

# theJournal

Issue # 200  
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Acting “AS If”

# 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, “What does acting ‘as if’ mean to you? How have you used it and how does doing this help your

recovery program?” 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 #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. And #202 – May/June –Recovery Suggestions – “What advice or suggestions for recovery would you give a newcomer?” Deadline for submissions is March 15, 2023. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

“What does acting ‘as if’ mean to you? How have you used it and how does doing this help your recovery program?”

I act as if about many things, not just those involving faith. I act as if I love myself when I make a mistake and try to forgive myself. I act as if I deserve good things when I practice self-care. I act as if God will protect me when I trust healthy people even though I’m scared. It essentially involves fantasy, pretending. I have lots of experience in that! I try to use those muscles I’d previously developed for self-harm to now heal myself.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

Acting as if? My answer is to let go of my disproportionate ego and turn to others.

— FRIDA (LYON FRANCE)

I believe there is a Higher Power. But what if I'm wrong? What if there isn't a Higher Power? I can say that it's easier for me to live as if there is a Higher Power than to live as if there isn't. If I discover when I'm dead that there isn't a Higher Power, I'll have lived a much happier life while alive.

— ANONYMOUS

I can allow another way of thinking or doing that is not me running the show.

— SAM, LONDON

Acting as if was very important for me in doing Steps 6 and 7. For example, how would I act when I was free of some defect or shortcoming? I started to act as if my use of sarcasm was removed. I used sarcasm as a weapon, knowing I could just say that I didn't mean it that way, or I didn't think someone would take it that way, when my whole reason was to hurt someone. I wanted everybody to hurt as much as I did. So I decided to listen for either of those two sentences and if I heard myself say either one, I made an immediate amends. I didn't like having to do that, and it helped me to stop being sarcastic. I started to be more thoughtful in my responses and even learned that sometimes saying nothing was OK.

— RICK S. PA



## Question of the day

Admit my helplessness. Rely on my Higher Power to agree to change my behavior.

— ANONYMOUS

Acting as if, to me, is a very positive and helpful suggestion and slogan about acting ‘as if’ I believed in a Higher Power which cares for me and can and will restore me to sanity.

It’s a slogan which to me has a similar meaning to “practice makes perfect” or even “fake it ‘til you make it.” We don’t have to be perfect instantly, we can’t always “make it,” and we don’t always “believe” perfectly in a Higher Power.

Even someone like me, who holds to a fairly conventional, ordinary, Christian conception of a Higher Power, needs to practice this suggestion of acting as if. Just because I have an understanding or concept about a Higher Power doesn’t mean that my actions automatically reflect that understanding. I need the reminder to help encourage me to act according to my values even when I don’t feel it.

Sometimes acting on faith is very natural and makes easy sense. Other times it feels forced and awkward. In recovery I can practice the principle of acting as if in those times it feels hard.

— ANONYMOUS, AUCKLAND

## Question of the day

When I act as if I'm someone worth loving (even though actually *feeling* that is elusive) I make better choices and stay in a better mindset.

— ANONYMOUS

It means we avoid acting out bottom-line behaviors in spite of our pain.

It means we decide how to respond to problematic situations after discussing with our sponsor and follow through even if it feels uncomfortable because it requires a new behavior!

And we go to meetings even when we don't feel like it!

We follow our Higher Power rather than engaging in addictive impulsive or compulsive old behaviors that we did before entering recovery.

And we do top-line behaviors even if we don't feel like it, sometimes, because we trust they will help protect us from returning to the chaos and pain of acting out addictively.

— KATHLEEN A., SACRAMENTO

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# Acting “As If” I Am Loved Because I Am



Hi! My name is Renee and I’m a sex and love addict.

And today, I want to talk about ways that I am able to receive and notice love that I wasn’t able to notice or recognize before program.

I used to think that the only kind of love that I needed or wanted or was worth anything

was the love of a man who idolized me and needed me. And I was just so into that one person that I was really blind and oblivious to all the other blessings and forms of love around me.

But now I can see love in abundance. I guess I’ll talk about my daughter.

I have a teenage daughter. She's seventeen, and as is normal with so many teenagers, myself included growing up with my own mom, there are so many ways to clash. And I get so much push-back from her.

For example, I'll say good morning to her, and she'll say with obvious irritation, "Yes. WHAT do you *want*, MOM?" And there are just so many ways that I get rejected by her.

So, oftentimes, it seems like she couldn't care less about me.

She can't wait to get out of the house. Actually, all of that may be true to some degree. Most of the time I have to act as if I believe she still loves me.

But here's something that I'm able to receive and be so grateful for this past week: in her high school Mandarin class, she was given an assignment to write a message of gratitude.

She had to write in mandarin. She had to pick somebody to share what she's grateful for about that person.

Write it out in mandarin, and then record it with that person if they were available. And she picked me. She wrote out this whole thing in Mandarin, and she read it to

me while we were recording and obviously, I didn't understand what it meant. But then she translated it. And she said, "Mom, I love you. You are always there for me and you're my best friend. I see you every day helping people, and you're a good person."

I said, "Oh, my!"

At the end of the recording she said, "I love you." And I replied, "I love you." And then we hugged.

That was her homework, to record that and share with her Mandarin teacher.

I realized because of this program, not to take so many things personally.

I think there's so many messages in life that I could assume mean that I'm not loved or I'm not worthy.

I can get messages that I'm not enough even in my own home. When I'm not getting the reciprocation of love back from my teenager, I know where to go. I go to my meetings, my higher power to be filled with that kind of love, so that when I don't get what I want or need from my teenager, for example, I can continue to show up and be present for her even though it's not reciprocated in the moment. And what I notice is

that my love is getting through to her. She does see it.

She is picking it all up, even though I can't see it in the moment.

And so, this program has enabled me to be so good with myself, but not by myself.

I know I can't do this by myself. I need program.

I need fellows, and I need to be reminded on a daily basis

to develop and continue a relationship with my Higher Power.

So, all the messages from outside, including those painful ones from my own child, don't hurt. And then these beautiful moments, like what happened this week, can come from her on her terms. And I just glow. I'm so deeply grateful. Thanks.

— RENEE

## 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>**

# A State of Grace

June 28

## ACTING “AS IF”

The fact that we needed faith in some Power, since we could not trust ourselves to be consistent in either behavior or motive, left some of us feeling even more shaken. Where would we find even the rudiments of a faith that could carry us through this dissolving and reconstruction of our whole personality? – S.L.A.A. Basic Text, Page 75.

It used to concern me that agnostics and atheists might have a hard time in a Twelve Step program. The phrase “act as if” seemed like a denial of a person’s right to their own beliefs. But when the time came that I needed recovery for myself, I had to suspend my disbelief. Though I was still skeptical about putting my trust in something I didn’t understand, I came to believe that a Twelve Step program could restore me to sanity. When I worked the second and third steps, I put “act as if” into action. I started praying, even though I didn’t know who or what I was praying to. By practicing the methods of a spiritual faith, my belief in a Higher Power grew with time. I found myself relying on my Higher Power more and more. I put faith before understanding, trusting that if I followed through with the actions, it would make sense as I went along. There is still much work to be done in my spiritual journey, but I know now that if I simply “act as if,” my Higher Power will do great work in my life.

*By practicing the Twelve Steps, my belief in my Higher Power grows.*

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*The Augustine Fellowship. “A State Of Grace : Daily Meditations.” The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A. Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.*

## A State of Grace

April 13

### FAKE IT 'TIL YOU MAKE IT

Nothing less than going through the death of all that I had been in the world up to that time—of experiencing the dissolution of my former self—seemed required...I could have no guarantees for the specific results. I would have to let it take me where it would. – S.L.A.A. Basic Text, Page 23.

Through withdrawal, while I was becoming the person I was supposed to be, I felt like an imposter. I had never had true self-dignity before. My reactions to stress had always been to act out in some way. My sponsor told me to act as if I was already the sober dignified person I wanted to be. She said that the more I took positive actions, regardless of whether I felt capable of them or not, the more normal those actions would become. Taking sober action felt strange, as if someone else was doing it. But the more I practiced, the better I was able to make that my first reaction. When I was wrong, Higher Power showed me another way or revealed something I needed to learn. In college, I remember saying that people with big vocabularies were “actors” and “snobs” and I went around cursing all the time in order to “stay real.” The reality of the situation is that I looked ignorant and those “actors” went on to do great things. I don’t have to put myself down to be true to who I am. I can “act as if” and still be real.

*I allow myself to fake it 'til I make it, trusting in my Higher Power.*

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*The Augustine Fellowship. A State Of Grace : Daily Meditations. The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A. Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.*

**To find “A State of Grace,” go to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org)**

# Twelve Step Literature and Acting “As If”



*“[My sponsor] suggested that I might try occasionally to act as if I believed. Somewhere I had heard that it is easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than to think yourself into a new way*

*of acting, and this made sense in the context of ‘acting as if.’”*

*— Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition (p. 193). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.*



I would stand, hold hands with other members of S.L.A.A. even if I didn't like or trust them, and say the closing Serenity Prayer, even though I didn't believe in God. It took four years of saying the prayers and acting as if God existed before I had a spiritual experience and got sober in S.L.A.A. It is now twenty-one years later, and I am still sober.

*"I SPENT MY life 'acting as if'—either acting as if I knew (I didn't ask teachers questions in school; they might find out I didn't know the answer) or acting as if I didn't care."*

— *Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition (p. 274). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.*

Acting as if I knew was an act of pride and insecurity before I got sober in S.L.A.A. I was too afraid of others abandoning me to let them know that I didn't have all the answers. I had to fix other people's problems or else they wouldn't want to be in a relationship with me. Not asking teachers questions in school stunted my growth.

Being humble would have helped me learn more. Acting as if I didn't care about a partner didn't help my relationship grow and was just drama and game playing. I had destructive "acting as if" coping skills before sobriety in S.L.A.A. I'm grateful that program taught me good "acting as if" coping skills.

*"As we practiced thoughtfulness towards others, really giving without holding onto the expectation of reward, impatience slipped away. The quick temper we asked God to remove was checked momentarily; we could suddenly feel the defensive fear that was hidden behind the anger, and find the courage to act on faith, rather than fear. We asked to have our longing for a person, or a particular sexual hunting ground removed and found ourselves given a choice. When we voluntarily chose to avoid those places and those people, the longing eased. The feelings of inferiority and insecurity, which we petitioned God to replace with confidence, were openly admitted, and as we accepted*

*the support or the confessions of similar insecurity from others, we felt comforted.”*

— *The Augustine Fellowship, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous: The Basic Text for The Augustine Fellowship, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. Kindle Edition.*

S.L.A.A. taught me thoughtfulness towards others. Before program, I only engaged in conversations where I wasn't really listening to what the other person was saying. I was really just waiting for them to shut up so I could tell them all the thoughts in my head in one long sentence so they couldn't interrupt and take back center stage.

I was forced to act as if I was listening when I sat in a room full of people and heard a speaker share for 10 minutes. I wasn't allowed to interrupt with my “very important thoughts.”

I practiced listening skills every day when I went to a meeting. After years of practice and finally quieting the voice in my head, I was able to really listen and hear the wisdom of the speaker.

S.L.A.A. taught me to see the fears underneath my anger. The courage to act on faith rather than fear took years of Step work, meetings, fellowship, meditation and prayer, but the freedom from fear and angry outbursts that I got from all that work was worth it.

I acted as if my longing for my qualifier could be taken away by a Higher Power. I didn't drive by my qualifier's house or check for him on social media. I didn't ask acquaintances about him or go to any of the places I could accidentally run into him. After acting as if for quite a while, the longing eased and eventually went away.

*“In withdrawal, we found that whenever we engaged in these accessory behaviors, regardless of how innocent or unaware we were of doing so, we had unwittingly set up the potential for sexual and emotional intrigue—just what we were trying so desperately to avoid!*

*The dilemma was that we didn't realize that we were culling ‘intrigue’ from these behaviors, and when we*

*finally did realize it, we didn't know what else to do. Our personalities could not be separated from these characteristic ways of rationalizing, of making eye contact, of 'hugging' and handshaking, and on and on. We found, however, as the addiction-serving motives for these behaviors and personality characteristics became clearer to us, that battling our addictive cravings with every minor 'set up' was becoming too exhausting. It was becoming necessary for us to grapple with the ache of wondering just who 'we' really were without our addictive trappings."*

— *The Augustine Fellowship, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous: The Basic Text for The Augustine Fellowship, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. Kindle Edition.*

Acting as if means that I don't engage in accessory behaviors because they will lead me down the path to act out. My sponsor, fellows, S.L.A.A. literature, prayer, meditation, and wisdom from

speakers in meeting helped me recognize when I was engaging in these behaviors and gave me strength to avoid them because I knew I was not alone.

The Withdrawal chapter in the Basic Text describes how difficult withdrawal can be. We can act as if and practice self-care even when we don't want to. Healthy activities like running errands, exercising, socializing, attending meetings can be acting as if because we are no longer doing self-destructive activities to try to cope with life.

*"We were suspending, for the moment, our very real fears concerning the outcome of all this by attending to those tasks immediately at hand. We were living in the immediate present and discovering that we could indeed make it through an hour, or a morning (mourning!), or a day. And we were discovering that there was a joy to be had in successfully negotiating our way through each twenty-four-hour period. We found that the most healing antidote to the gnawing pain of our struggles and doubts was to*

turn over any questions concerning the outcome of our withdrawal to God, or to whatever Power we felt was helping us to abstain from our old patterns. Through all of this we became, one day at a time, available to ourselves.”

— Fellowship, *The Augustine. Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous: The Basic Text for The Augustine Fellowship, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous . The Augustine Fellowship.* Kindle Edition.

Questions would constantly pop up during my experiences in withdrawal. Why am I doing this? Why did I sign up for this pain? What’s the point? Why don’t I just take the easy way out? Why wouldn’t I be with my qualifier if I could?

I had to believe that what sober people in S.L.A.A. were telling me was true. I had to believe that I could find a better way of living just as speakers in meetings had. I had to believe my sponsor when she promised joy and happiness were coming soon. Or I would have the strength to wait if joy and happiness were coming later.

“The work to change myself was difficult. I had to get a whole new set of coping strategies. I had to act as if I were a person of dignity until I learned to respect myself and stop unconsciously going down the path of addiction. Meditation and prayer helped retrain my brain. Bringing my unconscious habits out in the open in my Fourth and Fifth Steps also helped. Fellows sometimes called me on my behavior and though painful and often humiliating, this was useful in helping me change and become conscious.”

— *A State Of Grace : Daily Meditations . The Augustine Fellowship,* S.L.A.A. Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.

Fellows called me on my behavior. One fellow told me I had to stop putting myself down. Every time I started putting myself down, she would stop me. That helped me act as if I liked myself until I actually started liking myself.

Someone said at a closed meeting, “There is good in all

*of us. Seek it out, nurture it, tend it, and it will flourish.” So, I began searching for the positives within me. I realized that my feeling of inferiority was just one aspect of ego, and the arrogance I projected was the other. I must find the center median. So, I tried to act as if:*

*A.A. was giving me confidence.*

*I had an attractive personality, even though I was not beautiful.*

*I was worthy, like all others.*

*I loved myself and could therefore love others.*

*Faith was freeing me from the fear that had always gripped me.*

*— Alcoholics Anonymous World Service Inc.. Came to Believe (p. 104). AA World Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.*

The writer believed that with working the Steps, reading 12-Step literature, asking questions at meetings and being around sober members, they could fix the broken parts of themselves and become whole. They wanted to be like sober members who

they admired and “emulated” who had put the Third Step into their lives. The act of emulating is acting “as if.”

*This necessitated my finding a God of my understanding, plus a willingness to let go. I realized that I must say, “Thy will be done.” But who or what was this “Thy” to me? I began to go back, to review. What had I come to believe? I had come to believe in the A.A. program. I had come to believe that a power (A.A.) greater than myself could restore me to sanity.*

*I had come to believe that I no longer needed a drink. I had come to believe that I could grow to be a whole person. I had come to believe that faith could eliminate fear. I had come to believe that I could love myself and so love others. I had come to believe that love was the key. With an open heart, I returned to the Third Step and turned my will and my life over to the care of the God of my understanding.*

*— Alcoholics Anonymous World Service Inc.. Came to Believe (p. 104). AA World*

*Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.*

*Writing a letter to God can help us recognize character defects, refine our concept of a Higher Power, and believe that our Higher Power loves and supports us. For those of us who don't believe in God, this exercise, or others like it can help us with Step 2 when we "act as if" God exists.*

— The Augustine

*Fellowship. Sober Dating: Questions For Discussion (p. 35). Kindle Edition.*

Acting as if God existed finally led me to a spiritual experience that has kept me sober in S.L.A.A. 21 years, NICA 20 years, A.A. 26 years (today as I write this article), and a food program 19 years.

I'm so grateful.

— LISA C.



The Journal is now available online in audiobook (mp3) and pdf format.

Get them at:

<https://slaafws.org/thejournal/>

# Share space

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## Learning About Anorexia

The first time I scrolled through the list of meetings on slaafws.org and saw anorexia focus, I wondered what link there could be to an eating disorder. It was some weeks before I realized this was not a reference to food. “That has nothing to do with me,” I initially thought.

Hearing passages from anorexia literature read aloud in the rooms piqued my interest enough that I ordered two related booklets. Completing the checklist left me both surprised and comforted to finally have a name for some of my more salient behavior patterns.

With the concept of sexual, emotional, and social anorexia added to my vocabulary, I

began to ponder characteristic number 11: “To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.”

Was this the reason it had been relatively easy, once I made it through withdrawal, to refrain from breaking my sexual and romantic bottom lines? Was I hiding out in anorexia?

With the help of a good therapist and my sponsor, I concluded that I was. All along there had been anorexic aspects to my sexual and romantic relationships as well as to my friendships (or lack thereof).

I had made it through

withdrawal from acting out but was now faced with the challenge of addressing my tendency to “act in.” With the help of my sponsor, I have set some anorexia top line behaviors. They include learning to make phone calls, making outreach calls, not procrastinating self-care acts such as medical and dental appointments, car and house maintenance and repairs, taking vacations or short road trips instead of numbing out in workaholism, building a support network consisting of ...drum roll... other human beings!

Speaking of other humans. I also have to learn how to nurture friendships by doing my fair share of initiating activities and keeping communication lines open. I have to learn to communicate my boundaries, wants and needs honestly rather than in passive aggressive ways so common to us codependents. I have had very little practice in this area since I would tend to ditch friends as soon as an opportunity arose for me to lose myself in obsession and yet another closed-energy system relationship.

What does anorexia withdrawal feel like? Most of us know what withdrawing from acting OUT feels like. It can feel like a gnawing hunger, a need to fill a void or numb unbearable feelings.

What about withdrawing from acting IN? To me, this is a very different feeling. I’m not even sure the term “withdraw” fits because I am not pulling back from something, I’m pushing myself out into something—into the world, into a healthy and balanced life, into relationships in which I communicate cleanly and directly while maintaining healthy boundaries. It is terrifying.

The first few times I exercised new non-anorexic behaviors, I felt like a field mouse tasked with crossing a great open meadow, all the while suspecting there was a hawk far above waiting to grab me. It’s a feeling of being unprotected, vulnerable. It feels like anxiety, like anticipating the other shoe to drop. It is an undercurrent of dread tied to the notion that I have screwed something up or will, today, screw something up. Oh, did I mention there is a



tie-in to perfectionism? The (warped) logic behind much of my anorexia is that the more I isolate, the more I reduce the risk of screwing things up with other humans.

So what's the answer? In my case, the help of an extremely compassionate and patient sponsor has been priceless. When I said yes, I would love to check in daily for the first 30 days but for the fact that, "I can't make phone calls," my sponsor was willing to meet me where I was. They offered to call me back if I would text them.

That worked! It took many months, but gradually they weaned me from receiving calls to making them.

The sponsor-sponsee relationship proved to be the safe practice arena I'd needed for so long. Next came practicing with a recovery partner. I still am not keen to cold-call anyone, but I cherish my weekly calls with both my sponsor and recovery partner. I have also started being a better friend to my best girlfriend.

For me, anorexia is like a vortex that is forever trying to suck me back in. My sponsor and therapist and I are working on some objectives for me to practice interpersonal skills. This includes saying yes to some social engagements when I want to say no, and it includes practicing asking for what I want and need so I can learn that hearing "no" is not a death sentence.

One day at a time, through the Grace of my Higher Power—whose miracles reach me through every aspect of this 12-Step program—I am becoming a person who does not need to pull up the drawbridge and hide from life and the beautiful messiness of being part of the human family.

Bio: Kelly M entered the program February 14, 2021. Her sobriety date is February 17, 2022. She has worked all twelve Steps with a sponsor and has been cleared to sponsor as she was sponsored. She attends about four meetings per week in the central Arkansas area and online with STL Women's.

—KELLY M.

# On the Course to Freedom

All my life I thought everyone thought the way I thought. I thought everyone had crushes. I thought you were supposed to have crushes. It started in third grade, I was obsessed each day about this boy in my class until he moved away in grade 6. Then for three years I was obsessed about this boy at church. I would fantasize about a future together. I barely knew them.

I was afraid of men, yet obsessed about them. My father was violent and chaotic. He barely paid me any attention. I never remember him ever saying he loved me or even hugging me. He battled a mental illness and his own demons from his childhood.

I started dating in college. I had been dumped a few times early on because I wasn't sexual. So, my addict brain thought, "to be loved by a man, I have to be sexual." And that became the currency for me to buy affection. I married my first boyfriend after knowing him a year. That lasted 17 years. In my fantasy, he was a gentleman. The reality was he

was repressing his sexual attraction to men. In the last 7 years of the marriage I had numerous affairs just to numb out and feel alive.

After the divorce, I got into one relationship after another with more men who weren't emotionally available. But it was okay, I was never in relationship with them. I was never present. I was with a fantasy of who they could be. After three years of therapy, my therapist said, "You're obsessed. Nothing will help you but a 12 step program. I can't work with you anymore." Talk about feeling rejected and abandoned!

Little did I know she'd set me on the course to freedom.

I didn't know much about love addiction. I started in Codependents Anonymous. There I met an alcoholic with 9 years sobriety. I asked her to be my sponsor. After some time with me, she shared with me the *Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction*. Well, by golly, there I am.

I was so reluctant to go to S.L.A.A. meetings, but meeting after meeting, I heard someone

share my story. I spent a year working the Steps.

My therapist said I had a disconnect to self. I didn't know what that meant at first. Well, my identity was built around whatever I thought would appeal to the man I was obsessed about at the moment.

To build my self differentiation and connection to self, I created top lines. My top lines include: daily fear and resentment journaling, always asking God to release me from these and to support me in following his plan for me, meditation, grounding and breath work, gratitude lists, manicures, going to steam rooms, bike rides, regular S.L.A.A. meetings, daily contact with my sponsor and fellows, daily 12 step literature reading, going to the gym, painting, and time with family and friends because addiction thrives in isolation.

Top lines are about my needing to fill my own cup because all my life I would obsess about "the one," the man who would rescue me and re-parent me. I needed to grow myself up and parent myself.

This includes being responsible, organized, and self compassionate. The way I talked to myself previously was unacceptable. No wonder I was

living and dying based on the approval of whatever man at the time I gave magical qualities to!

I then created bottom lines. For me this meant no texting sexual selfies, messages, videos, or links. In the past, this was manipulation. I would try to perform to secure what I thought was love. I didn't see any other reason anyone would want me. So I led with that. And I attracted people who just saw my value as sexual.

This is the insanity of addiction. I was creating my own misery and it was compulsive. I wasn't even aware of my own contribution. I thought this was how everyone dated. A bottom line for me is to not go into performance mode to attract or keep a partner. I also had to keep away from romantic movies, series, and music.

Another bottom line for me was to stop contact when anyone said they didn't want a relationship. In the past, I would take it as an invitation to earn, perform, become the special chosen one to change them. There were plenty of men who just wanted me to keep seeing them and see where things went. I would self abandon. Then when it went nowhere, I would be near

suicidal. Once they would end things with me, I would text them to change their mind. I did this until they'd tell me not to. Then I'd text or call from a different number. I would write them emails and letters. I realized this was a pattern and it had nothing to do with the men.

Another bottom line for me is to cease contact with anyone who blatantly pushes my boundaries. In the past, I would view men who rolled over my boundaries as men who must really like me to be so bold and persistent. I would self abandon and acquiesce only to find once they achieved their carnal goals, they vanished. In addition to this, I blocked communication with any man who had a partner.

I created a dating plan. I learned that real love starts slow and is calm. I limited my communication to a few texts a day. I limited times I would see a person to once a week. I have a hard rule of nothing sexual in a car and nothing sexual for the first month.

Obsession is a word that always used to bother me. But I was obsessed. Now any time I see that word, I know the article is for me. I focus myself on keeping myself right-sized

and the person I'm dating right-sized. That means no one up one down dynamic. That means no creating a fantasy of them or assigning them magical qualities. It means not buying into this scarcity mindset social narrative of "the one."

It also is important for me to keep holidays right-sized too. In the past I would really build up expectations around any man I was seeing and my birthday, Christmas, and Valentines Day.

The insanity is that I would never feel worthy of receiving any gift. So whether or not they made any gesture, I wouldn't feel worthy regardless. These days would just be opportunities for me to indulge in self pity.

I limited my time on social media and dating apps. I made sure my profile focused on my intelligence and creativity instead of anything sexual. I avoided any profiles of men who were not relationship minded and had sexual references in their profile. I embraced being single enough to say no to unhealthy situations. Previously I would chase breadcrumbs of any attention whatsoever. The most important thing for me

while dating is knowing that I am never alone. I am always safe and okay regardless of relationship status because my Higher Power is always with me. I have the fellowship, family, friends, and plenty of

hobbies. I have a full life. I am the one I always wanted. I found inside of me what I spent years looking externally for.

—ANONYMOUS

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## Prayer for Letting Go of a Qualifier

“Higher Power/God, whatever it is I think I received from \_\_\_\_\_, please show me how to receive it from you and within myself”.

“Dear God, please release me from my obsession with \_\_\_\_\_ and my compulsion to create contact with them. I trust you love us both, please continue to take care of them and me and help me accept whatever you have planned for the highest good for both of us. Thy will, not mine be done. AMEN”.

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## Sober Dating

Like walking a tiger  
It's slow and it's steady  
I'm not really sure if anyone  
Is ever REALLY ready  
But, even so, we plug ahead  
We try to stick it out  
Although many have fled  
Our sober dating plan  
Will be our guide  
One day at a time  
We're in for a ride  
Whether in person, on zoom or by phone  
The best part of the process is that  
We don't have to do it alone!!!

— RISA



## **THE INSPIRATION LINE**

**Your 24-Hour Sponsor**

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**CELEBRATES**

**500,000 CALLS!**

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

# *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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