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Withdrawal

Gateway to Freedom, Hope and Joy

Sex and Love Addicts
Anonymous



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

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Regular attendance at meetings of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (S.L.A.A.) offers us a view of the possibility of a new life: a life free from our obsessions with sex, romantic intrigue, and emotional dependence. When others speak of miracles that occur as a result of recovery, we are encouraged. When they speak about the pain of withdrawal, however, we wonder whether or not we should keep coming back. The answer is YES! In the words of our basic text, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous:

... [T]he pain of withdrawal is unique, 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 realize, or make real, that potential for you and your life which has been stored there for so long.

What is Withdrawal?

A primary and critical step in beginning recovery from sex and love addiction is identifying our bottom-line behaviors — those activities from which we must refrain in order to attain physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wholeness. For guidance, we turn to our sponsor, our Higher Power, and other members of S.L.A.A. A change in our behavior — stopping the addictive pattern — one day at a time, marks the beginning of abstinence from compulsive and destructive acting out. The physical, mental, emotional, and often spiritual upheaval which generally accompanies the release of our addictive pattern is called withdrawal. Whether our craving is for sex, romance, or relationships, whether this craving is constant or periodic, not satisfying such a craving often comes as a shock to our system.



Abstinence from acting out is initially followed by a period of withdrawal. The word withdrawal typically conjures up an image of substance abusers dependent upon their “drug of choice” to alter moods and/or escape from the present moment. Like drugs, sex and love addiction can become all-consuming — pushing us toward greater and greater risk to our physical health, our emotional well-being, our sanity ... our very life itself.

Times of withdrawal can be uncomfortable for many of us. Our bodies go through unexpected physical changes; our emotions hit highs and lows we never imagined possible. We feel, perhaps for the first time ever, the void which we have sought to fill with our addiction(s).

The Experience of Withdrawal

Abstinence from acting out on bottom-line behaviors opens us to the vulnerability we have desperately sought to avoid. This vulnerability is experienced differently by each of us. The resulting withdrawal is sometimes recognized first by its symptoms:

- a craving to act out
- inexplicable aches and pains
- physical illness or exhaustion
- switching to new addiction(s)
- changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- general self-doubt
- desperation and fear
- suicidal thoughts
- desire to isolate
- obsessive thinking
- sadness, depression, or despair
- dreams of acting out
- emotional highs and lows
- irritability, anger, or rage
- preoccupation with fantasy
- confusion or trouble concentrating
- questioning of our interest in S.L.A.A. or recovery

During withdrawal, many of our long-suppressed thoughts and fears come to the surface. We become acutely aware of how we’re “missing” something — how in the past we would have acted or responded in a particular manner;



called a particular person on the phone; driven down a certain stretch of roadway; sought a rush of adrenaline from media of some kind; visited a “forbidden” place; or escaped into fantasy.

The dilemma was that we didn’t realize that we were culling “intrigue” from these behaviors, and when we finally did realize it, we didn’t know what else to do. Our personalities could not be separated from these characteristic ways of rationalizing, of making eye contact, of “hugging” and hand-shaking, and on and on.

If we aren’t acting out, *what then are we to do?*

Sometimes, we just breathe. It may be all we can do, for the moment. Reciting the Serenity Prayer has helped many of us pass that critical moment when we are tempted by our addiction. A phone call to a sponsor or other program member can help, as can reading an S.L.A.A. pamphlet, or Chapter Five of the basic text, *Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous*, where the experience of withdrawal is discussed in depth. Reflecting on the Twelve Steps can help us bring our focus back to the solution, instead of being stuck in the problem.

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.

We might be thinking, “No Way! ... It’s not worth it!” But the truth is, it *is* worth it. ***You are worth it. And you are not alone.***

As abstinence becomes familiar, our focus begins to shift from the pain of withdrawal, to the hope of just one day — even one hour — free of the active addiction. We must remember to take it easy. Our addiction did not magically appear on the horizon one day in full bore — our recovery from that addiction will most likely not materialize instantaneously, either. Just as our addiction took time to develop, recovery takes time too.



Beginning our New Life

In this time of self-examination and of learning new behaviors and responses to addictive triggers, we draw on our sources of strength and courage, both old and new. We take time to nourish ourselves physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. We learn we must replace the void which plagued us for so long by developing a relationship with our Higher Power. Additionally, healthy habits such as eating well, bathing, exercising, and resting help us avoid states which may contribute toward addictive behaviors. We consider ways in which we can enjoy life and love ourselves, without triggering our addictive craving. We may want to reward or acknowledge our abstinence. Instead of acting out, we find activities that are healing for us: enjoying a healthy and attractive meal for one, visiting a nature sanctuary, going to a baseball game, listening to classical music, walking the dog, taking the family on a picnic, or attending a play at our child's school are some examples of activities we have come to appreciate and enjoy.

We also call on the strengths of our sponsor, our program friends, and especially our Higher Power, to whose care we have surrendered these addictive behaviors. Faith in God and in the program of S.L.A.A. brings a calm in the midst of troubled seas. For example, some of us explore spirituality by attending religious services, or by creating a quiet place at home in which to meditate. Activities such as these help increase our awareness of our relationship to a Power greater than ourselves.

Another way to sustain our newfound strength is to identify and eliminate activities that may undermine our recovery. A review of our lifestyle shows us how our lives can be stream-lined and simplified. By removing the addictive stimulus from our daily routine, we often find that hobbies, even occupations, have been chosen because of the potential for an addictive hit. Without the possibility of acting out, we now find little interest in the activity itself. Though some changes are more difficult to implement than others, we learn to select those activities that support our recovery, and avoid those which offer only the promise of addictive hits and subsequent despair.



Freedom, Hope, and Joy

We may enter withdrawal with a sense of impending doom: What lies in store for me? How will I respond? Who will help me? Is it worth it? What must I give up, at what price? Who will I have become if / when I survive to see the end of withdrawal? Will it ever end? Can I ever have sex / love / a relationship again?

We cannot predict for you what is ahead. We do know that sex, love, and relationships are not necessarily activities we must stay away from forever. Once a measure of “manageability” returns to our lives, we can begin to make sober assessments of activities that may be safe for us. Honest, open communication with a sponsor or another sober program member is often a critical element in our decision-making.

Though abstaining from addictive, bottom-line behavior(s) is painful, the pain does not last forever. Emergence from withdrawal is marked by a noticeable decrease in the desire to continue to act out in our addictive patterns. Our recognition of our addiction, willingness to stop acting out, practice of the Steps and of the tools of the S.L.A.A. program, and faith and trust in a Power greater than ourselves enable us to begin to build a life free of our addictive behaviors. Not only have we come to accept withdrawal as a necessary step in recovery, we have also developed an appreciation for it. We feel joy in experiencing, perhaps for the first time, our self-worth, our self-respect, our dignity. A Power greater than ourselves is indeed restoring us to sanity, and our gratitude is profound.

Withdrawal Survival Kit

The following list of tools, slogans, and suggestions may be helpful if you are feeling the discomfort of withdrawal from sex and love addiction. Note: these are suggestions only; they may not necessarily be appropriate for each situation. Find what works for you, and ***use it!***

- Easy Does It
- First Things First
- Keep It Simple



- Let Go, Let God
- Think It Through
- One Day at a Time
- Just For Today
- This Too Shall Pass
- God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.
- Don't act out, no matter what!
- Maintain a simple, structured daily schedule.
- Don't isolate. Call safe program members.
- Call your sponsor. Get phone numbers of other safe program members; keep the list handy, and make the calls.
- Stay away from people, places, or activities that trigger you.
- Talk to your Higher Power about it first.
- Ask safe program people to call you.
- If you do slip, don't give up. Start over. Renew your commitment to Recovery.
- Attend 30 meetings in 30 days.
- Seek help from a therapist.
- Throw out whatever will tempt you to act out: magazines, videos, "contact" names, phone numbers and addresses, photos, letters, etc. If you can't throw it away, entrust it to your sponsor or another program member to hold on to it for you.
- Go for a walk or a bike ride — in a safe place.
- Change your energy — calm down, or get moving.
- Write in your journal. Prepare a written First Step.
- Get to a meeting. If an S.L.A.A. meeting is not available, consider attending an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Overeaters Anonymous, or another 12-Step program.
- Don't be afraid to say "No." Remember, you have the right to set boundaries in the interest of your own recovery.
- Read Chapter Five ("Withdrawal") in the basic text, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous.
- In unavoidable slippery situations, ask for help from a program member.



- Take care not to switch addictions — watch out for compulsive eating, drinking, spending, gambling, drugging, etc.
- Take a new route to work / school / home.
- Go to a place of worship, e.g., church, synagogue, etc.
- Pray; meditate; maintain conscious contact with your Higher Power.
- Avoid inappropriate media — TV, movies, videos, magazines, music, novels, etc.
- Buy yourself some flowers; send yourself a card.
- Spend time with safe family members and friends.
- Find a safe place/person where you can cry, rage, grieve. Avoid stuffing your feelings.
- Don't get too "Hungry - Angry - Lonely - Tired" (H.A.L.T.).
- Remember that feelings aren't facts — you won't die from them.
- Stay away from "old haunts".
- Don't act out on auxiliary behaviors. (If pornography is your addiction, don't go pick someone up in a bar, etc.)
- Don't go back to "try to make it work" one more time. Wait until you're through withdrawal to consider reconciliation.

Most of all, don't despair! Withdrawal doesn't last forever! Remember — You are not alone!

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.
4. 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 of these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.



8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted 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 understood 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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THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon 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 to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. 8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers. 9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve. 10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the 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 and films. 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



S.L.A.A. PREAMBLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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