

S.L.A.A.

**THE
BEGINNERS
KIT**

The text contained in The Beginners Kit is
S.L.A.A. Fellowship-Wide Service Conference approved literature.

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S.L.A.A. PREAMBLE

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous® is a Twelve Step, Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only requirement 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 the 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 four major resources:

1. our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom line addictive behaviour on a daily basis.
2. our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. 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 organisations, movements or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behaviour. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns which renders any personal differences of sexual or gender orientation irrelevant.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally, we try to avoid drawing attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

Characteristics of SEX AND LOVE ADDICTION

We may recognise ourselves in some of the characteristics that follow. As we recover, we may see in ourselves additional traits we did not previously detect. These characteristics are not offered as a definitive, diagnostic checklist. They do express the shared experience of many in the S.L.A.A. fellowship.

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 have 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 sexualise stress, 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 immobilised or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions and 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 involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealise and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

QUESTIONS BEGINNERS ASK

What is sex and love addiction?

S.L.A.A. believes that sex and love addiction is an illness, a progressive illness which cannot be cured but which like many illnesses, can be arrested. It may take several forms including (but not limited to) a compulsive need for sex, extreme dependency on one person (or many) and/or a chronic preoccupation with romance, intrigue, or fantasy. An obsessive/compulsive pattern, either sexual or emotional (or both) exists in which relationships or sexual activities have become increasingly destructive to career, family and sense of self respect. Sex and love addiction always leads to worse and worse consequences if it continues unchecked.

Before coming to S.L.A.A., many sex and love addicts think of themselves as social outcasts, perverts, or just plain "weak-willed." Still others feel they have only been pursuing what is "due" or "owed" them. They feel entitled to self-indulgence. The S.L.A.A. theory is that sex and love addicts are sick people who can recover if they will follow a simple program, which has proven successful for scores of other men and women with the same illness.

What is S.L.A.A.?

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, is a fellowship of men and women who help each other to stay sober. They offer the same help to anyone who has an addiction with sex and/or 'love' and want to do something about it. Since S.L.A.A.'s are all addicts themselves, they have a special understanding of each other and the disease. They know what the illness feels like and they have learned how to recover from it through S.L.A.A.

What is sobriety?

Sobriety is the return of choice, sanity, and personal dignity which comes from surrender to sex and love addiction, followed by involvement with S.L.A.A.'s Twelve Step Program of recovery. There are no absolutes for sobriety in S.L.A.A. as individual patterns of sex and love addiction vary. However, each S.L.A.A. identifies for him/herself major addictive behaviour, which is personally relevant, and becomes "sober" by abstaining from this behaviour on a daily basis.

How can I tell if I am a Sex and Love Addict?

Only you can tell if you are physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually addicted to sex and/or love. Going to several meetings will tell you if you can identify with other sex and love addicts. Obtaining the pamphlet Sex and Love Addiction: 40 Questions for Self-Diagnosis will help you evaluate your sexual activities, romantic behaviour, and emotional involvements.

What is acting out?

Acting out is becoming involved (or re-involved) with addictive "bottom-line" behavior. Addictive indulgence is hallmarked by loss of control over rate, frequency, or duration of bottom-line behavior. This loss of control always leads to negative self-destructive consequences which, over time, continue to worsen. Acting out patterns, and therefore "bottom-line" behavior, can differ markedly among individual sex and love addicts. This acting out behavior can run the range from obvious promiscuity involving countless individuals, to solitary acts such as compulsive masturbation, voyeurism, and exhibitionism, to obsessive commitments to fantasy and romantic intrigue. It may include hyper-dependency problems involving one (or many) individuals. Some acting out patterns can involve all of the above, but more often a "bottom-line" acting out scenario highlights one or two major areas.

What suggestions does S.L.A.A. give new members?

In S.L.A.A.'s experience, the people who recover from sex and love addiction are those who:

- A. Define their bottom-line addictive behaviour. They start now and add to it later if necessary. This is the sobriety definition.
- B. Don't act out—just for today, this hour, this moment, no matter what.
- C. Attend S.L.A.A. meetings regularly. Other meetings of 12 Step-oriented fellowships may also be helpful.
- D. Join or start an S.L.A.A. group.
- E. Get active in an S.L.A.A. group and in S.L.A.A. as a whole.
- F. Seek out the people in S.L.A.A. who have successfully stayed sober for some time and establish relationships with these individuals based on mutual sharing of experience, strength, and hope.
- G. Get a sponsor or talk to an S.L.A.A. person on a frequent basis during the withdrawal period.
- H. Ask for help from a Power greater than themselves on a daily basis, regardless of their belief or disbelief.
 - 1. Set aside a time of prayer each morning, saying "Help me to stay away from just for today."
 - 2. Set aside a time of prayer each night, expressing gratitude for the help received that day.

What can I do if I am worried about my acting out?

Seek help. S.L.A.A. can help. You can recover.

What do I do when the craving to act out hits?

Don't act out, go to meetings and ask for help. Breathe deeply, ask your higher Power for help and reach for the phone to call another S.L.A.A. member. The urge to act out will pass and you will be stronger than ever before.

What is withdrawal?

Withdrawal is a process sex and love addicts go through following the decision to break the addictive pattern. It may bring a variety of symptoms which must be waited out. This is more tolerable in the company of other S.L.A.A.'s. Symptoms as painful as withdrawal from drugs or alcohol are common. Intense longing and anxiety emerge, and fear, suicidal thoughts, or obsession with sickness, aging, and death occur. Depression and loss, anger, denial and "pink clouding" may all occur in various combinations.

What are slips?

A slip is a return to addictive behaviour, however brief. Experience has shown that slips don't "just happen." Most S.L.A.A.'s who have been through these periods say that slips, which can lead to sudden loss of self, can be traced to specific causes. They say they forgot that they were sex and love addicts and became overconfident. Or they became too preoccupied with business or social affairs to remember the importance of abstaining from acting out. Or they let themselves become tired and were caught with their mental and emotional defenses down. In any event, they withdrew from taking advantage of the help available to them. They ceased maintaining their S.L.A.A. lifeline. Getting honest and "current" with another S.L.A.A. and at an S.L.A.A. meeting can help overcome the despair of slipping, and put recovery back on track.

What is a sponsor? How do I get a sponsor?

A sponsor is an experienced, sober S.L.A.A. who has become seasoned in his/her new way of life, and is available to share his/her experience, strength and hope with an S.L.A.A. newcomer on an individual basis. A newcomer usually asks another sober S.L.A.A. if she/he will sponsor him/her. The prospective sponsor has the right to accept or to refuse, and/or may suggest another sober S.L.A.A. for this role whom she/he feels would be more suitable. The relationship of sponsorship is based on mutual trust and may be terminated at any time by either the sponsor or the sponsee.

What is denial?

Denying that a problem exists is a common form of resistance for beginners and others having trouble with recognizing their sex and love addiction. Various forms of denial include thinking: I'm not as bad as the others I see at meetings; I'm not a sex and love addict, I come from a good family; one more time won't hurt; I'll see him or her but I won't have sex; we'll just be friends; she or he won't leave me alone, therefore I can't get free. Acceptance of the S.L.A.A. program on a daily basis eliminates denial.

What is 'getting current' and 'keeping current'?

A practice at some S.L.A.A. meetings is the getting current period. Members who feel in danger of acting out can share these thoughts and feelings with the group as well as the situations which may be contributing to them. Getting current can be done with a sponsor or with individual members. Keeping current is best done on a daily basis.

What is intrigue?

Intrigue is a preliminary to acting out. The addict attempts to arouse the interest of a prospective sexual or emotional partner by secret or under-handed schemes, looks, dress, etc. The payoff may be a sexual act involving another person directly, or may also be some solitary sexual or emotionally based behaviour.

What is meant by "a Power greater than ourselves"?

Before they came to S.L.A.A., most sex and love addicts had already realised that they couldn't control their sex and love addiction. Sex and 'love' had become a Power greater than themselves. S.L.A.A. experience has shown that to achieve and maintain sexual and emotional sobriety, the sex and love addict needs to accept and depend upon another Power which she/he acknowledges is greater than him/herself. Some S.L.A.A.'s choose to consider the S.L.A.A. group itself as the Power greater than themselves, while others choose to accept still different interpretations of this Power. Most S.L.A.A.'s adopt a concept of God, as God may be understood by the individual him/herself.

Can I ever expect to have sex and love again?

Love and sex within a true partnership does not seem to feed the addiction. This kind of relationship seems to embody much of what was sought so desperately and futilely elsewhere. The road to such partnership requires much self-undoing before building can commence.

First a sense of wholeness and dignity is developed through maintaining sobriety on a daily basis and from working the 12 Steps.

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.

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 28. Do you feel uncomfortable about your masturbation because of the frequency with which you masturbate, the fantasies you engage in, the props you use, and or the places in which you do it? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. Do you engage in the practices of voyeurism, exhibitionism, etc., in ways that bring discomfort and pain? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 30. Do you find yourself needing greater and greater variety and energy in your sexual or romantic activities just to achieve an "acceptable" level of physical and emotional relief? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 31. Do you need to have sex, or "fall in love" in order to feel like a "real man" or a "real woman"? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 32. Do you feel that your sexual and romantic behaviour is about as rewarding as hijacking a revolving door? Are you jaded. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 33. Are you unable to concentrate on other areas of your life because of thoughts or feelings you are having about another person or about sex? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 34. Do you find yourself obsess-ing about a specific person or sexual act even though these thoughts bring pain, craving or discomfort? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 35. Have you ever wished you could stop or control your sexual and romantic activities for a given period of time? Have you ever wished you could be less emotionally dependent? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 36. Do you find the pain in your life increasing no matter what you do? Are you afraid that deep down you are unacceptable? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 37. Do you feel that you lack dignity and wholeness? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 38. Do you feel that your sexual and/or romantic life affects your spiritual life in a negative way? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 39. Do you feel that your life is unmanageable because of your sexual and/or romantic behaviour or your excessive dependency needs? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 40. Have you ever thought that there might be more you could do with your life if you were not so driven by sexual and romantic pursuits? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

What can you do?

If reading through these questions has brought home to you the fact that your sexual activity, romantic behaviour, or emotional involvements may be suspect, what now?

First of all, rest assured that you are not alone that many of us have lived out addictive patterns highlighted by these questions, and have found recovery through Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. If there are regular S.L.A.A. meetings in your area, attendance at these meetings will bring you into contact with recovering sex and love addicts.

In the event that you know of no such meetings, we encourage you to ask for a 'meetings list' to find a S.L.A.A. group in your area.

Above all, know that recovery is possible, and that a path to recovery does exist which can be shared.

What Is Anorexia?

In Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, we suffer from addiction to sex, love, relationship, fantasy, romance, and co-dependency. However, there is still another addiction some of us suffer from: anorexia.

As an eating disorder, anorexia is defined as the compulsive avoidance of food. In the area of sex and love, anorexia has a similar definition: Anorexia is the compulsive avoidance of giving or receiving social sexual, or emotional nourishment.

Some Varieties of Anorexia.

Some of us may not have had sex or been in a close personal relationship in years. Or we may be in partnerships but find it difficult to be emotionally close. We may be the members in S.L.A.A. who seldom speak in meetings, disappearing the instant the meeting is over. Or we may be those who, outside meetings, are barely social. Or we may be the kind who do not have intimate friendships. We may have many acquaintances but no one we're really close to. Or we may have close relations with only certain people, our children, say, but keep our distance from anyone else. There are many other varieties of anorectics as well. But whichever kind we are, all of us in some important way have distanced ourselves from experiencing love.

As anorectics or as people with anorectic tendencies, we may have a wide range of feelings and responses. Some of us feel overwhelmed in social settings. Others of us get high by socializing with a great many people in order to keep ourselves from intimacy with any one person. Some of us feel incapacitated by shyness in relationships with others. Others of us are in a relationship but are passionate only in one arena of it; for instance, we may be emotionally invested in the relationship but remain sexually or socially unavailable.

Just as our feelings have a wide range, so do our behaviour and patterns. For some of us, anorexia might take the form of an overwhelming dread of making phone calls. Some of us function well in particular situations, such as the workplace where intimacy is not usually valued, but find we are distant with family or friends. Others of us have used alcohol or drugs to become emotionally withdrawn. Or we have used them to become sexually, emotionally, or socially daring, while essentially remaining out of contact with others in any meaningful way. In this way, we have used other addictions to act out anorectically. Anorexia may be difficult to recognise.

Anorexia is a form of sex and love addiction, but it is often hard to detect. Other forms of sex and love addiction themselves can mask anorexia. Indeed, anorexia may be masked so completely that the individual doesn't recognise that anorexia is present at all. Sexual promiscuity, for instance, may actually hide an avoidance of intimacy. Co-dependency, while producing the "appearance" of relationship, may actually hide a resistance to real relationship. Often, when S.L.A. A. members stop acting out their most obvious addiction they discover to their surprise that anorexia lies beneath their addiction after all.

There are anorectics, of course, who are aware of ways in which they are anorectic. But there are others of us who have no sense of what is lacking in our lives in matters of sex and relationship and social communion.

Many of us don't even know what is possible. Some of us, for instance, know we can give love, but have no idea that love might be given to us. Others of us know only what it is to respond to other people's needs, but don't know what our own needs might be. Some of us have never known social joy, or honest intimacy, or emotional reciprocity. We have no sense of these things. Faced with getting our needs met, we are baffled because we can't even name these needs.

Anorexia is not just fear of intimacy. In some way, every person alive is afraid of intimacy, for shyness, modesty, and a sense of privacy are natural human endowments. But we anorectics have made fear of intimacy into a fixed policy, automatically operating. And anorexia may operate without a hum, with scarcely a ripple.

For while there are blatantly acted-out forms of anorexia, there are also quiet, subtle forms of it. Some anorectics maybe in no other way addicted. However, beneath the surface, anorexia is a busy addiction: it consists of not doing something, and not doing something, and not doing something. Not trusting, not committing, not surrendering. Here, unlike picking up a drink or shooting up a drug, anorexia's symptoms are obscure, uneventful. Here anorectic's don't act-out, they act-in, by refusing to act. For anorexia maintains itself by industriously declining to allow movement: outwardly the anorectic may appear to be quite still; inwardly the anorectic may feel quite still also. And so the anorectic pattern may remain invisible. Numbness to itself may make anorexia additionally difficult to notice as well.

Anorexia is a great disguiser. It can look like natural shyness or modesty or reserve. Even when hidden under extroversion or charm, anorexia often maintains a quiet, status quo state. It can even put on the face of spiritual purity. And neutral or vivid, it can go on for years unsuspected.

One day, however, we anorectics begin to realise that we have been living our lives for a long time without love. We observe the absence of closeness in certain areas of our lives and we observe that we are engaged in a policy of dread of others, and a strategy to keep them at bay. Whether our anorexia is social, sexual, or emotional, we awaken to the fact that we are not experiencing the giving and receiving of love that is so precious to human life.

Having become aware of this lack of love in our lives, we may then have tried to change our conduct. If we found we could not change it, we may come to understand we are addicted to it: it was conduct we repeatedly engaged in and could not stop despite its consequences.

Are you anorectic?

Here are fifty questions you might want to address.

There is no score for these questions.

Your own instinct will tell you to what degree they apply to you.

**Following the questions is information, should you wish
to explore further.**

THE QUESTIONS

- | | Yes | No | | Yes | No |
|--|-----|-------------------------------------|---|-----|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Do you go for long periods without being involved in a sexual or romantic relationship? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 21. Do you regularly disown your physical and emotional need for others? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Do you go without social activities for extended periods of time? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 22. Do you have a hard time playing and having fun with others? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Although in a relationship, have you found that, for a long while, you have not experienced: romance? sexuality? intimacy? friend-ship? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 23. Is it so difficult for you to set healthy boundaries with others that you withdraw entirely? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Are you alone more than you want, but feel unable to change that? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 24. Does everything have to be perfect before you get involved? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. At work do you have trouble developing relationships, talk only when absolutely necessary, or hide out in the work? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 25. Do you envy more outgoing people? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Do you avoid relationship with a certain gender? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 26. Do you feel your demonstrativeness is inauthentic? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Do you stay aloof when in groups? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 27. Does shame about your life cause you to avoid relationships? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Are you afraid of being noticed? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 28. Do you use your feelings of superiority or inferiority to set yourself apart from others? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Does being in the presence of others exhaust you, even if you like them? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 29. Do you think that no healthy, attractive person or group of people would want someone like you? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Do you habitually panic or push people away when they start getting too close? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 30. Do you have a hard time letting people know you care about them? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Do you usually try to withdraw from or completely control emotions, sexual feelings, or group situations? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 31. Do you think you are not "enough"-smart enough, attractive enough, old enough, young enough, successful enough, healthy enough, enough to deserve a relationship? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Do you feel uncomfortable when offered nurturing, affection, or love? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 32. Do you stay in relationships because you feel you don't deserve anything better or can't have anything different? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Do you usually dread encountering someone to whom you are attracted? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 33. Do you feel it overwhelmingly difficult to show emotion or to tell the truth to someone you wish to be involved with? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Do you feel safer when a relationship remains at the level of flirting and intrigue? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 34. Do you drive others away by coldness? aggression? timidity? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Do you feel a deep pessimism about your ability to experience lasting intimate relationship? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 35. Do you prefer being alone, rather than question the choices that keep you alone? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Are you continually attracted to people who don't meet your needs? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 36. Is your fear of rejection or of looking foolish so intense that you seem to be permanently stuck? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Are you afraid to relax around people because you feel it might lead to a sexual situation. | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 37. Do you suspect that your capacity to move toward intimacy with another is damaged or dead? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Do you fantasise about having a relationship without actually pursuing a relationship? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| 19. Do your sexual habits, masturbation for instance, keep you from relationships? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| 20. Anhedonia means the refusal to receive or give pleasure. Do you practice it? | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | |

	Yes	No		Yes	No
38. Do you have an overwhelming fear of being socially, sexually, or emotionally exploited or used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	45. Are you mainly attracted to unavailable people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
39. Do you usually feel resentful or envious toward people who have intimate relationships or active social lives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	46. Do you consider it not worth the trouble to engage with others because past experiences have been threatening or painful especially if others want to get close to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
40. Do you find sex repugnant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	47. Do you feel more comfortable or more in control when you decline sex or relationship or social invitations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
41. Do you feel sex is only for healthy people and will therefore never be for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	48. Are you habitually more open to strangers than those you are close to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
42. Are you more open to people you can not be sexually close to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	49. Do you feel so different from others that you are afraid no one can care about you or understand you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
43. When you do date someone, do you set a time limit beforehand on how long you will date that person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	50. Do you feel that love is missing from your life, yet don't know what to do about it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
44. Are you tied to your family of origin to the exclusion of others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

What to do now?

If enough questions here seem to apply to you, you may feel relieved or you may feel stunned or doomed or angry at this moment and all these would be natural responses. However, if something fundamental in your being has been touched by these questions, we do want to say this to you: you are not alone. There are many who are in the same situation as you. There are many who respond as you do and who feel as you do. Or who once felt that way.

We are the anorectic members of Sex And Love Addicts Anonymous. We know that there may have been good reasons for our having become anorectic; we also have come to realise that there is nothing to blame ourselves for in being anorectic, but now we want nourishing emotional, sexual, and social lives. Our anorexia may have come out of a precious sense of ourselves and of our own preservation, but still we want to change; we don't want to go on being anorectic. We have begun to do the work of recovery and change in Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous.

To build that recovery, we endeavour to stop acting out a pattern of sex and love anorexia and we work the 12 Steps of S.L.A.A. We have found, no matter how different or alone we feel, that reaching out to others to give help and to ask for it helps us to recover from our anorexia. That's why we are reaching out to you here to invite you to an S.L.A.A. meeting

Anorexia is a part of sex and love addiction, and S.L.A.A meetings are places for anorectics to be heard, and to hear, in turn, about the addiction of anorexia and about recovery from it. There we discover what the recovery process is for each of us. Any S.L.A.A. member may speak about anorexia at any S.L.A.A. meeting, but some S.L.A.A. meetings have a specific focus on anorexia.

If you are hesitant to go to a meeting, or if you simply want to speak to a fellow anorectic, Fellowship Wide Services will give you the phone number of an anorectic in the Fellowship you can call.

If there isn't an anorectic meeting near you, you may want to start one. When you contact the Fellowship-Wide Services office below, we will send you a start-up kit, an anorexia meeting format, and a person to contact who can tell you what their experience has been in starting a meeting.

STEP ONE

We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.

The word "powerless" summons up for us several related ideas. First, it means that whatever power is usually involved in making sound choices in our sexual and emotional behaviour did not reside with us. We were enslaved to sex and love (which we experienced as emotional dependency or romantic intrigue). The fact that we became captives of these things shows that there was something extremely important and powerful in our sexual and emotional patterns which gave us some kind of "payoff" that we thought we needed.

Sometimes we were seeking to screen the world, with all its demands and responsibilities, out of our awareness by mesmerising ourselves with sexual activity. Sometimes we were trying to deaden a load of guilt and frustration by taking romantic or sexual holidays. Sometimes we sought to fill the emptiness within us with another person. Or perhaps we masked the fear of commitment by thinking of ourselves as living out new standards of morality based on "guilt free sex" "free love," or "recreational sex." But all of us were using our sexual powers and emotional investments to either lessen pain or augment pleasure. These pervasive motives governed our sexual and romantic intentions and actions. At some time in our lives our behaviour began to take on the compulsive hallmarks of addiction. The once rare liaisons became monthly, then weekly. They happened when convenient, or when they interfered with work or family obligations. The occasional pleasurable daydream grew into a constant obsession that destroyed our ability to concentrate on more ordinary and more important things. One by one such things as satisfaction in our work, friends and social activities dropped away as we found more and more of our time and our thoughts absorbed by one person. The occasional relief of sexual tension with masturbation became a need for which the opportunity had to be created. We had lost control over the rate or frequency (or both) at which we would seek the romantic or sexual "solution" to life's ills.

Some of us were caught up in the hypnotic intensity of sexual and romantic encounters or relationships, merging ourselves into our lovers or spouses. These experiences became overwhelmingly compelling, carrying us along with them, exuberantly at first, and then less and less willingly. Unrelenting, the imperiousness with which our sexual and romantic interludes or absorption in a relationship now forced themselves upon us led to prolonged bondage to our sexual and emotional needs: a real, undeniable craving.

The original quest for distraction from life's tensions and responsibilities, for relief from past guilt and present frustration, now led us into oblivion. The brave new worlds of morality where "anything goes" because "nothing matters" boomeranged, leaving us grasping for some residual sense of meaning or reality in life. Obsession and compulsion, now our masters, meant that control over our sexual and emotional lives no longer resided with us, or within us. We had lost control, regardless of whether we admitted it to ourselves or not.

From the standpoint of "anything goes, who cares?" loss of control didn't seem so bad. In fact, the addiction itself often held us spellbound, convinced that it was what we wanted. Many of us were so numbed that only a blast of physical and emotional intensity from a sexual or romantic "hit" could penetrate and animate our progressively deadened, dissipated beings.

Like a cattle prod jabbed into someone who is exhausted and dazed, an addictive hit jolted us into a temporary illusion that we were alive and really living. It was as though we had a voice in our heads which said, "if you get more, then everything will fall into place."

If our addiction took the form of dependency on one person, again, loss of control did not always seem so bad. We could tell ourselves that our bondage was really the sign of a "match made in heaven," that since we would sacrifice anything for this love, we would surely be rewarded for our unselfishness. Alone, life was drab and empty; if we could only become more a part of our lover, become ONE, everything would be alright.

Yet a vague but persistent nagging within our deepest self continued to bear witness that all was not well. Despite all the cultural and rational camouflage behind which our addiction could hide, it was impossible, short of suicide, to kill that innermost voice that whispered to us of life's opportunities for growth and wholeness that we were helplessly letting slip by. The guilt of prior deeds and passions or missed opportunities gave way to the deepest, most pervasive guilt of all: that of having left life un-lived, of having turned our backs on the possibility of fulfilling a meaningful destiny.

These existential pangs were not welcomed into our awareness. Yet they found their way in, whatever we did. The heat of addictive passion was less and less able to blot them out. The addiction itself could no longer deliver that formerly reliable, thoroughly engrossing sexual and emotional return. The utter futility of going on under the sway of our sex and love addiction was finally becoming clear.

It mattered little whether our patterns were primarily those of unbridled promiscuity, or excessive emotional dependency' on one person, or some combination of these. Each of us, in his or her own time, finally experienced a sense of real desperation. To continue to live out our addictive patterns, or to be controlled by them, brought us in touch with the terror of irrevocably losing sanity, of slipping over the edge of an abyss beyond which any stability and life purpose would be forever out of reach. We found this prospect to be more terrifying even than the thought of physical death. This loss of one's soul could only be all the more poignant if the body in which it lived continued to exist, unanimated spiritually from within, and mon-strously driven by imperious instinctual drives which would now have become its masters.

Yet for a few of us the terror of being further devoured by our sex and love addiction brought us to the point of unconditional surrender. We decided we HAD to stop. Now we began to confront the second aspect of powerlessness: the paradox that surrender to the impossibility of control is the beginning of recovery.

Most of us had attempted at various times a wide range of strategies to control our behaviour so that our lives as addicts would somehow blend in with our "other" lives as members of society. We would break up with a particular lover, or find another lover, often in rapid succession. We stopped masturbating or started masturbating (as a substitute for getting sex from others). We changed gender preference, seeking relationships with those less sexually attractive to us. We moved to another town, made inner resolves, took oaths before friends or loved ones. We married jealous, suspicious lovers, or got divorced so that we would be free to find a more satisfying mate. We had religious conversions, sometimes choosing a monastic life where sex would not be available. We sought deep emotional involvement, trying to balance the intensity of one relationship by starting another somewhere else. And on and on.

These strategies, no matter how strong the conviction with which they were adopted, always turned out to be like "going on the wagon." If we had some initial success in curbing our addictive behaviour, we would quickly take on an air of smug confidence, wholly unwarranted, and conclude that we would now be able to "manage things." This merely lowered our defenses, so that we sank back into the quicksand of our patterns again, sometimes within months or weeks, more often within days or hours.

Our lack of success in managing our addiction, our loss of control, had become an established fact.

We had experienced over and over the mind altering effect which had sapped the strength of our resolve to free ourselves from sex and love addiction. Thus we approached the prospect of surrendering our sex and love addiction with real humility, for we had no way of knowing if such a surrender was even possible.

The addiction itself made our willingness to attempt freeing ourselves of the disease highly questionable. But at least we were becoming desperate enough, once again, to try to extricate our-selves. We began to recognise that we were powerless, not merely to change some specific sex partner, lover, or situation. We were powerless over an addictive pattern, of which any current, specific circumstance was just the most recent example.

The whole trouble in our previous attempts to manage the addiction was that we had underestimated the desperate seriousness of our condition. In flailing about, trying to be free of a particularly painful situation, we had failed to comprehend the scope of the pattern towards which our current disaster was pointing, and of which it was a result. True surrender of our sex and love addiction meant not only being willing to take ourselves out of the painful situation at hand. It meant, most importantly, being ready to be free of our whole life strategy of obsession with and pursuit of love and sex. The resolve only to be rid of a specific painful situation, without the readiness to break the whole addictive pattern, amounted to "going on the wagon."

If, for example we claimed that our bottom-line addiction was engaging in exhibitionistic behaviour, then in defining our pattern only as this specific practice we might kid ourselves that new, paid-for sexual liaisons actually were not part of our addictive pattern. We would claim that such novelty actually was a step forward, because we were no longer engaging in purely solitary acts. The opposite was true for those of us who labeled only blatant promiscuous behaviour as addictive.

We would engage in such solitary activities as masturbation, voyeurism, or exhibitionism, and claim that they were improvements because we were no longer involving others directly in our disease.

Such attempts were as futile as for an alcoholic to switch from beer to wine, or wine to beer, claiming either as an "improvement" over the other. Those of us who tried to deceive ourselves in the way we defined our sex and love addiction either found ourselves slipping back into the old behaviour, or getting into real trouble with our new "steps forward."

We learned the hard way that there was no such thing as half-surrender. The "freedom" to define our own addictive pattern could not be used in a self-serving way. Our addictions are a reality that persists regardless of any shortsighted, convenient definition. If we were leaving out of our personal definition some behaviour that was addictive, it would certainly, pull us back into the pattern again.

The certain pain of continuing our sex and love addiction brought us to the admission of Step 1, that "we were powerless over our sex and love addiction" and that we could not manage our lives unless we were free of it. Finally, we reached a point of surrendering unconditionally. The proof that our surrender was indeed unconditional was that we now refrained, one day at a time, from every form of bottom-line behaviour we saw as part of our own addictive pattern. If our primary addictive problem was obsessive love dependency, we separated from or severed ties with our "partners," This was not, done to punish ourselves or others, but out of a recognition that these were no-win situations. Many of us suspected or realised that we would need an indefinite period alone in which to learn to understand and deal with our disease. Distractions through some form of sex or love relationship could only abort our own recovery. If we had just been jilted by someone we felt was "indispensable" surrender meant that we accepted our loss, and refused to take revenge or recriminate. It also meant that, perhaps for the first time in our lives, we were not going to relieve our wounded feelings in some new person's arms!

Each of us, regardless of individual circumstances, was now willing to go to any lengths, a day at a time, to stay unhooked. This decision was unilateral. It did not depend on the cooperation or lack of cooperation of our spouses, lovers, or sex objects. We were willing to be available not to the next lover or new sexual fantasy, but to whatever might happen next within ourselves. Paradoxically, this was not willingness that came from strength, but from the certainty of the dire consequences of continuing on in our addiction. As we turned from the old patterns, the painful emotions we had always tried to evade brought us to a series of insights which were the gift of the Second Step.

STEP TWO

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

We endured the early phases of withdrawal, sometimes achingly putting one twenty-four hour stretch together after another. As this continued, we faced a real dilemma concerning our personal identity. While actively involved in sex and love addiction we had found it impossible (if we had thought about it at all) to assess just how great an investment we had been making in our addiction throughout the course of it. We began to recognise that our disease, far from being just a way to stop the clock with pleasure and intensity, had moulded our personalities in ways that would maximise our ability to get the addictive returns!

Our physical appearance, our mannerisms, the way we went about our careers or other activities, many of the traits we thought of as our identifying trademarks, as who we were, had been designed to serve our sex and love addiction. Even if we seemed to possess some positive traits, such as authentic concern for others, we could see that these had been perverted by our addiction, leaving us full of conflict and working at cross-purposes. The line between compassion and passion had never been clear to us.

Indeed, our sex and love addiction, dictating who and what we had striven to be in the world, had supplied our principal source of identity, our entire self-concept. We had felt so self-assured, surveying a crowded room, advertising or broadcasting our availability. We knew we would be met with similar energy from others, a neverending source of "rainchecks."

What security we had derived, knowing we could foster insecurity in others, making them all the more needy and dependent on us, thus insuring our own sense of well-being. We enjoyed the power our sex appeal gave us in enforcing our dominance over others by hinting that they could be replaced. We felt safe in knowing that physically, emotionally, and mentally we could continue to attract new people to us, or further bind those already in our web.

Yet, whether we were aware of it or not, our entire being had been moulded by our failure, or refusal, to solve from within the problems of our real lives: insecurity, loneliness, and lack of any abiding sense of personal worth and dignity. Through sex, charm, emotional appeal, or persuasive intellect, we had used other people as "drugs," to avoid facing our own personal inadequacy. Once we saw this, we realised that in surrendering our addictive behaviour we would inevitably have to question the whole foundation of our self-image, our personal identity.

This task was staggering, implying as it did that our former selves would have to die, or at least risk dying, so that a new self, free of the addiction, could live. Nor could we get much relief from this dilemma by bravely making declarations of some set values we were NOW prepared to live by! We came to realise that this disease of sex and love addiction so subtly and thoroughly permeated our best intentioned and most fervid plans to reform ourselves, that even our ability to think clearly was undermined. There could be no such thing as a self powered cure. Too many of us had tried this and had failed repeatedly. It was not that our logic, motives or intents were wrong. Rather, our very ability to see the problem clearly, and our wishes to change ourselves, were themselves systematically distorted by the addiction. That part of our mind which at least intermittently recognised our sickness was itself not immune, and could not be solely relied upon to guide us to health.

As we came to appreciate the magnitude and mind altering nature of sex and love addiction, and the extent to which it had perverted our value system, we had to admit that we could not reshape our whole identity unaided. In the stark recognition of our profound frailty, we experienced the need to find a Power greater than ourselves something that would be at least one step ahead of our diseased intentions, and give us the consistent guidance we could not provide for ourselves. The possibility of finding some form of faith, based not on any specific conception of "God" but rather on a need to find such a faith, was the beginning of spiritual healing.

Nevertheless, the fact that we needed faith in some Power, since we could not trust ourselves to be consistent in either behaviour or motive, left some of us feeling even more shaken. Where would we find even the rudiment's of a faith that could carry us through this dissolving and reconstruction of our whole personality? If there WAS no Power greater than ourselves, it would be impossible!

The most elementary solution to this problem of faith was found through contact with sober people at our regular S.L.A.A. meetings who had surmounted the need-for-faith barrier themselves. As we listened to their stories of sickness and recovery, we could identify at depth with their patterns of addiction and diseased values. And we could clearly see that they were now leading more positive and healthy lives.

As living examples, they offered us the hope that whatever sources of spiritual aid they credited as helping them might be available to us as well. We could not question the insanity of their past addictive histories which they shared with us. It was so apparent. Nor, when we contrasted the quality of the lives these people were now living with our own addiction rooted struggles and dilemmas, could we really doubt that they had been delivered over into a form of redemption.

Contact with those already recovering from sex and love addiction was also a source of practical help in sustaining our day-to-day sobriety. Suggestions on how to avoid addictive situations were given, and the simple act of explaining a current temptation or situation to someone else who understood seemed to help us stay honest with ourselves. As we realised how helpful this network of support was, we sensed that a belief in any specific God or divinity was unnecessary. Our need for faith could be answered with an affirming hope, a sense of the possibility for spiritual guidance that was already apparent in the experience of the S.L.A.A. members who preceded us.

This shift in our attitude from need to hope brought us to another fundamental milestone in our recovery. We had laid the first foundation stone for the acquisition of faith. We had seen that it was possible for us to live through the pain of withdrawal without returning to our old patterns, and we sensed that the Power to do this was coming from outside ourselves. Now we were ready to consider just how we might turn this faith into a practical, working asset. We began to examine the implications for our lives of the Third Step.

STEP THREE

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

The situation was roughly this: if our sex and love addiction was such a fundamental part of our personality—if it had developed long ago and had shaped or deformed many of our other personality traits, our relationships, and our value system then we had to ask whether all our prior ideas about who and what we were might be incorrect or ill founded. This is not to say that on a practical level everything we thought we knew about ourselves was wrong. But if we really wanted to change ourselves and lead new and sane lives, we had to at least pose the question, if only on the abstract level. We had to admit to the possibility that anything, if not everything, we believed could be faulty.

To use the Biblical expression of the "cup that runneth over," we were like cups that had run over with obsession, with neediness, lust, and intrigue. Step 3, as a spiritual exercise, suggested that we could choose to tip our own cup over and let the sickness run out of it. We knew that having done this, we could not refill the cup through our unaided will, because we had become convinced that any solitary attempt to do so would inevitably take on the obsessive/compulsive character of our personalities. We could not outwit our own addictive natures. The enemy was US.

We could see that if we were ever to be as cups running over with redeemed, non-addictive lives, then some Power greater than ourselves, the need for which we had already affirmed, would have to do the refilling. Such a Power (He, She, It, or They) would do that in Its own time, according to Its scheme of things, not our own.

What would our lives be like, we wondered, if we were really to empty our chalice of disease and refrain from refilling it again ourselves, and instead let it be filled eventually through God's grace?

We simply could not know. There were no guarantees. All we knew was that we did not want to go back into our active sex and love addiction again. The certain hopelessness of that condition, were we to go back, compelled us to move forward into the unknown.

With no guarantees, and with much apprehension, but with at least the rudiment's of faith, we came to understand that if we were unable to prescribe our own treatment for sex and love addiction, then we would be better off turning "our will and our lives over" to the God of our understanding, even if we did not know what might happen as a result. We made the decision to do this, however abstract the idea seemed.

Having made this decision, how could we now commence our new relationship with God? The answer, like all good answers, was simple. We had already been staying clear of addictive entanglements and episodes day by day for some time. What we added to this outward change in behaviour was prayer. We now began each day in communion with the God of our understanding by asking for help that day in staying free of addictive behaviour. We asked also that God help us in the immense undertaking on which we had embarked, that of undergoing the death of our former, addiction-riddled self, and the rebirth of a redeemed, affirming person. And if we were successful in not acting out addictively by day's end, we thanked God, whatever we understood God to be, for having helped us live another twenty-four hours free from bottom-line sex and love addiction.

The time-honoured Serenity Prayer became a part of our daily repertoire for handling challenging and potentially dangerous situations:

**God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can
and wisdom to know the difference.
Thy will, not mine, be done.**

As we looked at the remaining steps, we saw that they were structured on the principle of Step 3. Our cup of diseased behaviour would be emptied out, and we would cleanse it as best we could, making it ready for God's Grace to refill it, in accordance with God's plan, not our own.

The "decision" had been made, and we were now trying to open our lives to God's influence through the use of daily prayer. Yet much of what was to come still seemed like wishful thinking, and very far-fetched indeed. We were still plagued by sometimes prolonged bouts of obsessive thinking or emotional yearning for intrigue and romance, for sexual oblivion. These could be set off by accidental encounters with our former addictive lovers, which seemed almost fiendishly psychic in the uncanny way they happened just when we were most vulnerable.

At other times we would fantasise about all the people in the world who, we fancied, were bliss-fully unaware of anything called "sex and love addiction," and who were, we imagined, indulging themselves with great exuberance. Or we would remember with longing the "good times" in a past marriage or addictive relationship, forgetting all the awful experiences.

Such musing's would leave us in a very foul frame of mind, indeed! How deprived we were! When these clouds descended on us, any vision of the process in which we were engaged was obscured. Disregarding how much better off we really were now, we yearned for our former ignorance. And yet we found that the door to awareness, once opened, could not be closed. We had seen, we had even felt occasional hints of what a healthy existence could be like. We knew it was open-ended; there was no apparent upper limit to the spiritual, emotional and mental well-being toward which we were now moving, even though sometimes grudgingly.

What often serve to break a spell of bad with getting a new insight into ourselves, through sharing at an S.L.A.A. meeting, or during a time of reflective solitude, or perhaps in a dream. These insights seemed to stem directly from the fact that we had not squandered our energy in addictive acting out, in spite of severe temptations to do so. They put us in touch with deeper levels of our inner nature, bit by bit. Sometimes these "delivering" insights seemed to be a kind of reward for not having abandoned our sobriety, and from the vantage point of these oases, we felt grateful that we had not acted out again.

In this phase of recovery we found that much of the emotional energy which had been spent on our addiction was now surfacing as feelings and memories that were charged with meaning. More and more of our past pattern of sex and love addiction was being revealed or becoming clearer to us. Some of us kept journals, or a dream log, or entered into counselling or psychotherapy. We found that, almost in spite of ourselves, we were becoming formally engaged in the spirit of the Fourth Step.

THE WITHDRAWAL EXPERIENCE.

If you have read this far, and have, however reluctantly, come to the conclusion that sex and love addiction is the problem you are facing, you are probably feeling very seared and apprehensive. Perhaps you are still trying to shake off the awareness of sex and love addiction even as we have been sharing our experiences with you. Maybe, you tell yourself, these people are crackpots or extremists, or at the very least, party-poopers!

Yet some of you, despite efforts to deny the truth of what we have been labouring to share, can hear the bell tolling, and know that it tolls for you. We are with you. We recall only too well how terrifying the unknown was, looming before us as we ran from the grips of active addiction into the apparent void of ceasing it. How intensely we resisted the idea that our sexual and emotional lives were addicted!

What now? If, for instance, your pattern of sex and love addiction involves masturbating, how can you be sure that, if you stop, you won't find yourself climbing the walls with horniness? How do you know that stopping won't bring on premature senility, with atrophying sexual powers (or organs!), along with encroaching death? if you cease initiating, responding to, or otherwise feeding forcefield energy from others (that near-psychoic communication advertising that one is "AVAILABLE!"), how can you be sure that you won't just become an emotional and sexual eunuch, vitality gone? And how can you be sure, if you try to withdraw from a prolonged and sickening dependency on another person, one to whom you have long since given over control of your life, that you can find the necessary inner resources to stabilise on your own?

The answer to these wrenching questions is twofold. First, in terms of what your feelings are likely to tell you, the answer is that you can't be sure of any of the above. Second, however, is the possibility that our experience, as shared through this book, may serve to give you hope of being able to go through, and survive, withdrawal. Perhaps you will get the sense, as you reach this book, that withdrawal has left those of us in S.L.A.A. much better off than we were when we entered it. Be assured this is true, and that we share in common the experience of transformation to which it has led in each of us.

We can not go through your withdrawal for you, nor would we, if we could. Who would ever knowingly volunteer to go through it again? Certainly none of us! Yet the pain of each withdrawal is unique and special, even precious (although you probably don't now think so). In a sense, the experience is you, a part of you which has been trying to surface for a long time. You have been avoiding or postponing this pain for a long time now, yet you have never been able to lastingly outrun it. You need to go through withdrawal in order to become a whole person. You need to meet yourself. Behind the terror of what you fear, withdrawal contains the seeds for your own personal wholeness. It must be experienced for you to realise, or make real, that potential for you and your life which has been stored there for so long.

There are different ways sex and love addicts have started this process. The end result is the same: addictive sexual and emotional behaviour, on a daily basis, stops.

It also does not matter what the specifics of your own pattern of sex and love addiction have been, although it is important that you do identify your own pattern. Some of our patterns have included "one night stands," frantic sexual liaisons with no emotional tics, or manic masturbation, exhibitionism and/or voyeurism. Others have involved obsessive intrigue with, or dependency on, one or many people (serially or concurrently) with the conviction that without an "other" we would be at death's door. Regardless of which pattern is yours, it has to stop. No matter how powerfully your thoughts and feelings are tugging at you to continue indulging, you cease acting on them. It is this point when you finally stop that really signals the start of your recovery in S.L.A.A., and the day on which it starts is your personal sobriety date.

Those of us in S.L.A.A arrived at this point of complete cessation by different routes, and they are worth noting.

First, some of us maintained our addiction on full doses of whatever "did it" for us right up to the day we hit bottom and surrendered. Then we threw in the towel and went "cold turkey" from the whole pattern at once. This was the most brutal way of doing it, the most black-and-white. Stopping cold provided the strongest, immediate shock to our emotional and mental system, and the onset of withdrawal was hard and fast. Withdrawal entered into in this way was not, however, necessarily of shorter duration or of any higher "quality" than withdrawal which was arrived at more gradually. Our collective experience suggests that the scope and outcome of withdrawal is, within certain limits, the same for each of us. Here we are only referring to the various ways we used to start the process.

Some of us approached withdrawal gradually, chipping away at obvious problem areas. Even marginal success in doing so increased our awareness of other aspects of the addictive pattern that we really hadn't known were there. This process of increasing awareness led inevitably to a final surrender of the whole addictive pattern, and thus we were launched into withdrawal, and sexual and emotional sobriety.

To those who are familiar with concepts of addiction, such a "gradual" approach to surrender might seem like wishful thinking. There is no such thing as "half pregnant," and "one drink begets a drunk" is part of the conventional wisdom of A.A. Besides, the addictive experience has been so mind altering for most of us that, once enmeshed in it, we have lost track of ever wanting to be out of it!

There is great truth to this. Usually, however, by the time we let the concept of withdrawal into our thinking, the addiction was not reliably delivering the oblivion or pleasure we sought so ardently. More and more energy had to be poured into the emotional and sexual activities just to break even, let alone "go to the moon." It was as though an inner voice was saying, as we embarked on each new sexual or romantic episode, "Wherever I'm 'going' with this new face, or body, or mind, I've already 'been there' a thousand times before!"

The novelty of each new romance or "reconciliation" no longer screened the truth from view: each new situation was just another hopeless episode, holding about as much promise of fulfilment as swapping bubble-gum cards. As this jaded feeling broke through, the addictive "high" was becoming harder and harder to achieve and maintain. As we approached withdrawal, the sense of futility about continuing on was felt acutely. Although many of us tried more experimentation with just how much we could "handle," we finally encountered a mandate to withdraw just as surely as a steam locomotive driven on a one way trip into a glacier is ultimately faced with the prospect of cooling off.

Still others of us tried to use "external constraints" as a means of entering withdrawal. As the energy necessary to manage the addiction became greater than what we had at our disposal, the dam broke and the truth flooded out, as we revealed wholesale to spouses or lovers just what exactly was going on in our lives. The act of "vomiting up" the unpalatable truths had become an involuntary response. Some force within us was going for broke, forcing us to expunge the poison from our system. In becoming "open" in this way we still may have had little concept of "withdrawal" or "addiction." But as we witnessed the impact that these long delayed revelations had on the important people in our lives, we experienced for the first time the consequences of our actions, both past and present. Nor, when our guts had split wide open, did we dare stitch them up again, or let them heal over superficially. Not only were we too exhausted emotionally, we were deeply afraid of what the infection still in the wound could do to us. Therefore, by default as much as through courage, we maintained a standard of sharing and openness that was nearly absolute. In any realistic terms we were probably not yet really sober, or even necessarily aware that we were in the throes of an addiction. This meant that addictive experiences and episodes were probably still ongoing. Yet, whenever one of these addictive experiences occurred or threatened to occur, we sensed that there was some safeguard against further loss of control if we revealed to all concerned parties what was happening. For instance, we might make long distance telephone calls in order to tell a spouse or mate that we were on the brink of plunging into some tantalising situation. The dismay or disappointment which came from these people was a consequence of our behaviour, and by choosing to be open and face this consequence, we were cutting ourselves off from acting out further on the tempting situation.

In "going public" with those whom we had routinely deceived about our activities, the motive was not to punish. We were relying on these people, and their reactions to the disclosures of our shoddiness, in order to guarantee that we would encounter the consequences of our actions right away. We were choosing to pull the rug out from under our inclinations to cover up, segregate, or manage our intrigues and liaisons. It was often the cumulative result of these consequences in our relationships with those people who mattered to us which finally forced us to an awareness of the lack of control in our behaviour, and the need to label it as addictive. This inner commitment to sustain a stringent standard of honesty with others about our sexual and emotional behaviour seemed to be sufficient, in itself to start the inner process of self honesty which finally delivered us over into unconditional surrender and withdrawal.

Of course, to speak of "ways" of entering withdrawal from active sex and love addiction is a bit misleading, because we are not really the conscious architects of how we get there. Most of us can identify with some parts of each of these paths into withdrawal. Finally, it is important to emphasise, again, that however honest we became through any last ditch efforts at "control," our sobriety did not really begin until the last reservation had been let go, and we gave up the right, for one day (or one hour) at a time, to have "one more" liaison with our addiction.

And now you are there, and withdrawal is upon you. What are some of the dangers involved in going through it? What is the experience likely to bring you? How can you survive the inevitable temptations to slide back into old patterns?

The dangers can be described as being of two types. The first type involves the dangers inherent in the inner process itself. The second involves dangers stemming from outside yourself which can make it seem impossible for you to, go through withdrawal, and can influence you to abort it.

Perhaps the greatest inner danger comes from finding yourself face-to-face with the unknown. It is one thing to make a decision to withdraw when the painful stimulus of a recent addictive episode is still fresh. It is quite another thing to be open to withdrawal, not as a reaction to a specific addictive situation, but as a response to a recognisable life-pattern of addiction. Yet this larger perspective on the withdrawal experience is crucial if it is to be endured. What we have found is that once we have recognised certain bottom-line behaviour which we know is addictive for us, and refrain from acting out in these "bottom line-" ways on a daily basis, we then discover numerous habits and traits of behaviour and personality that have been addiction-related.

Discovering this whole range of underlying behaviour which is also tied in with sex and love addiction can feel very, very discouraging. A chronic handshaker, for instance, may find that this trait has been serving an addiction-related purpose. A person who dresses in a certain way may discover that the purpose of this is to attract certain kinds of attention. The person who "loves to hug" may be checking our responsiveness for later pursuit. Or one who "gives great back rubs or massages" can be subtly (or not so subtly) seducing the objects of this attention. These are just the barest examples of a very wide range of behaviours.

In the past these milder accessory behaviours had never been seen for what they were because they existed alongside the much more powerful, bottom-line payoff behaviours which were so obviously addictive. Minus the "big-payoff," however, we were able to see that these other behavioural manifestations were really procurement strategies. In withdrawal, we found that whenever we engaged in these accessory behaviours, regardless of how innocent or unaware we were of doing so, we had unwittingly set up the potential for sexual and emotional intrigue—just what we were trying so desperately to avoid!

Our habits of thought also needed changing. We were not accustomed to having our lives restricted. We found ourselves wandering freely "where angels fear to tread."

Our justifications generally sounded very convincing to us: "I can't help seeing him; he works in the same building as I do." "If my partner were more sexual with me, I wouldn't have to go outside our relationship for sex." "It feels crazy not to be talking to this person that I care about." "I have as much right to be at a certain location or function as s/he does. Why do I have to be the one who has to stay away?"

Some of our excuses were not so convincing, but we held onto them anyway: "I haven't seen this person for several days/weeks/months; that must mean I'm not addicted and can start seeing him/her again." "I only want to engage in this particular sexual practice sometimes. I know I have a problem, but I don't think I ever had any trouble with this." "If I don't tell anyone what I'm doing, then it doesn't count."

The dilemma was that we didn't realise that we were culling "intrigue" from these behaviours, and when we finally did realise it, we didn't know what else to do. Our personalities could not be separated from these characteristic ways of rationalising, of making eye contact, of "hugging" and hand-shaking, and on and on. We found, however, as the addiction-serving motives for these behaviours and personality characteristics became clearer to us that battling our addictive craving's with every minor "set up" was becoming too exhausting. It was becoming necessary for us to grapple with the ache of wondering just who "we" really were without our addictive trappings.

This unravelling was wrenching. We found it necessary to live through withdrawal in day-at-a-time, twenty-four hour compartments. We would awaken in the morning, sometimes very early, and inwardly exclaim, "Oh God! Another day of THIS!" Sometimes we found ourselves wishing that we had died in our sleep. Regardless of how we felt, however, we asked in prayer for God's help in facing the day at hand. If we had any grievances with God, we threw those in, too. No one was trying to force us to trump up gratitude! We were striving to be "honest," not "good."

We would then embark on our day. Living alone, as many of us were at this time, even the daily rituals of bathing, clothing and feeding ourselves became very important. Just going through these ordinary tasks was an affirmation of our caring for ourselves.

We then surveyed the day. There probably were tasks we needed to attend to, whether paying the rent, doing the laundry, shopping, or going to work. Physical activity, even as basic as taking a long walk, could get us out into the day a bit. Some took up jogging, or other exercises that required greater physical effort. These helped to provide a physical sensation of tiredness which could fill the void left by the absence of sexual release, or even replace it. Contact with other S.L.A.A. members or trusted friends, perhaps members of other Twelve-Step fellowships, was helpful. Attending open A.A. or Al-Anon meetings was likely to be possible, or perhaps we were fortunate enough to have an S.L.A.A. meeting in our area. Maybe we were trying to start such a meeting, and had tasks to attend to there.

The purpose of all this was not to clutter our day with activity. Most of us needed rest and solitude just as much as we needed other tasks, personal contacts and responsibilities. We were, within ourselves, expending as much energy as most people do who hold full-time jobs and maintain active family lives. In fact, most of us were "working" far harder than we ever had before. After all, we were working at standing still, at freeing ourselves from the tentacled clasp of a frightful addiction which had driven us to such a pitch of self destroying activity. Simply not doing it took tremendous effort. We were suspending, for the moment, our very real fears concerning the outcome of all this by attending to those tasks immediately at hand. We were living in the immediate present, and discovering that we could indeed make it through an hour, or a morning (mourning!), or a day. And we were discovering that there was a joy to be had in successfully negotiating our way through each twenty-four hour period.

We found that the most healing antidote to the gnawing pain of our struggles and doubts was to turn over any questions concerning the outcome of our withdrawal to God, or to whatever Power we felt was helping us to abstain from our old patterns.

Through all of this we became, one day at a time, available to ourselves. By the simple act of "standing still" we inaugurated a relationship with ourselves based on growing self-honesty, trust, and intimacy. Now we knew that our goal in withdrawal was to lay the foundation for personal wholeness. How this would translate into personal relationships or careers, we did not know. But what we did know was that the externals would eventually develop around this inner foundation of wholeness, and come to reflect our inner state. We were able to embrace this feeling of our growing capacity for wholeness, and leave specific outcomes to God. This shift in our attitude eased the sense of existential crisis. The other kind of danger encountered in withdrawal consisted of external threats. Here the risk was not so much in facing an unknown self, a "self" minus the addiction-derived self-image. Rather, the "threat" came in the form of situations which contrived to abort the withdrawal process itself and force us to resume the addictive pattern. Locked in once again, we risked being prevented from ever facing those existential questions which would have to be dealt with for recovery to develop.

The range and nature of external threats varied greatly, but many of them were incredibly "coincidental." With seemingly diabolic accuracy, they tended to occur when we were most vulnerable to them. For example, if we had severed (or been severed from) a clearly addictive relationship, and were still having a lot of mixed feelings about this (as is always the case), we could count on "running into" this person in places where we would Least expect it. More subtle, but equally dangerous, was the "chance" meeting of mutual friends and acquaintances who took it upon themselves to "enlighten" us about the emotional condition of our former addictive lover(s). Hearing that our former lovers were depressed and suicidal, or that they were courting or being courted by others, was compelling for us

Many of us have found, in S.L.A.A., that we needed to accept the possibility that psychic occurrences can happen, in order to make sense of some of these situations which seemed so uncanny. Even when we felt far removed from actual contact with a former addictive lover, such things happened as unex-pected letters, or finding ourselves in settings with special meaning in the past relationship. These things could serve to catalyse, or charge up, a feeling of being psychically connected to our former addictive lover. Eventually we came to expect that we would continue to encounter a barrage of such experiences! This was equally as true in those cases where we had been "dumped" by a former addictive lover, and ambiguity still persisted. We have found that wherever ambiguity is present, the potential for reactivating sex and love addiction is present also.

All of us, without exception, went through periods during which we were extremely vulnerable to mental and emotional shocks. Often these seemed to occur as a result of coincidental meetings or contact, direct or indirect, with old addictive situations. Yet just as frequently we discovered that our vulnerability had already flared up prior to one of these external tests. It was, in such cases, as if our own vulnerability and susceptibility to addictive sexual and emotional experiences either romantic or sexual intrigue, or emotional dependency born of personal neediness were sufficient in themselves to set in motion the makings of a "coincidence"!

When external challenges, especially those with psychic overtones, did occur, and we felt ourselves thrown back into having to devote all our energy, once again, to abstaining from addictive behaviour at a "bottom line" level, we once again felt the extent to which the roots of our sex and love addiction had infiltrated our very souls. It seemed, sometimes, that the forces which chained us ran far deeper than did our abilities to counter them.

It was, and is, humbling indeed to have to entertain the possibility that we are possessed at such great depth. Even for those of us who have been sober in S.L.A.A. for a long time, this possession-at-depth can still assert itself with great force, and hold on to us with a fiendish tenacity. Yet we must say that, tenacious as the psychic hold may appear, it, too, does respond to the withdrawal process. In these matters, time and daily consistency of action are the tools with which we fashion our release, under God's guidance, from the tyranny of the psychic realm. This may be the last domain of the addiction to relinquish its power, but it does happen.

What are some of the tools we have found which can help us hold up and behave with consistency in spite of external challenges? Clearly we needed some ways to counterbalance the erosion of our awareness and resolve by these psychic coincidences.

Perhaps the most important principle here was not to deny to ourselves that we were, indeed, being severely tested. In light of the fact that these external invasions of our personal resolve seemed to be unavoidable, they were better dealt with if recognised for what they were right away.

Another defence against these unnerving onslaughts was sustaining awareness by starting and keeping a list of very short observations of exactly how we were feeling in withdrawal. Many of us didn't wait until being tested to start keeping a list like this: it could have been too late by then. In our list we did not edit out any negative sentiments. Despite the pains of withdrawal, the positive results of early sobriety were very evident to those of us who had truly encountered terror while in the active phase of the illness. Even the difficult feelings of early withdrawal were better than the alternative. So we "listed" away! There was no such thing as a feeling or an observation that was not germane.

Here is a small sample of some of the observations we came up with. Perhaps some of them may apply to you, too:

"I'm feeling acute pain of withdrawal and loss today, but I am not feeling, self disgust."

" . . . anxiety and neediness, clawing at my guts . . . "

Sex and love addiction: I don't 'have' it; I am it!"

"Seeing, a squirrel eating a nut, so systematically devouring it layer by layer, the way I felt devoured by X."

"Three hours today without thinking of X. Can I believe it!"

"Chance encounter. . . , that needy hunger calling me back. How I crave it."

"Maybe X is healthy and I am the sick one. Regardless, in combination , we are sick."

In addition to daily prayer and S.L.A.A. related activities, maintaining such a list was a major bulwark against acting-out on the addiction wherever particularly disconcerting possibilities presented themselves. Every item was a feeling we had had about our sex and love addiction and withdrawal, and in writing them down, we crystallised them-made them stand still. When a challenge came along with all its emotional turbulence, we consulted the list. It helped us stay centred, almost in spite of ourselves. Even as we felt ourselves being swayed, reading this list could reconvince us that "It really ,was that bad," and that the current "possibility," were we to follow through on it, would be an extension of our addictive pattern, not an exemption from it. However bruising these clashes seemed between the addictive, tantalising forces and the forces for maintaining emotional, mental and behavioural consistency, we knew what we had to do and avoid doing.

Of course, regular contact with other members of S.L.A.A., or others who were trustworthy and knew what we were trying to accomplish, was also very steadying. In fact, every way we found that had awareness-sustaining', power was important; they were all true anchors to windward. However, devices such as list keeping were especially helpful because they could be used at all times and in all places, regardless of the availability, or lack thereof, of support from other S.L.A.A. members.

How do we know when we are approaching the end of this stage of recovery? After all, withdrawal does not go on forever (although it may feel interminable). What signposts do we have to indicate to us that we are ready for a new chapter in our sober lives? We would like to share some of these signposts with you, as we have experienced them. The first signpost was a growing awareness that we were now quite seasoned at dealing with temptations on a regular basis. Those situations which had been SQ transfixing in the earlier phases of withdrawal were now easily, if not always comfortably, handled. We had developed a capacity to assess these varied threats, and to deal with them with real consistency. In withdrawal we had found our "sea legs;" we had become "street wise." We had been granted freedom of choice over becoming sexually or emotionally involved.

The second signpost that we were ready to leave the withdrawal phase was that we were no longer concerned with how much longer we would have to abstain from sexual or romantic entanglements. Early on, many of us had exclaimed, "How long do I have to wait before I can have a relationship, or have sex?" "I want to get this over with, get through this so I can have a relationship." But now these concerns did not plague us in the same way, or with the same intensity. In fact, we could laugh, retrospectively, at concerns like these. We could see that they really consisted of this underlying thought: "How long do I have to refrain from acting out before I can begin to act out again?" Well. . .!

What came to pass is that as we refrained from seeking to escape from ourselves through acting out on our sex and love addiction, we began to become intimate to ourselves. Such an experience is difficult to describe. However, essentially we were inaugurating a new, inner relationship. Despite the gruelling qualities of dealing with outer temptations and inner insecurities, we began to experience withdrawal not as deprivation, but as self enrichment. It was not simply a matter of having something taken out of our lives.

We were doing the "withdrawing;" we were choosing to take back, or withdraw, the energy which we had been squandering on futile pursuits. This very energy, now back within us, was helping us to become whole people.

This deepening awareness of our own inner change buoyed us up. As long as we were on the road to growth, time didn't matter so much. The paradox is that once we accepted that we simply could not know how long withdrawal would last, and felt prepared to go on with the process regardless of how long it took, we discovered that we had triumphed! The fear of being deprived of our addiction was the real fear behind our concerns about time. In coming to terms with this fear, the chances were great that we were becoming ready for the withdrawal phase to wind down.

A third signpost that we had come through withdrawal was that we became more aware of personal relationships with children, spouses (or lovers or partners), friends, siblings, and parents. The time of contemplation during withdrawal had brought with it awareness of how our sex and love addiction patterns had permeated our relationships with most of the important persons in our lives. We were now ready to put some of our new-found energy into the tasks of reassessing these relationships, repairing them when warranted.

Often, withdrawal brought with it the need to make some difficult decisions. We had built some relationships on false illusions or premises. In others we had been using the term "friendship" very loosely indeed. In the absence of much personal dignity, we had "settled for less." "A little of a bad thing," had seemed preferable to "nothing of anything." We had never stopped to really question what our needs were in these relationships. We began to notice those daily telephone calls, or other overtures which we habitually made to those who never responded in kind. We came to regard the energy needed to maintain these meager relationships as an unacceptable expenditure.

There were other situations in which a person who had seemed so "indispensable" (and convenient) during our past turned out to be unable to accept our awarenesses about sex and love addiction and our need to grow via S.L.A.A. Sometimes these people seemed threatened by our awareness. They wanted us the "old" way. We had to face the sometimes painful truth that we had outgrown relationships like these. We were, indeed, beginning to feel more worthy of reciprocity!

Those of us who had separated from spouses or former partners (individuals who had been in our lives and involved with us, but were not necessarily sex and love addicts themselves) began to question the healthy and unhealthy aspects of these relationships. In early withdrawal, we had been quite ready to write off all prior relationships in which sex and commitment had played any part as "sick." Now we were "coming around" to a more perceptive and accurate understanding. We realised that we had never been emotionally available on a consistent basis to these people. Until we had given these relationships a chance in sobriety, we would not know what potential was there to build on. With the perspectives of other S.L.A.A. members to help us maintain our clarity, we began to explore the possibility of reconciliation.

A fourth signpost of being ready to move beyond withdrawal was closely related to the third. We began to have new energy available to invest in new, or once abandoned interests. The possibility for personal growth led us to explore new careers, schooling, new hobbies, new circles of friends. Perhaps a new partnership was beginning to unfold. In many areas we found ourselves ready and able to address these new opportunities.

Nor was this energy the kind which had once driven us so obsessively and compulsively. It was as if in the process of having encountered, and passed through, our own inner turmoil and suffering, the rite of passage had changed the very obsessive/compulsive character of our past "energy" into something that was now much more smooth and even. In the spirit of this basic change, we felt that whatever new, real-life possibilities were now awaiting us were direct extensions of our inner growth, not diversions or escapes from it.

We were beginning to be able to feel a sense of direction which was now pointing beyond the withdrawal process toward what our lives might come to look and feel like as our inner experiences were translated into partnership, activity in a community, and career. The energy which had been devoted to the inner experiences of withdrawal was now freed up, the better to enable us to address what life offered. This represented another major signpost that the withdrawal phase was drawing to a close. Strangely, we often found that events or circumstances which provided either motivation or opportunity for us to live out more of our potential as sober people would just "happen." These situations or events seemed to appear providentially at just about the point when we felt our own readiness to explore and respond to these opportunities. Where we once seemed to be swimming upstream against the currents of Fate, we now felt ourselves moving with the flow. Fate was starting to work with us, and a sense of having a personal destiny was starting to emerge.

And what can be said of the final signpost that withdrawal is ending? Well, this signpost was really after-the-fact. It showed itself at that time when we knew that our lives in sobriety and withdrawal were, in fact, due to change. Perhaps a marital reconciliation was scheduled to commence, or a new partnership was being explored, or a change in career status was imminent, entailing a major shift in personal responsibilities. Life tasks, whether personal, relational, occupational or academic, were due to be taken up again. No longer a mere possibility, the time had been specified: the date was set.

As we approached the point of enacting this change in our life circumstances, we usually became aware of a range of surprising feelings. We realised that the time we had spent in withdrawal—and the whole withdrawal experience itself had been a precious, singular period in our lives. With all the pain and ache of the early going, with all the difficult and dangerous challenges to our new and vulnerable sobriety which we had faced, and throughout all the gut-wrenching we had undergone over our crisis of personal identity and meaning, We somehow knew that we would miss this period once it was behind us.

Amidst all difficulties and uncertainties, a simple intimacy had come into being for us: we had met ourselves, and found ourselves worthy. We had become "beloved" to ourselves. We had discovered a whole new relationship with God and life. As we contemplated our changing lives, we actually felt longing for a future time in which we might once again come to experience the magnificence of our own solitude, and come again to know directly that well-spring of inner dignity and wholeness which was filling us, and which was now to flow, through us, on into our lives in the world outside.

We knew we had experienced a Grace.

THE PROMISES

If you have decided to follow the suggestions in this program a new life will begin to unfold within you. Along with this new life are promises that will guide and sustain you. They are manifested among us sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. These are the promises we in this S.L.A.A. group have found:

1. We will regain control of our lives.
2. We will begin to feel dignity and respect for ourselves.
3. The loneliness will subside and we will begin to enjoy being alone.
4. We will no longer be plagued by an unceasing sense of longing.
5. In the company of family and friends, we will be with them in body and mind.
6. We will pursue interests and activities that we desire for ourselves.
7. Love will be a committed, thoughtful decision rather than a feeling by which we are overwhelmed.
8. We will love and accept ourselves.
9. We will relate to others from a state of wholeness.
10. We will extend ourselves for the purpose of nurturing our own or another's spiritual growth.
11. We will make peace with our past and make amends to those we have hurt.
12. We will be thankful for what has been given us, what has been taken away, and what has been left behind.

“THIRD STEP PRAYER”

God, I offer myself to thee,
To build with me and to deal with me
as thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage of self
that I may better do thy will.

Take away my difficulties,
that victory of them,
may bear witness to those
I would help.

Of thy power, thy love and
thy way of life,

May I do thy will always.