

# the Journal

Issue # 206

Single Issue \$4



# Sponsoring

# 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, “How has sponsoring helped you in recovery?” 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 #207 – March/April – Parenthood – “Has S.L.A.A. helped you become a better parent/prepared you for parenthood?” —Deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2024. And #208 – May/June – Pets. “Please share how pets have helped your sobriety/special stories about what pets have meant to your recovery.” Deadline for submissions: March 15, 2024. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

“How has sponsoring helped you  
in recovery?”

I love sponsoring. It is rewarding and reminds me of where I was and where I don't want to be again.

It is when the relatable moments occur when I can share my experiences as I am also a sex and love addict.

I have learned to not get too enmeshed.

I have many boundaries which has also taught my sponsees about boundaries in their life too.

I love the reward of seeing someone living recovery and doing the work.

I have also learned to have acceptance when a sponsee just isn't ready either.

— ARI F, NJ

## Question of the day

Receiving sponsorship helps me. Listening to and following the advice of a sponsor has helped me put into practice my admission of powerlessness. If I have the power to think my way out of addiction, or to figure out how to guide myself through the Steps all by myself, according to my plan, best ideas and thinking, then I am not powerless. If, however, I really am powerless, then I need to ask my sponsor to lead me through the Steps. And powerlessness is where the Steps start.

Giving sponsorship equally helps. The Steps also suggest that I carry the message. Being a sponsor myself gives me one important way to do this. Through being a sponsor, I have the opportunity to both tend the garden of my own recovery, and to give it away at the same time. Any time two addicts talk about recovery together (which is fundamentally what sponsorship is), both are helped.

— ANONYMOUS

When I began to volunteer to do service for the fellowship, I became a sponsor. My first sponsee was a sex and love addict. I had no idea what love addiction was. She recommended I read a few books. She taught me what love addiction was. It was this wonderful gift that sponsors and sponsees receive from each other. It is from this reciprocal sponsor-sponsee relationship that I learned about my love addiction. It helped me in my recovery.

— MELISSA K, NJ



## Question of the day

Sponsoring helps me in my recovery because I start the Steps all over again to guide another person through them. It keeps me active in program so my sobriety doesn't grow stagnant.

— LIZ, BOSTON, MA

For me sponsorship was a crash course in co-dependency. At first it wasn't easy. It doesn't always run smoothly. Sponsoring really made me look at my boundaries with others and taught me how to set them and how to receive them with love and responsibility. However, when it rolls well, seeing the programme work in others is incredibly life affirming and I especially find hearing people's Step Four and Five a special honour. Sponsoring is a big part of my recovery, it still challenges me at times and I see that as an essential part of my recovery growth. We are all just humans doing our best.

— CLEO F, LONDON, UK

It has helped me find more compassion for others struggling with sex and love addiction.

It has also, unfortunately, caused some heartache and disappointment as I feel there have been very few I have truly helped.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

My father passed away earlier this year at the end of May. Despite my family of origin being my qualifiers, I was of service to them at the time while he was in hospital after having gone no contact for 10 months. When I went no contact after his death, I noticed the distorted foggy thinking that overrode my program because I was addicted to them. I was convinced I never did the Steps despite looking at my notebooks of Step work. I did a Step Three towards the whole situation. Since then HP has blessed me with sponsees. Through sponsorship I was able to focus on the facts and remember that I actually did the work. I was restored.

— ALTON, DUBAI

In my sex and love addiction I mostly fear three things: commitment, intimacy, and emotional availability. All three dimensions of recovery I have been exposed to in sponsorship and co-sponsorship.

I remember my first sponsee. We stuck it out. One hour on Tuesdays, rain or shine. And she was dedicated and nervous and always would find things to do five minutes before our call, then finish at the beginning of our call, then excuse herself. One time she needed a break, a nap during our meeting time.

The truth is she reminded me of myself so much! My carefree attitude, cluelessness about the others' time and the demands. And yet it was so cute. She taught me to have compassion and see myself with compassion. I grew to simply desire to be there. To share the love and help each other grow and face the truth.

— ANONYMOUS, NY

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It has helped me revisit the Steps. It's like I'm doing them again but in a greater and more fulfilling way.

— GIL H., WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA

## Question of the day

It has shown me how I struggle with boundaries and honesty in relationships. My sponsees also mirror me and show me how far I've come and how far I have yet to go. But most importantly to let go of people and let God lead.

— DAYA, ICELAND

I began this program in 2008. I went to meetings and read the Basic Text and other materials. However, I did not find the gifts of serenity and deep love - real love -Mary J Blige-type real love until I got a sponsor in 2012 and began and finished working the Steps with her.

— SUZANNE, SAN ANTONIO





## **The First Person I Was Truly and Completely Honest With**

When I started working the Steps, my sponsor was the first person I was truly and completely honest with about

all the horrible things I had done to myself and others, all my anger and judgements towards myself and others, all

my deep rooted fears that were causing my patterns of avoidance and playing games and roles.

Under the constant fear of rejection I told him my deepest secrets, regrets and mistakes - and found recognition and love.

After being honest with my sponsor in my Fifth Step, after looking honestly at my shortcomings in Step Six and Seven, I started being honest with the people I had hurt in my Eighth and Ninth Steps.

I have grown spiritually through learning these Steps, and I continue to grow as I practise them on a daily basis.

Through becoming honest with my sponsor, I become willing to be honest with my other sisters and brothers in the program, and gradually I find the courage and acceptance to be honest with people outside the program too. My sponsor helps me use the tools of the program to look at myself, my thoughts and actions, my motives and

intentions, so I can ask my Higher Power to remove that which makes me less useful to myself and others.

That is what I try to pass on as a sponsor myself. I meet my sponsees with love and recognition. I share my experience and my discipline, I do not counsel or tell people what to do, except learn and practise the Steps.

Sharing this solution is by far the strongest component in my own recovery and continued sobriety. I cannot tell how many times I have been feeling low and full of self-pity, when a sponsee suddenly called, forcing me to turn my attention away from myself and towards someone who needs help.

That always saves my day. It lets me get my head out of my \*ss and turn back to the path of light. Passing on the solution keeps me sane and helps to keep myself spiritually fit and my own program fresh.

— SIMON A., COPENHAGEN

# Cannot Do It Alone

## 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 our lives could be restored. ¶
3. Made a decision to turn our will and the care of our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. ¶
4. Made a search for a God, who would understand our helplessness. ¶
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. ¶
6. Were entirely honest with ourselves. ¶
7. Humbly asked God to remove our defects of character. ¶
8. Made a list of our wrongs, and became willing to accept our share of responsibility. ¶
9. Made direct amends to such people, except where it would injure them or break confidentiality. ¶
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. ¶
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to do His will. ¶



What I learned in recovery was that I cannot do it alone. I had to stay and learn to give it away (sobriety) in order to keep it. This meant finding a sponsor and learning to sponsor. My fierce independence in

life and doing it my way set the perfect storm for all my addictions.

Until I hit bottom and asked for help, I was doomed. Luckily, I called my therapist whom I had not seen in over a year

when I hit bottom (a new young lover tried to beat me up under the influence the night before then left me alone). A few days later I was picked up on a street corner and taken to a private rehab center.

With the help of three therapists and only us two clients over three weeks I was convinced I would need support after rehab. I prepared a recovery plan that included going to meetings three times a week. I went six- and seven-times a week. I heard in the rooms that I would need a sponsor so I watched members in meetings for a month. Today I can say I have the same A.A. sponsor for 30 years and S.L.A.A. sponsor for 20 years.

In A.A. I was told not to sponsor until I had a year of sobriety. I was so frightened that first time I raised my hand to sponsor someone. I learned with that sponsee to tell the truth about myself. I am gay and I work the 12 Steps only with sponsees. I am not a friend, moneylender or lover. We might become friends in the program with time.

It took five years in A.A. to realize I had another addiction – sex and love. I asked my A.A. sponsor to sponsor me and he had the insight to say I do not

know about this addiction. It took two more years to find my S.L.A.A. sponsor. I travelled great distances by car and air to meet other sober sex and love addicts at 12-Step retreats, Gatherings, Roundups and more to find my sponsor.

My S.L.A.A. sponsor had me write out answers to the 40 Questions for Self-Diagnosis that I answered yes to. From twice a week 30-minute phone calls I determined my bottom-line behaviors over three months. I had to check-in by phone daily that first month telling her how I felt (mad, sad, glad, fear, shame/guilt) and what I was up to. If I needed to talk, I had to ask. This was the blueprint I used with the many sponsees I had the opportunity to share my recovery and service.

As I increased service beyond the group and intergroup level, I found a service sponsor. What a blessing because I learned more about the spiritual principles of the Twelve Traditions and then the Twelve Concepts. When I became a board member, I was assigned a board mentor (a.k.a. service sponsor). He is still my service sponsor and friend 15 years later. I am fortunate to have so many long-time sponsors and

sponsees today.

My sponsors were there when I had a new or difficult sponsee or challenge in service meetings. I became not only sober from my addictions but sober emotionally. I learned to be patient, have good boundaries, and when I did not know something to say so.

During the first year of the Covid pandemic I had over 25 sponsees which helped me to continue to stay sober and practicing the principles. Of course, the return to face-to-

face meetings and work meant I had over committed and today have half of that number. My addiction to service and sponsoring has led me over the last few years to downsize or is it right-size?

How has sponsoring at all levels (group, intergroup, conference and board) of recovery helped me in recovery? First, I cannot do it alone. Second, I need to ask for help. Third, I must give it away. Fourth, stay.

— RITA H./MONTREAL  
NOVEMBER 14, 2023

## 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>**



# Share space

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## A God-Sized Hole



Twenty-three years ago, I walked into a therapist's office in a rather pathetic condition. I could not eat. I could not sleep. I was totally discombobulated, having just been rejected by the object of a year-long obses-

sion and emotional seduction: Nicole.

I had always seen women in one of two ways: as a sexual object, or as an object of perfection which I placed on a pedestal. Nicole was the latest

and most-extreme example of the latter. She was perfection in my eyes: a beautiful, intelligent blond, a pilot, a triathlete who could play the piano and guitar and write impressive poetry.

From the moment I laid eyes on her at our workplace, I became obsessed with winning her love, and for almost the next year she took up most of my thoughts every day.

I would ruminate about how I could run into her at work, spend time to talk with her, rehearse what I would say to her, review what I had said to her, and evaluate what I could have done better to make her like me more and make her realize that we were meant for each other.

Most waking moments were consumed with thoughts about Nicole. All my motivations for exercise, dieting, self-care, etc., were all based on winning her love.

I tried to maximize our frustratingly few encounters each week by planting seeds about how well we got along, and how we had a unique emotional connection, how I understood and appreciated her more than any other man she had known, how our temperaments were perfectly matched for each other, and so on. It was an emotional seduction,

and I used every bit of my intelligence and manipulation skills to work it.

Looking back on it now, I believed subconsciously that if I could win the love of this perfect woman, then I would finally be lovable, something I did not feel deep down. It didn't matter that I had a loving wife and three beautiful children. That was not enough. I had a need that could only be filled by Nicole (I thought). All my low-self-esteem problems where women were concerned would finally go away. I would be complete.

Over time, my machinations wore her down, and we finally ended up spending a night together. We weren't sexual per se (it was never about sex with her), but we kissed and cuddled and talked all night long, and I was high as a kite the entire time.

By the time morning came around, I had put enough emotional pressure on her to convince her to be my mistress. We parted ways after breakfast, me to go back to my wife and kids, and her to go out of town for a few days to visit some old high-school friends.

However, when she shared what was going on between us with her friends, they pointed out that she was getting into something that wasn't what

she professed to want: a husband to start a family with. Instead, she was going to be the other woman. She saw the light, came back into town, and announced that she didn't want to have a relationship with me after all. She backed this up by instantly erecting a very tall and powerful emotional wall between us.

So, after a very long and stressful year, victory had been snatched out of my hand at the last moment, and the surprise, frustration, and catastrophic nature of this caused me to just lose it. I did not know what to do or what would happen to me. I had placed all my hope for self-worth on Nicole, and she had rejected me. Now what was I going to do? Not being able to sleep or eat, suddenly becoming extremely depressed...this is what drove me to seek professional help.

As the therapist sat me down and began asking me questions about why I was there, I couldn't stop talking about Nicole and what had happened. It was Nicole this and Nicole that. The therapist had to keep dragging me back from my rants about Nicole to answer the questions she had asked about me. One of the questions was whether there had been any alcohol in my family of origin. I admitted

that my father had been an alcoholic, but dismissed that by saying it had nothing to do with why I was there, then went back to talking about Nicole.

Finally, out of frustration, the therapist walked over to a white board hanging on her wall, drew a very crude figure of a person, and in the middle of the torso, drew a circle. As I watched with curiosity she said, "You have a God-sized hole that you've been trying to fill up with Nicole." I thought to myself, "OMG, she probably draws this stupid figure for anyone who comes in here no matter the reason!" but said something a bit more tactful to her about it. She paused, then asked me if I would be willing to at least read a book. I couldn't very well say no to that, so agreed. She handed me "Adult Children of Alcoholics." I rolled my eyes, but promised I would read it. I took it home and the next day cracked it open. And I cried and cried and cried. I went back to her the following week with a bit more humility and asked her what she thought I should do. She recommended group therapy with a different therapist.

So, I attended group therapy for a number of years, during which I came to realize that I was both a sex and a love ad-

dict. On the advice of that therapist, I entered the S.L.A.A. program.

Yet, in spite of two to three weekly meetings, obtaining a sponsor, and working other parts of the program, I couldn't let Nicole go. While she had made it clear that a romantic relationship was out of the question (and had actually started dating another man who would end up being her first husband before long), her emotional wall eventually came down and we started what I now know was an emotional affair. This "friendship" took various forms over the next few years, including, in the end, actually going into business together! I knew that I was addicted to her and had told her as much, but we both were getting the emotional connection out of our relationship that we thought we couldn't get elsewhere.

It wasn't until about three years after being in S.L.A.A. that I was able to break off contact with her. She and I had traveled out of town together for a business gig and had ended up once again cuddling in bed the last night. By the time we got back, I was as high as I had been that first night almost four years prior. I remember walking into my home where my wife and three young

boys were, so high off Nicole that I really didn't even notice them. It was such a horrible realization that I knew I had to end it.

She happened to be moving to a different city right then, so the timing was good. I told her that I needed to break off all contact and so didn't want to know her new address or phone number. She had known this would be coming at some point, and so didn't resist it. We had a tearful farewell, after which I destroyed all emails, photos, and any other trappings of Nicole that I had in my possession. Although I felt a sense of loss, at this point in my recovery, I could see how damaging my holding on to her had been to my recovery, my relationship with my family, my self-esteem, and probably a bunch of other stuff. And, to my surprise, my biggest emotion was a sense of relief. My recovery also took a huge leap forward, I think because I had done something so significant for myself.

Although for a few years afterwards I would catch tidbits of news about Nicole from mutual friends (including her divorce), I didn't obsess over her and didn't want to look her up. Eventually, we had enough separation in time that I lost all track of her. Years went by

that I didn't even think about her. And this was because I was working my program.

At the time, my biggest struggle in recovery was with the concept of a Higher Power. I came into the program a staunch atheist because of some religious experiences I had growing up. I had come to view people who believed in God as weak and unable to handle life themselves. Although I was willing to do the Steps on a superficial level, I really wasn't willing to "drink the Kool-Aid" of the whole God-thing (as I viewed it), and so trudged along in recovery trying to do it mainly by myself (which of course, didn't yield very good results). A story for another time is how all that changed for me, but suffice it to say that after 10 years in program I finally realized that I was spinning my wheels in recovery, not seeing the results I saw others experiencing, and the only difference seemed to be the whole HP thing. So, I finally humbled myself, acted as if I believed in a Higher Power...until I actually did. And then miraculous things began happening in my life. Again, another story for another time, but suffice it to say that this truly changed my recovery. When I got to the point

where I truly realized/believed that there was something out there that loved me unconditionally--as I was, with all my imperfections--for the first time I finally accepted myself, and for the first time truly felt lovable. The shame was gone, and so were my obsessions.

I also found my need for affirmation from others-- especially women--drop away. I loved myself, knew that Higher Power loved me, and didn't need love from anyone else. I found myself enjoying solitude and found satisfaction in my life as a single person. When I finally began dating, I found that I was very selective, being interested in a woman only if she could add value to my life. And considering how good my life was by myself, and how much compromise a relationship takes, it was a pretty high standard to meet!

In fact, during the 12 years after becoming single, I only had two relationships: One lasted six weeks and the other three months. I terminated both relationships when it was evident that they were taking increasingly more out of my life than they were putting in. Being able to walk away was evidence to me that I truly no longer needed to be in a relationship to be happy.

Fast forward five years from the last of those relationships. I was at the point in my life where my sons had grown up and left home, I had recently retired, and with plans to sail the world, sold all my possessions and began searching for an appropriate sailboat. This was a very deliberate process, with a lot of input from my therapist, my sons, my sponsor, other trusted program members, and especially from my Higher Power, whom I had now come to trust implicitly. The doors to this process kept opening up in amazing ways, so I knew my Higher Power was behind it all.

But, I had frequently been asked a question (with some incredulity) when explaining my plans to people: “You are going alone?!?” It was an obvious question, and my reply was always, “I’m planning to go alone unless Higher Power puts someone in my life to accompany me.” (I had long since given up on active dating, putting the responsibility of me having or not having a mate on my Higher Power.) So, my plans went forward, and I finally found the boat-of-my-dreams. Three days after purchasing it, I got a weird text message out of the blue.

It was from Nicole. It had

been so long since we had any contact (17 years, to be exact), and the message was so nebulous that I thought it was probably intended for someone else. But, to be honest, my heart did race a bit at seeing her name.

I decided to call her instead of responding to the text. It turned out that the text was indeed intended for me. She was wondering what I was up to these days. She had been divorced from her second husband for a year and a half and felt like reaching out.

We ended up talking for three hours straight, catching up on 17 years. It was like old times, that same emotional connection. But this time, we were both single and free (me with a military pension and her with a large alimony settlement). I told her my sailing plans, and she got very excited about that, saying that she loved sailing, and we both knew she loved traveling. We finally ended the call both feeling very excited and hopeful that maybe we would rekindle the relationship and travel the world on my sailboat. I couldn’t believe this was not a Higher Power thing. I mean, three days after buying my boat, and I hadn’t heard from her in 17 years! Paahhleeaaaaasssse!

After I hung up, I immediately called my sponsor.

We had a long talk. He wisely reminded me about what had brought me into Program, the chaos and damage my obsession with her had caused, and so on. We also talked about how admittedly the present situation was different because we were both now single and unattached adults, we had both grown, etc. We agreed that I would, very slowly and with accountable-to-sponsor boundaries in place, reacquaint myself with Nicole and see what happened and whether I was able to stay healthy.

She lived on the other side of Florida, so we weren't close enough for an immediate visit. Instead, we talked on the phone a couple of times each week. It was amazing how similar our personal growth paths had been in many ways. We still felt very comfortable with each other and had many great conversations.

But, during it all I was keeping a very careful eye on my emotions and behavior to see if I was getting impulsive or obsessive. And I was doing pretty good. For example, if she called and left a voicemail, but I had something else going on, I noticed that I was finishing

that before calling her back (sometimes waiting until the next day or even the day after if I was busy). If we were talking and it got to be bedtime, I signed-off to finish the conversation some other time. There were also other signs that this was something that might improve my life, but it would still have to prove itself. In the meantime, I was going to live my life just as I had been.

After a few weeks, we decided we should meet, but those plans kept falling apart for various reasons. At the same time, I was having to move my boat around from one side of Florida (where I purchased it) to the other (where I lived)—a nine-day trip. I was not comfortable sailing this boat by myself since it was much larger than any previous boats I had owned, and so began lining up crew to help me sail it around the state. But despite my best efforts, I could not find anyone to help for the first few days. Nicole, coincidentally, lived about an hour from my boat. So, to kill two birds with one stone, we decided (with some trepidation), that she would help me move the boat the first three days. So, we would be meeting for the first time in 17 years, stuck on a 38' boat for three days and three nights!

When she showed up, I was quite surprised at how beautiful she still was. After all, by this time I was 57 and she was 49! She looked just as I remembered her, and I found myself, once again, very physically attracted to her. We spent the first day prepping the boat for the journey and getting used to each other. I think we were both surprised at how comfortable we felt and how much fun we were having together.

But, over the next few days as we sailed down Florida's east coast and she shared in more detail the story of her life the previous 17 years, a lot of unhealthiness and trauma revealed itself. While she always had been big on self-improvement, and still was, there were a lot of signs that in some ways she was pretty screwed up. It also became clear over the next few days that a relationship between us was not going to work out; we were both looking for different things. At the end of the three days, I thanked her for helping me move my boat, and we parted company.

And, amazingly, I was okay with us going separate ways. I won't deny that the whole thing was very emotional on a lot of levels. But, it was very

obvious that I had changed. I didn't contemplate at any time trying to change myself to make a relationship with her possible. I didn't try to convince her that that a relationship between us was possible and that we should give it a try.

And, even more telling, I didn't have any further contact with her after we parted ways (and still haven't a year and a half later). It was worth a try, but when it became clear that it wouldn't be a healthy relationship for me, I was able to walk away.

Although I still don't quite understand exactly what Higher Power's purpose was in having Nicole pop into my life so dramatically after so many years, it was clear after some contemplation that I no longer need to fill my God-Sized hole with a woman—even Nicole. My Higher Power has filled that hole to the brim, giving me everything I need to be satisfied with life. I continue to let Higher Power determine when or if I'm supposed to have a partner in life, and in the meantime, I've discovered that life is indeed an adventure whether I'm alone or with a partner. I'm very excited to see what my Higher Power has in store for me next!

— BARRY C.



# Sharing Our Feelings: An Essential Tool for Recovery



Hello. We are Deb and Stephen, two members of S.L.A.A. who have been on the editing team preparing the second edition of the Basic Text for the Fellowship's 50th anniversary. Our team has spent countless hours discussing how feelings are conveyed in the Basic Text, including how the word "feel"

is used. These discussions have led us to consider how we talk about feelings in meetings and in our everyday lives. We want to share our thoughts with you.

**Deb:** In my addiction, I rarely shared my feelings, and the consequences were many. If I was not clear about how I was feeling, misunderstand-

ings and conflicts happened. My loved ones couldn't read my mind, so if I didn't share my feelings for fear of being vulnerable, they couldn't respond to me. This caused resentments. When I kept my feelings to myself, especially my strong emotions like fear, anger, shame, remorse, and sadness, I experienced emotional and physical pain. The most serious effect of not being able or willing to share my feelings was that, as an addict, I turned to sex and love, substances, or other behaviors as a way of numbing myself or escaping my pain.

As I look back on the ways not sharing my feelings harmed me, I can now admit that my unresolved, intense emotions often led me to soothe those feelings with sex and love and act out in my bottom-line behaviors. Then I felt shame, guilt, and remorse, which led me to act out more. What a vicious cycle I was in!

**Stephen:** I've heard in S.L.A.A. that "feelings are not facts, but they are real, and they must be acknowledged." I have certainly found this to be true. If I'm having an uncomfortable feeling, it's important for me to identify it and accept that I'm having it, so I have a

chance to reconcile it. When I do this, the negative emotion has less hold on me. As my sponsor says, "A burden shared is a burden halved."

**Deb:** I protected my secrets about acting out and my addiction for fear of being found out or having someone try to intervene. I had hurtful exchanges with others, pushing them away with statements like "What I do is none of your business," "I am not hurting anyone," and "I'm going to leave you if you continue to confront me." This left those who cared about me hurt, angry, and afraid to share their feelings with me ... ever. This robbed me of emotional closeness, intimacy, and trust.

**Stephen:** In recovery, this is not the way we want to live. Our goal is to be and stay sober — physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. We strive to be our best authentic selves in all we do, and one important way to do that is to share our feelings. But this new mindset doesn't happen overnight.

**Deb:** I first had to learn how to "name" my feelings. I started out simply by sharing six basic feelings with my loved ones, sponsor, and fellow members — mad, sad, glad,

hurt, ashamed, and afraid. This seemed emotionally risky at first, and I felt vulnerable and exposed. So in the beginning, I would share the intellectual information located in my brain that began with the words “I feel,” but was actually a thought. I said things like: “I feel that I am doing well in recovery,” “I feel that my sponsor expects too much of me,” and “I feel that my homegroup is very supportive of me.” Eventually I realized that while expressing myself this way was acceptable, grammatically correct, and seemed safer, I would have to learn another way to talk about my feelings in order to connect emotionally with others. This meant that I needed to share my feelings by using “feeling” words.

Here are examples. Instead of saying “I feel that I am doing well in recovery,” I could say “I feel happy and satisfied with my recovery right now.” Rather than saying “I feel that my sponsor expects too much of me,” I could share how I was really feeling by saying, “I feel annoyed when my sponsor expects a lot from me.” And instead of saying “I feel that my homegroup is very supportive of me,” I could say “I feel grateful to my homegroup for

supporting me.” Sharing this way better connected me with others. By becoming vulnerable and approachable I became more honest and trustworthy.

**Stephen:** One of the quirks of the English language is that the word “feel” is often used to express a belief, a thought, or an opinion rather than an emotion. In fact, when we’re having a feeling we usually just say, “I am \_\_\_\_\_.” This valuable piece of information helps me sort out and resolve problematic or strong emotions faster.

For instance, if I’m “feeling betrayed” I’ve learned to stop and ask myself if “betrayed” is really an emotion. Upon closer examination I realize that “betrayed” is actually my opinion about what I think someone did to me. Digging deeper I may find that because of this betrayal I am angry, disappointed, ashamed, surprised, bewildered, or brokenhearted. Once I acknowledge how I truly feel I can begin to move past the sense of resentment I have over the betrayal. This helps me prepare to move toward the other person in a less accusatory or defensive way, so I can begin the process of reconciliation.

**Deb:** As I practiced this

new way of communicating with those around me, I experienced more happiness in my life. I was less likely to act out. The tension and conflict I once had in my communication with others turned into healthier, more respectful, trustworthy exchanges. As a result, I am now not only a person who shares my feelings; I have become a person other people share their feelings with too, thus deepening my relationships.

**Stephen:** Those new in recovery are told to start feeling, start sharing their feelings, and be rigorously honest. They may innocently assume they are doing this when they use the word “feeling” to express an opinion, and are pleased at the progress they’re making — that is, until the person they are speaking with gets offended by their opinion! I’ve learned that people are usually willing to know how I am feeling; they are less interested and more likely to be upset by my opinions. My sponsees and I talk a lot about how to dig deep for their true feelings. In my experience, understanding this tricky nuance in the language can be difficult, but in the end, it’s really valuable.

**Deb and Stephen:** Our relationships improve greatly when built on this new way of sharing intimately. We find it imperative to share honestly with others in times of joy, despair, anger, and grief if we truly want to live sober a day at a time. We have come to understand that “in full possession of our own personal sense of dignity, and living our way into intimate partnership with another, we found that we no longer needed to rely solely on sexual expression to provide our sense of security and identity. Our growing ability to trust, to share, and to live openly in a partnership was already helping to provide these things.” (Basic Text, pg. 103)

This new way of communicating and our commitment to becoming feeling persons has clearly changed our lives. One day at a time, we have over a half-century of sobriety between us. We jest that Sharing our feelings should be added to S.L.A.A.’s “Five Ss,” after Sobriety, Sponsorship and meetings, Steps, Service, and Spirituality. Sharing our feelings has truly become an essential tool for our recovery.

— DEB W. AND STEPHEN S.

## French

# Se reconstruire

Je travaille le programme DASA depuis 2 ans 1/2, 3 réunions par semaines, des appels à des ami-e-s des fraternités très régulièrement, lectures et marrainage. Je me sens très soutenue, j'ai comme un filet de sécurité sous moi en cas de besoin. Aujourd'hui je sors de mon anorexie amoureuse, j'envisage la possibilité d'une nouvelle relation. J'étais partie en courant d'une relation, diabolisant l'autre et ayant peur d'elle. J'ai encore tendance au phénomène "d'obsession romantique", mais je sais mieux interagir avec et utiliser les outils du programme pour ne pas rester "scotcher" dedans. Mes relations de façon générale se sont améliorées. Je suis à la fois plus tolérante, et aussi plus m'affirmer tranquillement et aller vers ce qui est bon pour moi (ou le construire si besoin).

—ANONYME

## English

# Rebuilding

I have been working in the DASA program for two and a half years, attending three meetings per week, calling fellows regularly, reading, and sponsoring. I feel very supported, like I have a safety net under me when I need it. Today, I am coming out of my love anorexia and considering the possibility of a new relationship. I had run away from a relationship, demonizing the other person and being afraid of them. I still tend to have the "romantic obsession" phenomenon, but I know how to interact better with it and use the program's tools to not get stuck in it. My relationships in general have improved. I am both more tolerant and more assertive in going towards what is good for me (or building it if necessary).

—ANONYMOUS



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Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup, originators of the Inspiration Line, want to thank Fellowship Wide Services and *the Journal* for supporting the Inspiration Line. GDVI wants to acknowledge the 15 volunteers from all over the US & Canada that leave inspirational messages on the Line and credit them for making this huge milestone possible: Alicia, California, Alyce, Montreal, Canada, Alyson, Pennsylvania, Bob, Pennsylvania, Brenda, Maryland/Florida, 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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