

Talking About Your Sexual Needs with Your Partner

Objective

To help you identify the sexual needs and desires that you might have trouble communicating to your partner, and to learn strategies for talking about them.

You Should Know

Although sex and sexuality are all around us in our culture, many people still have a difficult time talking about their own sexual needs and desires. It is still considered taboo by some people to be open and honest about what you like, what you don't like, what turns you on, what turns you off. Many couples struggle to discuss sex openly, perhaps out of some fantasy that their partner should be able to read their mind and know what they like. Many people worry that if they raise the issue of wanting more sex that their partner will think they're "too sexual" or aggressive. Others are concerned that if they share that they would like less sex that their partner will think they're unloved or unattractive.

Putting into words one's sexual needs, desires, fears, worries, and hopes can be a challenge. But learning to communicate authentically with your partner can greatly improve your sex life together, whether you've been together a long time or not. This doesn't mean sitting down and doing it all at once—it's a dialogue that evolves and grows over time, with the goal of deepening your level of intimacy and mutual pleasure.

In this worksheet, you will first identify your needs and concerns and then learn some strategies for approaching your partner for an honest conversation.

What to Do

Describe your current sexual relationship with your partner in the following ways:

1. Frequency of sexual activity (list everything from affectionate hugging to making love), e.g., daily kissing, weekly intercourse, and so on.

2. When you engage in sexual activity with your partner, who usually initiates? How do you feel about that? Are you happy with that pattern? If not, how do you wish it were different?

3. What do you enjoy about your current sexual relationship with your partner?

4. What are your top three concerns about your current sexual relationship with your partner?

5. What was your sexual relationship like before now (if you have been together for a while)? What has changed, if anything? Why?

6. Have you ever talked about your sexual needs with your partner before? What is your current communication like with your partner in general? That is, do you communicate openly and honestly about all aspects of your relationship or just some? Describe.

7. What types of sexual activity would you like to be engaging in with your partner that you are not engaged in currently (e.g., you would like to give and get oral sex but your partner doesn't want to; you would like to try "kinky" sex, but your partner doesn't want to)? Be specific.

8. What types of sexual activity are off limits for you, even if your partner desires them?

9. What other aspects of your communication with your partner about sex and sexuality, needs, and desires, are important to you that have not otherwise been addressed? Be specific.

Now that you have identified some of the issues that concern you, here are some tips and strategies for beginning a new, healthy conversation about sex:

- Schedule a time to talk about sex with your partner in a “safe” location, with no kids around.
- Do not talk about sex when you are tired, hungry, angry, or distracted.
- Do not talk about sex when you are in bed or right before bedtime; or just before, during, or just after sex.
- If you are initiating the conversation, start slowly by saying you’d like to talk about your desire to be closer and to have a more satisfying intimate life.
- Learn to use “I” statements in your communications and avoid blame. That is, instead of saying, “You’re always in a hurry when we make love,” try, “I would love to slow down our lovemaking so I can feel closer to you,” or “I like it when you’re on top of me; can we do that more often?” or “I get really turned on by foreplay—can we talk about how to do that more before we make love?”
- Ask your partner what they like, what satisfies them, what turns them on? Listen with an open mind and don’t respond defensively.

- Don't try to cover everything in one conversation! Just broaching the topic can be challenging for many couples, so take it slow and be compassionate with yourself and your partner if this is a thorny or unfamiliar area of communication.

Reflections on This Exercise

1. What are your fears and worries about starting a conversation about sex with your partner?

2. What would help you to overcome those concerns? Is there someone you can talk to first—a friend, spiritual advisor, therapist?

3. What is your vision for what your communication about sex would look like in the future? What one step are you willing to take today toward achieving that vision?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
