

theJournal

A red airplane wing is visible in the upper right corner, flying over a vast, snow-covered mountain range. The sky is a clear, deep blue. The mountains are rugged and covered in snow, with some rocky outcrops visible. The overall scene is bright and high-contrast.

Issue # 199

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Fun in Dating

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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Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day for this issue is “Is it possible for an S.L.A.A. member to get past fear and have fun in dating without acting out?”

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 #200 – Jan/Feb – “Acting as if.” – “What does “acting as if” mean to you? How have you used it and how does doing this help your recovery program?” Deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2022. And #201 – March/April - Different Sexual Cycles - “From the standpoint of shared vulnerability, it was no longer a matter of ‘Who’s right?’ or ‘Whose ‘rhythm’ is more reasonable?’ but, rather, “How, given the unavoidable nature of this conflict, can we negotiate around it constructively?” ... In some ways our lives as sober sex and love addicts had been simpler before partnership, because having no sex had been easier to handle than working this issue out with another.” Page 151, The S.L.A.A. Basic Text- “How do you deal with a partner’s different timeframe (less or more sexual desire) and gain intimacy instead of creating distance?” – Deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2023. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

“Is it possible for an S.L.A.A. member to get past fear and have fun in dating without acting out?”

Question of the day

Heureusement, oui! Au début c'était difficile parce que j'étais submergée de peur et tout pouvait me faire flancher. Petit à petit, j'ai avancé dans ma sobriété et la peur s'est naturellement dissipée, j'avais plus confiance en ma Puissance supérieure et ai eu envie d'essayer le rencontre sobre. Evidemment, mes vieux schémas reviennent de temps à autre, mais je me rends compte beaucoup plus vite et utilise mes outils (littérature, marraine, réunions) rapidement. Je ne suis pas seule et mes amis du programme me le rappellent dès que je décroche le téléphone. Merci à tous pour votre présence dans ce program.

Fortunately, yes! At the beginning, it was hard because I was overcome with fear and anything could throw me off. Slowly, I moved forward in my recovery and fear gave way to trust in my Higher Power and I wanted to try sober dating. Of course, my old patterns come back from time to time, but I realize it a lot faster and use my tools (literature, sponsor, meetings) quickly. I am not alone and my program friends remind me of it as soon as I pick up the phone. Thank you all for your presence in this program.

— KELLY-JOY J., MONTREAL

I find dating in recovery— with sponsor support and a dating group — is safe and sober. It can be fun when I focus on meeting interesting people. I still experience a lot of fear. What if I never find someone? What if I lost my chance? What if I'm too fill-in-the-blank? My God has the answers to those questions; I don't. I only know that if I don't try to relax and have fun, I'll have to give up. And I don't want to give up on my dreams.

— V.V., CALIFORNIA

Not Taking Anything Too Personally



PHOTO BY ANONYMOUS, POLAND

Yes! I think the key for me to make dating, especially online dating, more fun and easy, is to have really good

boundaries. I found the more specific I get in my online profile, I already weed out people that wouldn't be a match. I have a time limit for the time I spend on a dating app in a day. I keep first dates light and polite. Location is important to me, so I set up all dates within a few miles of my neighborhood. That way I know if a potential match is willing to drive out to me. If he's not, then it's not a match. I don't spend more than an hour on a first date and typically only do coffee or a light drink during the day. That way if it turns out that I don't really like to spend time with this person, I haven't really gone too far out of my way, and I never see it as a waste of time. I try to really get to know that person and see who they really are and just be myself. I feel like I have to go on a lot of first dates before I meet someone that I can go on a second date with.

I don't always follow the rules of my dating plan. I know myself and I know where I can stretch the boundaries a little bit without getting hurt. I don't find that I get triggered nearly as much anymore, even by the

people that I'm really interested in because I am dating multiple people at the same time which I feel helps a lot to not obsess over just one.

At the end of the day, I know I'm not in control of anything, God is, and I can't change anyone. I have faith that what's for me will not pass me by. I trust in my Higher Power's plan for me, and I know it will be perfect for me. Maybe it won't be my plan, but I know Theirs is better.

I don't take anything too personally or too seriously. I consider dating a study in humanity. I stay curious and live a full life enjoying time with friends and hobbies.

I don't overwhelm myself with dating, I see it as another interesting side hobby and if I need a break from it, I just take a break. Through dating I have learned so much about myself, communication and relationships just by being open to what HP puts in my path.

If I stay true to myself and my needs and wants, I feel that dating can actually be fun and not feel too much like work!

— ANONYMOUS

Sober Dating Can Be Fun

It is hard to have fun dating when you first start dating in a sober way. For me, it felt like learning how to walk again. I was consumed with fear of rejection and awkwardness. The honest truth is that, for me, sober dating was not fun. It was a spiritual practice. And regardless of whether or not the person I dated liked me, or I liked the person I dated, I felt closer to God at the end of the date.

Moreover, I would check in with my fellows in S.L.A.A. and my sponsor, and I would also feel closer to them. Most of all, I felt closer to the person I wanted to be-someone who was free from a paralyzing fear of rejection or obsession with sex and love. There was a lot of anxiety when I dated because I knew I had to take things slowly and keep paying attention to my feelings.

One of the worst parts about my love addiction was that it would blind me to how I felt and whether a person was

a good fit for me. Rather, in my love addiction, I would only think about "what was right for the other person" and "how to impress or please them." Now, I had to slow down and experience a date for myself: Was the person I was with considerate to those around us or dismissive? Were they present in our conversation or just trying to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear? Did they share similar values to me?

None of this inner work was fun. But neither was suffering the heartbreak and humiliation that staying in my disease brought. Eventually, having fun came, and the partner I have been with for the past eight months brings a lot of joy and laughter into my life. But I don't think I would have found any of these gifts without accepting that dating in sobriety was going to be hard before it was going to be fun.

— LIZ, BALTIMORE, MD

A Sense of Safety

The Big Book of A.A. says that it is the “great obsession” of every alcoholic that somehow, someday they will be able to “control and enjoy” their drinking, “to drink like other people.” As an active sex and love addict, I also had a great obsession, that somehow, someday I would be able to control and enjoy my acting out, and that I would be able to “date like other people.”

Writing my Fourth Step inventory, however, showed me that I simply can’t date like other people. The same sort of dating behaviors that I see non-addicts engage in with relative impunity, like casual sex or a whirlwind romance, when I looked at my inventory, had only ever led me down a dark and dangerous path, into progressively more and more self-destructive behaviors and toxic relationships. It was clear that I couldn’t risk dating in the same ways that I used to.

Thankfully, I had a wonderful sponsor who helped me write a very thorough dating plan, with guidelines for almost every scenario. While I was afraid that all those “rules”

would feel restricting, I was surprised to find that they were actually incredibly comforting. Having those guidelines in place gave me a sense of safety, knowing that, as long as I just followed them, they would protect me from my old behaviors, from ever going down that dark path ever again.

Even more surprising, though, was the discovery that, not only did my dating plan protect me from my acting out, but it also protected me from my own anorexia. Because my dating plan made me go so slow in dating, it ensured that I never got too overwhelmed by too much intimacy too fast. So even though I would often get scared and feel like I needed to run away, I knew that as long as I just stuck to my plan, there would be plenty of time and space to just feel those feelings and let them pass. I may have wanted to run from intimacy many times, but my dating plan has made it so that I don’t have to.

However, all of that is not to say that sober dating has always been easy or fun. It’s

just been *different*. Sober dating, for me, has been different from the way I used to date and different from the ways that I see non-addicts date. Sometimes, it can be incredibly challenging. But sometimes, it actually has been fun (although it's certainly a different kind of fun). And sometimes, it has been the most amazing, beautiful, even spiritual experience, and has brought me to a place of greater trust and faith in my higher power and of greater love and compassion for myself and others.

Let me give some examples of the way that sober dating has been different. The first thing that I noticed was that there were just way fewer dates. I didn't use any dating apps for my first year of sober dating, because I feared they'd be too triggering, so I only went on dates with people I met in person. Which meant that I only had a handful of dates. And even when I did eventually try out the apps, I found that my new, much higher standards were eliminating the vast majority of people before we ever even got going. Plus, my newfound self-esteem, honesty, and clarity didn't necessarily

appeal to a lot of people. Most people were still interested in playing the games that I was no longer down for. So, my dates were somewhat few and far between, which was really hard. In that way, sober dating seemed "worse" than the way I used to do it. But what was a million times *better* was the quality of the dates I did go on! I was meeting people who were far more kind, present, and available than I had ever experienced before. And if I did meet someone who wasn't, I could recognize it right away.

Which brings me to another way that sober dating was different, and much more difficult, than the way I used to do it. I had to learn to say "no." In the past, I had always liked being pursued, using other people to fuel my ego, because I had such low self-esteem. But in sober dating, when I discovered that someone was unavailable or not a good match, it didn't matter how much they liked me, I had to let them go. Wow, that was really hard. I had to face all my fears, that no one else would ever like me, that this was my last chance, and on and on. But here's the part where it's actually way better than the way I used to do it: saying no

to what doesn't work for me felt great! It was the most amazing self-esteem booster. And each time I did it, it got easier and easier. And the more I said no to what I didn't want, the closer I started to get to what I did want.

So, what about fun? Is it possible to have fun while sober dating? Well, in my experience, yes and no. I've definitely had fun, but it's just a different kind of fun. Gone are the dates that end (or start!) with wild sex with someone I barely know. That kind of "fun" is off the menu for good. Same goes for sexy flirting, suggestive innuendos, or instant intimacy with someone I've just met. That stuff might be fine for other people, but it's not for me, not anymore. But in its place, I've discovered a very sweet kind of innocent fun that I never knew existed. Because my dating plan requires the first several dates to be short, in public, and in the daytime, I've had to

find things to do that I never would have even considered for a date before. Like going for a walk in a park, going mini golfing, or getting an ice cream together. The kinds of things that I imagine teenagers would have done on a date 75 years ago. It's kind of cheesy, but I've also found that I really enjoy the innocent sweetness of it all. It feels almost like I'm getting to do my adolescence over again.

So, yeah, it's definitely not like the way dating used to be, and it's not "dating like other people." In many ways, it's been a lot harder. But I've also found it to be a lot more rewarding, more satisfying, and far more self-esteem building. I won't say it's more fun, but I will say that it's just a different kind of fun. And I've been in a new relationship for going on nine months now, and we have tons of a fun! Sweet, funny, delightful fun.

— M

Changing My Thinking



PHOTO BY ANONYMOUS, POLAND

I met this guy on a dating app and we found out that we both live right near the Lake Hollywood reservoir. We made a plan to go on a hike on our first date and to walk around the lake. I was very excited about that. But then I ended up going to a doctor's appointment because of a problem with my ankle. I

found out that I have to wear this boot to protect my ankle. And so, I contacted the prospective date and said, "Would you mind if instead of going on a hike around the lake, we go to an event at the Ford theater?" And so, with this big clunky boot, I walked over to meet this guy. I saw him standing at the box office

and as I approached, I noticed he doesn't seem as tall as he indicated in his online profile. I have a dating plan and my dating plan does not allow me to walk away from something. I actually have to walk forward and walk through it. And just because somebody has a profile doesn't mean that I have to believe everything on the profile. My dating plan means I need to go out there and investigate and find out if what they say is true. I get to make my own profile for them, so to speak. As I walked up to him, I had this little thought, "Oh, he said he was 5'10" on his dating app. He doesn't look like he's 5'10." So, I get that information and I stick it on this little shelf at the bottom of my brain stem. And then I walk up to him. I'm kind and gracious and we greet each other. We go in and we have food and we're laughing. I'm enjoying his company.

And then I notice myself during the date, lifting that information off that little shelf and then dusting underneath it and putting it back on that shelf and continuing with the date. I was sitting next to him in the movie and I could smell the beer on his breath and I

was fantasizing about kissing him. But I kept dusting that shelf. My dating plan indicates that I cannot ask for a second date while I'm on the first date. My dating plan says that I have to go away from the date and journal about the date and then identify any flags on the date that are revealed to me. But I should wait to invite the person on another date until after I do that journaling.

But I also know myself enough and I kept looking at this information on the shelf and I knew that if I didn't actually ask him on a second date while I was on that first date that information would be the stuff that I reflected upon later and I probably wouldn't ever ask him on another date. I recognize that my dating plan is not commandments carved in stone.

It is just a plan, and I can alter my dating plan. So, during the date, I had all these conversations with myself in my head about my dating plan and I chose to invite him on another date while I was on the first date. As we left the Ford theater, I gave him a hug and I said, "I would really enjoy seeing you again. Would that be okay?" And he said, "Yes." I

said, "Great. I'll be in contact." We both went our separate ways. I plodded home on my leg brace. I got to my apartment and went to bed. In the middle of the night, I woke up to use the restroom. I had taken the brace off because I don't wear it while I'm sleeping. I got to the bathroom and as I was standing there at the toilet, I stumbled and re-sprained my ankle. I was frustrated and my ankle hurt. I got back to my bed, and I was laying there.

My ankle was throbbing. I said to myself, "Okay that was stupid." I was reflecting upon what the doctor said. He said I must wear this leg brace at all times except when I'm sleeping or showering. So, in the morning, I called my program wife.

She had broken her ankle in February. I said to her, "Hey Suzanne, when you were wearing that ankle brace, did you use it to go to the restroom? And she said "Of

course, you have to wear it all the time. You have to wear it except when you're in bed or showering." I responded, "Oh, but it's such a hassle to put that thing on because it's not just putting the leg brace on, you also have to put the shoe on the other foot that lifts you up. And then it dawned on me suddenly that I am two inches taller when I'm wearing this leg brace. I realized that the information that I filed onto that shelf at the bottom of my brain stem was not actually the truth. It was my perception and upon further investigation I realized he was telling the truth about his height on his profile. When I use the tools of the program and don't act on my first thought, I can actually examine my thinking. And I'm grateful for that because I didn't write him off when I thought he was lying. I asked for a second date and we're going on our second date this afternoon. Thanks.

— GLEN S13

Fun in Sober Dating: the ABM Meeting

Editor's Note: At the 2022 Annual Business Meeting in Sacramento, California, the Conference Journal Committee breakout session was turned into a meeting to get content for the Journal. The Journal editor, Lisa C., interviewed one of the delegates (Rachel) about the theme for this issue, "Fun in Sober Dating." Afterward, everyone in the room shared on the topic for three minutes. It was such a great experience! The transcript of that meeting is below.

LISA: Thank you for doing this. What is your sobriety date?

RACHEL: My name is Rachel, and I'm a sex, love, and fantasy addict. My sobriety date is August the third, 2018. So, I just celebrated four years in this program. (Everyone in the room applauds.)

LISA: Can you tell us a little bit of your journey in S.L.A.A., and what your bottom lines are?

RACHEL: Sure. So, one of

my bottom lines I got from hearing someone else's bottom lines.

When I heard it, I was like "that's terrifying and I need it." It's "no lying to be liked, or to avoid conflict."

And my bottom lines have changed since I came in: no self-harm, no self-endangerment, no exhibitionism, and I didn't have that last one when I came in. My disease morphed while I was on Step Two, and I got another bottom line.

LISA: Thank you. How did you prepare yourself to date sober, for example, Steps, sponsor's help, anything you did to prepare?

RACHEL: So my sponsor agreed to clear me to date after Step Five, and I was not eager to start dating. And I didn't want to do it. I was scared. And then she said, "Well, so we'll work on your dating plan, and then, after you have your first sponsee, then you may start dating."

So that helped, actually, to

have to have a sponsee. It's a way that the program works - to keep us in connection with the program, to keep us in connection with the Steps.

And so, I made a dating plan, and I don't know if this happens to other people- but I'm pretty consistently behind my dating plan. I dated someone for four months, and we never kissed. This person was incredibly patient with me.

There were a series of questions to answer in my dating plan.

What kind of red flags have been an issue for me before?

What red flags have I ignored in another person?

What red flags do I exhibit when I'm on the road to trouble?

And how do I intend to maintain my sobriety while dating?

If I notice that I am not going to meetings or if I notice that I'm not doing as much self-care, or even thought patterns like, am I obsessing a lot about how I look, or something? Am I not reaching out to my sponsor? Am I not journaling or doing Step work? Am I not taking time to pray or meditate? Am I not doing my spiritual maintenance? Am I not doing top lines? If I start letting go of top lines, I know I'm in trou-

ble.

LISA: How long were you sober when you started dating?

RACHEL: I think about a year and a half, maybe two years into the program.

When I got a sponsee. And I still have that sponsee. Many have come and gone.

I have a total of four sponsees right now, and sponsorship is just honestly the most beautiful relationship in my life right now. I have never loved anybody so much. I love my sponsees.

LISA: Do you feel confident in your ability to stay spiritually centered on dates? If so, how did you get there? If not, what steps do you take to allow trust in yourself and a Higher Power?

RACHEL: That is a really good question.

Staying spiritually centered on dates. Staying centered in any way on dates is hard for me.

I tend to just leave my body. Before the date, it helps me to pray and meditate, and to remind myself that I'm just here to spend time with a human being because my addict brain makes much of it. It also helps me when I book end a date (call fellows before and after the date).

If I'm nervous, it helps to

remember that I'm just having fun.

Just getting sober in this program wasn't really enough for me to know how to be authentic in my life.

I'm a hider. I hide and perform. And I want to make you like me.

I just want everyone to like me. I've actually had to take classes to learn how to communicate what's even really happening for me, how to talk about my feelings, how to express what I want, and what I don't want. The Step work helped me to know who I was.

I was so lost when I came here. Even after nine years in another fellowship, there was still so much of me that was missing, so much of me that just wanted to please more than I wanted to be encountered, and to be seen and known, and so that's my brand of anorexia. I also learned that the reason relationships didn't work before recovery was because there was no one here for another person to encounter.

I was so busy shape-shifting and assessing what the other person wanted me to be and trying to be it, that it was like there was no one here.

So, in this program, and with the help of some actual

classes, I have integrity today.

If someone goes on a date with me there's someone to encounter here, there are things that I like and don't like.

There are things that I'm willing to do and not willing to do, and much of that is laid out in my dating plan.

I chose to follow the dating plan as a means of surrender. The dating plan is a way of surrendering to a Higher Power by making that more important than whatever the reaction of the person in front of me has to the dating plan. I figure the right person will be OK with me taking up just a little bit of space. And the dating plan helps me trust that that I've got myself. Sober dating is a huge living amends to myself because all of my acting out behavior was a way of abandoning and devaluing myself. By using a dating plan, I actionably value myself by saying yes, by saying no.

I actionably care for myself by having made a decision ahead of time what I'm willing to do and what I'm not willing to do. And sticking to that is a way of showing myself that I care about myself.

So, it's a super important part of my program and a super challenging part.

LISA: I had trouble setting

boundaries, and I actually hallucinated before my first date with my now husband. Before the date it was like the world was dark - my qualifier was stalking me, and I thought I had to call the police ten minutes before the date. And then I did a fear inventory, called my sponsor, called my fellows and talked to my neighbors, and found out that what I was thinking was just paranoid and not real. And then I went on the date with him and talked to him in a warm atmosphere. I had coffee with him and just felt like the world was so beautiful and it opened up. And after the date the world was so bright it was two different worlds.

What blocks you from having fun on dates and how have you overcome this?

RACHEL: What blocks me from having fun on dates is being in my head, just overthinking it and making assumptions about another person.

That's like a natural thing that humans do to keep ourselves safe.

But it's a bit lizard-brain and it's not serving me in this area of my life.

What helps me is to breathe, to get centered before

I go, to practice curiosity, even to think of some questions to ask my date ahead of time. And another thing I need to do is to not host the whole date.

I need to sit back and see what they bring to the table. I don't have to curate their entire experience.

I practice receiving a little bit on a date and it's uncomfortable. I think that's the reason why I totally get that someone would hallucinate before a date because you're going into the unknown. Of course, your brain is going to try to make you unbalanced. But because it's so unknown that makes it really uncomfortable.

And just because it's uncomfortable doesn't mean I'm doing it wrong, it just means maybe I'm doing something new.

My whole goal in sober dating is just to have a new experience. If it feels like skiing all my cues are being read and it feels just like too much flowing and there's no awkwardness, I'm probably in a pattern at this point. If there's a little bit of awkwardness, if there is a point where, I say "no" or I say something that doesn't go over well, that's an opportunity for me to see, "Well, how does 'no' go?"

Is there going to be room for me in this person's world?

I try to actually find out early on how "no" goes over with them. It's not like I'm testing them.

But it is like that's a great way to find out if there's room for me here, because I didn't ask for room for myself in the past but now, I do.

LISA: Thank you. Please describe any particular dates that have been good, sober fun.

RACHEL: Hmm, yeah. I went out with someone who took me ice skating and he drove me there in a Tesla.

Getting there was fun and ice skating was fun. I've gone on a date where it was a picnic in the park, just daytime stuff. I'm a pretty fun girl. It's not really that hard for me to have fun.

LISA: Well, I was thinking my dates before S.L.A.A. were always one date, sleep with the person, like nothing in between- don't get to know the person, don't get to know if they're going to leave you. But with S.L.A.A. that way of dating was like, how do you turn off your thoughts and really be present with the person you're on a date with? I was able to do

that because I had a dating plan that says, "I'm not going to sleep with this guy, period."

I had my boundaries. My sponsor gave me my dating plan that said dates were during the day, for one hour. That was my boundary to follow.

Well, I would like to thank you very much for doing this for *the Journal*, and I really appreciate you.

Three minute shares

I'm, Gil. I'm a love addict, co-dependent, and sex addict.

I really like this topic of sober dating. For me, I first started sober dating after I made my amends in Step Nine. I wasn't ready to date either. I was getting used to living alone and enjoying the company of Gil.

And Gil is a pretty swell person.

Dating was a surprise to me. The two things I learned in sober dating and being spiritual while dating was, first, that the dating plan is a way for me to tell myself what I actually want, instead of concentrating on whether or not I am impressing another person.

So that's one. And then the second thing is that not all

dates are going to be great.

I don't think even a bad date is a bad date, because what good dates used to mean to me is a completely different version of what it is now. Even if I feel like the guy's not the right fit for me, dates are kind of like outreach calls, because if it's a first date, it's a coffee date and I'm sitting there with the person and I'm getting to know them and I'm also learning about myself. If the guy is like super handsome it's like, how am I acting around this person? Sober dating is a practice in recovery.

I don't ever think I've wasted my time with anybody.

I thank you, Rachel, for your lead.

I'm Angus and I'm a sex and love addict. I'll start by saying that I'm in a relationship almost three years.

And my dating history in recovery was checkered.

It wasn't the perfect story, like I slipped a bit. I had to really relearn or learn to do sober dating from quite a low level. I would go on my first dates kind of pretty ecstatic that I was going on the date because I'd get back to my addiction basically.

And when I didn't because I was following a dating plan and I wasn't having sex on the first date or they weren't right or I didn't fancy them, I felt really low like it was just difficult. So, there were times when I just didn't want to feel like that.

Gradually I developed the willingness to work a sober dating plan and kind of do things differently because I was getting the same result. And I was kind of coming back to my sponsor and he was like I'm turning into a nurse you know. It talks about it in the Big Book about sponsors are not a nurse for a patient spree.

My sponsor said, "I'm turning into your nurse a bit. I'm just saying now, I'm not saying anything, but just to make you aware. I'm like okay, I need to be willing to change. I'm not willing.

And so, I decided to be willing, and decided to do it differently. And it was very uncomfortable, but I did it.

Gradually it got better, and gradually I could go on dates and not act out, not want to act out, and just see it as an opportunity to get to know someone, to get information about the

person. I could find out if we were compatible or not. With regards to fun, you can't have fun with everyone. I can't have lunch at every table, and it can't be so much fun with everyone, because I'm not that much fun.

You know, I'm fairly fun, the funny guy in the room. So, if I connect with people, we can kind of have what we call in England, banter.

So, I think, for me having fun is about recognizing where I've got a similar sense of humor to someone and giving myself space to get to know someone, so we can kind of see if we've got a similar sense of humor. With my girlfriend it was gradually trusting each other and gradually getting to know each other.

And then it was just fun, because we had a similar sense of humor, and we could just kind of riff off each other.

I'd say also just wrapping up, that it was good to plan it so it's not just going to coffee every day. I put a bit of planning into it, so we went to the arcade, we went bowling and to a gig. We gradually did stuff to enable certain conditions for us to have fun rather than just resting on our laurels.

Thanks for listening.

I'm Lauren, addict. Sex and love addiction and sober dating, for me, made me feel like an addict who was sticking her hand back in the cookie jar, because I can act out in addiction with anything. I think sober dating, because I'm still doing it, has been such an incredibly humbling experience. It brings out that emotional sobriety side of my addiction.

With a substance addiction I can just not engage with it again. But with sex and love addiction I've got to learn to have a healthier relationship. When I first started dating in recovery, it was really difficult. If there was one thing I could tell my younger self, it would be to slow down.

You don't have to do this all yesterday. I got into a relationship quite quickly after sober dating, and it spiraled out of control very quickly, and ended quite catastrophically, actually at Christmas last year. I don't know if I want to go into the specifics around that.

But just to say that this illness can be really, really debilitating. My experience with sober dating isn't just going out doing fun things like going to

arcades.

For me, it was literally that I went back in, fell straight back, headfirst, into a situation that became very unmanageable quite quickly because I was in my ego at the end of the day.

I was thinking I knew how to do this because I've been sober. I've done all my Twelve Steps. I've got this s**t covered, excuse my language. I thought that because I'd worked the Steps that I'd know how to date. It turns out that I have moments where my Higher Power either really loves me or they really hate me because it was like I almost got schooled in all of the things that are my downfall. In a way, it helped me to see my patterns.

That experience helped me to see that through this very unmanageable situation, I saw exactly where my blind spots were. And I think that is the joy and the blessing and the curse inherent in sober dating, because it has shown me that I've got some work to do, that I don't get to come straight out of the gates and have the happy ending with the white picket fence and the Labrador. That's not how this is going to work for me. Actually, I'm grateful for that now.

But it's definitely been an incredibly painful process for me. My hope is that by my being able to share about this stuff, that it makes it less so for someone else. If there is anything I can say to others, it is to slow down. It doesn't have to go so fast. And I'll leave it there. Thanks for letting me share.

Hi everybody. I'm Mira, a sex and love addict. I am very new at dating. In my past life, I would have said I haven't had any successful dates so far. But the fact is, I have because I haven't acted out on any of my dates. Now I'm just trying to think about how to bring fun into dates. In the old days, fun would mean something very different. But for me now, fun is having my girlfriends from my office help me pick out clothes to wear. We decide my outfits together, go shopping, and do the preparation together.

I feel really taken care of because I cannot dress myself. My friends helped me buy all of my dresses for this year's annual business meeting. And they were saying, "Look, if you're standing up you need to

have the full dress,” because they know I wear really scruffy jeans. They were like, “Please don't take the jeans.” But that's the safety. I know my girlfriends and I think I look nice.

So, then it's great I don't have to worry about how I look. And I always pick a date that I think if the guy doesn't show up or he's horrible I will enjoy. I can give an example where I picked this exhibition. I think it was called Lux. It was loads of beautiful different light displays like roses would bloom on LED. And you could walk in a room and there was like a fake waterfall. Light would play all over you. And it's so lucky I chose that because I think the guy that turned up was on cocaine. He went to the bathroom six times.

And he was sniffing throughout the date. And there was one room which was like a very dark room and it was an ocean so it would light up and the waves would go over you. He said, “Oh, I think I'm having a flash back. I need to leave.”

I guess at the time I didn't see the fun in it. But I should have known because on our first date he described seeing God during lockdown represented by a giant white albino

snake. But like I say I'm learning. My favorite things to do on dates are like go for a walk in nature where there's really beautiful things to look at. So, if a conversation is awkward or boring you can say, “Oh, look at this fountain,” or “Oh, look at this cute mural,” or something. I really love games and gaming. So, if I can invite somebody who'll come to a board game cafe and they're up for it, that can be sober as well because if you have dice and you're moving a thing you don't need a beer. And I'll have fun and can be sober in the moment and not worry about people needing to have wine or sit in a pub. I'm really trying and having fun. Let's hope the fun doesn't continue too long because I would like to find my forever game companion.

Thank you.

Hi, I'm Nathan, sex and love addict. Well, my sober dating was done so imperfectly. My first try at it, I was already three and a half years in program. No one had really talked about a dating plan with me yet. That first try ended up in a marriage. That's the truth. And that marriage ended up burning to the ground. But that im-

perfect dating led to my awakening in S.L.A.A. It put me in so much pain that I wanted to die.

That led to the realization that I couldn't do this one more time. It led me to a deeper level of sobriety and finding out that I really had to learn to love myself before I could put myself back out there to start dating. That was part of the problem: who was going to love me if I couldn't love myself?

It's like I couldn't even look in the mirror and like myself. Why would anyone love me? And then I was just destroying these relationships as they were coming. And when I finally got a dating plan in place the second time, there were ups and downs.

There was lots of fun and I learned to just have fun and not be on an interview, to just see if I can enjoy this person. I asked myself, do all these things matter? Does my checklist really matter in the big scheme of things? Can I have fun with this person, and can I trust them?

Part of the point of sober dating was learning to trust myself because the fact of the matter is, I couldn't trust myself, so I thought no one else was trustworthy.

How is a partnership ever going to work like that if I'm always worrying about whether or not they're an untrustworthy partner?

I tried to describe sober dating to my sponsors and they asked, "How do you know if someone's good for you or not?" And it's in the *Journal Sober Dating Focus Booklet*, and I don't know exactly where, but an article describes it. The writer says there's OMG (Oh my God) chemistry in relationships and there's GPS (graceful, peaceful, and serene) relationships.

OMG is like when you see someone, it's like your heart's pumping and your veins start coursing. You're really attracted to the person and you can't stop yourself from wanting more. That's my addiction. And then the writer talks about the GPS relationship which is graceful, peaceful and serene. I go on dates and sometimes I think, "I have no attraction to this person. I don't find them intelligent.

I don't find them funny. There's nothing. But then there's those dates where I find them attractive, I'm serene and peaceful. I can have a conversation. I'm not jacked up. When I have OMG chemistry with people on dates, that's

when the sexual thoughts start very quickly and I can't really reign those in. Going slow with the sober dating plan builds trust for me to have a trusting relationship. The minute I bring in sex, that's one of the things, the physical stuff that gets started quickly I can't reign it back in. I know today that that's the end of the relationship. This partner is not going to work for me.

Thank you.

I'm Laurie, sex and love addict. I haven't been on a date in over three years. And I'm just now starting to put my big toe into the dating pool. Before this program, if a guy showed up at my front door with a bouquet of red flags I would just be like, "Oh, I love red flags. Thank you so much. I will put them in a vase. I'll change the water every day and see how long I can make them last." Maybe the relationships lasted for a month or years.

But because of this program, I recognize red flags so quickly now and I'm so grateful for that. My daughter has taught me a lot about dating. She's 34. I would focus on one guy and fantasize, I mean, we'd

be married before I even went out on a date with them. I don't do that anymore. My daughter said, "Mom, dating is supposed to be fun. Don't park a car in one guy's driveway." I'm just so grateful. And my sponsor and I are doing a dating plan and I told her I'm really itching to jump in there. She's like, slow down, pause, connect with your Higher Power, and call me." And that's about it. Thank you.

Hey everybody, I'm anonymous, recovering sex addict. I had a hard time finding guys to date. This is in the '90s and it was before the internet. We used to put an ad in the newspaper, and nobody answered ads. And so, one of the funniest things that's ever happened to me was on a blind date. Whenever I had a blind date I wanted to go to the same restaurant because I knew the food was good. So at least I'd have a decent meal. Somehow, I had two dates within one week.

They were both blonde graphic designers. So, I admit by the second date I got confused about who this one was. Was he the one from Missouri or was he the other one? But

the funniest part was when the waiter came to the table on the second date. He was the same waiter from the first date a few days before. He said, "How great to see you both back again so soon." I never felt more indiscriminate in my life which is very ironic. I tried to date but it was just very hard. And I had never dated as a kid.

So, as has been shared here, when I went out with this one guy I thought, "Oh God. He's kind of boring." But I didn't have anybody else to date. He seemed nice.

We dated once a week for a number of weeks. After a few weeks I thought, "He seems kind of nice and he does seem to have a little sense of humor." It was just shocking to me to feel like that because that had never happened.

In the past, it was immediate, either it was dark, or I moved right in. I had never just dated and gotten to know somebody. I guess that really was fun.

I didn't view it that way at the time probably. But getting to know somebody and then liking them without having sex right away was fun. That was 22 years ago and we're still together. God does for me what I can't do for myself. Thanks.

Editor's note: Some language in the following share may be triggering.

I'm Alicia, grateful recovering sex and love addict. It's really great to have this topic. And so I want to share about my first date after lockdown. But before I share about that, I want to say how important meditation has been for me and dating.

Meditation helped me to really develop the power of the pause and to just be still when I wanted to act out or to be still when I wanted to say something that might be inappropriate or to just be still when I wanted to be physical when it wasn't appropriate. And so, as we all remember during lockdown, we were in sweats or maybe sweats from the waist down and a nice shirt on the top half for our Zoom meetings.

But finally, it came the time where we could go out and it was the first time in a while I'd put on a dress, makeup, and high heels. I was so excited about this date but appropriately excited. I was more excited just to be out and at a restaurant.

And he chose a really nice restaurant in Corona del Mar that was really special. We'd had a couple of talks on the

phone that were very sober. We were both interested in a relationship. I got to the restaurant, and we were chatting and everything was going fine. And then, all of a sudden, he says "I just want to let you know I'm really oral." And it was so amazing because one of our promises in S.L.A.A. is that we will recoil from it as if it were a hot flame.

I'm sitting there and, in my mind, it's a good thing my thought bubbles don't show, because I thought what the hell you f***g just blew this date. But I thought, I am dressed head to toe. I have taken a long time to prepare for this and I am not going to get up and walk out right now. But you are done.

The cool thing was that as he says this the server came right in at that minute and I was able to ignore the comment and just continue on. I never spoke to the man again. But what's important in the situation for me was that traditionally I would say, "We're

really not a good match and I thank you for meeting me and you know it's best that we end this date now." And so, I could say that in my mind and behave like a woman of dignity and grace.

I didn't have to devalue myself or turn him into a monster. The next day I did hear from him. It was this kind of cold text message. And I just didn't respond.

The strength that I think we develop with meditation is that grounding that meditation gives me when I'm alone in my home and I'm just sitting.

Meditation gave me the strength when that happened to just be able to be still in my thoughts. I didn't have to go off on some horrible tangent.

The meditation gives a grounding and a sense of stability where I just don't need to act out. I don't need to stoop to his level. I just didn't need to do anything. So, it was meditation.

Thank you.

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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