

# the Journal

Issue #216  
Single Issue \$4



# Codependency

# *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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## Question of the Day

### & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day for this issue is, Codependency – “Please describe how codependency has been an ingredient in sex and love ad-

diction for you.” 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: #217 – Nov/Dec – Stalking: “Have you experienced and or been a stalker? How has S.L.A.A. helped you recover?” Deadline for submissions is Sept. 15, 2025. And #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.

Please go to <https://slaafws.org/thejournal/> and click on “Answer Question of the Day.”

“Please describe how codependency has been an ingredient in sex and love addiction for you.”

Codependency was (and can still be) a driving force in my disease. Before coming to S.L.A.A., I had no boundaries or sense of self and was terrified of being alone. I would pay for people to go to the movies with me - even though I couldn't stand their company. In relationships, to make sure they wouldn't leave me, I molded my values and beliefs (even spiritual beliefs) to what I thought the other person wanted. My rock bottom was letting a man shave my body because he wasn't "usually attracted" to hairy men. I felt like a dog in a kennel being changed. It was incomprehensible demoralization like they talk about in meetings. When I came into the rooms, I was instructed to date myself and meditate daily to form a relationship with a loving Higher Power. It was through this process that I identified my true values and beliefs. I came to realize that I'm a pretty wonderful person - just as I am.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

The fear that someone may leave me has always triggered my fear of and/or addiction to abandonment. When I am in that state: I seek approval, I chase a high, I chase a fight in my relationship or I beg for sex in order to believe he won't leave.

— ANONYMOUS

I depend on others to make me feel better about me.

— ANONYMOUS

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Codependency has been a huge ingredient in my sex and love addiction. I grew up very enmeshed with my mother and her relationship with me was emotionally incestuous. She confided in me in ways that were developmentally inappropriate. She would want to cuddle on the couch or hold hands in public when I was a teenager. I didn't want any part of that, but she was alone and I didn't want her to be sad, so I betrayed my own comfort to try to rescue her.

I brought these instincts into my adolescent and adult relationships: doing things I didn't want to do physically, making emotional promises I couldn't keep, all for the sake of trying to prevent my partners from feeling bad. I would compulsively betray my own boundaries for the sake of my partner. This was a recipe for resentment, passive aggression, and acting out. Through working the Steps, I am now learning what it means to honor my own truth and autonomy. Boundaries are healthy. "No" is a good, loving word. One day at a time, I am learning to avoid situations that put me at risk physically, morally, psychologically, or spiritually. I am learning to take care of my own needs before involving myself with others. I am learning to love myself, one boundary at a time.

— ANONYMOUS

## Question of the day

I sometimes think that if I don't do exactly what I imagine a partner needs, I will not get my sexual needs met.

—ALLEN S., LOS ANGELES

I learned that setting a boundary and expecting the other person to change is codependent behavior. I need to be the one to change my behavior in not staying connected to unhealthy behavior.

—TINA K., VAN NUYS

## Growing in Recovery

My sex and love addiction led me to enter into, and continue returning to, a codependent romantic relationship.

I needed to be loved, so when someone decided they wanted to love me, I chose to be with them. (They had their own needs, stemming from their own family of origin, which led them to seek out and stay in a codependent relationship with me.)

As my moods and my sense of self-worth would fluctuate, I would turn to them for stabilization. Yes, I'm good enough.



No, I don't need to be depressed or anxious. (In turn, their ability to manage my moods helped them achieve a

sense of peace and control.)

Eventually, after many, many years, my sex and love addiction blew this relationship up.

But I don't blame my addiction for destroying it. Because my addiction got me into it in the first place.

Getting out of that relationship has been very positive for both of us (and for our children). Progress in program would have been more difficult if I were still in the relation-

ship. Today I am learning how to stand on my own two feet. To re-parent myself.

To check the primordial fear that my fundamental needs won't be met. And to engage with others without taking on their feelings or fears.

We should depend on each other in healthy relationships. But we should not allow the other to enable our failure to grow and recover.

— ANONYMOUS

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## Always Needing Someone Else to Make Me Feel Better About Myself

Codependency for me has often taken the form of swinging between sex and love with another person—always needing someone else to make me feel better about myself, and craving the feeling of being needed in return.

That dynamic gave me a "hit" I was constantly chasing. It made life feel more exciting, more meaningful, even though it was ultimately unhealthy.

I was enthralled by people who showed interest in me, and I wanted them to be hooked on me just as I was

hooked on them.

I'd become obsessed with getting a girl to like me—to admire me, to look up to me, to somehow fix the deep insecurities I carried.

I expected her to fulfill me, and I wanted to fulfill her in return. This created a distorted expression of both sex and love addiction. I sought out the opposite sex to ease my self-doubt and used sexual acting out to achieve that temporary relief. The more someone wanted me, the better I felt. The more I obsessed over

them, the more alive I felt. It was a cycle I was stuck in for much of my life.

Today, I am freeing myself from that bondage. I've begun learning to bring my insecurities to God instead of projecting them onto others. I no longer seek fulfillment through codependent relationships. I no longer need a woman to feel good about myself. I now see the opposite sex as human beings—equals to be treated with dignity and respect, not as tools for validation or symbols of status.

I am open to relationships rooted in love and joy, not hidden motives or emotional dependency. As a result, my compulsion to act out sexually has diminished. I now see sex as an expression of love, trust, vulnerability, and genuine connection—not as a way to soothe

my insecurities or inflate my ego. Recognizing the other person as a separate, autonomous human being has brought me self-respect. I'm no longer dependent on others to tell me who I am. I know who I am—and I allow others to be who they are. I'm no longer using people, and by respecting them, I'm learning to truly respect myself.

Today, I love my life and the relationships I'm building. I'm deeply grateful to this program for helping me discover these truths. I love myself, and I love others—not from a place of need or emptiness, but from a place of connection. We support each other, grow together, and walk side by side—not because we are stuck, but because we choose to share the journey.

— KARIM, LONDON

## **Before S.L.A.A., I Didn't Know How to Be By Myself**

Hi everybody. I'm Mira. I'm a recovering sex and love addict and I never heard the expression co-dependent until I

came into S.L.A.A. and somebody gave me one of the very famous books by a popular psychologist.

And what I realized was from growing up as a very little child, I had a very aggressive, abusive mum. She would yell at us, take food away, and hit us if we were naughty or even if we weren't. And then my dad would come and sneak food to us or treat us better. I just grew up being in a state of fear and needing someone to calm and soothe me.

If only I'd realized that when I was young. So any relationship I had with a romantic or sexual partner, I guess in my eyes, if they loved me, they were going to take care of me. And if I was having a crisis, I would suck them in.

If there was something wrong with them, I would put everything aside to deal with it and look after them. I always describe it as having tunnel vision and just seeing that one person in my vision. And as I got my recovery and my top lines, my eyes opened and I could see mountains and oceans instead of just being really tunnel focused on one other human.

And the part that makes me feel more sad is that I was only seeing my value through the lens of the person that I was in love with (love with inverted commas) and not really knowing or understanding what I had to offer to the world.

I just didn't understand my value unless I was praised for some outrageous behaviour, something creative, or artistic. I needed to look good in the eyes of the men that I really was desperate to love me.

And I probably didn't really love myself because who had energy for me? I needed to make my environment safe by making my friends and partners and everybody safe.

And when I think back my poor brain, every minute of every day was ticking around how to not upset people, how to manipulate people so they would protect me or look out for me, how to get this one thing I really needed that would feed my ego.

And so whenever I had a break-up, I mean the withdrawals: jeebus, wowie, zowie! I can't even express how I would be. I'd go into work after a breakup, and I'm sure many of my female colleagues would have breakups and you'd never know.

Not me. I'd go into work shaking and crying. I'd be in the bathroom for a half an hour. Everyone who knew me thought I was too skinny because I didn't have any process to live independently. I just didn't understand how to be by myself. If I had a break up, my best friends would tell each

other, "Oh, can you take Mira now." They would take care of me on a rotating schedule because I couldn't be on my own.

Honestly, people used to say, "You should try being single. I really love it. It's really fulfilling." And I would think, *you are a dirty liar. How the hell can you be happy on your own?*

So, I came into S.L.A.A. in 2017 and I did my first three Steps and I was like, *I'm cured, yay!*

But I went straight back into a really ill-considered relationship where the guy didn't appreciate me. I was just trying to make him love me. Eventually covid and lockdown forced me to come back into S.L.A.A. and do my 30 meetings in 30 days. And during lockdown, I cried, but I did all my top lines. I got the promises. I found sol-

itude; now I love being alone. But I'll never forget some things that happened during lockdown. Like when I had a leak in my sink and I managed to fix it. I felt like Wonder Woman. I was like, *I did this by myself. I did it! I did it!* I was parading around my flat on my own and learning what I love. Like I love jigsaw puzzles.

I like going on really long walks by myself because people don't get mad at me when I stop to smell all the flowers.

A big part of this program has been reclaiming my independence and understanding my worth, which when you're codependent, you just don't see yourself. So yeah, that's me and codependence hopefully codependent no more, but I still am a little bit. Thanks for listening.

— MIRA

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## The Disease Iceberg

I came into S.L.A.A. almost exclusively focused on my sex addiction behaviours. However, the longer I'm in the program, the more focused I'm becoming on my love addiction behaviours.

It's like the sex behaviour is

the tip of the "disease iceberg," my love behaviours are the bottom of the iceberg below the surface of the water. What is below is much larger than what is above. What is below the surface is the bigger problem; that's the part of the

"iceberg" that sinks ships.

So much of my love addiction is about dependency, the need to be loved, the need to be needed.

If my partner addictively needs to be needed, so much the better. At least that's how I felt in my disease.

But, this seemed to set up a vicious cycle for me. I would make my partner my Higher Power, and she made me her Higher Power.

In my experience this does not work.

It's a burden that another human being can't seem to carry for long, I know I certainly couldn't.

It was one of the things that put a long-term sustainable relationship out of reach for me in my opinion.

It was my own emotional dependency that made me turn to false Higher Powers.

In recovery, I try to form a healthy relationship with myself first, which, for me, can take years of work.

I do my best to "date God" and form a healthy relationship with my Higher Power before I act upon dating anyone else.

One activity that has helped me in this process was to write out a "dating plan" which other program members were able to



provide me with.

The dating plan process reminded me a lot of the Step Four inventory process. It was just a different sort of inventory.

And, as Step Ten indicates, the inventory never stops.

— ANONYMOUS, ONTARIO, CANADA

# Share space

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## My Introduction to Meditation

My introduction to meditation was a direct result of joining S.L.A.A. and hitting bottom in this addiction. I was over 13 years in A.A. prior to getting to S.L.A.A. If I had ever meditated before, it was once or twice, and only because I was with a group.

My life improved in A.A. so quickly that I thought, “Nah, I don’t really need to bother with meditation.” I told myself I didn’t have the time.

Then my life just about ended, I joined S.L.A.A. and a roommate of mine said, “You’re such a mess. You should really start to meditate.”

I was so desperate for anything that could help, I even tried meditation. And I’m a

complete fantasy addict—I hadn’t lived in the present moment. I don’t know if I ever had. So I had no idea what to do. I didn’t go to training. I just went upstairs—maybe not that day, maybe another, I don’t even know—and tried to meditate for a minute or two, or something like that.

My brain was just obsessed — that’s what got me into S.L.A.A. I was completely obsessed for a very long time—while meditating.

However, something surprising happened: I took to it. I don’t remember the exact time frame, but within a period of time, I was meditating one hour a day, six days a week. And I have to say, that really revolutionized my life.

I had done everything I could to avoid being with the person I was obsessed with, and what meditation has done is help me develop a loving relationship with myself—because I am just really trying to be in the moment, each moment.

I do believe it's very difficult to start. Personally, I think it's really difficult to take the time and actually do it. I also think it's very difficult to continue doing it. It's almost like, once you've done it, that should be enough.

But for me—because I'm very structured, extremely boring in so many ways—I just found that making myself do it was simply an important thing to do. That's what kept me doing it. So I did about an hour a

day for the first four and a half years. Then it dropped to about half an hour a day, probably six days a week, for—I don't know—25 years? And then the last... I have no idea, maybe five years? It's been half an hour a day, seven days a week.

I will not—I *will not*—go a day now without spending half an hour meditating. Unless I'm on a plane, or in a hospital, confused, or something like that. But it has become such a critical part of my life that I cannot recommend it any more highly. I just can't think of the words to express how wonderful and helpful it's been for me. I'm so grateful my friend told me I was such a mess—because I was.

Thanks.

— ANONYMOUS



# My Lead Share



Part of me does not want to write or even read this lead share. I am scared that what I will share will show very little growth.

I am scared that I will be embarrassed or worse...

disappointed in myself for not doing enough to truly heal and be well; not enough to show that I am no longer an addict; not enough to end my addiction and all its unhealthy patterns, creations, and outcomes.

I never expected to clean up various messes from my addict self, as if I was a hidden second party that was not privy to the experiences of the “highs” my addict took me through.

No, instead I was the clean-up crew that received all the “lows”, did damage control and ultimately had to take my addict self to a meeting, to therapy and choose not to exile her to the farthest regions of my psyche. I have chosen to watch her closely in my mind’s eye as I manage my own life and advocate for my wellbeing and care.

My addict self gently looks out the window of our existence watching the world go by in beautiful, peaceful waves of joy, connection, and wonder.

Sometimes, she speaks up reminding me that something might be amiss, but typically, she is wrong, and peace is restored in our system.

I used to hate her, that addict. Echoes of the phrase “once an addict, always an addict” still haunt me with frustration. I blamed her for ruining my life, relationships, finances, jobs, and anything in general that was not going well for the last 40 years. However, when I choose to remember that she learned all these behaviors when she was 18

months old, never being shown how to engage in healthy ways, to ask for what she needs or even know what it felt like to be truly and deeply loved, I am reminded to give her so much compassion.

She so DEEPLY desired to be loved, seen and cherished. I’m providing that love to her now as I also learn to love myself deeply; this, I do alone and in relationship with others around me who truly care.

March of last year feels like a lifetime ago. So much has happened, changed, become irrelevant and my entire life is extremely different.

Internally, there was a death, a hollowing out, and an emptiness, replaced with deep sorrow and grief that dwindled in echoes as I allowed the scars to slowly heal from such deep excavation.

I was exhausted in ways I never knew I could feel. When I look back on my healing separation from my ex-wife and all the work I did as well as the aftereffects of the decision to end my marriage, I am left in shock and awe.

The tenacity and resourcefulness that poured out of me in a time that I was excavating everything out of my system is purely astounding and I for one do not think I could ever

have the stamina to do it again. That is the gift of withdrawal – when it is done well and fully the first time, it is complete. Never to be done like that again.

No wonder all the literature says that no one would ever do it for you – it is the worst hell to go through. There were many times I wished to my higher power that I could have just been an alcoholic or a drug addict, but it is important for me to remember that my addiction is unique in and of itself and even more unique to me.

No Sex and Love Addict will EVER have the same experience. Which to me, makes the healing process even more profound and personal. After my reunion with my now ex-wife in August, we were both clear that we were NOT supposed to be together anymore; on my end, I knew it was toxic, abusive, and very unsafe for me to return to.

What made it extra painful for me was to hear from her that she spent the time having strangers live in our home, she did extensive drug experiences, went bar hopping and from what I could tell dove extensively into spiritual bypassing. When I offered to share with her my amends letter (part of

Step Nine), she refused it out of hand; she has still never read or received it. What I learned from this experience is that even when you have a genuine apology and accountability to offer, the other person may not be ready to receive it because they are also not ready to truly look deeply into who they are and how they treated you.

I offered an amends to my first ex-wife and received no answer. Which was an answer in and of itself. By September 11, I loaded my car with what I thought I needed, kissed my ex-wife goodbye one last time and left.

I arrived at my friend's at nearly midnight to find a lovely card by my couch space which read "Sarah – you have endured so much lately. I hope you find our house as a comfy place to rest a while. Please let me know if you need anything at all. Make yourself at home." I fell apart knowing I finally had a place to rest my head long enough to start my grieving process.

As I navigated my deep and profound grief, I felt further withdrawal, confusion, desperation, and heartache more so than I ever expected. I continued stumbling forward, taking my wedding ring off the final

time the night of my five-year wedding anniversary on September 14th. I attended a healing ceremony a few days later where I was able to purge and deeply feel the grief that was pouring out of my entire body, mind, heart, and spirit – crying and wailing into the fireplace for hours. “She’s not coming, is she?” No, sweetheart, she isn’t.

I was told that the bigger the love, the bigger the grief and as I navigated just being raw and exposed the whole night long a wisdom came to mind. Grief is an emotional contraction giving birth to something new. But who was I giving birth to and what was to come?

At the end of the 90 days at my friend’s house, I moved back to my old house for two weeks to finalize packing and purging while my ex was out of country. This was just extra trauma to unravel, but helpful in the long run.

I continued to navigate my sobriety by scraping and clawing my way to the next three-month mark. “If only I can make it to nine months, I will be okay.” I went through this mental process of believing that as soon as it came December, I would quit the program.

I don’t need it; I will disappear and start my life anew. Yeah, my higher power had other plans.

As I reflect, I noted that I had moved nearly 30 times in the last few months and was technically considered unhoused; not in the sense that I was sleeping on the streets or in my car, but I was constantly bouncing around.

This was exhausting in ways I never thought possible. So, I finally made the decision to hunt for an apartment; I looked at 32 apartments in three days and finally landed on one in Cherry Creek that fits both me and my dogs’ needs.

Which was a strange thing to additionally advocate for; my ex didn’t want our greyhound because he had needs that were beyond feeding and ignoring.

I hated having him there with me – he was a constant reminder of the rejection of her and how she consistently attempted to erase me from her existence.

I also realized how incredibly painful it has been for me to notice that she literally has not said or typed my name since June 2024. Would I only exist again in my death?! My

therapist (whom I'm pretty pissed at right now about it), playfully asked what it would be like for me to date. I dove into the apps that night, swiping left and right and taking breaks pretending that I was ready to navigate this online world of intrigue, obsession and pursuing.

As I asked people out on dates, things got weird, but I held tight to keeping my bottom lines clear and accounting to how I was showing up for them.

I never once compromised my sobriety. With two people I have dated, I asked for them to say my name.

But it wasn't until last night that I realized it was because I want to exist in the lives of people around me. Why can't I exist in your world?! Do you not see me?! The first girl I dated, she was super-hot and easy to connect with – after the third date, she told me that she needed to take a sabbatical from dating, and she had stuff to work on still.

Later to realize it was a sabbatical from me. Thanks for lying. The second girl was super triggering because she was neurodiverse. No thank you,

hard swipe back to the left. There have been a few coffee dates but that ended up friend vibes only – two of those I agreed with fully.

This last girl, I have shot myself in the foot fully with how I emotionally monitored her and pulled her into a toxic pattern to which I can account for and apologize for profoundly but don't think it will turn into anything other than good-bye.

Additionally, I slipped back into behavior of sacrificing my time, money, energy, and capacity to engage with her throughout the day.

I have spent \$1,200 to fix my car to drive to Utah to take her on a date and I was willing to take the entire day off to be around her, all with my dog being toted along with me. This would have been a three-day, \$1,500.00-, and 750-mile date all at my expense – just to have three to four hours with her. That's not impressive, that is toxic overcompensation and a full abandonment of self. This pattern showed up in ALL my relationships! So, it's probably a good thing I shot myself in the foot – that way I can't drive! Wake up, Sarah – the

answer is NOT in Utah, NOT in another person and NOT going to be found in a dating app filled with intrigue and unhealthy people that are seeking to fill a void.

Don't fill each other's void together, please! Today I reach a milestone that I never thought would happen – one year of sobriety.

I figured I would disappear, give up and leave all this work behind as if it didn't mean anything to me, as if the work, effort, and support of the people around me didn't mean anything either. That would have been devastating and confusing for them.

As I navigate this new version of myself, my path forward, and my sobriety in a new way, I need this program, the friends in it with me, and the Steps to keep me sober, sane, and on the right path.

I find it incredibly ironic to

read chapter eight of the Basic Text to see my old version of self I was hoping to have going through this process in a “saved marriage” but now I see that I am the person who is creating something new in that same chapter, a new version of self, a new version of a future. I am going to keep doing the work to be truly well.

I'm going to peel back layers of myself more and more. And...I'm going to mess it up. I have no other choice but to be happy, healthy, whole and navigate life holding hands with my addict self as we venture forward together.

And hopefully...with a little patience, we will both be truly well. And maybe one day in right timing, fall in love again. May name is Sarah. I'm a sex and love addict and I pass.

—SARAH

## Opening Up About My Struggles

It was a Thursday in July. I sat on my patio surrounded by blooming summer flowers, shaded by a large umbrella. That afternoon, I joined a Zoom call with dear friends and shared that life had been hard, revealing that I had joined a Twelve-Step program for personal reasons. Later, I went for a walk and spoke with another friend on the phone, opening up about my struggles and how I didn't feel like myself.

Just a few weeks earlier, I was driving home with my daughter from her therapy session. The tension and heaviness between us had been building for years during her adolescence. But recently, I sensed something new—rage, disdain, and contempt. It was palpable.

As these feelings intensified, I grew more uncomfortable and anxious, so much so that my chest felt like it was sinking into a dark abyss and I could hardly breathe while simultaneously wanting to jump out of my skin. I didn't fully understand what was happening, but I knew something significant was unfolding.

Deep down, I always knew there was a possibility she would find out. The thought was too much to bear, so I pushed it into the background, onto a shelf, hoping it would remain there. I told myself that if she did find out, she'd be old enough to understand and to forgive. But as the silence and tension grew unbearable, I selfishly pushed for answers. I wanted something—anything—to break the discomfort, even if it meant anger or a fight.

"You disgust me," she said.

Those words said it all and I knew.

Seven years earlier, life seemed perfect from the outside. I had a beautiful family, a loving husband, all my needs met, and the freedom to run a small business that gave me time to be with my children and pursue my interests. My husband was hardworking and honest. I was healthy and energetic, doing everything I thought I should do to stay well and heal from childhood wounds. My days were filled with eating well, exercising, meditating, journaling, and attending therapy and psychological retreats. By all appear-

ances, I had it all together. Yet, despite this outward perfection, life felt chaotic, overwhelming, lonely, and I tried to follow the formula for a happy and meaningful life by writing in my journal about my dreams in the next five years: spending time with my husband, traveling to Africa with our family, enjoying my children, teaching new topics for work, and expanding my business.

They were simple, heartfelt wishes for a sweet life with my family. I prayed for help, not knowing exactly what kind of help I was asking for, trusting God to know better than I did.

Around the same time, I joined a local group that delivered meals to the homeless, hoping to pull myself out of the funk by being of service. I loved it. It gave me a sense of purpose and connection. I felt valued and energized. Every Saturday at four a.m., I would quietly slip out of bed to join my fellow volunteers, delivering hot coffee and meals in the quiet desolate streets downtown.

It was during those early mornings that the conversations began. We talked about raising children, navigating adolescence, feeling out of place in our neighborhood of a predominately drinking cul-

ture, and appreciating books and the qualities of nature that gave us a peace of mind. They were simple, innocent exchanges, but something began stirring inside me. My heart raced, butterflies filled my stomach, and I had a new energy and clarity. I began brainstorming ways to spend more time with this person.

Even now, seven years later, I could never have anticipated what was about to happen—and then it did. I had an affair.

That was why I disgusted her. My daughter had grown to know the man that became my partner. She loved him, and he loved her. But it was messy. I carried the weight of guilt, shame, disappointment, and anger for seven years. No matter how much I tried to forgive myself, I held myself in contempt for betraying the family I had dreamed of since I was a little girl. The fantasy of a perfect family, the one I thought would save me from pain and suffering, had crumbled.

In those seven years, there was love and goodness, but I was trapped in a cycle of love addiction that I couldn't break free from. Therapy, meditation, yoga, affirmations, reading, journaling—none of it could pull me out. I divorced, moved twice, lost my business

to the pandemic, went to graduate school, and grieved the loss of my best friend to suicide. I started over as a single mom.

By grace, I eventually found the strength to leave the relationship. With the financial help of a friend, I slowly untangled myself. But even after leaving, I struggled with the pull to return in subtle ways, not being able to fully release the relationship. Then I got COVID. Sick and panicked, I feared being alone and leaned back into the relationship for safety.

A few weeks later, during that car ride with my daughter, everything came to a head. Her discovery of the affair led me to S.L.A.A. (Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous). I was desperate and out of options. My daughter's contempt became the catalyst for a deeper surrender.

I attended over 90 meetings in 60 days, found a sponsor, followed every suggestion and leaned into the wisdom of those who had walked the path before me. But the loneliness, despair, and self-contempt were relentless and unforgiving. I had reached a point of acceptance that none of my efforts had been able to protect me from this experience of total darkness. And it continued.

That Thursday night after my Zoom call and talking to my friend on a walk, I went to bed after taking medication prescribed by my psychiatrist. That's when the suicidal ideations began. The images and thoughts flooded my mind, overwhelming me. Terror consumed me as I lay curled in a ball alone in my house, crying and praying for them to stop. I was trapped in my mind, desperate for relief. By morning, trembling and exhausted, I called a friend in desperation. She arrived within 30 minutes, wrapping me in her arms as I broke down. She stayed with me for two days—an angel sent to walk beside me.

Six nights later, I began treatment specifically for suicidal ideations and depression. The pain, loneliness, sensitivity, and abandonment weren't new—but this time, I faced them without the buffer of another human being. No partner, friend, family member, or child could ease this pain. It was mine to hold with a slow surrender to God.

For the first time since I was a young girl, I was truly alone, fully realizing that this was a sacred journey between me and God and something I couldn't will my way through by just self-care strategies. This was a rite of passage; a

dark night of the soul that I needed to traverse. Day by day, I stepped into the journey of being with the existential emptiness I had known since childhood. The difference now was that I could name it, recognize it for what it was—no longer buffered by another person protecting and distracting me. I did the next right thing. I stayed the course, moving forward into the unknown.

Even in the midst of discomfort, grief, and anxiety, I could feel something shifting. It was as if energetic chords were slowly unraveling, untangling from places they had been knotted for so long. But with this unraveling came a deep sense of disorientation—I had no bearing on where I was headed, no clear sense of who I was becoming.

Over time, I began to see just how entangled I had been. I had done everything “right,” yet my drug of choice—love and the fear of abandonment—had kept me from truly facing myself. It was only in surrendering to the dark night of the soul that I could finally begin to heal. Looking back, I see that God answered my prayers,

but not in the way I expected. He led me into the abyss, stripping away the illusions I had clung to. The affair, the love addiction, was perhaps God’s only way of getting me to see and feel what I couldn’t do with self-will alone. My daughter’s contempt, though painful, became a gift. The withdrawal, though excruciating, was a reminder of pain I never wanted to feel again.

The dark night of the soul has been a humbling, terrifying, and necessary path home to myself.

Though the journey continues, I am learning to root into the earth and reach toward the heavens, one day at a time. Surrender and letting go happen slowly—never on my time, only in God’s. As my ego, self-concept, and personality soften, I sense something unfolding.

I don’t know exactly where I am all the time on the path, but I know I am somewhere with God’s love and protection. Grace allows me to trust in the mystery, to have faith that I am becoming who I was meant to be, step by step, in His eyes.

—ANONYMOUS

## Understanding the Healing Pain Versus the Hurting Pain in S.L.A.A. Recovery

If anyone had ever told me how excruciatingly painful withdrawal would be, I would have run the other way! It was a new kind of “horrific” I’d never experienced before and would not wish on anyone!

**However, the good news is that withdrawal ends! And in the midst of it, I found there were two kinds of pain:**

— Healing pain

— Hurting pain

**Here’s how I define each of these:**

**Healing Pain:** The pain of turning away from qualifiers and the destructive thinking and behaviors that ultimately leads to recovery. For example: When we feel the urge to act out, and we don’t, there is still pain, but it is a healing pain, a good pain. Every time we resist acting out, we grow stronger and stronger in recovery. It builds our connection to our fellows and our Higher Power and makes it easier to resist acting out the next time. Walking through the healing pain brings many rewards at the other end.

**Hurting Pain:** The pain of

continuing to act out and participate in destructive thinking and behaviors inherent to one’s addiction. For example: When we feel the urge to act out and we do, we experience a damaging, hurting pain. This is revolving-door-pain, and it will never end. Growth does not occur, and isolation and excruciating pain are the everyday norm. Nothing ever changes. Giving in to the hurting pain brings many regrets at the other end.

So there’s a pain that hurts you, and there’s a pain that heals you. S.L.A.A., and working it religiously, gives me the option to pick my pain!

When we think it through and choose recovery instead of acting out, the healing pain helps our lives get better and better and better! We actually begin to heal our disease. We begin to heal the shame, guilt and suffering. These are all replaced with positive feelings and actions. We are eventually restored to sanity as we are promised.

When we act out we forever remain in the endless cycle of pain and suffering from our

sex and love addiction.

Allow me to describe these two types of pain in greater detail.

### **HEALING PAIN:**

- **It is short-term pain.**

Even though it feels like it is going to last forever at the time, the good news is, it passes, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but it passes.

- **We have hope in spite of the pain.** Because we know it ends, we know there is hope for a brighter future free from sex and love addiction.

- **Obsession ends.** When we're in the grip of our disease, our thinking is 100% clouded by obsession. This is the number one reason I came to S.L.A.A. I did not own my own mind! I was plagued by the obsession with connecting to men, what I was going to say, what I was going to wear, what I was going to do, and on and on and on! The freedom from obsession is priceless! Life is on the other side of obsession!

- **The rollercoaster of insanity eventually stops.**

My disease was an emotional rollercoaster of excitement from the romantic high, followed by the negativity and pain of yet another all-time low.

- **We are able to connect with a power greater than**

**ourselves.** Without constantly acting out and turning to our sex and love addiction, we are able to build a relationship with our Higher Power that can help us heal and be restored to sanity.

- **We learn how to build our internal resources of love, attention, validation, and approval (LAVA).**

When we stop turning to others and expecting them to fill this need, we learn how to love ourselves the way we always hoped others would love us. And we can become more deeply connected to our HP, the ultimate source of our recovery and LAVA.

- **It serves a valuable purpose.** Feeling the painful feelings and not acting out helps us to heal the painful feelings and learn other healthy self-soothing actions. It leads us to a better understanding of ourselves, our patterns in our addiction, and what will truly help us to heal in recovery and emerge capable, confident, and happy.

- **It leads to a joyful life.**

A life that is meaningful, fulfilling all of the promises of working the Steps.

- **It involves a loving community.** We build a life full of community and connectedness. We have the privi-

lege of sponsoring and sharing the recovery we have worked so hard for with others. Our healing pain actually benefits others in addition to ourselves.

• **Focus on others.** The intense obsession on ourselves, our qualifiers, and all of our problems softens and gives way to a life of service where we are able to give of ourselves and make a difference in the lives of others.

• **We continuously evolve and grow.** We grow in greater connection to our fellows and mankind, and we evolve in our recovery, awareness, and connection to our Higher Power.

• **The rewards.** There are so many rewards for making the journey through the healing pain that it is truly like the gold at the end of the rainbow. And remember the rainbow comes after the storm! The most glorious reward found in the healing pain is the return of sanity as the Big Book states. Yes, you can now do a happy dance!

### HURTING PAIN

• **It is long-term pain and suffering.** There's no hope of it ever going away. It is utter insanity to think that we will find the perfect person

who will take all of our pain away and make us happy.

• **It fills us with a hopeless feeling.** It blocks us from the sunlight of God's spirit and we are never able to develop the kind of relationship with our Higher Power that can restore us to sanity. And without a power greater than ourselves we forever feel hopeless.

• **It serves no valuable purpose.** It is full of insanity, confusion, frustration, and pure agony. It serves no valuable purpose, just destruction.

• **It leads to a horrible life.** A life filled with unmanageability, intensity, urgency, chaos, drama, insanity, and possibly domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse.

• **It involves frequent isolation.** After years of insanity, our friends and family are sick of hearing about yet another one of our escapades. No one seems to understand us so we are stuck alone with our pain.

• **It causes us to focus on ourselves all the time.** The world revolves around us and our disease. We cannot be there for others who really need our time and attention. Besides ourselves, those who suffer the most are our children. There's no way for them to understand why we are al-

ways unhappy and crying.

• **It halts our growth.** We never reach our full potential and evolve into happy, mature, successful adults. We stay stuck in a self-destructive cycle.

**Granted, both are painful, but you have to pick your pain. One is recovery. One is insanity.**

When you choose the healing pain there is a ton of support to help you in S.L.A.A. Support is available to us in our meetings, in outreach calls with our fellows, in our literature, and in our budding relationship with a loving Higher Power. We are never alone as we learn how to feel the feelings and not act on any of them.

We learn how to practice topline in our life. Toplines are behaviors or activities that bring us closer to our Higher Power and to our true self. As a result, our top-line actions heal us from our addictive self. Toplines help us learn how to feed and nourish ourselves instead

of needing another person to do so. They give us the joy in living a sober life free from our addictive behavior.

When we focus on the healing pain our self-worth begins to soar, we feel deeply connected to our Higher Power and we feel empowered to go beyond the initial relief we feel from the program to working the Steps and getting real recovery and healing.

The initial “relief” we might feel when we initially come to S.L.A.A. is not recovery. Yes, it is absolutely the beginning of recovery, but long-term healing and recovery comes from working all 12 of the Steps in S.L.A.A. And it is impossible to authentically work the Steps when we are acting out, the equivalent of being drunk.

When we choose the positive path of the healing pain, we are choosing ourselves and the new, healthy, sane, manageable life available to us, one of freedom from sex and love addiction!

— ANONYMOUS IN THE OC

# *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.

# the Journal

