

Reigniting the Spark and Sexual Passion



Sex is a powerful way to strengthen the bond in a relationship, express your love for your partner and to experience excitement and satisfaction together.

The couples who report having the most enjoyable, satisfying sex are couples who are connected with one another emotionally – sex becomes another way in which they can grow closer together.

All of your progress up to this point will support you to address any difficulties you might be having in this area of your relationship, and the tools you've learned will help you talk about them in a productive way.

Introduction

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Sexual intimacy in a relationship has the potential to be a powerful source of connection, love, and closeness. Sex and bonding produces oxytocin in our brains, which promotes a feeling of trust and safety. The more trust and safety we feel, the more it can lead us to have a positive sexual experience, which leads to more safety and trust.

Because addiction impacts this part of the relationship, it's important to repair the damage that was done by creating trust and safety *outside of and **before*** moments of intimacy. Having stability on a general level allows for a better sexual experience for both people.

The building blocks for female sexuality include safety, relationship satisfaction, and emotional intimacy (Dr. Rosemary Basson of University of British Columbia).

The way in which you can most effectively create safety and satisfaction in the relationship is to continue to share vulnerably with each other, have positive moments together where you're spending quality time, and asking for your needs to be met, as we discussed in Module 4.

The following pages contain exercises to start you on the path towards reigniting the spark and improving your sexual relationship together.

Creating Emotional Safety and/or Closeness

Each couple is at a different stage with regard how close they feel to one another, which is why it’s important that you and your partner work together to identify the most important next steps for your relationship specifically.

Please answer the following questions in a neutral, non-blaming way – just state your needs. IE Instead of saying, “I need you to stop being so condescending and mean to me all the time.” Write, “I need to be treated with respect and kindness in how we speak to each other.”

In order to increase the level of safety or closeness in the marriage, what specific things do you each need?

What skills do you each need to develop or implement in order to integrate those things?

(IE the ability to share how we feel vulnerably instead of attacking each other; develop confidence to ask for my needs to be met; to have positive reactions as I share with you what I need so I feel confident that my needs will be heard, etc.)

What daily or weekly routines do you need to put in place in order to consistently take the action that will help you each develop this closeness together?

Relationship Satisfaction

What interactions, behaviors, feelings, or experiences do you want to be having with each other that will increase your relationship satisfaction? Generally speaking, what do you want more of? What do you want less of?

Are there areas where you can you work together as a unit to increase mutual levels of satisfaction? Or are they individual things?

What skills do you each need to develop or implement in order to integrate those things?

Emotional Intimacy

In what ways can you develop more emotional intimacy with each other? Or might need to be addressed in order to be more comfortable to begin deepening your emotional bond?

How can you effectively address those issues in a way to get them resolved? What skills do you need? What actions must you take?

Is there anything from stopping you from taking those actions now? Is there anything that you might need from your partner that might help you be more open / able to connect?

What seems to be the most difficult part of forming a deeper emotional connection with each other?

How might you be able to work through that together?

HEALTHY SEX

The way in which many people learn about sexuality is through media, which unfortunately distorts the purpose and meaning of it. We are taught that it's all about how you look, what you do, etc., but it leaves us feeling more and more lonely and empty when we only focus on the one-dimensional, physical aspect of sex.

Adding additional layers (emotional and even spiritual) to your intimacy will enhance the experience significantly, which is what most effectively meets our needs.

As you're working on improving and healing your sexual relationship, you'll find the most satisfaction when both of you are engaged fully, feel safe, and when the experience is based on principles of healthy sexuality.

The characteristics of each couple's sexual relationship are different – there is no right or wrong way to do it. The most important thing is to repair and build your intimate relationship in a healthy way, which is defined as being mutually satisfying and enjoyable, connection forming, relationship enhancing, and increasing closeness between both people.

Here are some of the elements of a healthy sexual relationship:

Sharing With	Safe
Nurturing	Selfless
Freedom	Connected
Mutual	Fulfilling
Expresses Love	Fun
Enhances the Marriage	In Line With Values

What are the top two qualities of a healthy sexual relationship that you would most like to be integrated into your sexual relationship? *(You may use items on the list or things that aren't on the list that are important to you)*

What needs to happen in order to incorporate those elements? What actions do you need to take?

Is there anything stopping you from taking those actions now? Is there anything that you might need from your partner that might help you be more open / able to work on things?

What steps can you take towards resolving any of those blocks? Or what do you need in the relationship or from your partner in order to begin to work on those blocks?

RESOLVING TRIGGERS

A trigger happens when we make a meaning out of a situation that threatens our well-being (whether it's real or perceived), which then activates fear, hurt, pain, discomfort, and a physiological response, like a tightness in our chest, pit in our stomach, heart racing, etc. We are emotionally triggered by our *perception* of the event, which then evokes a response.

In order to resolve triggers, we need to make a new meaning out of a situation or find safety. The exercises in module 3 and 5 help you understand the relationship dynamic of how a meaning is made, which creates a feeling, which then turns into an action and how that then activates our partner's response.

The way through a trigger is to share the meaning we are making, the feeling it creates, and to then ask for what we need in order to change the meaning or find safety, comfort or reassurance again.

Slowing down and processing your triggers is important to heal. Simply avoiding the trigger or situations where it could be brought up prevents you from growing and fully healing.

Both individuals developing the skill to process triggers, whether they are brought up in the sexual relationship context or otherwise, is one of the most valuable skills you can learn. Talking about a trigger outside of the moment can be a good place to start to practice working through the issue.

What is a situation that triggers you? Just write the observable event and facts for this section. (Your answers don't have to coincide with your partner's)

His example: Whenever I initiate sex, I usually get turned down and told that she doesn't have a desire to do that with me right now.

Her example: My husband initiates sex within a few days of us being intimate the previous time.

What meaning do you make out of this situation?

His example: That I'm unattractive and our sexual relationship will never get repaired and become a means of connection for us, no matter how much work I do to help her feel safer.

*Her example: He is in his addiction and he's just replacing sex with me for other acting out behaviors. He's not really interested in **me** and connecting with me.*

What *primary* emotions are present in moments when you're triggered? (Refer to module 3 exercises - section 2:C)

His example: When I feel unsure about whether or not you want me sexually or want to repair that part of the marriage, I feel inadequacy, fear, loneliness because I want to connect with you and feel close to you that way.

Her example: When I am unsure about your motivation for sex, I get scared and feel unimportant, like I am being replaced the addiction and that it's not me you're interested in, and that's sad for me because I want you to want me as a person and not just my body..

How do you respond to these feelings and meanings that you’re making out of the situation?

His example: I shut down and allow resentment to build and avoid conversations with her until I move past how I feel in the moment.

Her example: I say no to sex and don’t want to talk about it anymore for the rest of the night. Sometimes I get critical or short with him so he knows not to ask for a while.

What do you need in order to feel reassured, comforted or safe?

***Note – getting our need met often doesn’t have to do with the content of the event. In this example, his need isn’t to then have sex, and her need isn’t to avoid sex. *The need centers around changing the meaning and comforting the primary emotions.*

His example: I need reassurance that you are open to working with me to repair our sexual relationship, and I need to hear that you find me attractive and that I’m a good enough partner for you. I hope that you’re able to recognize my efforts to create safety for you.

Her example: I need reassurance that you’re initiating sex because you want to feel close to me and that your mind and heart is on me. When I get scared that you’re in the addiction, I can feel safe again when you’re willing to open up and share emotionally with me, understand why I’m feeling this way and validate me.

Share each of these items with your partner. Repeat the exercise as many times as you need to in order to process through each trigger that derails your progress. The more you can unify to challenge false meanings or offer comfort and reassurance, the safer the relationship will feel for both of you.

Sometimes people wonder what to do if they aren't able to meet the need or offer the reassurance that the other partner is seeking. If this happens, express the *desire* you have to meet their needs and to support them, then possibly identify what must to happen in order for you to be able to respond in the way that your partner is requesting.

His example: Yes, I can see why you would get scared and I understand how important it is to you that I'm not in the addiction and that I'm focused on connecting with you. I'm not great at it, but I'm working hard to learn how to open up and share with you how I feel, and I'll continue to do my best, so please understand that I'm trying, even though it doesn't come naturally for me.

Her example: All of the pain that I'm in makes it difficult for me to feel attraction towards you, but I want to heal and get back to that place. I'm willing and I do want to work on this part of our relationship, and I hope you can be patient with me as we work on things. A part of what will help me is if we are spending quality time and connecting in other ways, which helps me feel loved and safe.

You can use this formula to resolve any trigger, whether it's in the context of sexual intimacy or not. Try your best to stay with the process and work towards releasing each trigger in this way as they come up. Be patient with yourselves as you're working through things. Though it can take some time, it ultimately leads to total freedom and healing.