

## SLAA Share-a-Day

April 9, 2011

### Building Healthy Relationships in Recovery/Dating Plan

*Love one another but make not a bond of love.*

*Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.*

- Khalil Gibran

### Dating Plan Worksheet

Started \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_

Revised \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_

Further revised \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_

### What is healthy dating?

**Suggested books to consult prior to dating** (Please note: The following books are *not* conference-approved)

*If the Buddha Dated: A Handbook for Finding Love on the Spiritual Path*, by Charlotte Sophia Kasl

*Easy Does it Dating Guide for People in Recovery*, by Mary Faulkner

Calling in "The One," by Katherine Woodward Thomas

**Suggested Books on Healthy Relationships** (The following books are *not* conference-approved)

*How to be an Adult in Relationships*, David Richo (other SLAA fellows have recommended other Richo books)

*Getting the Love You Want*, Harville Hendricks

*The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman

*Couple Skills*, Matthew McKay

*Sexual Anorexia, Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred*, Patrick Carnes

### Questions to ask yourself *before* starting to date again:

Have I taken time in SLAA recovery to get to know myself, to see my addictive patterns? Have I used the tool of withdrawal (see SLAA basic text – Withdrawal Chapter)? How can I date soberly? Do I have a sponsor in SLAA? Am I working the 12 Steps/12 Traditions in SLAA? Do I have a dating plan? What is my intention regarding dating? What am I looking for? Do I want companionship, socialization, or to meet potential partners? What is my history around dating? Have I completed steps Four & Five? What are my character defects that keep me from dating and intimacy? What support do I have around dating? Does my sponsor know who I am dating? How will I connect with others in the dating realm?

### Bottom Line Behaviors

(Definition of Bottom Line Behaviors: Activities that I either must do, or be sure to avoid, in order to stay out of my addictive pattern. Non-negotiable boundaries I set for my own behaviors to achieve and maintain my serenity. So our bottom lines are self defined, recognized and set

with the help of a sponsor and a higher Power. Bottom lines are those activities that WE are powerless to stop, which are making OUR lives unmanageable.)

### **Top Line Behaviors**

(Activities that enhance my self esteem – i.e., attend meetings, go out for fellowship, make time for friendships, cultivate hobbies, further my career, giving service to my recovery community, these actions and behaviors enhance my financial, physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual health and well-being. Practicing these behaviors will help me stay out of my addictive pattern and will help maintain my serenity.)

### **Addictive Cycle or Pattern** (uncovered through 12 Step work with sponsor)

(Definition: Repeated behaviors that recur from one relationship to the next that create disharmony, keep me trapped, stuck, unhappy or unhealthy. Usually there are hints or red flags that I am in an addictive pattern. For example:

Thinking that every person I date has the same defects.

Thinking that every date is a potential spouse.

Rushing relationships to keep them exciting.

Acting outside my values to keep a relationship going.

Needing to be in a relationship all the time, rain-checking, setting up a new relationship without closure on the one I am currently in, etc.)

### **Discovering Your Addictive Patterns**

Examples of addictive patterns can include:

- Always choosing unavailable partners
- Confusing lust with love
- Being sexual very early on in relationships
- Having fantasy relationships with people who show you kindness
- Dating people who remind you of your mother or father
- Ending relationships when they become too intimate
- Objectifying people as mere sex objects

How do you usually begin a new relationship? Make a list of your past several relationships and how you got involved.

Define what I mean by “available.”

Define what being sexual is to me.

What are the signs things are not going well?

What red flags do you tend to ignore or rationalize?

What makes you stay in an unhappy relationship?

What were the perks and payoffs in previous relationships?

How have your last several relationships ended?

Is your life balanced?

Ask yourself what percentage of time do you devote to the following areas of life:

Spirituality

Health and wellness

Relationships

Social/cultural

Career

Finances

Personal Development/Education

What interests me?

What do I enjoy doing in my free time?

What is my vision for my life for the next year? Two years? Five years?

**Getting clear about characteristics I choose in a partner:**

List what I want in a date/partner (i.e., someone who is kind, compassionate, humble, funny, intelligent, creative, social, flexible, available, loving, etc.).

What was I originally attracted to in previous partners?

What totally turned me off?

Is this person respectful to you?

Is this person in recovery programs for problems that make their lives unmanageable?

Do you want to have a family/children? Does this person want to have a family/children? Is this person good with children?

**Dating Stages / Plan/ Guidelines** (Suggestion: Collaborate with your sponsor and higher Power in connection with all that follows)

A sponsor recommended that I move through stages of dating, to let the dating evolve from the public to the private, and that the intimacy will follow (if appropriate). for example:

**Stage 1** - Attraction – emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual (ongoing)  
(may last up to 4-6 dates...or 8-10 dates)  
Meetings should be in public for the first 4-6-8-10 dates

How many times a week would I see this person?

If recovering from anorexia, how many dates before deciding not to move forward? (I.e., at least 2)

No apartments

Physical contact – kissing?

Who will pay for dates? Dinner? What do I feel comfortable with?

How many calls in one week can I place to him?

How many calls can I initiate?

How many emails/text messages can I initiate? (Are emails/text messages too triggering?)

Calls should be kept to \_\_\_\_\_ in length.

Minimum notice of at least \_\_\_\_ days before a date.

No French kissing on the first \_\_\_\_ dates. French kissing ok after the \_\_\_\_ date.

First \_\_\_\_ dates he/she does not come to my house.

Date must start and stop on time.

No phone calls longer than \_\_\_\_ minutes in length.

No more than \_\_\_\_ phone calls a week.

No phone calls/chats that interfere with \_\_\_\_\_.

No breaking a prior commitment to accept a date.

No light petting for \_\_\_\_ weeks/months.

No heavy petting for \_\_\_\_ weeks/months.

No revealing past history until the \_\_\_\_ date.

No more than \_\_\_\_ dates a week for the first \_\_\_\_ weeks/months.

Never sex within the first \_\_\_\_ weeks/months.

Any red flags?

**Stage 2** - Getting to know one another (6 - 10 dates on...around 2 months or more)

Private realm okay

See this person no more than \_\_\_\_ times per week.

Is this person predictable in their availability to me?

Do we communicate well?

Do we respect one another?

Do we enhance one another's lives?

Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?

Am I consistently attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?

Any red flags?

**Stage 3** - Becoming mutually exclusive

Evaluate:

Life goals and visions

Mutual attraction/compatibility:

- Spiritual
- Physical
- Emotional
- Intellectual
- Financial

Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?

Am I consistently attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?

Any red flags?

**Stage 4** - Exchanging intimacy (“into me you see”)

Never sex without:

AIDS test \_\_\_\_\_

Commitment of exclusivity, monogamy \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion about STDs \_\_\_\_\_

Pregnancy protection \_\_\_\_\_

Sex after \_\_\_\_\_ months

Appropriate time to meet one another’s family/parents:

(i.e., After six months...)

Vacations together: how soon?

Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?

Am I consistently attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?

**Stage 5** – Preparing for the future, one day at a time

Engagement

Moving in together

Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?

Am I consistently attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?

**SLAA members share their experience, strength and hope around using their dating plan in recovery:**

A: After identifying what I'm powerless over and the patterns that continuously emerged when I was active, I devised a plan with my sponsor. It was another symbol of surrender. My sponsor knew what my triggers were and helped me work out a plan that worked for me. I still refer to my dating plan even though I've been in a committed relationship for a while. Every single time I deviate(d) from the plan, I feel off-balance, so it been a really helpful diagnostic tool regarding what works and what doesn't work for me around dating and being in a relationship.

My dating plan gave me a sense of well-being and security around stepping into the dating arena. The most comforting aspect of having one was knowing that a relationship might grow in stages, if I allowed it to. Leaning into this idea, I cultivated faith in healthy relating revealing myself and experiencing another person a little at a time. When in fear, I turned to my HP and my friends in SLAA, showing up no matter what.

Realizing that nothing ever grew when I gave into instant gratification gave me the courage and faith to show up, knowing that the good stuff will grow – that I'd learn for the first time how to build trust by being trustworthy and grow and mature by showing up a little at a time, a day at a time. In my active addiction – I wanted a quick hit – there was an urgency and a demand for instant gratification – instant gratification ultimately left me feeling empty and lonely and in despair. Through the dating process, I got to show up and stop looking to another person as a drug – to esteem me, make me feel \_\_\_\_\_. I learned to see their hearts, their humanness.

J: Dating plan=ESSENTIAL. How else am I going to "learn to swim" without some guidelines and instruction?

Here's what I found crucial in mine:

- Knowing what are deal breakers for me in another's behavior
- Knowing what do I do if there's a deal breaker/red flag
- Calling my sponsor
- 13 dates before making a "yes" decision to getting into a relationship
- If in anorexia, at least 2 dates before a "no" decision
- No physical contact unless in a relationship that we have both agreed to
- Bookending dates with phone calls/texts to fellows
- Time limits on dates that are clearly established and communicated
- Plans for date (see a show, a movie, a meal etc)
- Remembering date does not equal relationship

K: My dating plan helped me have a long term relationship with a healthy, loving, pretty much functional man. Dating plans, do not promise a perfect relationship. They promise that I am more sober than I would be otherwise. They promise that I am not running the show. They promise that I surrender and my life gets better when I do.