

## SOBER DATING

### Addictive Cycles or Patterns in Relationships

**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.

### Questions To Ask *Before Starting Dating*

- Do I have a dating plan?
- What is my intention regarding dating?
- What am I looking for - companionship, socialization, or to meet potential partners?
- What is my history around dating?
- What are my character defects that keep me from dating and intimacy/ keep me in obsession or compulsion around dating?
- 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?
- How do you usually begin a new relationship? Make a list of your past several relationships and how you got involved.
- Define what you mean by "available."
- Define what being sexual is to you.
- 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?
- What were you originally attracted to in previous partners?
- What totally turned you off?
- Is your life balanced?
- Ask yourself what percentage of time you devote to the following areas of life:
  - Spirituality
  - Health and wellness
  - Relationships/family/friends
  - Social/cultural
  - Career
  - Finances
  - Personal Development
  - Education
- What interests you?
- What do you enjoy doing in your free time?
- What is your vision for your life for the next year? Two years? Five years?

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## IDEAL PARTNERSHIP LIST

Get clear about characteristics you want in a partner,. ...be clear about what *you* like/need and date to find someone who is a good *match* for you.

### Behaviours, Qualities & Characteristics in my Ideal Partnership

#### EXAMPLES

1. Available (complete with ex-partners & all 'back doors' are closed)
2. Monogamous
3. Sober/Clean from & actively working a spiritual program in any known addiction
4. Mutual sexually attraction – available & active sexually
5. Physically affectionate & demonstrative
6. Family orientated/loves/wants kids
7. Looks after physical health
8. Financially self sufficient
9. Social & fun, sense of humour
10. Good listener AND talker
11. Willing to work on personal & the relationship's emotional growth
12. Has hobbies, interests, friends outside the relationship & is respectful of mine

#### DEAL BREAKERS

What are your 'deal breakers' i.e. if this occurred you would leave the relationship:

1. Had an affair, intriguing outside of the relationship
2. Picked up on any known/new addictions & refused help
3. Stopped working a program of recovery (dry)
4. Physically violent/abusive
5. Emotionally violent/abusive (define – e.g. raging, name calling)
6. Withdrew sexually or emotionally for extended period of time
7. Refused to seek help if serious issues arose

#### WHAT DO I BRING TO A RELATIONSHIP

1. Clean/sober from addictions
2. Intelligent
3. Good listener/talker
4. Take responsibility for my personal growth
5. Fun/social/sense of humour
6. Friends/interests outside the relationship
7. Monogamous
8. Family orientation/ love kids

#### ARE THERE GAPS?

1. Physically – not taking care of myself
2. Finances are a mess
3. Lack confidence physically/sexually
4. I'm still entangled with my ex

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## DATING PLAN

These are suggestions only. Always collaborate with your sponsor and Higher Power to set a dating plan that is appropriate for you

### 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? (eg. at least 2)
- No more than \_\_\_\_ dates a week for the first \_\_\_\_ weeks/months
- First \_\_\_\_ dates they do not come to my house
- No revealing past history until the \_\_\_\_ date.
- How many calls in one week can I place to them? How many calls can I initiate? Calls should be kept to \_\_\_\_ in length. No phone calls/chats that interfere with \_\_\_\_
- How many emails/text messages can I initiate?
- Minimum notice of at least \_\_\_\_ days before a date.
- No breaking a prior commitment to accept a date.
- Date must start and stop on time.
- Who will pay for dates? Dinners?
- No French kissing on the first \_\_\_\_ dates. French kissing OK after the \_\_\_\_ date
- No light petting for \_\_\_\_ weeks/months. No heavy petting for \_\_\_\_ weeks/months
- Never sex within the first \_\_\_\_ weeks/months.
- Any red flags?

### Stage 2 - Getting to know one another

- (6 –10 dates or...around 2 months or more)
- Private realm okay
- How many times per week per week will I see this person – no more than \_\_\_\_\_
- 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 attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?
- Am I staying current & honest with my sponsor?
- Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?
- Am I maintaining contact with friends & family outside the relationship?
- Am I engaging in interests & activities outside of the relationship
- Any red flags

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## **Stage 3 - Becoming Mutually Exclusive**

- Evaluate:
  - Life goals and visions
  - Mutual attraction/compatibility: · Spiritual · Physical · Emotional · Intellectual · Financial
- Am I consistently attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?
- Am I staying current & honest with my sponsor?
- Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?
- Am I maintaining contact with friends & family outside the relationship?
- Am I engaging in interests & activities outside of the relationship
- Any red flags?

## **Stage 4 – Sexual Intimacy**

Agreements/Commitment to exclusivity and monogamy

### **Sexual Bottom Lines**

- Sex after \_\_\_\_ months
- Discussion about STDs, Pregnancy protection, AIDS
- No sex without protection
- Appropriate time to meet one another's family/parents:
  - e.g. after six months
- Go on holidays together: When? How soon?
- Am I consistently attending my SLAA home group meeting and sharing honestly?
- Am I staying current & honest with my sponsor?
- Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?
- Am I maintaining contact with friends & family outside the relationship?
- Am I engaging in interests & activities outside of the relationship
- Any red flags?

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

Moving in together/Engagement/ Marriage

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- Am I staying current & honest with my sponsor?
- Am I consistently maintaining my network of support outside of the relationship?
- Am I maintaining contact with friends & family outside the relationship?
- Am I engaging in interests & activities outside of the relationship
- Any red flags?

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## EXPERIENCE STRENGTH & HOPE

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

- **Member 1**

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 has been a really helpful diagnostic tool regarding what works and what doesn't work for me around dating and being in a relationship.
- **Member 2**

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.
- **Member 3**

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 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 \_\_\_\_\_(fill in the blank) I learned to see their hearts, their humanness.
- **Member 4**

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.
- **Member 5**

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 dating does not equal a relationship

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