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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
SEX AND LOVE  
ADDICTS  
ANONYMOUS

Sex and Love Addicts  
Anonymous



THIS PAMPHLET IS S.L.A.A.  
CONFERENCE-APPROVED LITERATURE

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# ***S.L.A.A. Preamble***

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

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction, we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal difference of sexual orientation or gender identity.

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



## ***What Is S.L.A.A.?***

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a fellowship based on the 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. With established meetings in many cities in the United States and several cities overseas, this self-help fellowship is open to people of any age or sexual preference.

Members include both those who suffer from a compulsive need for sex, and those with a desperate attachment to one person. What all members have in common is an obsessive/compulsive pattern, either sexual or emotional (or both), in which relationships or activities have become increasingly destructive to all areas of their lives—career, family and sense of self-respect.

Although S.L.A.A. was started by recovered alcoholics and is modeled after A.A., meetings are open to any person who believes he/she has this problem whether having previously suffered from a chemical addiction or not.

S.L.A.A. first began in 1976 in Boston by a few people who had come to realize that sex, romantic intrigue and dependency were affecting their lives in the same ways as had their chemical addictions. They found that the compulsion to continue with promiscuous sex or to return over and over to a destructive relationship could not be controlled by willpower alone.

Typical stories include those who frequented “pickup” bars in spite of repeated bouts with venereal disease and fear of discovery by their families. There were others who either found it impossible to break off destructive relationships, or broke them off only to find themselves in others equally as bad. Still others engaged primarily in solitary acts.

In spite of the relative newness of this fellowship a number of persons have found hope and recovery in sharing their experiences with each other. Some of these self-diagnosed sex and “love” addicts are finding themselves capable of satisfying “partnership” relationships for the first time in their lives.

More importantly, with or without a love partnership, these recoverers have found a new sense of freedom and dignity of self. Some feel that without



the support and recovery facilitated through S.L.A.A. their dilemma of having to choose between acute loneliness and isolation from others on the one hand, and addictive relationships or activities on the other, would have set them up for committing suicide.

## ***Why we Believe it is an Addiction***

Rich M., an original member of S.L.A.A., defines an addiction as:

*“...the use of a substance or activity, for the purpose of lessening pain or augmenting pleasure, by a person who has lost control over the rate, frequency or duration of its use, and whose life has become progressively unmanageable as a result.”*

We believe that this is an addiction not just because we need or use sex and “romance” more than others, but because of the motive. Unlike normal persons, who seek love and sex to fill normal needs, addicts use them to lessen the pain that comes from problems in other areas of life.

As we seek someone or something to “take us away from all this,” we are really seeking to avoid reality altogether. We come to use the intensity of sex and romance, however fleeting, to substitute for other satisfactions, to comfort ourselves for a real or imagined lack of love, or to avoid or try to make unnecessary attending to a life that seems to give us too much pain.

Of course normal people may seek escape or transcendence over life’s problems in romance or sexual adventure—sometimes! The difference for us is that we lose control of this and cannot stop. We sacrifice closeness and emotional consistency with others, and our loneliness and anxiety grow as our loss of control continues to result in ever more serious consequences.

## ***The Experience of Addiction***

In our addiction, it seems as though the power lies elsewhere, and that our lives are slowly being destroyed by forces, tensions and problems that cannot



be denied or escaped.

For the sex and love addict, closeness to others has become increasingly rare and difficult, if, indeed, it has ever existed. The desperate search for relief from loneliness in ways that seem always to promise but never deliver any lasting contentment, isolates us from the whole range of human relationships enjoyed by “normal” people. Even worse, this desperate quest masks the progressive loss of self that is the real heart of the disease.

Sometimes the addiction expresses itself in going from one sexual partner to another, seeking someone who can live up to what is in reality an impossible set of demands. Often this restless search is rationalized as being in response to unhappiness at home. Sometimes the addiction comes as desperate clinging to one person, in spite of repeated abuse or lack of understanding. Still others may experience their addiction primarily in solitary acts, such as exhibitionism, voyeurism or fantasizing over pornography, with or without masturbation. For all of us the internal experience is the same.

As sex and love addicts we search always for the person or act of sex that will transform a lonely reality and fill the sense of restless, lurching emptiness inside. As we cling to those means of trying to fill our own void, we feel that no one can really understand us, and that there would be no point to life without “love” and sex. Often there are fears that if we really revealed to others what we were thinking, or told them of the things we did, that we would be despised, or flatly abandoned.

The kind of love relationship in which two people, possessing integrity of self and a sense of inner strength and sureness, come together to share, has usually formed no part of our prior experience as sex or love addicts. As is common in other addictions, we have changed our personalities to suit the occasion, the better to develop “currency” with which to purchase oblivion in someone’s (or anyone’s) arms, whether real or imaginary.

## ***To Make a Beginning***

What can you do if you admit, however reluctantly,



that sex and love addiction might be the problem, instead of the lack of “enough” or the “right kind” of sex or love partner?

As in alcoholism, the mental obsession that leads to a return over and over to the destructive pattern can only be broken by a willingness to turn to some power outside oneself for help. It is usually only when the pain seems itself life-threatening that consciousness can be achieved and maintained.

First you must face honestly that it is not simply “the other person,” but primarily the neediness inside yourself that is the real source of the terrible pain. If you have doubts, the quickest way to determine if this program is for you is to try to stop the pattern abruptly and for a reasonably long period, say for a few weeks or months.

Generally, intense longing and anxiety emerges and continues to grow. This will usually be coupled with failure of the resolve to live in accordance with consistent values and without self-destructive entanglements. If this happens, little doubt should be left about the seriousness and hopelessness of the problem.

The admission that one is powerless over the compulsive need for sex and/or “romance” is obviously not one that is easy to make! Like other addictive “surrenders,” this one usually comes as the victim finds life narrowing down more and more to relationships or situations that seem only to bring increasing pain, while promising fulfillment that seems ever elusively just out of reach. The ability to see the downward progression and the loss of power to halt or reverse the trend is vital before the humility to seek help outside oneself becomes possible.

This dilemma in admitting powerlessness was shattering to those of us reaching it. The unfamiliarity of the idea that we could use sex itself or a “lover” like a drug, coupled with the horrifying implications of having to stop, put those of us reaching this desperate point into a state of absolute panic. Some of us considered suicide, or feared that we were on the verge of irrevocably losing our sanity.

The suffering and pain of our ongoing addictive lives seemed matched by terror of the emptiness which would surely be ours if we stopped. We could



understand how an alcoholic could get along without drinking, or how a gambler could live without gambling, even though the world is full of cocktail parties and wagers. But who ever heard of doing without love and sex?! What else could be worth living for? Would we have to become hermits or monks?

Fortunately much of this sense of confounding panic was the addiction itself talking. No addict finds it easy to imagine any kind of life minus the thing that has become so important in giving a sense of identity. It does not seem possible, let alone desirable.

Yet the reality is that there are real kinds of love and use of sexual capacities which are totally different in their nature from our self-centered and self-destructive patterns as sex and love addicts!

The beginning is simple, but not easy. The admission of powerlessness has to be coupled with a readiness to break the addictive pattern; to stay away from all sexual activity except that which would be worked out in a committed, continuing relationship. If, at the point of surrender, there is no positive relationship left toward which to build, a period of total sexual abstinence is called for.

This withdrawal from sexual and romantic entanglements generally brings symptoms just as physical and as painful as the withdrawal from drugs or alcohol. On our own the tension would be too much, the temptation to indulge just one more time would be unbearable, and the belief that there could be another way to live would weaken.

The understanding and support of others who have gone through the pain and trials of withdrawal help us through this period. Even with the aid of the fellowship, the subtlety with which the compulsion alters our thinking, and the ease with which rationalization creeps in, aided by a society that idolizes sex and romance, is astounding. It cannot be endured without constant vigilance and the help of a power beyond ourselves.

When the immediate anxiety of withdrawal begins to ease, careful attention to the Twelve Steps is needed to prevent a return to addictive behavior. As in alcoholism, we believe that sex and love addiction is a three-fold illness: physical, mental, and





spiritual. Recovery in all three areas is necessary if we are to achieve comfortable, long-term sexual and emotional sobriety.

This first period of abstinence serves as a catalyst for self-confrontation, facing the feelings that necessarily come out when the source of blotting them out is removed. Since this is tantamount to coming to grips with our whole sense of identity and our whole way of relating to the world, the process can be painful and difficult.

Some members seek professional help with this self-inventory, as well as using the 12 Steps. However it is done, this process of self-confrontation and willingness to change is a precondition for readiness for a “true partnership” relationship with another human being, or for a contented life alone.

## ***The Road to Recovery***

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

First we find a sense of wholeness and dignity within ourselves. This comes from continued sobriety on a daily basis and from working the Twelve Steps. Our personal wholeness is a natural result of willingness to trust God, clean house and help others.

For all of us the path to recovery, chosen only because the pain of our addiction had come to exceed the short-term relief of tension, has brought us returns we would not have expected. While recovery is difficult, this way of life has given us new freedom and a deep sense of purpose. The S.L.A.A. program has given us, in recovery, real autonomy and self-respect. With these attributes has come the capacity for partnerships based on authentic love and intimacy, whether they be with children, spouse, or friends.

If you have shared our experience of pain, perhaps you may now accept our experience of hope and redemption. May you join us now, as we help each other — one day at a time — to discover true freedom and dignity of self!



## ***Meetings***

S.L.A.A. is very protective of the anonymity of its members. Accordingly, meetings are normally closed to outsiders and those who are merely curious. However, anyone who fears they may have this problem will be welcome, as long as the anonymity of the persons attending the meeting is respected.

### ***Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.\****

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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#### TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol—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 Him. 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 Him 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 God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His 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 alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

### ***Twelve Traditions of S.L.A.A.\****

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon S.L.A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as this Power may be expressed through our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. Any two or more persons gathered together for mutual aid in recovering from sex and love addiction may call themselves an S.L.A.A. group, provided that as a group they have no other affiliation.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.L.A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers.
6. An S.L.A.A. group or S.L.A.A. as a whole ought never endorse, finance, or lend the S.L.A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every S.L.A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. S.L.A.A. should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. S.L.A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues; hence



the S.L.A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, film and other public media. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all fellow S.L.A.A. members.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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#### TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
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12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



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