relationship is only because of this Program and my Higher Power. Both my husband and I committed to work our programs, be completely honest, and slowly restore intimacy. Trust takes time and consistent actions showing change. This has taken work and pain at times. We are committed to open, honest communication without unrealistic expectations. The reasons we were married are different than they are today. Today we live in an open, honest, committed, intimate, respectful, and program-centered loving partnership. We continue to know this is a necessity to live in this new foundation together with our Higher Power.

— ANNA F., WACO, TX

Time plus good behavior equals trust.

— NED J., PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL

Please share your experience, strength, and hope
around reconciliation.

This question brings to mind my relationship with God, my disappointments in life, and my efforts to reconcile with God. This, for me, is a difficult and ongoing process, and requires serious introspection and prayer.

— SAM E., NYC

Starting again is something I have learnt in this programme. There are always opportunities to stop, see my part in what is happening and be willing to cooperate and do things differently.

— FIONA, LONDON

Living amends power my relationships. Not being led by self-will as a result of recovery is the foundation for clear boundaries and communication.

— JENNY K., SAN FRANCISCO

Saying I'm sorry is the hardest thing I've ever done. Growing up when I admitted wrong and expressed remorse, my face was rubbed in it, and I never heard the end of it. So, I learned to never say I'm sorry. Conversely, I also learned from this that you should never forgive and forget because it keeps you in the one-up or powerful position. In recovery, I learned that saying, "I'm sorry" and "please forgive me" are crucial to the health of my relationship. Forgiving is also paramount. I need to exercise my forgiveness muscle often. I must keep my side of the street clean and keep my eyes off of his side of the street. I'm so glad I have program and tools to help me live at peace with God, myself, and my husband.

— ANONYMOUS

Progressively Healthier Reconciliations



I have had a series of progressively healthier reconciliations with an individual with whom I once believed I

was in a healthy romantic partnership.

Through S.L.A.A. literature study, meetings and working

with a sponsor, I came to learn that this “partnership” actually was yet another fantasy-fueled, so-called relationship that further qualifies me as a member of this fellowship. I entered my first (and hopefully last!) S.L.A.A. withdrawal as a result of this “relationship.” After I reached a point of indifference about whether there ever might be any romantic aspect to any future interactions with this individual, I knew I had completed my withdrawal and could attempt reconciliation if I and my Higher Power saw fit. I was able to reconcile with this person and enjoy a strictly platonic yet emotionally intimate friendship and companionship with them.

Our friendship even yielded an amazing 16-week road trip in close quarters with limited resources! But the tensions and constraints of that trip led to relational sickness that called for new boundaries and an indefinite pause — if not an end — to the friendship. After three months of no contact we are beginning to reconcile and discover what might be salvageable. It may be nothing more than pleasant, respectful yet distant acquaintanceship, but I choose to turn that outcome over to my Higher Power and just keep working my program.

— ANONYMOUS

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>

Practicing Spiritual Principles

My experience has taught me that practicing the spiritual principles, through a daily commitment of applying the Steps to my life, results in a healing that allows me to live with fewer expectations but greater hope that the trust in my Higher Power will provide the results the universe has laid out for me.

Over time, I get to live in my recovery and demonstrate, through my recovery actions, that I am worthy of trust.

In practicing self-intimacy through honest appraisal of myself (inventories) I arrive at a place of forgiveness for myself through the grace of God. In turn, I experience forgiveness of others and this miraculously transmits into my

relationships. It is not an overnight matter and I get to demonstrate patience, love, and tolerance each day that I practice building a relationship with a power greater than myself. By the grace of God, I have the experience of freedom from the bondage of myself. None of this happens as an individual effort. Support from others, my fellow recovering addicts, my sponsor, and other supportive, loving individuals that are part of my recovery network are all very important components of the process. These experiences of building recovery relationships and allowing others to be part of my process builds intimacy and brings joy into my heart.

—JUDE, TUCSON, AZ

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



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Rigorous Honesty Is Key



My husband and I are both in program and this was encouraging in committing to reconciliation. As the Basic Text (page 148) notes, the difficulties in our marriage during addiction was in (each of) us. My sponsor asked me what I wanted to have whenever I felt slippery.

My immediate response was to stay with my husband and work on our relationship.

Rigorous honesty was key for me as I had been anything but that. I called/texted every time I was leaving from a location, whether it was the store, my meeting, or a workout at the gym. Each one of us saw our own therapists

and did couples counseling for several months when I entered program. We were able to identify “tender spots” we each have, akin to triggers. This assisted in creating a more caring, loving way of communication.

Acceptance and seeking Higher Power’s guidance are also key. We are quite different in personality and how we experience life and our relationship. Using tips from

the *Healthy Relationships* pamphlet are so helpful.

I work at keeping the focus on myself. This includes attending meetings, being of service, and sponsoring. I use the Steps to diffuse emotions from triggers and give the outcome to Higher Power. Each day is different and precious in our marriage thanks to the program.

— ANONYMOUS

God’s Plan vs. My Plan

When I first arrived at S.L.A.A. 5 years ago, the last thing I wanted to do was to reconcile with my husband and make my marriage work.

I was ready for a divorce and hoping after I got my first sponsor, she would see how wrong he was for me and give me the green light. However, my Higher Power had other plans for me.

The first S.L.A.A. meeting I attended was my first 12-Step meeting period. I showed up at the time listed on the website and was terrified to go in.

When I attempted to go in, there was not a soul there. “Of course,” I thought, “I am the ONLY one who is this crazy!” Luckily, I made the decision to call the 2 ladies who had phone numbers listed on the website. Both went to voicemail. I really had never felt so alone.

I had given myself the extra 5 minutes I said I would wait, while actively texting and snapchatting my “person of addiction (POA)” mind you, and got ready to pull away and never come back when one of the ladies returned my phone call. I told her what was going

on and she proceeded to tell me that the meeting did not start until 30 minutes past the hour and that the website time was wrong.

She promised me if I stayed, others would show up and that I was not alone. I will be eternally grateful for that phone call back.

During that first meeting, I heard others share and I heard my story. I saw where others were, and I wanted to be there too. I read the *Blessings* and I cried harder than I thought possible.

I met others who were just like me and I finally, for the first time in my life, knew where I really belonged. I felt at home.

After the meeting I went out for fellowship and asked what I had to do to get what they had. I wanted a fix and I wanted it now. To my dismay the answer was, keep coming back and get a sponsor.

That did not seem like it would work to me. I wanted to feel better NOW, not in a week. Luckily, my Higher Power gave me enough from that first meeting to get me to return the following week.

During this meeting I was granted the privilege of hearing the story of the woman who had called me back. I so

desperately wanted what she had so I asked her after the meeting to be my sponsor.

It was at this point that I shared with her more of my story and how it seemed so similar to hers.

She, however, was at the other end and happy in her marriage. I would have bet my life at that point that I could never be happy in mine.

It took me about 6 months of recurring relapses and a 2-week intensive treatment center to get sober. For me, my Third Step was the actions of quitting my job, where my "POA" worked, telling my husband that, yes indeed, I had still been cheating on him, and leave my then almost 2 year old son for the first time. I struggled as I had never done so before when I had to leave my son.

Then my sponsor asked me one of the most important questions I had ever been asked, "Wouldn't you have given ANYTHING for your mother to have done this for you?" And with that, I signed up to go on a plane and leave everything behind to focus on myself, not knowing what I would return to financially or in my marriage. When I returned, my husband was still active in his own addiction and

had not yet hit bottom. In order to protect my own sobriety, I let him know that I had to put my program first, not our marriage and that I could not continue to stay in a relationship with him while he was active in his own addiction. It took him a few months and when I was able to actually hold the boundaries I said I would, he realized I really meant it.

By the grace of God, he went into program as well and got sober and has stayed that way, even now 5 years later.

However, just because we both got sober it did not mean smooth sailing for our marriage. We had to sit down and have a real conversation about our relationship. We both were sober, had sponsors, attended 2 meetings a week, and had group and individual therapy weekly.

We were doing the deal to get and stay sober. And we also both agreed, we would work on ourselves and support one another in sobriety.

But we would not work on the marriage. We decided, as painful as it was, that we had to focus on ourselves and see who we really were without our addictions.

We trusted our Higher Power to guide us down the right path. And we trusted that as we walked our separate paths, we would either start walking closer together or farther apart.

But either way, we would be okay and could handle whatever God thought was best. For the first time in our relationship, we surrendered it to God.

While our marriage could have gone either way, God's plan for us was to grow together.

Today, I genuinely love my husband in a way I never imagined possible. That is because I am full of love from my Higher Power and from myself. The love he gives me just makes my life that much better. We are interdependent. We love each other and choose each other each and every day. Not because we need each other, but because we CHOOSE each other.

We have a level of intimacy emotionally, physically, and spiritually that grows with each obstacle and victory we go through.

The road has not been easy by any means. Just because we got sober, life did not get easy

and neither did our marriage. It has taken a lot of hard work, dedication, surrender, therapy, God’s grace, and meetings to get where I am now.

In these past 5 years I have had a “POA” reach out to me for 4 years consecutively, had my family of origin abandon me, had my baby girl die at 14 weeks gestation, had another amazing little boy, and lost my job. I have also made true lifelong friends, found healing for my family of origin trauma, had people become my chosen

family, have financial security, celebrated 4 years of continuous sobriety, and have chosen to work with my husband.

My Higher Power has shown me through everything, good and bad, that the solution to everything is to surrender to his will for my life, not mine. When I have finally and honestly surrendered something to him, it ends up working out exactly how it was supposed to.

— COURTNEY H.

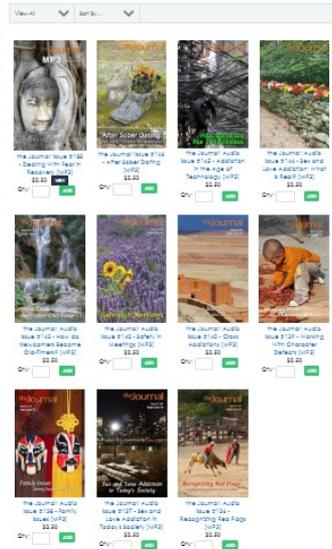
MP3 Audio Issues of the Journal

\$2.50

The Journal is S.L.A.A.’s meeting in print. Each issue contains personal stories of recovery, writings on important recovery topics, poetry and humor. Each audio issue of the Journal is read by an S.L.A.A. member and represents a print issue released as part of a subscription to the Journal.

ISSUES AVAILABLE ON MP3:

- #185 - DEALING WITH FEAR IN RECOVERY
- #146 - AFTER SOBER DATING
- #145 - ADDICTION IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY
- #144 - SEX AND LOVE ADDICTION: WHAT IS REAL?
- #143 - HOW DO NEWCOMERS BECOME OLD-TIMERS?
- #142 - SAFETY IN MEETINGS
- #140 - CROSS ADDICTIONS
- #139 - WORKING WITH CHARACTER DEFECTS
- #138 - FAMILY ISSUES
- #137 - SEX AND LOVE ADDICTION IN TODAY’S SOCIETY
- #136 - RECOGNIZING RED FLAGS



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An Unexpected Reconciliation in My Recovery

I was hopeful when I came to S.L.A.A. that the program would help save my marriage. It didn't, but it did save me from the miserable existence called my life. Along the way, something quite unexpected happened. I was reconciled with a long-estranged friend.

I came to S.L.A.A. after eight years of tenuous sobriety in another 12-Step program (tenuous in that I had engaged in enough half-measures that I only partially recovered). What I willfully ignored was my sex and love addiction. I was in a dysfunctional marriage. The dysfunction was rooted in the fact that my wife and I were incompatible as a couple. Yet, I believed I couldn't live without her. To make myself feel better, I turned to my addiction. Acting out with porn was part of my daily routine. Visiting strip clubs was a weekly special treat that I felt I'd earned given how difficult she could be. Let's face it though. She wasn't the problem. I was. I was in complete denial about my



addiction.

I was shaken from my denial when my marriage collapsed after 10 years. That's another indicator of just how sick I was. I was hooked on a person with whom I didn't get along with for a decade. The collapse of the marriage nearly caused me to collapse. I had a panic attack. I believed I could not exist without my marriage. My panic ended up being a blessing, prompting me to get the help I so desperately needed in the rooms of S.L.A.A.

Unlike my eight years of half-measures in that other program, I chose to do things differently as I worked to recover from sex and love addiction. Oh yes, I had the gift of desperation. Working the program wasn't easy. My self-esteem measured about a two on a 10-point scale. My low self-image started when I was a kid. When I found sex and, later on, relationships, I felt complete. Worthy. Now, in recovery, I was faced with no longer being able to rely upon sex, love, and relationships to complete me.

I threw myself into the Steps, doing what was asked by my sponsor. When I got to Step 4, however, I developed a huge resentment towards him. You see, he gave me the standard lists of topics to cover—resentments, fears, sex conduct, harm to others. But I thought he should have asked me to do more. I was a sick guy who made lots of mistakes. Didn't he realize that? I said to myself, "He's going to screw this up for me." With resentment in hand, I completed my 4th Step, writing down the lists he suggested and also covering the additional areas I thought he had overlooked. After sharing these details with him in my 5th

Step, I expected praise and accolades for doing what he'd forgotten to ask of me, plus the apology he clearly owed me for dropping the ball. While he did acknowledge my honesty and vulnerability, there was no praise or accolades or apology for my extra effort. How dare he! As I drove home, I finally realized what had really happened. I hadn't done it for him. I'd done it for me. I desperately wanted to recover, so I went above and beyond what was asked. This was a first. I was the guy who'd engaged in half-measures much of my life, including my recovery in my first 12-Step program. I'd learned not to trust my own commitments. For the first time in my life, I fully showed up *for me*. This was the beginning of the reconciliation with that longestranged friend I mentioned previously— that friend being me.

The trust I was developing in myself grew over time into healthy self-esteem. At first, I'd look myself in the mirror and say, "Hey, you're not so bad." A few months later I said, "I'm kind of proud of you." Then, a few months after that I took a good long look and said, "I like you." Before long, I told myself, "I love you." And I

meant it! I never set out to develop healthy self-esteem. But that's the beauty of the Steps. In doing the work, I learned that I could finally trust myself to take responsibility, make a commitment, and keep it. I had reconnected with the one person who will always be with me wherever I go. I had lost a marriage, but I had gained a friendship with myself.

By the grace of my Higher Power, I celebrated 15 years of S.L.A.A. sobriety this year. My sobriety is but one of the many gifts I've received in recovery. I have a relationship with God that continues to expand and deepen. My life is full of the best friendships I've had in my life, many of them with people in our fellowship. I met a

wonderful woman who is now my wife, and we have a healthy and loving marriage. And my relationship with my best friend, me, continues to evolve and grow. I didn't set out to reconcile with myself, but the fact that I did has become one of my most cherished outcomes on this journey — so too is my serenity. I'm serene most of the time, even when life becomes challenging. Being comfortable in my own skin and loving the man I've become is worth all the hard work of my recovery. And that work continues! I will be forever grateful to my Higher Power, this program, and the men and women of S.L.A.A. who have supported me every step of the way.

— SCOTT W., TAMPA BAY, FL, USA

Expecting Relationships to Take Away the Pain

Expectations were the primary reason why I set myself up for so much pain and suffering with relationships.

Without knowing it, I expected that there would be a loving, romantic relationship that would somehow take away the pain of existence, the

boredom, the shame of not being able to fix my family or my weight, the frustration of feeling like I was just not loveable enough. Somehow, if I could find the perfect person, I expected that this relationship would then become the solution to ending this pain.

However, pursuing this expectation ended up bringing me into relationships with people who had the same delusional thinking that we could magically solve our problems with self-will. Of course, neither of us could fix each other or cope with reality any better once we were in a relationship than when we were single.

When my expectations were not met, I reacted in denial rather than accepting that another person could not meet these expectations. I went to insane lengths, disregarding any sense of self-respect for my own physical, emotional or spiritual well-being, in order to try to get reality to fit my expectation that somehow, somehow, this person and our relationship would be the thing that would fix me.

This strategy never worked, and only robbed me of more and more time, dignity, and soul, like any other addiction,

until I was ready to face the facts of my situation. And when I realized that this relationship could never meet my expectations, I also realized that I had no capacity left for trust or intimacy.

I would ask myself, “what was the point of even being in relationships if they could not meet these expectations?” For a long time, I dealt with the pain of not being able to trust people by isolating and practicing sexual anorexia for many years. A time came when shutting down my desire for romantic relationships and a healthy sexuality threatened my sobriety in other programs, and I had to face the fact that it was time to rebuild my capacity for trust and intimacy. This was when I started working in S.L.A.A. It has been over a year of work in the program before I was ready to date in a sober way and let go of the expectation that a “dream relationship” would solve all of my problems. Before I was ready to date in a sober way, I had to rebuild that trust in myself through working the 12 Steps and building an intimate relationship with a sponsor.

When I was able to be honest with my sponsor about

what I wanted and who would serve as a compatible partner, I was able to see that it was ok to expect that a partner be healthy, respectful and trustworthy.

But it was not ok to expect that they would take away all of the pain that I myself had to deal with through my past romantic relationships, my family or with God.

The relationship I have with my sponsor established a foundation so that I am able to trust my own instincts and desires and accept that it is ok to say no to relationships that

are draining or uncomfortable. Sober dating is scary sometimes because when I am honest, I am risking rejection. But it is the only pathway to an intimate and more fulfilling long-term relationship.

Today, by some odd miracle, I find that I again have hope for a sane and satisfying future marriage one day, but that I don't need this relationship to end the unbearable pain or problems in my life. For that, I have the support of my sponsor and the S.L.A.A. fellowship.

— ANONYMOUS, PA

Reconciliation Is Sane With the Tools of S.L.A.A.

In my acting-out days before I found S.L.A.A., I had many dysfunctional relationships. Once I tried to reconcile with a former partner multiple times over the course of 5 years! We kept trying to make it work but it never did. It was crazy that we tried so many times and for so long. I remember having a nightmare

where I was in a wedding dress about to marry him and I was crying so hard that my mascara was running down my face. Through my sobbing, I was saying that I didn't want to marry him because he was mean. He really didn't like me during our 8-year relationship. He tried to change me. But I thought that because the sex

was good, the relationship must be good. We really didn't like each other and couldn't communicate.

My sex and love addiction was deeply embedded and my self-esteem was in the gutter. I still felt like I couldn't live without him. So, even though my attempts to reconcile failed, all I could do to survive was to keep trying. The attempts at reconciliation were painful, full of weight-loss attempts, bleaching my hair, buying new clothes, late night calls, and being available to him whenever and wherever he wanted regardless of the inconvenience to my life. My education and my career suffered. New relationships imploded.

When I finally found S.L.A.A. recovery at the age of 30, I was able to let him go. When I finally realized I couldn't be his friend and made a no contact rule, I found a new freedom from obsession. After my spiritual experience in S.L.A.A. in 2001, my career took off and I started sober dating with a dating plan under the guidance of a sponsor.

I chose a healthy sober man to enter into a committed partnership with. We were in a

relationship for 6 months when my character defects got the best of me. My jealousy was difficult for him to handle. It brought up his rage issues that he thought he had dealt with and let go of.

One day while being intimate, I had a PTSD episode. I won't go into detail, but I basically accused him of cheating on me. I didn't say anything because the PTSD episode made me think I was back in 1980 and that my boyfriend was the first boyfriend I had who beat and raped me and whose abuse caused my PTSD. But we both knew that I was thinking he cheated on me. His rage was evident but contained. He didn't do anything to hurt me, but he had to distance himself from me and was unhappy with his reactions.

After 2 days of sobbing on the floor of my apartment, I tried to explain to him what a PTSD episode was for me. I read to him from a self-help book by a leading psychologist. But he broke up with me anyway. He said he wanted to remain friends. I knew that if I remained friends with him, I would eventually start changing things about myself to try to win him back. I didn't

want to erode my self-esteem. I told him not to call me unless he wanted to get back together.

Even though rejection is painful, I knew I had a foundation in recovery and a spiritual connection that would help me weather the storm. I relied on my Higher Power, family, S.L.A.A. fellows, meetings and service work to get me through withdrawal. My biggest fear was acting out or beating myself up over the break-up. But I was able to love myself through it and didn't act out. I learned to see my part, and to trust myself, my Higher Power, and my recovery. The break-up taught me valuable lessons and I committed further to working on my character defects.

After two months, I realized that he wasn't coming back. I started to think about dating again. It was Christmastime and I spent a couple of weeks with my family. When I got back from vacation, I got a voicemail from my ex telling me to call him. The return phone call was a God shot for me. Let me explain. My ex always said he wasn't the marrying type. His longest relationship was with a cat who slept by his side for 21 years. Two years after his cat's death,

my ex was unable to enter a new relationship with another pet even though friends had been recommending it. When I returned the phone call, I got his voicemail. The message said, "I can't take your call right now. If you'd like to leave a message for G-, Bonnie or Clyde, leave it after the beep." He rescued cats! When we talked, he told me he wanted to reconcile. I felt that his ability to open himself up for a new relationship with a pet was a sign that he was ready for the responsibility of a relationship with a human also.

The old me would have been too distrustful to reconcile. Before S.L.A.A., I would have been obsessed with finding out what he had been up to during the 2-month break. I would have been distrustful of his motives for breaking up and for getting back together.

Because of my foundation in S.L.A.A., my strong relationship with my Higher Power and myself, I knew that I didn't have to take the break-up personally. I knew it was just a lesson to help me let go of character defects. I really liked G- as a person. We had a healthy relationship for 6 months. I didn't act out when

we broke up. It didn't demolish my self-worth. I didn't gain 40 pounds or wallow in depression. I wasn't desperate to get back together. I was actually enthusiastic about the possibilities. I didn't get lost in fantasies that we would get married. I looked at the situation realistically and realized that I wanted to build a partnership with a good guy who made me laugh and who I really enjoyed being around.

My sponsor said I seemed to be on solid ground for reconciliation and gave her blessing. She said to take it slow. Wait a week before the first date and no sex before many conversations about reconciliation.

My family really liked G- and were all happy that we were reconciling.

My former sponsees-turned-friends were not happy. They felt he disrespected me when he broke up with me. They still harbored resentment against him. I saw my part in it and didn't think they were right. I set our first date back together for an S.L.A.A. New Year's Eve party. Under protest from my former sponsees, we all went to the party together. I was really

happy that night. Old me would have caved under the weight of disapproval from my friends. I would have either refused my boyfriend or played mind games. I was truthful and communicated with them even though reality has always been uncomfortable for me.

Over time, everyone could see that reconciliation was right for G- and me. 6 months after getting back together, G- joined S.L.A.A. to work on his anorexia and fear of commitment. He sponsored many men and became the chair of our local Intergroup. After 4 ½ years we got married. We've been married 13 ½ years and of service at all levels in all of our 12-Step programs.

I had a friend who always said, "God doesn't give you a relationship when you want one. He gives you a relationship when it will help other people."

I truly believe that reconciling with G- not only made me very happy but has helped many people over the years through our shared service, fellowship, friendship, and sponsorship.

— ANONYMOUS

Share space

One Year Sober and Learning to Accept Feelings

I recently had my first-year anniversary of being sober from my bottom lines in the S.L.A.A program. I started coming to S.L.A.A more than a year ago, and quickly dove in. My willingness to dive in so quickly was born out of my disgust with myself and who I devolved into when feeling triggered, rejected, lonely, hurt, or slighted. I didn't like who I had become, and I knew that the fullness of me was healthier than the behaviors I was engaging in.

I needed help. I needed hope. After the first meeting, I picked someone on the phone list, called them, and asked them to be my sponsor. I was so done with the hamster wheel of my addictive

behaviors and how much destruction they were causing my soul. I was so sick of feeling ashamed in relationships and acting in ways that I didn't want to act but felt compelled to. My sponsor told me that she considered all sponsorship temporary sponsorship, and that if I felt like I needed a change at any point we could talk about it and I could make my own decision about how to proceed.

Even from the very beginning, I could see how so much of my relational patterns had been about fear — fear that things would end, or that ending would mean something was wrong with me. She was giving me choice and the ability to use my own internal

barometer to gauge if I wanted to keep going in the relationship, if it needed to slow down, if I needed something different, or if this was not a good fit. She was also taking care of herself. It was an egalitarian and a compassionate beginning. Because I could quickly identify the behaviors that were disgusting and shameful to me, these became my bottom lines.

Listening to other people in meetings, I began to hear behaviors that resonated as bottom lines and added those. At times, I saw how my bottom lines were too rigid or harsh towards myself and moved them to middle-circle behaviors. Overall, I had clarity around what felt healthy and unhealthy, but things evolved as I learned more from others and reading materials.

I have been working with my sponsor for over a year and am currently on Step 9. When I started the Steps, I started like I start almost everything in life. I said, "Alright. I got this. I'm going to do it. Full speed ahead." After spending almost three months on Step 4, I learned that the process of doing the Steps are an evolutionary process. It's not a

matter of checking boxes next to each step but feeling into them. A family member recently sent me a video of baby finches hatching and the mother bird tending to them. I noticed myself wanting to rush the process, to get to the end of the hatching process because most of it was slow with occasional action. I wanted to see the hatched bird already. I feel like the action of doing the Steps is important.

I have to notice the way I feel about working the present Step and the way I feel after the unexpected rewards of the process of going through the Steps. It's like running. If stretching and cross-training doesn't come before or after, it's probably going to be far more painful. I am trying to go slowly and be gentle with myself. I am trying to accept myself in my feelings. I'm noticing all the fears and judgments and shame I have around harm and resentments.

I'm noticing the relief that comes with writing it down and the tenseness in my belly when I remember relationships where I have caused pain. And I notice the comfort that comes with sharing it with another person. One of the

feelings that was the hardest for me to accept and come to terms with this year was the feeling of loneliness. I can remember the exact moment that I decided to allow loneliness to happen. I wasn't going to date, engage in activities, or vent my way out of feeling lonely. Even though I felt like I had cultivated a strong sense of active solitude and comfort with being alone, I had never confronted the feeling of being lonely. I let myself be lonely. I let myself cry.

My sponsor reminded me that it is just another feeling, in the many feelings we have. Being lonely is okay. A year sober and a little longer in program, I can finally let myself have feelings. I can notice the impulse to engage in a bottom line and let it pass.

I recently got into a new relationship. It is going surprisingly well for both of us. I feel like I have been able to be honest about my own feelings, and that he is able to be honest with me about his feelings. This past weekend, he was having a bad day. I was feeling particularly sad for many different reasons. We let each

other have our feelings, decided to have dinner, but not spend the night.

The next day he sent me a text saying that he appreciated having a space where he could just be himself. It felt like an exhale. It felt like all that work of accepting my own feelings was also service to another person. I felt thankful to myself, my sponsor, and the program. I feel like there are adages about relational health such as being the person that we would want to date or treating ourselves the way we want to be treated. Those adages feel true. I don't think I would have guessed that I had been someone who was not acknowledging and allowing how I felt before really working the Steps and aspects of the program. Doing the Steps allowed me to see my blind spots. I am grateful to the process of the program. I am grateful for the Steps and my sponsor. I feel so incredibly hopeful about how my relationships with myself and others can be. I do not feel compelled to engage in any old behaviors. I feel too much peace now.

— ANA, DENVER, CO

Rejection = God’s Protection and Redirection, and Other Notes on Withdrawal



The depth of pain and the length of the withdrawal is commensurate to the inappropriate priority we’ve given someone else in our life.

When we feel like we lost our “everything,” we feel hopeless and experience intense pain with no end in sight.

When we lose someone who was important to us, but not our “everything,” we still experience pain that lasts longer than we’d like, but we never lose sight of the light at the end of the tunnel. It never again destroys us like the pain of our initial withdrawal in S.L.A.A.

Eventually, pain is inevitable, but agony is optional. At first, we don't have a recovery foundation established so agony isn't optional. But if you stay the course, you will never feel horrific withdrawal again. If you don't work the program, you get to keep doing the same thing and expecting different results again and again and again!

When the desire arises to do something dysfunctional, or to break our bottom lines, we must vividly remember our Step 1 and what withdrawal was like because it is easier to "stay sober" than it is to "get sober."

Our Higher Power, working the Steps and doing everything involved in "working the program," gives us the ability to "right size" everyone and everything in our life and build a solid program of recovery. When everyone in our life is "right sized," then the depth of pain and the length of the withdrawal are bearable.

I got here because of a break-up and experienced unbelievable withdrawal. It was 30 days of the blackest, most painful "dark night of the soul" I could ever imagine. I felt like I'd been sucker-punched in the gut and then

the pain of the punch reverberated through my entire body over and over again! And on top of that, I couldn't stop crying! I was devastated! And I saved every one of those tissues for a very long time as a testimony that I was never going to let my love addiction rule my life like that again. The visual of this huge baggie of used tissues was shocking! (Yes, I eventually threw them away!)

Now, I'm an old pro! In my eight years and five months of sobriety, I've had five sober break-ups and plenty of hurt feelings because I wanted a call back or a second date and didn't get one. Today, I say, "Oh well. God has someone better in store for me," and I move on.

Now I know, there's no such thing as rejection, just God's protection and redirection.

Today, thanks to S.L.A.A., my Higher Power, working the Steps, my sponsor and my fellows, men, dating, relationships and all things sexual are in their proper perspective. I can easily say that I never thought I'd get through withdrawal and today I feel better than ever. It's worth persevering, one day at a time.

— ALICIA IN THE OC

Boundaries in Interpersonal Relating

I was 35 years old before I ever heard the term “boundaries” in the context of interpersonal relating. And in the 9 years since then it’s been a long, sometimes painful process of really learning about boundaries — learning what exactly they are, who they’re for, why I need them, when I need them, how to best communicate them... the whole sticky ball of boundaries wax!

Back when I first heard about boundaries, I was seeing a therapist. I started seeing that therapist hoping they would help me avoid getting fired from a job. I was at risk of losing that job because I was often an emotional wreck at work and was intensely distracted from my job duties, usually engaged in some form of communication with J who I was deeply in love with — or so I thought at the time.

My relationship with J began while on summer vacation. I met J on Saturday evening and by Wednesday I was “in love.” It was intense and exhilarating and fulfilling and crushing and everything I thought I wanted and couldn’t

live without. It was an emotional rollercoaster that I was powerless to get off of.

As the rollercoaster continued over the next several months, I came to see undeniable evidence that J may have an undiagnosed case of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

All of the literature on this disorder suggested that my best course of action was to leave the relationship. But I was so hooked on the highs, that was the last thing I could think about doing.

The effort I was putting into hanging on to that relationship — trying to make it work, trying to cope with the lows, trying to twist myself into the knots J seemed to need — was more than I had put into either of my two short-lived, failed marriages.

My devotion to the relationship was clearly a sign that it was meant to be! If only I could better manage the lows, better understand NPD, and be the superhuman I so often fool myself into believing I can be.

My tenacity in this relationship earned me a recurrence of major depression

with serious and frightening recurrent suicidal impulses. That was a concern that I brought to my therapist, but of course my goals were to not get fired and to get educated and skilled enough to deal with J's NPD.

Thankfully, instead of helping me toward those goals, my therapist helped me toward the goals of improved self-worth and the ability to set and maintain boundaries.

That therapist, like so many before and since, helped me to get out of the scrape that was the nightmare of the relationship I found myself in at the time.

It wasn't until about 3 years ago, when I found S.L.A.A., that I was able to begin to see that I had been using therapy and other strategies as a band-aid, over and over again, to get myself out of the current jam, rather than seeing and addressing a whole life pattern of love addiction and abuse of sex as a bargaining chip for getting love.

In recovery from love addiction I have learned so much more about boundaries. Compared to my initial introduction to boundaries 9 years ago, these last 3 years have been like advanced graduate studies!

Some of the toughest lessons I've learned about boundaries include:

1) Learning that they're for me to abide by, not for me to blame, shame and punish others for failing to recognize or abide by — they are neither rules for me to unilaterally establish and enforce upon others, nor hidden landmines for others to live in fear of inadvertently them setting off;

2) Learning that I am, and must be, responsible for communicating my boundaries to others — even when I fear that doing so will result in conflict or might bring about the end of my relationship/friendship/association with the other person;

3) Learning that boundaries come in not just one form, but two forms — *both* external and internal.

External boundaries were the first form I learned about and, for me, were the easiest to master (to the degree that I've "mastered" them so far, anyway). External boundaries guide me in deciding what external situations and behaviors of others I will allow myself to be — or continue to be — subject to.

Internal boundaries have been a lot more difficult for me to grasp, and I still am learning

to master them. Internal boundaries guide me in two ways: deciding what behaviors of my own to subject others to and deciding how I will allow the words and actions of others to affect me internally. This second aspect of internal boundaries seems especially challenging for me, as I continue my work to un-learn unhelpful reactions such as taking things personally and rushing to self-centered (usually fear-based) conclusions about how another person's words/behaviors were intentionally hurtful/harmful.

In S.L.A.A., even without yet venturing into any attempt at sober dating, I've received

many opportunities to learn about boundaries and put that learning into practice. From sharing with other recovering sex and love addicts in the rooms, to working with program friends and recovery partners in outreach calls, to working with my sponsors, and to working with other trusted servants in service to the fellowship, each aspect of my program affords me new and different opportunities to strengthen my knowledge and skill with boundaries.

My life is vastly different in S.L.A.A. and I am so grateful for that. In a very real way, S.L.A.A. is actively saving my life, one day at a time.

— ANONYMOUS



The Power of Change

Editor's note: This is one S.L.A.A. member's concept of a Higher Power. Step 3 says "God as we understood God." S.L.A.A. has no outside affiliations.

We don't really have a step in the 12 Steps that says, "We have to change ourselves." And some of us have spent what seems to have been too much time as our old selves, not yet knowing who we wanted to become and having only an indefinite, elusive vision of who that might be. So, we questioned how much progress we were making.

We are told in the program and recite by memory our request that "God grant me the COURAGE to change the things I can." But our old selves cannot do this. So, we come to meetings and hope by osmosis that change will happen. Not even really thinking about a "God."

What's more, there are atheists among us wondering why they are in a spiritual fellowship talking about God. "Are these people Jesus freaks — about to thump me with the Bible and ask me to repent? All I want to do is change who I am." But ironically the true definition of "repent" is "to change." We often hear shares in the Fellowship about how

hard it is to turn over "my life and my will" to a Higher Power as required in the Third Step. But if I resist this step and just "think it," I lose out knowing and feeling the real power of a Higher Power — the power of change.

To be successful in the 3rd Step, I had to have faith and hope. I had to believe. If I just "thought" it, that Power was an illusion I could only talk about. I couldn't enter into that Power and experience the peace and goodness and love necessary to transform my life.

I found that in order to believe in a Higher Power, I had to transform my mind. I had to acknowledge the weakness and failures of my mind. And I had to train my mind to be "less." So, I had to make a deal with my mind to allow room up there for a Higher Power. And I expected those roommates would have some squabbles. The main problem with my mind was the idea of sharing, and even relinquishing control. And for a narcissistic, self-indulgent, controlling addict, this meant I was about to walk off a cliff

and foolishly expect something to be there to save me. Yet this is exactly what belief, faith, and hope require. But my mind, if still in control, could not allow that. So, what was the answer? Oh! Its in the 4th Step. I guess the steps are out of order. Lol. The Fourth Step requires to be honest, open, and willing. But these qualities are toxic to the addict! How could I possibly break through the defensive, protective, and isolating lattice work built up around me. These walls have been my strength and hope for years. But, yes, they have failed me. Or I wouldn't be in these rooms.

Honesty. What is that? I know how to lie. And it is hard for me to give up truths I have developed over time in my addicted mind — so-called truths even from childhood that may actually serve as a lie to prevent me from achieving the peace and love and goodness I truly seek. My mind keeps those truths trapped inside the walls. They feed my insecurities, fears, and shame. My mind is a steel trap and can argue all day long that those truths are not lies! But they bring me no peace.

So, I need a new definition of honesty. Not one based in the past but one that frees the old me to be a new me, not a me created or defended by my

mind. And THAT is the reason I need a Higher Power to believe in, one that can help me achieve a new me. So, move over mind, there's a new sheriff coming to town!

Now I have a real chance to be open and willing, to believe and accept the experience, strength, and hope of my Higher Power. All I had to do was learn how to access that power. And with my mind now sulking in the corner with its doubts, fears, and resentments, I have a chance! I have a chance to explore faith and hope in God to find the tools I need for a new me. Yes. The Fourth Step is designed to accomplish this — to put a check on our unreliable mind, to explore our past honestly, to be open to the miracles available through belief in a Higher Power, and to truly know and count on your Higher Power to get you through the tough times, even with joy! This has been true for me. And I am truly grateful. I'm not just saying I am grateful that I have believed and accepted the wisdom, power and will of my Higher Power to order my life. And by knowing Him, reading His Word, and accepting His Son, Jesus, as my savior, I have been truly transformed. I am changed! I invite you to take this step as well.

— MIKE C. TUCSON, AZ

Light One Candle...Watch It Glow



In mid-April, the GDVI Inspiration Line reached an incredible landmark: 400,000 phone calls. Every single call is important, representing a recovering addict looking for a voice to hear, a person who works their program daily by calling, a newcomer to the program, or someone just holding on who needs a lifeline.

It is significant to note that the Inspiration Line only began to tally numbers in

2008. The current total represents 12 years of calls. It has been estimated that there were likely an additional 100,000 calls prior to the numbers being chronicled, for a total of over 500,000 calls in the history of the Inspiration Line.

A little bit of history helps with understanding the miracle of what the Inspiration Line has become: one addict, Michael S., came home from a meeting in 1988 after hearing a

young man share that he spent hundreds of dollars on phone sex instead of feeding his family. The young man's share deeply troubled Michael, as he was unable to sleep that night. Sometime in the middle of the night, Michael had a vision, an idea, a spiritual awakening. Call it what you wish, but something happened that night. In the morning, Michael realized that there had to be a way to create a safe number for people to call, and in that moment, the genesis of the Inspiration Line was born. For years, the Inspiration Line was what today would be considered an antiquated tape answering machine in the basement of Michael's house. There were only two volunteers at that point, but the messages were changed daily. Slowly and surely, word began to spread.

Today, the Inspiration Line is supported by a team of over 20 volunteers across the United States and even Canada. Calls come from all

over the globe to hear a 6-minute message of hope and recovery. Additionally, an Inspirational Story Line with a 20-minute message was founded 2 1/2 years ago; it receives over 200 calls per week. Today, the Inspiration Line averages 200 calls per day! The Inspiration Line has become a model for other Intergroups, as England has recently found its own Inspiration Line. We are indeed grateful to the Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup for their continued support of both lines.

The message of this anniversary is that one single recovering addict can engage in a small act of service, and the power of recovery is so contagious and powerful, it can impact hundreds, thousands, and even hundreds of thousands of other addicts who want to recover.

Light one candle... watch it glow!

— MARK A.

THE INSPIRATION LINE

Your 24-Hour Sponsor

215-574-2120

S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
7. We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.
12. We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.



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