

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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Motions adopted at the 1989, 1990, and 1991 Conferences chartered *the Journal*, but it is impractical for all of the content of a periodical such as *the Journal* to be Conference-approved. Each recovery group can determine its own position on the use of content from *the Journal* at its meetings.

Just Start Writing...

Coming Out of Resignation

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:

- Sobriety. Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottomline 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.
- 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.
- 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 Stalking: "Have you experienced and or been a stalker? How has S.L.A.A. helped you recover?" 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: #218 — Jan/Feb — BDSM (bondage, discipline (or domination), sadism, and masochism)— "Is BDSM a bottom-line or accessory behavior* for you? How did you recover from your addiction to BDSM?" *see "Setting Bottom Lines" pamphlet. Deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2025.

And: #219 — March/April Fantasy — "In what ways has letting go of fantasy helped you grow in recovery? How do you stay present and build real intimacy instead of escaping into fantasy?" Deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2026.

Please go to https://slaafws.org/thejournal/ and click on "Answer Question of the Day."

"Have you experienced and or been a stalker? How has S.L.A.A. helped you recover?"

I have experienced someone who has been romantically obsessed. I had to adjust and rethink my presence on WhatsApp and I had to consider phone or email communications due to the overwhelming response I would receive. One of the discoveries from a couple of programs which has helped me with this is realizing that if trying to help someone upsets my spiritual condition or the amount of time spent causes me to think that I'm trying to help their recovery more than they are trying to work for their own recovery, perhaps I need to re-evaluate.

- JOEL S (SF, CA)

Question of the day

Intense (and I mean intense)! Online stalking of crushes and ex-partners has been a regular part of my behaviour from a young age. Checking a qualifier's spotify account used to be a daily habit for me, and I would look at their past listening history to formulate theories about what they may or may not be thinking or doing. It was torture. It was insanity. I lost hours and hours doing this. When it came time to define bottom lines with my sponsor. I was nervous to put direct and indirect contact with qualifiers on my list because I knew I would have to give up my habitual daily online stalking and I was really scared I would not be able to do so. To my surprise, I am now over two months free of this bottom line and am so very grateful for the gift of ability I have been given to surrender this behaviour. Sometimes when I am on my computer I get the urge to check an ex-partner's account, but then I am reminded that it has never and will never provide me with what I am actually seeking- a sense of security and relief in alignment my HP.

Anonymous, Montreal

Question of the day

I believe I have played both roles at points in my relationship & addiction journey. I have pursued unavailable people beyond the limits of their expressed & unexpressed boundaries. Only after coming into the fellowship did I get introduced to something I should have known in the first place, which is respecting myself and other people's boundaries.

But more recently, I have experienced being pursued (which is a better way to describe this). The pursuit I experienced is difficult for a people-pleaser wanting to help. In the process of "helping", the pressure/feeling of the stalking/pursuit experience provided me quite a bit of clarity over my part in how my overindulgence in the past may have felt to another individual. It's a feeling of suffocation and boundary crossing that is unlike any other I have experienced.

I now step away more quickly from situations which are presented to me. When someone says they are taking a pause or unwilling/unable to pursue a relationship, I respect that. I no longer pursue beyond the request to separate, but it's still difficult, I must admit. With the experience fresh in my mind, I am much more empathetic to other people's journey given that I have some perspective on it, as well.

Joel S (San Francisco, CA)

Learning Boundaries



I was bullied at my high school by some classmates. That was one of the reasons why I left the town where it happened and moved to a big city. 25 years passed and I got a profile on Facebook and my own business website with details for my clients to contact me. Those details were inter-

cepted by bullies from my high school. Some of them became single mothers who, along with their kids, were kicked out of their homes by their husbands. They wrote to me. They searched for me all that time and finally found me. One of the stalkers moved to another town and I started getting

weird phone calls from taxis and institutions from town. They claimed I ordered a taxi in that town (far away from me) and I heard a terrifying laughter when I tried to explain I didn't order any taxi. Then some institutions called me claiming I applied for a loan with them. I was also contacted by unknown people who claimed I placed an ad in that town's press and now they want to provide some services of making a customised couch for me. I got phone calls from some laundry claimimg I left some dirty laundry with them in that town and I needed to pick it up.

I had to change my phone number and move my business site to Facebook where I could block those bullies. And yet even there I would get emails on my Facebook business page from some of them that they wanted to rekindle a friendship with me. I quickly blocked them but then they started writing from different profiles. I never responded to this, but the emails kept coming although less regularly.

I started working hard at another Twelve-Step fellowship where I learnt how to set firm boundaries. At one point, in May 2024 I was called by the stalkers. They claimed they had intercepted my new phone number and when I told them I didn't want to hear from them, I felt like I was not getting through to them. I told them I wanted them to disconnect but they didn't seem to understand. Then I threatened them with contacting my lawyer and the police. I told them our friendship would be rekindled by the authorities. Then I disconnected. But they kept calling. I decided to answer my phone but I didn't say anything. Instead, I put it into my bag and shook it.

After that, I never heard from them again. Now I am no longer scared of those people. I learnt at S.L.A.A. and at another program that it is important to be upfront and confront such people and situations hands-on. I am also learning in S.L.A.A. that such people are very sick and if I am scared of them, I only feed them with my attention and it is not worth it. I did trauma therapies and am still doing Twelve-Step proincluding S.L.A.A.. grams. Thanks to it, I learnt to focus on my own recovery and left sick people to their Higher Power, who will sort them out sooner or later and I don't need to worry about it.

ANONYMOUS

From Obsession to Freedom

I have been the stalker most of my life in different ways. I've also been stalked a few times. The most recent experience was both at the same time. I was stalking my husband's whereabouts — physically with trackers and digitally with his passwords. I was looking for reasons to distrust. At the same time, I was being stalked insidiously by my last qualifier.

In active addiction, I lived in the illusion of how great I am and woe is me. I prided myself on being one step ahead, carrying broad shoulders of control. Boundaries weren't part of my vocabulary. People were objects, and I treated them as such.

Eventually, it brought me to my knees. First it affected my friendships, then my family, and nearly my place at work.

Recovery in S.L.A.A. has brought me from survival mode into peace and serenity. I am no longer in a fog. I am no longer frozen. My world has become wider and brighter.

I learned to let go. When I practice giving it up to my

Higher Power, the curtains are drawn back, and I can clearly see how my obsession manifests the disease. Using the tools of the program — outreach, authentic connection with myself and other members — I am brought back to the present and given a choice to do the honest, next right thing.

I no longer need to look through a magnifying glass at the keyhole of someone else's life or be a caged bird in my own life. I lost myself in that prison of control, watching and monitoring, which only mirrored my addictive relationships. S.L.A.A. has brought me personal freedom.

Today, I am learning to selfidentify, not to be driven by insecurity, fear, jealousy, or obsession. Today, I have a choice. My Higher Power wants the best for me. When I surrender to recovery, I am free.

If you see yourself in my story, know that you are not alone. There is a way out.

- Trish NY

Fearing for My Safety

Trigger warning: references to abuse

I was 13 years old the first time a man tried to physically pursue me. I was a freshman in high school, stepping off the bus only two blocks away from my home.

I lived in a quiet, wealthy neighborhood and was too young to even consider the possibility of a nearby threat. A man nearly 20 years older than me happened to be walking down the street the same time I stepped off the bus, and was stopped in his tracks at the sight of me.

When he began following me home, making comments on my body, comments on what he'd do to me if I only just went back with him to his home, I felt paralyzed with fear, and despite not wanting to reveal where I lived, I led him straight back to my house to cut the interaction short. I remember making it back inside of my house, heart racing and dizzy with terror.

The entire duration of my walk home now mostly a blur to me, I had a throbbing stone of guilt lodged in my chest for feeling like the whole thing was ultimately my fault: I did not tell this man to leave me alone, I did not tell him I was not interested.

I was only a teenager and scared of this man who was much older and stronger than me, and I feared what he would do if I denied him completely. Not only this, but I kept it to myself. For the remainder of the school year this man would wait by my bus stop and follow me home, attempting to get me to come back to his place. Every time, I would laugh him off and passively let him know I was busy with other things. Back then I was incredibly ashamed of my lack of setting boundaries. My parents and most of my friends had no idea this was going on, due to my guilt. I felt if I revealed the situation to any adult figure that could possibly help me, they'd disgrace me for not doing more to tell this man to leave me alone. I was swallowed in a pit of horror and embarrassment and did nothing more than become a yielding shell of a young girl.

By the following school year, this man had stopped showing up and turned into the Journal

nothing more than a disturbing memory to me. But the weight of the situation remained heavily on my shoulders- especially when I found myself in a similar situation only 4 years later.

I was working at a local diner chain and a new hire entered one morning- charming, tall, and buff. He looked as if he could crush me if he only quickly became tried. We friends, and later on he began a romantic relationship with one of my best friends. When my friend moved away for college, he and I still frequently spent time together while they juggled a long distance relationship. I, too, was in a romantic relationship during this time. Despite this man, I'll call him Tony, and I, both dating other people, it did not stop the obsession he began to form towards me. I did not see it coming, not up until it was far too late to stop the feelings he had developed. The turning point of chaos was the first time he tried to kiss me, and I immediately rejected him in disgust and shock. Soon after that happened, Tony and my best friend broke things off for that reason, and I began to keep my distance from him. But it was hard, considering the fact that I'd see him almost every day I was on a shift at our shared workspace.

I felt the passiveness that swallowed me as a teenager come into play: I could've reported him to my boss when to things began spiral, could've told my mother. whom I still lived with, the truth of what was happening. But I didn't. The fear of an angry response from outing Tony kept me silent. The next year was the most stressful of my life. There were mornings I would wake up finding love letters and poems stuck in my window, which accumulated to the point where there must have been hundreds of written notes to me shoved in the back of drawers or sitting atop my trash. There were days I'd be home and he would show up at my doorstep unannounced, or days where I'd come home and he'd be waiting outside my bedroom. The more intense these interactions became, the more worried I'd become about setting more strict boundaries with him. Tony knew perfectly well that his affections were not reciprocated, yet he never stopped pursuing me in disturbing ways.

By that point I felt if I had rejected him even more bluntly than I previously had, it may the Journal

very well only make things worse. There were times he'd show up somewhere in public where he'd known I'd be, flowers in his hands and devoted speeches ready for me, shrugging it off when I'd reject these advances. There were many moments at work where he'd use any excuse to touch me, hands on my hips as he passed me by or a firm grip on the back of my neck when I'd be busy chopping lemons in the back kitchen. For a year, the notes, the touching, the hundreds of ignored calls and long affectionate texts did not falter. And of course, just like all those years ago, I couldn't help but feel responsible.

Things took an even darker turn one night that he and I were working a shift together at the diner. We closed up around 10 p.m. and I hastily left so I didn't have to be around him any longer. There, fumbling with my keys to get into my car, I felt a cold blade held gently against my throat, a strong hand on my shoulder, and the words: "It would be an honor to take your life" leaving Tony's lips. I froze in absolute terror, unable to speak or move. Then: a quiet chuckle, the pressure of the knife and his hand gone and footsteps as he walked away, got in his car and left while I stood trembling. I moved locations to a different chain of the diner soon after. I had trouble sleeping, eating, and almost never left my house unless I had to work. My life once full of laughter and friends and fun outings turned into a deep pit of isolation. I barely even felt safe in my own home, considering that nothing had previously stopped him from invading my space there, too. It all came to a stop when my best friend who used to date him was visiting town.

We drove to my house and found him there outside, waiting for me. She told me to wait car, got Out screamed at him in the middle of the street to leave me alone, to guit the harassment and to never return to my house again. She used the sort of aggression that I couldn't, that was needed to finally be rid of him. All I felt was shame as she did what I was far too afraid to do. I am eternally grateful she was there that day, yet I never stopped feeling guilty that I had let it get to the point that it had.

Even to this day, I struggle with that guilt. I still feel the disgrace and blame towards myself lingering, although I'm much more aggressive now in the Journal

setting boundaries towards anyone that makes me uncomfortable. I'm able to push through my utter fear of a man that has the strength to hurt me by using strong language to make them back down, although it took me years to even get to that point. I won't lie-I've had encounters since Tony where I become that yielding shell of a young girl once again and have let things happen that I should have fought against.

But every day I am still learning to stand up for myself. S.L.A.A. has helped me process this part of my life in many ways. Listening to others speak about their stories and how they have formed their ways of thinking has made me feel less alone in something that once felt so isolating. Even further, strange way, S.L.A.A. in a meetings have also led me to become more empathetic towards the situation in its entirety.

Although I'm fully aware Tony's behavior was inappropriate and caused me great distress, I also now know his obsession and limerence towards me was an unrelenting battle for him that also must have felt isolating. Of course, this does not excuse anything in my eyes, but it has led me to grant forgiveness towards him, even if he'll never know it. I used to wish malicious things upon Tony, used to pray he would live a terrible life for the things done. Since going he's S.L.A.A. and having a broader knowledge of victims of love and sex addiction, I want nothing more than for Tony to become aware of his behavior and hopefully heal from it so he can one day learn what reciprocated, healthy love really is. I fully believe even someone who has played an intensely dark figure in my life deserves even that, S.L.A.A. has aided me to let go of the bitterness and resentment I held onto for so many years over my stalker experiences. I don't think I'd be where I am currently in my recovery without letting go of those feelings. It was always necessary for me in order to move on and finally let the past stay there, while taking the things I've learned to defend myself with me.

- Breezy J., Los Angeles, CA

Stalking Can Come in Many Forms



Through being in S.L.A.A. I have learned that stalking comes in many forms, some of which may be less obvious of an issue than others.

The first S.L.A.A. bottom line I set with my sponsor was;

"no social media stalking my ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend." When I checked up on these two, it was painful and yet it gave me a jolt of excitement. This kind of stalking also fueled a pity party

around the idea that he had moved on so fast and how hurtful this was to me. I was taught by a sponsor that when I cyber stalked like this, it was akin to emotional cutting. It always hurt me, but it sort of felt good and it gave me the still false sense of connected to that person, and that continued connection was what I (or my addiction) truly wanted. It was painful to give the stalking up, but once I started blocking both of them on various social media sites (even payment apps - my addiction got creative!) started feeling a sense of freedom and began to focus on my own withdrawal and life. I learned to give up being a detective and instead, prayed to God that if there was some information I needed. that God would show me and if not to please lift the obsession. Some people call this behavior info seeking, and I have used it as a tool to give me an illusion of control.

But it is just an illusion; I cannot protect myself from being hurt. I have come to accept that hurt feelings are the price of admission to living a full life. A power greater than I can help me through hurt feelings, but I have to give up

forcing solutions and trying to play God. I began to see over time that there were other areas of digital stalking that I needed to give up in order to keep my sobriety intact. Giving things up to stay often has accompanied with a sense of grief when I realize that I might not get to do what I believe "normal people" got to do. But as I worked the Steps, I became increasingly willing to do things like blocking muting anyone who associated with qualifiers or past painful relationships that I was trying to move forward from. Stalking those people online only prolonged my diseased thinking, increased my longing, and left me vulnerable to the possibility of acting out. It was difficult to let go of the cyber stalking because I still wanted those hits adrenaline as a way to selfsoothe or feel alive. Something like seeing a mutual friend post a picture with my ex would send me into a spiral, but I couldn't look away, I couldn't help but read comments and see who liked it and try to piece information together. It was compulsive and always made me feel worse and connected to recovery and it

made me want to act out, perhaps by posting things to try and perform an "amazing life" online. Since I do not possess the self-control not to creep on these folks, I find using some kind of digital boundary has been helpful, even if it feels extreme or cruel (like blocking).

I also now have boundaries around posting online followed by checking obsessively to see if the person I wanted to see has seen it. This fed the part of my addiction that believed sex and love was a game validation in which there were winners and losers, and if I only played it right, I could get that particular hit I seeking. So much of my addiction has been power and "getting" someone or having the upper hand. I added to my Middle Lines (accessory behaviors) that if I'm checking to see if a particular person interested in has looked at my Story or if I'm checking up on their whereabouts online to maybe figure out why they're not calling me, I then must check in with my spiritual fitness and ask what's going on. I need to take the middleline behaviors seriously because crossing them can lead me into bottom-line behaviors easily - it's a slippery slope.

When I got in my first serious sober relationship, I realized I really wanted to go online and stalk his partners. This was something I always done in relationships and had never thought twice about it. But I decided to add this kind of digital stalking to my bottom lines because online stalking never helped me live in the present, and it always just became a tool to hurt myself and make up stories. three years, I am still together with that partner and I choose to focus on our actual relationship and not give in to some weird itch I have to feel pain or compare and despair. Today, I trust my Higher Power to bring all the info I need to me in God's time and without much effort from me and my addictive detective work. I have discovered that I want to create a safe digital life as well as a safe real life. While living in the age of social media may mean that we are able to access information that we really shouldn't have access to. with Recovery we have choices. And today, I chose to protect myself and my sobriety.

— SARAH B.

Strong Enough to Keep Myself Safe

I've actually been on both sides of the stalking topic. I've been the stalker and the one being stalked. When I look back to that point in my life when I was actively engaging in stalking behavior, I fullbody cringe like I can't believe that was a period of my life. But it was. If I'm being honest, it was a period of my life. But there was also a period of time where I was stalked for years by someone. We dated for about six months and pretty quickly into the relationship it became obvious that he was not faithful. The relationship ended after that.

It remained this kind of undefined situation where continued to live with me, continued to want affection from me. He continued to tell me that he loved me and continued to do whatever he wanted to do. But then if I were to do the same thing, it would cause friction. It was this whole thing. And I didn't realize it then, but it was just a way of basically him saying I can do what I want, but you can't. You stay on the shelf while I go live my life fully and do whatever I want. And then I come back to vou and vou're on the shelf.

I didn't see that back then. I was just kind of living every

day in the moment back then. It was maybe a few years like that and then I would find somebody and I would get into another relationship and he would intentionally try to sabotage that relationship. And this happened quite a few times. I would try to maintain the friendship.

It would become very apparent very early that that was not possible to do. After a no contact was established, there would be sabotaging of the relationship from just behind the scenes, and this just was a cycle that happened over and over again. And anytime a relationship ended, he would come back into the picture and send family members to my door.

He hid in the bushes to hear what I had to say or call me from different numbers, contact family members, contact friends and say that he was worried about me like he thought that I was losing my mind or something.

So I didn't want to be with him anymore. I didn't realize how much it was affecting me. It just kind of seemed like something that was just happening and I didn't really understand the gravity of it until I was outside of the situation. Once I got outside of the situa-

tion, it was much different. I could see the behaviors for what they were. It got so bad at one point I had had surgery and as I'm recovering from the anesthesia coming out of surgery, he proposed to me. I was in this period of my life where a lot of things were crumbling for me. I was scared.

I was thinking I'm going to be alone forever as I'm coming out of the surgery and then he proposed to me, of course I said yes. I'm a sex and love addict. And here's somebody basically throwing themselves at me in a time where I am vulnerable and scared and I do not know what is going to happen.

So, a couple more years went by. I just would prolong the date further and further anytime anybody would ask me about it, especially family members. I would say, "We're waiting for this to happen. We're waiting for that to happen." Then I would just keep prolonging it. And then, right before I joined S.L.A.A., I was in another relationship about 6 months, which was verv destructive in its own right, and is the reason I'm in S.L.A.A., so ultimately grateful for it. But during that period of time, we didn't talk for that entire relationship.

And then as soon as the re-

lationship was over, maybe a month or two later, he was suddenly, magically around again. And then I was going through my withdrawal in S.L.A.A. and just that need of not wanting to be alone was so strong that I would still say, "Don't leave me." And he would just make it known he was there to take advantage.

And eventually I gained the strength to establish no contact. And for the first time in almost 10 years, I can have a relationship that isn't haunted by someone.

I just want to wrap up by saying that there is a content creator that I watch who says not to call them my stalker or my anything, not to declare any ownership at all. It's always the stalker, the weirdo, the creep who will not stop calling me.

And I think that's always important to remember that this is not because of me. This is the other person's problem. And I just need to keep myself safe.

And I am grateful to S.L.A.A. and to everyone I've met who have gotten me to this point where I can be strong enough to keep myself safe. So, thank you for the time.

Pix

Share space

Walking Into the Sunshine

I'm 84 years old and I've lived a long, mostly healthy life. Unbeknownst to me and most of those who knew me, including family, friends, and work colleagues, I was living a lie!

Who was I really--the man behind the mask, pretending I was someone I was not? I had a childhood and adolescence filled with sexual abuse by a caregiver, physical abuse due to my scrawny stature, and emotional abuse because I was made to feel insecure, inferior, and inadequate.

I retreated into my own self-imposed solitary confinement where I would not be judged and where I could be the master of my fate. I developed many fears--of social connec-

tion, of physical intimacy, of learning to drive a car, of dating. I was a virgin until I married at the age of 24 because I was sexually ignorant and underdeveloped.

I stayed alone and played alone until one day at summer camp when I was serenaded by the whole camp singing, "We love you Stevie, oh yes we do!" That was the fix and the adulation I had been looking for, and it set me off on a quest to prove I was worthy. So I began running away from my loneliness and self-pity. Over the next many years, I had a respected and honored legal career and became a competitive athlete, running every day for over 13 years and completing 22 marathons. I also became a serial seeker of love and sex in all the wrong places. I would seek out massage therapists who would help me feel relief and self-hatred at the same time. Over many years, my life became unbearable as I tried to compartmentalize my real life from my fantasy world.

All the while, I was selfishly acting in my interests, unaware of the wrongs I was committing against everyone else, including myself. Finally, I was exposed after all of those years. I understood all of the harm I had caused. It was the best thing that could have happened to me. My wonderful wife of 54 years separated from me and put me on notice.

I was at rock bottom, stumbling around in muck and chaos. It was time to engage with a therapist and confess to my behavior. With the help of this therapist, I began to learn what I had done and that I was a sex and love addict. I also realized that my addictive compulsive disorders meant that I was on the autism spectrum. The therapist urged me to join S.L.A.A. and BSS (Brothers, Sisters, Siblings) in particular. I took her advice and now, after 280 meetings in 280 days, I am working the Steps. I am learning from reading the Basic Text and articles in the Journal and listening to my loving and brilliant fellows. My wife and I are amid a successful reconciliation, and I'm continuing my recovery every minute of every day. My story continues, and although I'm still and will always be an addict, I'm constantly working towards walking through the golden door into the sunshine!

- Steve M.



Just Start Writing...

I don't know how many times people, friends, acquaintances, colleagues and strangers have told me to 'just start writing'. So, here I go......

Like so many adults struggling in the world today, I grew up in an alcoholic, dysfunctional, violent home with parents who were ill-equipped to take care of themselves let alone raise and love four children. As with so many other lovehungry children, I was manipulated and sexually abused and the outfall from that lifealtering experience led me to places no one should ever visit or experience.

Suffice to say I abused drugs, alcohol and women in search of that ever-elusive sense of self-worth, acceptance and inner peace. Counselling certainly helped me to realize my horrific upbringing was not my fault and ten or so years of being involved with a Twelve-Step program for sex addicts took me out of the shadows of guilt and shame. But it was coming to the realization that the void in my heart, in my soul, was always going to be a

part of me; that no amount of counselling or recovery work was going to set me free from the internal demon that undermines the basics of life experiences and the ability to make sound decisions.

The wiring of my brain, as with every person on this planet, is established by the experiences of childhood. Now the significance of this maturation process can be seen in the decision we make as we move towards adulthood.

Fundamentally, a child who grows up in a loving and nurturing environment will understand the importance of making sound decisions. For me, many of the choices I made as a teenager and young adult were self-serving, and more often than not, hurtful towards others.

The faulty wiring of my brain convinced me to disregard the feelings of others for the sole purpose of feeling good, even if only for a few minutes.

That euphoric feeling, though only temporary, became the focal point of my existence. Nothing else mattered.

I lost friends, partners and houses as a result of my dishonesty and desperate need to not feel that void inside me. Sex with strangers, screwing around on girlfriends and my wife, attending sex clubs were all unhealthy behaviours which undermined everything good in my life. Sadly, I still went ahead with whatever fix was available to me, knowing deep inside I was not going to feel any better afterwards. Actually, I always felt worse – more guilt and shame - though I could not stop myself.

So, what helped me to face the realization that the emptiness inside was always going to be there and that unhealthy behaviours were never going to be the magic pill I so desperately wanted them to be? There are five tools, for a lack of a better term, that I use to help deal with the internal emptiness and enable me to feel better about myself: fitness, friends, self-talk, sitting still and acceptance.

Fitness

Going to the gym five to six days a week was and is the best way for me to start the day. I work out at 6:30 am and no matter how bad or anxious I feel before getting to the gym, I always feel better afterwards. When I first started going to the gym over forty years ago, it was yet another way to meet women. Eventually exercise became a priority to me as a way to stay healthy and feel good inside. And it is for those two reasons alone, I need to be at the gym almost every day.

Friends

Friendships are extremely important to most people and more so for me as they represent my sense of self-worth. If I am hanging around with healthy minded people, then there is a tendency to feel okay about myself. On the flip side, if I am associating with unhealthy people who are also looking to avoid reality, then I too fall back into the trap of looking externally for gratification and validation.

In my younger years, friends were a commodity I used to meet women or manipulate for sex.

Now, friends are people who compliment my sense of self-worth. Friends laugh with me, challenge me, make me think from a different perspective, and more importantly, can help me from acting out and repeating unhealthy behaviours of the past.

Self-talk

Self-talk, positive self-talk has to be the most challenging to perform on a regular basis. I can criticize, denigrate, and destroy my self-worth with ease. Within ninety seconds my internal compass can be stuck in a bitter mixture of uncertainty and darkness.

And I did it to myself, which just compounds the anxiety and negative view I have created. This, I am a master of!!

To combat this toxic sense of self, I focus on activities or behaviours I can be grateful for. What I mean by this is, when the negativity starts to seep into my consciousness, I focus on what provides me with a feeling of gratitude.

For example: I can be grateful for a great workout in the morning, or talking to my 96 year old mother, or handing our personal hygiene products to underprivileged children at the local schools.

Every time those undermining feelings start to permeate my thoughts, I say out loud (in a quiet voice so no one thinks I am crazy) what makes me feel intrinsically better.

I may have to repeat the same sentence twenty or so times before the negativity fades.

Sitting still

There are times when all the expressions of gratitude just don't work. The immediate response is an overwhelming sense of doom and darkness. And I can actually believe there is no end in sight. The trick for me is to stop fighting the negativity and just sit still.

This process has two redeeming benefits: the first is the spinning wheel of negativity slows its pace – it still spews out all the crap, but with less intensity; and the second is eventually the bad feeling and panic subside.

As with everything in the world, nothing ever lasts forever. And the crazy-making, self-destructive thoughts settle down. It is so important to remember that the bad feelings will dissipate – I just have to give time to the process and have a little faith.

Acceptance

What exactly does acceptance mean? Does it mean that no matter what I do, life will be a dismal disappointment? Does it mean some people will always be failures regardless of their efforts? Well, if a person has a skewed perception of reality and feels that life is black and white, not

grey, then maybe the answer to the question is, 'yes'. For me, acceptance means there will be days I feel okay or good and then there will be days I feel the sour damage caused by my upbringing, and I need to accept that.

That's it! It doesn't mean I get to act in a selfish manner and use people to experience a moment of pleasure when reality becomes a challenge. It also doesn't mean I get to gloat when life is brimming with positiveness. It means there will be good and bad days, and I need to accept that.

It is so easy to look at living day to day in a two dimensional bubble where there is an action plan to address the difficulties and challenges, and a process of appreciating a day of sunshine and roses. By no means does this article depict any of the variability life can throw at us.

Even when I stay true to all the tools in my arsenal, life can somehow devise a new way of undermining my sense of inner peace.

What then??

Where do I find the strength to keep going without the self-destructiveness of acting out? An energy healer, Mel (an amazingly insightful lady) helped me to understand that the spirits of those important to me I've lost are always with me. There are three people from my past that help me when I need support the most: my sister who was the only family member I loved and respected; my dad, yes my dad, the person who was afflicted with a torturous life of addiction and violence; and Peter, a dear, dear friend I met at a Twelve-Step program.

Whenever life becomes more than I can handle, I look upwards and to the left where my three compadres exist. I ask questions, vell at them for answers, blame them for the s**t I'm experiencing, somehow get guidance when feeling at a total loss. Some would say this is a Higher Power or spirituality but all I know is they are my internal support network, and I truly appreciate their existence.

I hope this article helps you appreciate the wonders of life and at the same time provides insight to working through difficult issues spurred or compounded by a less than healthy upbringing. The world has a lot to offer every one of us and with hard work, faith and self-appreciation we can all see the goodness.

— PB

Coming Out of Resignation



Trigger warning: references to sexual abuse

I came into S.L.A.A. when my therapist suggested I might be struggling with something called 'intimacy anorexia.' I had no clue what that meant but felt intrigued. So, I did some research and realized the term 'intimacy anorexia' perfectly articulated my lifelong struggles.

As a child, I was fairly outgoing and happy. I enjoyed school, people and playing outdoors. My family was dysfunctional, but I didn't notice the effects of that until the age of about 8 years old, when my personality and emotions be-

gan to change drastically. I was being emotionally and socially bullied by my uncle, who lived with us at the time, and my parents weren't protecting me. I was also being molested by my older female cousin and aunt. I felt so confused and ashamed and didn't know why I wasn't saying no or protecting myself. In fact, I was seeking them both out more. Of course, as a child without any guidance, it was impossible to protect myself from sexual abuse. But at the time, I didn't know that and started to become disgusted with myself and intensely afraid of my vulnerability. I distinctly remember making a promise to myself to stop crying, stop feeling and essentially build walls around my emotional self. I decided to never trust a human being again and keep my true self secret, only allowing her out when I was alone.

Outwardly, not much had changed; I was still more or less social and doing well at school. But internally, a lot had changed, and it was only a matter of time until this started to be apparent in my relationships.

I ditched my childhood best friend and have been friendhopping ever since, always looking for a friend who will give me something: social capital, academic advantage, status. There were moments of genuine connections, but it didn't last. After a couple of years, I would feel slighted or abandoned and my anorexic urge to pull away would take over. Romantically, I felt handicapped. I was attracted to both men and women, but feared and stayed away (if not physically, emotionally) from any person I was attracted to. I told myself the only way I could 'get' a guy to want to date me was by earning it. So, I tried to be as pretty as possible, skinny, smart, popular, sexy. I used my body to seduce men. I ended up having a few very short relationships, usually with guys I didn't even like, starting at around age 14. Despite these relationships being short-lived and addictive, I felt over the moon that someone chose me.

Fast forward to age 27, I found S.L.A.A. For years I couldn't find an anorexia sponsor. I was really suffering with social, emotional and sexual anorexia. I was addicted to porn, fantasy, isolation and masking. I withheld love, affection and compliments even Ι really appreciated someone or something. I remember a fellow in the program told me she loved me (platonically) after we'd been chatting for six months and I just said, "thank you." I felt terrified of expressing affection and being rejected or abandoned. If I didn't express my feelings, they didn't exist, and I wouldn't be hurt. My mom was quite avoidant and would pull away and become distant when I expressed love. It planted this urge to avoid coming off as caring too much.

I finally started an 18-week anorexia workshop and worked all Twelve Steps with a sharing partner. It was such a healing experience to meet others who were just as anorexic as me. It wasn't a perfect experience, I changed sharing partners a few times, but by

the end of it, something shifted within me. Halfway through the workshop I got into yoga and have been consistently practicing it ever since (for about 5 months now). I can't emphasize enough how something as simple as yoga has impacted my healing, giving me something to look forward to every week, improve at, and use to connect with my body and breath. I stopped watching porn after detailing the exact sexual abuse incidents. I never let myself remember fully or articulate exactly what happened to me and this was a crucial step in my recovery. I began telling people 'I love you' and 'I miss you.'

My sharing partner would tell me "I'm so proud of you" and this was very nourishing and a gift. I received a medical diagnosis of complex PTSD and ADHD. I became willing to sponsor. Before working the anorexia steps, I was very resistant to it even though I was qualified in other fellowships. I started to do things professionally that I was dreaming of doing for years, but wouldn't give myself permission to do, like teaching math. I re-installed my Instagram account and began expressing myself, posting on social media, sharing my opinions and thoughts. I realized that my development had been stunted in a lot of areas of my life. Although it felt overwhelming to begin to develop myself instead of hiding away, I did. I started reading books written for teens on making friends, gaining adult skills, achieving financial independence because I had missed those valuable lessons. I still have some way to go, but I'm so proud of myself and grateful for the healing. Romantically, I'm still terrified and suffocated by the idea of commitment, but I really want a partner and someday. family Ι stopped becoming sexual with people outside a committed relationship and this is a selfesteem-raising action.

I have also stopped trusting people I meet immediately. I used to share personal information right away and now I take my time even with friends. When a new or old friend stops taking initiative or reaching out, I don't chase. I let others' actions and consistency guide me, not just words or labels. I truly resigned to anorexia at one point and believed I will never experience human closeness. Now, I've come out of resignation. I hope the same for every anorexic soul out there because it's truly such a painful affliction.

-Anonymous

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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