

## **Dedication**

*Making Sex Sizzle after the Baby* is dedicated to all the loving parents of this world. Couples who give much to their children each and every day yet at the end of it, more often than not, find themselves with little to give to each other.

This book was especially created to help you bring back the balance and that special sizzle you once knew during your “solo journey” as a couple. As you delve between the pages, it will enable you to step back and take a closer look at what really matters.

Then, as the practical juggling of every day life takes on a renewed perspective, the love you have between you will continue to grow as you embrace both your couplehood and your parenthood.

## **Special Thanks**

I want to thank all the teachers in my life, clients and professional peers alike, for blessing me with a wealth of human insight to allow me to help couples break free of emotional bondage when the overwhelm of parenthood erodes the love between them.

I also want to thank my husband, Dr. Steven Parker, for putting in many long nights after his own very exhausting days to support me. Without his belief in me, and the support of my now grown children, Marissa and Matthew, I may not have had the persistence to enter the world of the Internet and provide you with this first in a series of many books, audio programs, teleclasses and workshops to come.

## A Personal Message from Dr. Toni Parker

My journey to help couples adjust to parenthood began when I brought my first child into the world. Like many new mothers, I was excited about experiencing natural childbirth. In anticipation of my baby, I became a zealous student of all the very best prenatal classes I could find. But that excitement turned to despair at the moment of birth. After countless hours of painful labor, my doctor finally told me that the baby was just too big. My dream of natural childbirth was replaced with a C-section.

Little did I know at the time, that a deeper emotional setback lurked beyond my disappointment in being robbed of natural childbirth. Soon after delivery, I was swept up in a sea of emotion, trapped by alternating waves of depression and anger. I felt as if I were drowning, with no life raft in sight. I was caught up in a downward spiral of despair that lasted for well over a year.

“How could this be?” I kept repeatedly asking myself. “I attended all the very best classes. I should have been as well informed as any new mother could ever possibly be. Why didn’t any of those instructors talk about the possibility of a C-section and its emotional impact?”

To make matters worse, I soon became confused about how I was feeling as a woman. The changes I was experiencing in my own body and my growing fatigue clouded any meaningful interaction with my husband. Half the time I couldn’t even get dressed to greet him when he came through the door at night.

I poignantly remember the day I walked in for my six-week checkup, when the doctor told me I could resume normal sexual activity. Without missing a beat I blurted, “That’s the last thing on my mind!” Not only was I nervous about the possibility of pain if we did make love, I just wasn’t interested and hadn’t been for months since the baby. My focus was my daughter. How could I even think of having my husband touch my breasts when my concern was making sure I had enough milk to nurse her!

When I look back at it all now, I realize how important it is to make an effort to get dressed into something nice. It might have made me feel good enough about myself to feel like I wanted to be physically close with my husband. Maybe then, I would have opened my eyes enough to see that I needed to put more effort into my relationship. But that didn’t happen. Sadly there were times when he tried to caress me, but I just pushed him away. And to his credit, he didn’t get angry. He just walked away in silence and sometimes found something else to get irritated about. Basically, I was just plain overwhelmed with absolutely everything that was going both on inside and outside of my body. I couldn’t even begin to prioritize what was important in my life much less see how this was affecting my relationship.

Finally, at my wits end, I reached the only viable solution left. It was just at the time I was advised that I had grounds for a malpractice claim with my daughter’s birth. Instead of getting embroiled even more deeply into a situation I could not change, I decided to take charge of my pain and anger once and for all. I turned it into my *raison d’être*. Vowing that no other woman would needlessly suffer the impact of such ignorance again, I studied to become a certified childbirth educator. My new mission — to help other women learn about the realities and *all* the possibilities that could happen during childbirth. This included providing a forum so women had a supportive environment to discuss their

## A Personal Message from Dr. Toni Parker

feelings about the birth experience and motherhood. It also allowed them a safe place to explore their fears and all the other complicated and entangled feelings that go along with their new life role.

As a result, I spent several years teaching childbirth classes at various hospitals in San Francisco and Palo Alto. Then a new challenge began to rear its head after I began to incorporate extensive follow-up into my practice. I realized that the soon-to-be parents I had so carefully prepared for childbirth were facing the same dilemma I had— emotional issues *after* child birth. That many couples had little or no idea of how to balance being a parent *and* being a partner at the same time. So again, fueled by my own too poignant life experiences, I began teaching parenting classes and at the same time continued my studies to become a licensed psychotherapist.

By the time I graduated, I had given birth to my second child. Thankfully, my son was born naturally under the care of a wonderful new doctor so my second birth experience didn't carry the post emotional trauma of the first. Heeding the gift of my earlier lessons, I made a concerted effort to balance the demands of my expanded family while resuming my work with couples and families.

I also sincerely thought I'd be more sensitive to my husband's needs this time round, but my good intentions were derailed in the juggling of demands from two children. So once again, the more we didn't talk or make time for each other, the larger our issues grew. Finally, we faced up to the reality of our situation and vowed to get off the treadmill. We committed to working on our relationship, making regular alone time and creating special occasions to allow more romance and passion into our lives. Happily, we made it work and our children are all now grown. I moved my practice to Encino, California, and have since served many new parents. As my reputation and demand for speaking appearances grew, so did my realization that the very issues I resolved for myself and had helped many clients overcome were also prevalent worldwide.

That's when I decided to establish a web presence to promote sustained relationship harmony and happiness. Hence, [www.RealSolutionsForLove.com](http://www.RealSolutionsForLove.com) offers the convenience of learning from the comfort of your home through seminars by phone (teleseminars). Additionally, you may wish to bookmark the site and check back for an opportunity to meet me personally, as I also conduct workshops on relationships as well as sexuality and intimacy throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

Also take a peek at how to have a lighter-hearted love growth experience at [www.TheRomanceTour.com](http://www.TheRomanceTour.com)

And should you have any hesitation or embarrassment about reaching out to work with me privately, then rest assured that I have been a trusted resource for countless couples over the years and have pulled them through the toughest of times. So if you're having a rough time "going it alone", I invite you to take advantage of my wisdom and proven "real life" strategies. I have over 20 years of success with couples just like you ... backed by ongoing research in the specialized fields of sex, love and relationships.

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## Making Sex Sizzle After the Baby is Born

### Introduction

Most American women face sexual difficulties at some time in their lives. A recent research study suggested that 25% of women were unable to experience orgasm with a partner and 33% lack interest in sex. (Laumann, 1994) Sexual difficulties have many sources and causes. Some are the result of a lack of communication, power struggles between partners, unresolved resentments and issues, cultural attitudes which state that women should be everything except sexual beings, or changes in circumstances. Having a baby is one of the biggest changes in a woman's life. Overnight it seems, nothing is the same and it never will be again. Coping with these changes may seem overwhelming, at first. All too often, new mothers are tired, out of touch with their partners, and feel unattractive. Right after the baby is born, many women face changes they never expected in their own attitudes, their environment and especially with their sexuality and their sexual self-esteem.

Many books and articles have been written on the subjects of body-image and self-esteem, but very little has been written about a far more important aspect of a woman's self-perception... her sexual self-esteem. To fully understand sexual self esteem we must look at the emotional and sociological factors that influence a women's impression of her sexual self.

A good sexual self-esteem means you feel and enjoy your sexual desire. It means you make good decisions about how to keep the sizzle going with your partner for the long haul.

This eBook will give you some suggestions about how to reconnect with your sexual self, how to get connected and stay connected with your partner, and to be able to take care of the baby, too. The goal of this book is to help you to create high sexual self esteem and to give you a release from sexual myths that may rule your sexuality. Covered here are such topics as good sexual self esteem is true beauty, sexual communication and intimacy, non-demand pleasuring and Tantric sex, keeping sex alive after the baby is

born, and even masturbation. Sexual intercourse or positions are not included because there are many excellent books and articles on the subject.

Rather than competing with the hundreds of competent mummy-paste salesmen who promise fantastic self-esteem by reading their book, we will give you some ideas about how to boost your sexual self esteem. Some of the solutions listed in this book are quick and easy and others will take a little time. When offering a solution to a particular issue, you will see the word "*Solution*" in italics at the beginning of each paragraph that has ideas for you. A summary of great ideas can be found in Appendix One, if you want a quick reference. We will give you some ideas about how you can learn to love yourself and how you can keep that extremely important connection to your partner. All of these things will help you give your sexual self esteem a jolt and help your sex life to sizzle! You may be asking, right about now, how important is sexual self-esteem, really? Because it is linked to self-confidence, and a good self image, it is darn important.

### And Baby Makes Three...

Now, you've done it. You went and had a baby.

You have taken birthing classes, read books about what to expect out of motherhood, decorated the nursery and bought a hundred baby related items, all in preparation for your new baby. The fact is no matter how prepared you and your partner are for the new arrival, few people can comprehend the profound changes this single event will make in their lives. Not only are there changes because you have a new, very demanding, resident in your home, your sexual relationship with your partner will undergo changes, too. So, how can you learn to deal with all these changes? No school teaches these things. It is strictly on-the-job training. My mother used to tell me that she lost the training manual that comes with every new baby. Parenting is trial and error and every new parent will make many, many errors. This is to be expected. But, what many don't expect is how the baby changes the sexual side of your life. Sure, everyone knows that a few weeks before birth and a few weeks after, there is a ban on intercourse. I am talking about the deeper changes that often occur after the baby is born. It's not just the women who feel intense emotional

and physical changes. Men feel changes to. It will hit you one day soon after you bring the baby home: *This change is permanent.*

Georges says, “I was walking home from work one afternoon, about a week after my son arrived. It hit me like a ton of bricks: I am a father! I sat on a park bench and started to cry, I got so choked up and scared. But, then I realized that I had to keep it together if I was going to be able to raise that little boy. I feel ready for all that, but I had to get ready in a hurry.”

Casey says, “I felt like, I can’t do this. I can’t be a mother. I had only been a mother for about four days and I felt like I couldn’t go on another minute. Then, I felt guilty because I wasn’t totally in love with my baby, but rather I was terrified that I would make a mistake and she would be ruined. My Grandma kinda smiled at me when I told her how I felt and she said, “What makes you think you don’t love your baby? It sounds a lot like love to me.” She took the baby for the afternoon and let me take a five hour nap. The world was better when I woke up.”

Remember when you were first pregnant; you experienced a lot of emotions, most of them positive. You were thrilled with prospect of creating a new life and thrilled with the excitement as you made preparations for your new baby. You decorated the nursery, bought car seats, high chairs, clothes, blankets, toys, sheets for the crib and a couple of hundred other things. You were excited to finally be big enough to wear maternity clothes so you could proudly show-off your belly. It was a special time in your life. Also during this time, your body was changing, rapidly. As women learn to cope with the stresses in their body caused by pregnancy, sometimes they become insensitive to their partner’s needs. Many times, men will even become resentful of their unborn child because their partner is so focused on the life inside her.

## *Mark and Sandy’s Story*

Mark and Sandy were so happy to be pregnant. They had tried for about four years and finally, the dream came true. They celebrated on a regular basis by having frequent and loving sex until the fourth month when Sandy felt the baby move the first time. Suddenly every time she felt the baby move, she would speculate as to whether it was a foot or a hand. That was something Mark couldn’t possibly experience. She would press her belly against his abdomen, hoping he could feel what she was feeling. It was as if Sandy was obsessed. Because Sandy seemed to only want to talk about how many times the baby kicked her, Mark didn’t enjoy the exercise. He began to resent his unborn child. Sandy sensed his reluctance to “experience” the baby’s kick, so she stopped trying. This was just the beginning of their distancing.

Mark’s emotional needs weren’t being met and he longed for the close, intimate conversations they had and the special time he and Sandy spent together. He missed Sandy’s love. To make up for the loss, he wanted sex more often and soon began demanding sex. He wanted to be close to Sandy and sex seemed a perfect solution to him.

The more Sandy got into motherhood, the more she drew away from Mark.

This was a couple who couldn’t keep their hands off each other before she got pregnant. Mark said to me in therapy, “I feel guilty admitting this, but I am jealous of my son. He has all of Sandy’s attention. This started before he was born and has gotten worse after his birth. I just can’t reach Sandy. I can’t get her to understand that I need her, too.”

If things didn’t change between them and quickly, Mark was considering divorce or worse, an affair. Fortunately, they chose counseling before anything really devastating happened in their marriage.

Sandy’s story isn’t unusual. For her, there were a lot of issues going on in her head. Not only is she totally into motherhood, she was having trouble dealing with the physical changes that her son created in her.

Does this sound familiar to you? You hold your new baby, watching while they sleep. Your partner suggests it would be a good time to have sex. You think to yourself, *my hips are bigger than ever, my belly has stretch marks, I am breast feeding and while my breast look huge right now, when I stop breast feeding, I suspect my breasts will suddenly sag to my knees*. Furthermore, something happened to your hair since you brought the baby home. It is stringy and lifeless and all the gel in the world can't bring it back to life. You have dark circles under your eyes, your favorite fantasy has become taking a nap, and is that wrinkle? Although you want to do something about your body, you are simply too tired to go to the gym, or to roll around on the floor with Pilates in the VCR. Forget an exercise class!

You have never felt less sexy in your life, but your partner still wants to have sex with you. Doesn't he realize just how terrible you look? Even if you are still slender as ever, you are too busy and too tired to think about sex. Doesn't he realize that a good nap is more appealing than ever having sex again?

On the subject of BUSY, one of my clients, Sally, told me recently, "I really mean to take a shower every day, but the baby starts crying and by the time I get her settled and fed, it's one in the afternoon. And I haven't even gotten out of my pajamas, yet. Brittany woke me up twice last night and when she settles in for a nap, I hit the bed at the same time. I never seem to get enough sleep. Forget sex. The bed is just for sleeping these days."

On the subject of BEAUTY, Brenda tells a different story. "My husband is really into how I look, you know, my appearance. Since the baby, my waist is bigger and I have a bulge in my tummy. My mom told me that Scarlet O'Hara [from *Gone With the Wind*] went from a 14 inch waist to 18 inch waist after having her daughter. So I guess your waist getting bigger is normal. Still, I had no idea I would look like this! When I get back to normal, then I will enjoy sex more."

We live in a culture that is very appearance oriented. Everywhere we look, we see gorgeous models on the television, on outdoor advertising, in window displays of nearly every store, looking at us from the covers of countless magazines as we stand in the check out at the grocery store with a basket full of healthy veggies piled on top of the ice cream. The models suggest that to be sexy, we have to be a size 4 with incredibly long shapely legs, fantastic hair and perfect skin that requires no make-up, and sparkling teeth. They never have circles of fatigue under their eyes and they always have that I-am-ready-for-sex look on their faces. Is it any wonder that women start to feel un-sexy when compared to high-salaried models?

On the subject of being TIRED, Sandra says, "When will I ever get to sleep all the way through the night? The baby is supposed to be sleeping all night by now, but that little guy has such an appetite, I never seem to get him full. At five months old, he still wants to be fed in the middle of the night. He is so demanding that I don't get anything done when he is awake, so I save house work to do while he is napping. But, then, I don't get to sleep. I think I will hire a baby sitter to watch him just so I can sleep."

These stories are not isolated incidents. I hear the same stories over and over when I am counseling couples who have just had a baby. Let's look a little closer at some of these issues.

Sexual self-esteem is tied closely with body image. Being tired, busy and/or heavier than you were before the baby makes you feel unattractive. If you feel unattractive, then it is nearly impossible to feel sexy. If you don't feel sexy, then you limit your sexual encounters. On the other side of that coin, if you are comfortable inside your skin, you are much more likely to feel like engaging in sex with your partner. One of the most sexually appealing traits a woman can have is self-confidence. Was your self-confidence ejected from your body at the same moment the baby was? You brought the baby home. Now, you need to bring home your self-esteem and your sexual self-confidence.

## Chapter One

### What, exactly, is the problem?

As a sex therapist for many years, I have just about heard it all: The good side, the bad side, the pain, the joys, the rewards of being a partnered individual. In fact, I am beginning to hear the same stories over and over again. I can tell you that you aren't alone. Consider this story:

#### *Kayla and Jim's Story*

Kayla and Jim had been married for eight years and they had two children, a boy and a girl, ages five and three. They were college sweet hearts and were married soon after they both graduated. He had been the class president, the football quarterback, and was very handsome. She was on the gymnastics' team and was very pretty. They made a very striking couple. They had wonderful careers, were financially set, and had a score of loving and accepting friends and family. Outwardly, no one would ever have guessed their marriage was very close to ending.

Kayla came to me first for counseling. She spent the first sessions complaining about Jim and how angry he was all the time. He acted impatient with her and the children. He acted impatient with both their families. He snapped at her for the smallest things and yelled at the children for just being children. Kayla complained that he seemed to have given up on them as a couple and a family. He didn't want to do anything as a family and avoided talking Kayla.

Finally Jim came to me and he told a different story. He didn't like the fact that Kayla complained all the time about the way he did things, such as mowing the grass or cleaning the pool. Jim felt as if he was being scolded for being a naughty child. Jim felt disappointed in Kayla as a companion, to say the least. He remembered when they had fun together and when they laughed about everything. Jim told me, at that time, Kayla did her thing and he did his and he actually preferred it that way.

After several sessions with me, very little had changed. Kayla and Jim were caught in a trap of both wanting to be right rather than fixing what was wrong.

With both laying blame on each other, it was difficult to get through to them.

I asked Jim what happened in the marriage and he told me that when he married Kayla, they were passionately in love and they made love frequently. He felt really good about himself because he was able to satisfy her as a lover. She was his best friend and they shared each others deepest thoughts and secrets. They spent every possible moment together. They held hands and they kissed affectionately. Even when Kayla was pregnant with their first child, they eagerly looked forward to the child being born, feeling it would bring them even closer. But something else happened instead.

Kayla became so involved in her role as a mother, that when she wasn't caring for the baby, she was fatigued. Sleep became her priority and not sex. Intimacy with Jim was not even considered. Jim said he felt left out of her life because she didn't take his needs into consideration at all.

In the beginning, Jim talked to Kayla about his feelings of hurt and abandonment. Because she was tired, her hormone levels had changed, and she was very over-worked, she found that she really didn't care too much what was going on with Jim. She complained that he did almost nothing to help her with the baby or with the house. She told me that she couldn't believe that he was actually complaining. Rather than complaining, he should have been helping her. She said she felt like she had two children instead of one. Kayla felt like Jim was jealous of their baby and that was something that she could not have imagined before they had the baby. She told me she was so busy taking care of their son's needs that there was no way she had time to take care of Jim's too. She wanted him to think about HER instead of spending all of his time thinking about HIMSELF.

Because Kayla rejected his sexual advances so often, Jim stopped investing time and energy into his marriage and began investing time and energy into his work and his friends. So the downward spiral began. The more she rejected him, the more distance was created between them. She once said to me she didn't want to have sex with him because she didn't feel close to him, at all.

When they did have sex, it was clouded with feelings of resentment and anger and normally left them both feeling empty and farther apart than ever.

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

When one person in a couple suddenly loses their interests in sex, such as right after a baby is born, the other partner often feels rejected and depressed. They begin to doubt their abilities as a spouse and a lover. They wonder why their partner isn't attracted to them any longer. Have you ever heard this or said this?

- “You don't care about me. You're just a sex maniac.”
- “If you would go to work in the real world instead of staying home with the kids all the time, you would understand how I feel.”
- “If you weren't so controlling, you would just accept that I'm not as physical as you are and you would leave me alone.”
- “It's only sex. It's not a big deal!”

For someone like Jim, a partner who wants an active loving sex life, a lack of sex is a big deal. It is much more than wanting physical release. It is about the connection, the closeness, the intimacy and the affection. It's about feeling attractive, feeling like a whole person, feeling like you are the best person possible, feeling good about yourself on many levels. It's about feeling that special oneness. It's about being in love.

When a person like Kayla encounters the time in her life when she just isn't interested in sex for a number of legitimate reasons, her partner's feelings do not matter to her very much. As a result, because she is basically satisfied with her state, she does little to change it.

On the other side of the coin: What about Kayla? Deep inside, she was mystified by her sudden apparent disinterest in sex. She was frustrated and angry because of the continuing arguments with Jim. Her continual disappointment in herself made intimacy even less likely. She always wondered why sex was ruining her otherwise decent marriage. Both Kayla and Jim were obsessed with sex in different ways. It occupied a great deal of their time and energy. Kayla was obsessed with avoiding sexual situations and Jim

was obsessed with how many times a week he did not get sex.

For some solutions to this problem, jump ahead to Chapter Two or keep on reading to learn more about some of the problems couples have.

Here is a different story. It has a similar beginning to Kayla and Jim's situation.

### *Bill and Janine's Story*

Janine was a beautiful woman with sexy curves and gorgeous dark hair. Bill was extraordinary in his appearance, with his captivating blue eyes and his thick blonde hair and his surfer's hard body. They met while both were on vacation in Fort Lauderdale, fell immediately in love and were married after only a few months. They didn't have a lot of money, but their love sustained them in the learner times. Janine said she felt like they defied the “you can't live on love” rule. They were so attracted to each other they had sex sometimes as much as two or three times a day for the first three years of their marriage.

Bill boasted that his friends were jealous of them and would frequently ask him how he did it. He would tell them, “I'm so sexy, she can't keep her hands off me.”

Janine says she felt closer to Bill every time they touched and she loved being in love with him.

When Janine got pregnant, it wasn't planned, but they were happy nonetheless. In the beginning stages of her pregnancy, Janine and Bill's relationship changed little. But, in the second and third trimesters, Janine began to pick up a lot of weight. She gained nearly a hundred pounds before her daughter was born. As she began to gain weight, she stopped wanting to have sex with Bill. She was afraid to let him see her getting fatter, so she made a point of not letting him see her naked. No more showers together. No more sex with the lights on. No more showing off her sexy underwear.

He was annoyed, but attributed the change to her pregnancy. He believed the myth that pregnant women don't have sex, so he wasn't overly concerned at that point. Of course the myth is false! Pregnant

women can enjoy frequent and fulfilling sex for most of their pregnancy. Bill assumed everything would be back to normal after the baby was born.

What happened was this: Janine had gained so much weight, she felt very ugly. She assumed Bill thought the same thing because he had backed off from her, sexually. They never discussed the fact that Bill was responding to the old wives' tale and stopped making sexual advancements because of it.

The truth is Bill didn't care about Janine's weight gain. He thought she was still a very sexy woman. In fact, he enjoyed exploring her new more voluptuous curves. He loved the stretch marks on her abdomen because they represented the life they had created together and he loved their daughter very much.

Janine was living with the idea that to be sexy you had to look like you had never given birth at all. Because of the demands of her daughter, she failed to take time for herself, so her hair was not quite as gorgeous and she looked haggard. Their daughter was colicky, and threw up frequently, so most of Janine's clothes were stained and they couldn't afford to buy new ones. The baby took all the extra "grooming" money.

Because Janine avoided Bill, he began to think she didn't find him sexy any longer. He resented the fact that she would not let him touch her because she had created such an intense negative body language barrier between them.

Eventually, every time Janine rejected Bill, he grew more despondent. He felt more alone than ever before. Because HE assumed she didn't find him sexy, he joined a gym and began working out several times a week. She resented the money he spent on his gym membership and withdrew from him further. SHE assumed he was trying to regain his former surfer's hard body because he was looking for another sexy attractive woman who was untainted by childbirth.

She also resented the fact that she couldn't go to the gym, in an effort to regain her pre-birth weight body. She lamented, "How can he spend all our money on the gym when I need it worse than him?" and "I need new clothes, but he doesn't care about that. He is just interested in the way he looks."

They began bickering about little things and about big things like money and sex. Most of the time, she would get angry and go to bed without talking to him and he would watch TV until he was sure she was asleep and then fall asleep on the couch.

The worse thing in the world began to happen. Bill felt so bad about himself that when an attractive gym employee began to spend more and more time talking to him and complimenting him on his efforts, he responded. Suddenly, he began to see himself as sexy again.

Before Bill actually had an affair, he decided to talk Janine into counseling. They would pay for it with the gym money. Bill didn't want his marriage to break up because he still loved Janine and his daughter.

When they arrived in my office, both were very accusing of each other.

- "She doesn't think I'm attractive."
- "He thinks I'm ugly."
- "She won't listen when I try to tell her how I feel."
- "All he wants is sex and he doesn't care how I feel."

Is this familiar? Bill and Janine had lost their closeness and their intimacy and neither one was listening to the other. Had they listened, they would have realized that Janine still thought Bill the sexiest man around, but she couldn't believe he would actually want to have sex with a fat mother. Bill still thought Janine was the sexiest woman he had ever seen and he felt very un-sexy because she didn't want to have sex with him.

Fortunately, they sought help before Bill actually had an affair. Couples tell me that an affair is on the short list of the most destructive things in a relationship. It is also one of the hardest things to overcome. I commend them for coming to me before that happened.

These two stories illustrate two of the most common problems couples have after the baby is born: Being too tired to have sex and feeling too unattractive to have sex.

### Sexual Self Esteem

Everyone needs to understand that regardless of your current sex drive, all people experience peaks and valleys during their lives. It doesn't necessarily mean that you have suddenly developed low sexual desire and will never want sex, again. Many times a lack of interest in sex, for whatever reason, is only a passing thing. Perhaps you have a lot on your mind, you are stressed about your job or career, perhaps you have a physical problem, or you may just be in a solitary mood. We all go through stages such as these and as long as your disinterest doesn't last longer than few weeks, there is no reason to be upset or to think you're weird or something worse.

Seeking counseling should happen only if you are worried that you have a problem or if your partner is worried about their problem. That is the hard one to take because everything sexual is so very personal. Taking your partner's feelings into account may be very difficult, especially if you normally have different levels of sexual desire. The partner who is not getting enough sex may automatically assume that there is a problem with the partner with the lower sex drive, when that may not be the case at all.

So, if you are in a relationship and your partner has recently had a baby, she will likely experience a decline in sexual desire for a number of reasons: Fatigue, feeling unattractive, hormonal changes. This is not permanent. If you are patient, loving, understanding, then things will change for her and she will once again desire sex.

*Solution:* However, if the problem persists after the first few months after the baby, then, please seek counseling to get your relationship back on track. You and your partner will benefit in the long run. Many times a problem is easier to work out in the early stages rather than waiting until there are multiple problems to contend with at the same time.

For many women, accepting their bodies has been a life long battle and the changes child birth has wrought doesn't make acceptance any easier. Your body looks worse than ever! Consider this: *The media's idea of what is beautiful or sexy is very limited*, yet it is hard to get rid of the notion that we would be much happier if only we could more closely align our body with the media's notion of beauty.

The media is only part of the problem. The other half is living in the future. Living with the idea that you will be sexy just as soon as you loose that 20 pounds or as soon as you can get to the gym and power lift your way to sexy abs or as soon as you can sleep away those lines of fatigue on your face. Accepting ourselves now is the greatest challenge, rather than waiting until that magical point in the future when we can, finally, appreciate our bodies. More than half the women in America are dissatisfied with their bodies. Even if you move in circles where a greater range of body types are accepted, there seems to be something many women want to change. Nearly every woman sees something to envy in another person. Haven't you looked at someone and said to yourself, "Wow! I wish my legs looked like hers." Ironically, she is looking at you and thinking, "Wow! I wish my hair would curl like that."

There is also the fact, that for many women, their bodies are the one place they feel in control. Despite forward thinking, women still make smaller salaries than men, still shoulder most of the house-work burden, and still have the principal responsibility for child care and nurturing. With so many things out of our control, we like to think we can control that one aspect of our lives. We can pierce, powder, shave, diet, manicure, perm, nap, and exercise our way into beauty. Right?

Consider this idea: Bodies are a work in progress for your entire life. There will never be that magical moment when your body is perfect, regardless of how many diets you try or how much plastic surgery you have performed. Isn't a better plan to accept what you

have right now?

It is hard to begin the journey to self acceptance but it can be done. Focus on your good points and find a way to flaunt them.

*Solution:* Take a few moments to imagine what your life would be like if you truly stopped worrying about your imperfections. Envision how free you would feel when relieved of the burden of self-deprecation. No matter how long you've felt badly about yourself, you can make a decision that will change your life forever. Stop striving to look like a perfect model and accept yourself right now.

This is a simple exercise that really works. When you look in the mirror, tell yourself how pretty you look and give yourself a great big smile. This exercise only takes a few seconds a day. If you do this every day for just 21 days, you will really believe it. Once convinced, keep it up for the rest of your life.

The proof is this: I have a friend, Gloria, whose husband is less than handsome. Jake isn't by any means grotesque, he simply doesn't look like Sylvester Stallone. He is short, tends to be chubby, has very little hair and a tremendously big nose. Gloria said every morning, after his shower, while totally naked, Jake would address the guy in the mirror and say, "You're a handsome son-of-a-bitch!" He never had a problem with his appearance in any way. You say, most guys don't have a problem with that, right? Well actually, a lot of men do, but the percentages of women who dislike their appearance are much higher.

Jack says, "I can't get those negative voices out of my head that tell me I am not good enough for Sherry. I love her and I want to please her, but I can't understand what she would see in a guy like me."

Dwayne says, "I am like the shortest guy in the world. Girls don't date short guys. My Dad told me that. He said that I would never get married because no girl would want to date a short guy. I tell myself that I'm not so bad. I'm 5'6". But, I am the like the shortest guy in the world."

*Solution:* Gloria listened to her husband for the first five years they were married and she tried it one day after seeing what it did for his self-esteem. After her shower, she looked at her overweight body and announced to the naked woman in the mirror, "You're a gorgeous babe, aren't you?" The first few times she tried it, she felt a little silly, but she kept it up. She noticed that from the first day, she actually felt good that whole day. After about three weeks, it was just a habit to tell the woman in the mirror, "You're a gorgeous babe, aren't you!" Several years later, Gloria is still over weight with a wrinkled face and graying hair, but she never worries about that at all. She dresses well for her size, she does her make up nicely and fixes her hair. She is a very attractive woman, but her beauty radiates from the inside.

Jake tells others, very proudly, "You see that gorgeous babe? That's my wife."

But, suppose you have something you are disgusted with about your body. Can this be changed? Lamenting because you aren't taller, for example, is a waste of time. If you are overweight, you can change that fact if you are concerned about it. Just remember, if you have a lot of weight to loose, it won't happen overnight. While you are in the process of loosing weight, you can still feel good about the way you feel TODAY because you are doing something beneficial for you and for your health. So, every time you look in the mirror, tell yourself you are a gorgeous babe or a handsome guy for all you men who are reading this. This solution works equally well with both genders.

Remember Bill and Janine from the last chapter? She had gained a lot of weight after their child was born and she felt like Bill didn't find her attractive any longer. Even though Bill told her that she was still attractive to him, she felt like he wasn't being honest and was just saying it to make her feel better.

To Bill and Janine, physical appearance was very important. I asked Janine what she planned to do to change her feelings of despondency and her feelings of being unattractive. She told me she wanted to join a gym but it was too expensive. So I asked her what she could do instead and she didn't have a solution. Bill was the one who came up with a solution for both of them. "I want to go to the gym too, but we can't

afford the expense. What I really want is to spend more time with Janine.”

*Solution:* So, I asked him when he worked and he said during the day. He said, “Instead of plopping in front of the TV after dinner, we can go for a walk in the evenings. That way Janine and I can both get exercise. We can even take the baby. It’s a whole lot cheaper than a gym.”

Janine was enthusiastic about the solution. When I saw them three weeks later, Janine had only lost a pound or two, but she was much happier with her life and so was Bill. They were using their evening walks as a time to talk to each other and to get closer to one another, as they once were.

Janine had begun to feel good about herself because she was doing something positive to improve herself. She became instantly more beautiful on the inside.

So, as women, many times we worry about the way we *look* far more than the way we *feel* about our selves. Our society has seen to it that we believe this way by giving us those beautiful models to compare with. Women have a nearly universal idea: our validation comes from our looks. For many women, after the baby is born, their personal needs become secondary to the baby’s needs and sexual self-confidence suffers as a result. When you don’t make time for yourself, even with a new baby in the house, your entire life can be affected.

It is important to take action now to improve your sexual self image and your low self esteem. You owe it to your partner, to other women in your sphere of influence, but mostly, you owe it to yourself.

### **Conquering Low Self Esteem... For Yourself**

**T**oo many times, low self esteem begins when we are children. Self esteem is the major ingredient in feeling good about ourselves, which will determine a lot about your ability to be emotionally and sexually intimate (See Chapter 5).

#### *Solution*

Self love, which is genuine concern, interest, and

respect for yourself, is the first step in having a satisfying intimate relationship. As a small child, our self esteem is either bolstered or torn down by the adults in our lives. If we are loved, adored, and encouraged by our adult influences, then we very likely will grow up with a high level of self esteem. Since childhood, our self esteem is also influenced by our choices that we make.

**Dana says, “If a man beings to fall in love with me, I push him away from me as fast as I can. I don’t want any relationship to progress to the point where I have to undress in front of him. I am so disgusted with myself that I would rather be alone than face the inevitable rejection from some guy.”**

#### *Irene’s Story*

**I**rene grew up in a house hold where her parents were distant and cold toward her and overly critical of her. They were busy people and they rarely showed affection to their daughter. She grew up thinking she couldn’t do anything right because when her parents talked to her at all it seemed as if they were always pointing out her faults rather than praising her efforts. She felt bad about herself. Irene spent so much time worrying about doing everything right, that she frequently did things wrong. When she mad a mistake, like not getting an “A+” on a test, she would fall deeper into despair.

Irene discovered a way to solve her own problem or so she thought. When she was fifteen, she started dating a boy that was five years older than her and their relationship quickly progressed into a sexual one. Her parents were so disinterested in the good things in her life, that Irene felt she finally had someone who would at least talk to her without telling her she did something wrong.

Irene wasn’t in love with David, and she felt as if he wasn’t in love with her, but she still allowed the relationship to progress to a sexual one because she was getting something she desperately needed but wasn’t getting from her parents—affection and attention. She endured her boyfriend’s sexual

advances, knowing he didn't love her and knowing he was using her. There was no tenderness in their lovemaking and in fact, he disregarded her feelings toward sex. Not surprisingly, when she got pregnant, he abandoned her. Then, she was left to struggle with the rather ruthless way he had treated her. She came to my office with very deep feelings of not being wanted or needed and not feeling worthy of a decent relationship, although that is what she regularly fantasized about.

If you don't feel good about yourself, you may begin to think that you don't deserve a loving relationship with a kind and caring partner. This may lead to you choosing a partner that is addicted to substances, extremely critical, harsh, physically or emotionally abusive, or unfaithful. All of this simply because you don't feel you deserve something better. Also, because we learn lessons about relationships and love and self esteem from our parents, you may not even realize you are being mistreated. If you do realize it, you may not do anything to change your situation. Because your need for affection is so great, leaving a bad situation may become nearly impossible for you.

Listen to this: Staying stuck in a poor relationship will further damage your self esteem. You will find yourself in a downward spiral of being in a bad relationship and having that belief validated by the fact that you are still in that bad situation.

*Solution:* You may be thinking that it's too late to solve self esteem problems, especially if you have made some bad choices as a result of your diminished esteem. The answer lies inside you. You have to spend some time identifying and then changing your negative ideas about yourself. A sex therapist can definitely help in this area, because changing ingrained thoughts and ideas is never easy. To find a therapist near you, contact [www.aasect.org](http://www.aasect.org).

Do any of these negative ideas ever scamper across your thoughts?

- If I fall in love with someone, they will just hurt me.
- I will never feel good about myself again because I am worthless
- I am an evil person
- I will take anyone because I just can't be alone

- I am disgusting to myself and everyone around me
- I am an alien!
- Why start a relationship because it won't work out anyway
- The world is a terrible place to live, so I will just make the best of it
- No one will ever love me, so I don't look for love.

Do any of these negative ideas sound like you? Do you recognize yourself? It is important to realize that if you make life choices based on these negative ideas, then you are guaranteed to never get what you really want. To give you an example, the first negative idea on the list is "If I fall in love with someone, they will just hurt me." If you make your decisions based on that idea, you will either be alone for the rest of your life or in an abusive relationship that increases your negativity, all because you don't feel you can do any better.

In most cases, however, no matter how bad your childhood may have been or how bad your past relationships have been, you can force yourself to take responsibility for making positive choices instead of continued negative choices. If what you're doing isn't working for you, then do something else.

*Solution:* The first thing to do is to identify your self esteem problem and then to begin to change your thinking. For some, this seems like a big task, but don't try to tackle the whole problem at once. If you picture your problem as a pie, cut the pie into many smaller pieces and deal with only one piece at a time. If you don't know where to get started with this, then contact a sex therapist in your area. To find a therapist near you, can go to the AASCET website, American Association of Sex Counselors, Educators and Therapists, at [www.aasect.org](http://www.aasect.org).

### *Lacy's Story*

**L**acy grew up in an environment that was based on emotional neglect and she developed into a very fearful person. Not only did she feel vulnerable, but she felt an intense fear of being rejected. She married a very wonderful man, but even so, she couldn't relax enough to enjoy sex. She was too fearful of saying

something that would hurt him, making him leave her instead of asking for what she wanted, sexually. She never had orgasm. She resigned herself to making the best of a bad situation. But, her husband knew she wasn't happy with her sex life, so he suggested she get counseling.

Her entire life was established to cater to her fears. She told me during therapy that in the summer, even on the hottest days, she wouldn't wear shorts because she was afraid of what someone may say to her. She wouldn't wear a bathing suit or go near the pool in their apartment complex. Lacy was convinced that someone ridicule her about her appearance.

Oddly, Lacy was a very attractive woman and had no reason to think anyone would ridicule her because of her appearance.

Lacy realized she had a serious problem with self-esteem and wanted to improve hers. I suggested she start walking in the complex. This was very frightening for Lacy. But, she pushed herself to walk. She began by walking just around her building and only at night so people would less likely be out and about. She began by wearing long pants and long sleeved shirts to further shield herself from the neighbor's eyes.

Lacy soon discovered that walking around her building wasn't bad at all. She began to extend the length of her walks. Soon she was walking around the entire perimeter of her complex. The next piece of pie was to walk during the day. Reluctantly, she chose early morning, thinking again that fewer people would be in the area.

She saw a few of her neighbors and they didn't laugh at her or ridicule her in any way. Most waved and smiled. A couple of neighbors talked to her outright, asking her how she was doing. She was encouraged by this and tried her walk with shorts and a short sleeved shirt one day. The result was the same. Her neighbors waved and a few spoke to her. She felt empowered by the fact that she conquered a major fear in her life. Because she felt powerful in the world, she began to feel more comfortable in her body. She was finally able to understand her fear was based on negative ideas and that these could be overcome.

*Solution:* Lacy's story is an example of how to take a slow approach, conquering a portion of the problem at a time instead of trying to deal with it as a whole. There was no way Lacy would have begun walking in shorts right way. She had to work into that stage. A trained therapist can give you suggestions of how to take small steps to your own self improvement because each individual is unique and each solution will be unique.

Keep in mind, self esteem and sexual self esteem is a process in the round. Having sexual intercourse is a poor way to deal with low self-esteem. Intercourse cannot be safe or healthy if you are sexual with someone who doesn't care for you as a person. Having good self esteem sets the stage for good relationships and for trust in those relationships. It is important to develop your good self esteem so that your sexual self will not be inclined to "look for love in all the wrong places," as the song goes.

This is an exercise that will help you recover lost self esteem, regardless of how it was lost—either through a neglected or abusive childhood or through a previous abusive relationship, or siblings teasing or not quite fitting in during high school. None of these situations are permanent. You can learn to look at yourself in a brand new way and this is a major step to learning to love yourself.

*Solution:* First, make a list of at least three things you like about yourself. More is better. Is it your hair? Your eyes? Your smile? Your personality? Your honesty? Your skill with computers? When you get your list made, put them in order of importance to you. These are the qualities you will learn to dwell on. By nourishing the parts of you that you like the best, the parts you don't like will start to seem very unimportant. Dwell on this list. Think about it. Concentrate on it. Talk to yourself, telling yourself "I have the prettiest eyes!" and "I am a very friendly person!" Tell yourself these things several times a day. Your brain believes what you tell it, so never tell it, "I have the ugliest nose, ever!" Tell it only the good things. Always only the good things.

Next, imagine you have just met a terrific person and you want to impress them, and you have suddenly gained full access to a TV studio. Design a commercial that sells YOU as the product. This

commercial should only show your best qualities and what you would most like that person to see in you. Once you have designed your commercial and you thought about it and you know exactly what it looks like and what it says, then play your commercial over in your head about 20 times a day, just like a real commercial on TV. You will start to feel pretty good about that person in the commercial, I promise.

Another big part of overcoming low self esteem is identifying patterns that created this situation in the first place. People we choose as friends or lovers may not be the best choices for us. Also ideas or beliefs we hold may not be the best either. Get another piece of paper and make two columns. In one column write the heading, "Bad for Me," and in the other column write, "Reason This Person/Idea is Bad For Me." OK. I know you can see where this is going. In column A, write down everything in your life you feel is bad for you, like bad habits. Do you smoke? Do you get angry easily? Do you mistrust people? Do you secretly binge on pizza every Friday night? Include people who are bad for you. For example, do you have any former boyfriends or husbands who abused you? Do you have friends who take advantage of you? Do you have relatives who belittle you? Is your present partner abusive? As you make your list, do you see a pattern forming?

Study this list and then you can start working on eliminating the bad things in your life one at a time. You cannot conquer the whole world all at once. Even the Romans conquered the world in tiny steps, one piece of the pie at a time, without trying to do it all at once. Over time, as you eliminate bad beliefs and bad people on your list, the list will get smaller and smaller. Just the act of overcoming bad habits will empower you as a person and that is a big hurdle to overcoming low self esteem.

These exercises will apply to anyone who suffers from low self esteem, whether it has been a life-long battle or something that just arose as a result of your changing circumstances, such as having a brand new baby in the house and feeling like there is no way you can do everything required of you.

## ...For Your Partner

When women have low self esteem, they feel as if they deserve punishment for being out of shape or fat or too tired. They punish themselves and their partners. Women who aren't happy with their appearance often tune out their partner's expressions of admiration and love, or they deflect sexual advances.

Here is something to think about. If someone wants to make love to you, the last thing they want to hear is how fat you feel or that you feel guilty because you only did seven minutes of the twenty minute workout. They don't want to hear that the baby kept you up half the night and would they please hurry up because you'd like to get some sleep. Your partner wants love and physical contact. Before rushing to turn off the lights as you are undressing, stop to think about the delightfulness of an intimate encounter. Think to yourself, "This person wants to have sex with me regardless of how I look or regardless of how tired I look." That is pretty darn awesome to think about.

*Solution:* It is a very common after the baby is born, to simply not be interested in sexual activity for a number of reasons ranging from having low self esteem, to being very tired and overwhelmed, to changing hormone levels. This is the time to talk to your partner. Don't assume he automatically knows what you are thinking and feeling. You have to talk to him. He chose you for his life partner and he will be there for you during these times if you tell him what is going on in your head to make you feel as you do.

Tell him you feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of taking care of the new baby. Together you can work on a solution. Maybe it will be something as simple as him allowing you to take a nap after he gets home from work. An hour in the bed will feel like heaven and then you can rise, make dinner, and feel more like spending time with your partner.

If you feel out of shape or fat, tell him your concerns and listen to his reply. You will likely find that love really is blind and he is still very interested in having sex with you regardless of how you see yourself. Many times you will find your fears that he doesn't love you because your tight abs are a thing of the past

are your fears only.

I have devoted an entire chapter, Chapter 4, to communication because it is so important in your relationship with your partner. He is the one who will be with you long after your baby has grown up and moved on to a life they have created. Your partner is the one who will still be with you and he should never fall out of your focus.

Patty says, “The whole time I have been married... almost 35 years now... I have kept Tim first in my life. Within two months of bringing my first child home, I started planning a Saturday night date with my husband. I would make sure the baby was down and I would make a nice dinner for Tim and me. We saved cleaning the kitchen until the next morning because after dinner, usually steak with wine, we would head to the bathroom to shower together and then spend the next hour, or sometimes more, in the bedroom. Just him and me. Sometimes I was really tired and on those occasions, Tim would make dinner while I relaxed.

We didn't always have sex. Sometimes Tim would give me a massage and hold me until I fell asleep. He would then take care of the baby's needs for the rest of the evening, giving me a chance to catch-up on my sleep. But, spending time with Tim was the most important thing to him and to me. We never lost touch.

Even when the kids were older, they would go on a sleep over on Saturday nights, or they would watch TV in the family room while Tim and I had our time. It was a rule. Saturday night belonged to Mommy and Daddy.”

You may be thinking that planning a sex date with your partner isn't sexy because you prefer sex to be more spontaneous. If you think about this closely, you'll realize that sex has rarely been truly spontaneous. When you were dating, you would plan

what to wear, where to go for your date, you showered and shaved your arms and legs as if that one extra hair would mean the end of your relationship forever. You would even plan what you were going to say. That sounds like a lot of planning to me.

Leah says, “For a long time after the baby was born, Richard and I would try to be spontaneous with sex. So, that meant waiting until we both got into bed. He worked two jobs so I could stay home with the baby, so when we both finally got into bed at night, one usually fell asleep with the other was asking for sex while yawning. Scheduling sex was the best solution for us. We were both ready and eager for sex because we knew it was coming and we learned to look forward to our “date.” ”

### ...For the Other Women In Your Life

Giving everyone around a look at your self-esteem and your sexual self-confidence is the best gift you can give to other women in your life, especially younger women. They are in a world where female denigration is the rule rather than the exception. High school girls have many variations on the theme, “You look great. Did you lose weight?” College girls still wrestle with the “I hate her! She is so skinny,” scenario. Young women read glamour magazines and think, “I wish I had Cindy Crawford's body.”

Our current cultural standard of beauty is actually 15 to 20 pounds underweight, which is, according to medical professionals, the definition of anorexia. What happened in this country that the current idea of “beautiful” is a woman with an eating disorder? But the image is burned into our brains: beautiful equals too skinny, scrawny, bony, emaciated, malnourished, ill. When I put it that way, then suddenly, maybe beautiful isn't so great, after all. Maybe this isn't truly a goal to strive for.

It is a sad fact that with all this in-your-face advertising featuring underweight women, American girls are dieting at a much younger age. As few as 30 percent of girls in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade are satisfied with the

size and shape of their bodies. (Steinbaum, 1994, p.21) These girls are comparing themselves to underweight supermodels and making the bad decision to diet when their bodies need the extra nutrition to develop properly. Where do girls get these ideas? Yes, advertising is one major place, but the seeds may have been sown much earlier.

Every time a daughter, younger sister or niece sees us frown when we check out our bodies in the mirror, they get the idea that physical imperfection is not acceptable. Thinking about our effect on other women in our lives is important because if we have a negative self image we project that onto the younger women. Chances are very good that our negativity began when we saw our mothers looking disgusted as they tried on a pair of pants in a store's dressing room. I remember reading an Ann Landers newspaper column when I was a teenager that said a wife should starve herself if she had to, to stay in that size twelve dress. In the seventies, that was still considered the way to keep a man.

Carol says, "My Mom has a coffee mug that says, 'Things could be worse. We could be trying on bathing suits.' So do I think not-so-perfect bodies are shameful? Yes, I do. I learned that at my mother's knee."

Marnie says, "My older sister would cry because she thought she was too fat. When I was little, I thought she looked okay and I thought she was just being silly. But, as I got older, she would tell me, "Don't eat that candy. You'll get fat!" or "You have to skip lunch because if you eat too much, you'll get fat." By the time I was in Middle School, I was terrified of being fat and afraid that all food was bad for me. That was the beginning of my bulimia."

It is difficult to break the habit of listening to the negative tapes running in our heads, but there are things we can do. Imagine how wonderful it would be when someone says to us, "You look great! Did you lose weight?" when you can reply, "No, actually, I gained five pounds last month, but I had a really great

orgasm last night and I feel great!"

*Solution:* Being sexy is a state of mind. If you feel sexy you're sexy, then you will dress and act like you're sexy. That is a simple truth of life. Other people around you will respond your sexiness, too.

Velma says, "I have been overweight my entire life, so one day, just as an experiment, instead of dressing in loose fitting, flowing clothes like I usually wore, I dressed in a short black skirt, black tights, high heels and a v-neck sweater. I went to do my regular Saturday errands. I felt really sexy and I was amazed at how many approving looks I got from men."

Doria says, "I have some friends who live in Boston and on a recent visit there, we went to a club that was frequented by Russian émigrés. The women were at least 30 years older than the average American women in there and 30 to 50 pounds heavier. They all were dressed in what my proper Boston mother would call "inappropriate" clothes for their age and weight. They were dancing and having a great time. They were attracting all the men in the club, whether Russian or American because those ladies *knew* they were looking good and *knew* they were sexy. There is no way you have to be skinny to be sexy."

Improving your self image is for *you*. I will repeat that. *The person who will benefit the most from an improved self image is you*. If you are hung up on your appearance because you think fat is unattractive, then maybe it is time to improve your self-image. "There are no official statistics for spending on diet products, but estimates vary from \$40bn to \$100bn in the US alone - more than the combined value of the [American] government's budget for health, education and welfare." (Cummings, February 5, 2003) That means Americans are spending 40 billion dollars to 100 billion dollars a year in gym memberships, diet food, diet pills, and diet clubs. It makes you stop and

think: Americans wanting to be thinner is largely the result of the media bombarding us from every angle. To prove my point, I watched a movie on the Oprah Channel recently and with only one exception, every commercial they showed was something having to do with dieting or diet pills or diet products. Is it any wonder that Americans are caught up in this media hype? Isn't it a good idea to have more sex instead of more dieting?

### **Benefits of Sex**

You already know from everything you have heard and read that nothing dampens libido faster than a negative self image. How many times have you discouraged sexual contact because you're less than perfect whether from being too tired or from not having lost your post-baby weight? The truth is nothing makes you feel better about your body than really good sex. Give it a try! And if you want a really good night's sleep, sex is the best sleeping pill ever invented. Rather than discouraging sex because you're tired, remember that a great orgasm will relax you and put you to sleep faster than anything else.

I heard my grandmother say, "Sex is for those who need it." OK. That is a very valid statement because we are sexual creatures. We all need sex. But, what are the real benefits of having sex?

A good sexual relationship makes you feel close to your partner emotionally. The couples who are truly connected have almost a visible bond between them. I can almost pick them out of a crowd. Others can feel the connection between them. The bond is created not because the couple is having sex, but because they are intimately connected.

Sex creates a very powerful bond on many levels. Not every sexual encounter will move the earth and in fact, you may not orgasm every time you have sex. But, the physical contact will ensure that you and your partner are intimate and united.

Sex produces some really nice "feel good" chemicals. When you are aroused, and during and after orgasm, your body produces endorphins and oxytocin. Endorphins are natural opium. They protect you from pain and give you a sense of well being. Oxytocin is

sometimes called the bonding hormone and will help you feel connected to the person you just made love to. Oxytocin is also triggers orgasm. These feel good chemicals help us ignore fatigue, aches and pains, headaches, and disconnection.

With all of these benefits, it just makes sense to have sex, either with a partner or by yourself, as often as possible. I know that saying that just opened another can of worms... but be open minded and read on!

## Chapter Three

### How to Learn to Love Yourself

Here in America, we have very puritanical roots. People born before 1940 felt like a woman should be sexually innocent and pure. The idea of a good woman enjoying sex was unheard of! Good women were not supposed to like sex which is the same thing as saying only bad girls enjoyed sexual relations. Any activity people engaged in was supposed to be productive and if anyone engaged in any activity simply for pleasure, they were considered bohemian, hedonistic and selfish. Because it wasn't necessary to enjoy sex to reproduce, the aspect of sexual pleasure was given a very low priority.

Also, as few as thirty years ago, many parents believed if children were taught about sex, that would only arouse their interest in the subject, thereby leading the poor things down a path of intemperance and destruction. As a result, sex education was severely lacking at home and in the schools. My own "sex education" consisted of the gym teach telling us all about our menstrual periods and if we dated a boy, we would "get into trouble." There was little or no useful information given to us.

Most mothers never even mentioned the word "sex" and fathers certainly didn't. If anything was said at all, it was to remind daughters that if they had sex outside of the safe bonds of matrimony, they were bad, dirty and not worthy of respect. If a girl got pregnant, she deserved what she got and the gossips in the neighborhoods assured that enough negative things were said about the girl that other girls wouldn't want the same thing to happen to them.

Most girls buried the sexual feelings so deeply that many weren't even aware of having them. And still somehow, these same girls were supposed to automatically turn, into loving sexual wives who were able to keep their husbands satisfied enough that they wouldn't "go astray."

Shelly says, "When I was in high school, I felt like some kind of whore because I was having sex with my boyfriend. I know now that what I was

really doing was searching for love and nurturing. My parents were both alcoholics and there was almost no love in my home, but I was still expected to be a so-called good girl. I needed to be loved and although I knew my boyfriend was just using me, it was still nice to have someone hold me like they really cared."

Today, parents are becoming more aware that sexual information is important to give to their children. But, they don't have any frame of reference because no one taught them. They still struggle with embarrassment.

There are hundreds of double standards we have to live with every day. Here are just a few.

- Being a virgin is virtuous and the greatest gift a woman can give a man is her maidenhead on their wedding night. But this same inexperienced virgin is supposed to magically transform into a sexual hotty from the first night of her marriage.
- A woman's self esteem is dictated by a man's sexual attentions. This is easily accomplished by seduction, yet carrying through a seduction can lead to a bad reputation and low self-esteem. And that same woman, if she decides not to carry through with the seduction is considered a tease.
- Women are taught that sex is a way to get a man and it is not for our personal enjoyment. But, if we use sex to get a man and actually enjoy sex, then we are considered dirty.

Is it any wonder we walk around confused? Is it any wonder that women continually walk a thin tightrope, trying to figure out what we should or should not do?

### What is Hiding "Down There?"

One of the barriers to good sexual self-esteem is ignorance about our bodies. Most of us don't know what we have, physically, or how all that stuff between our legs works. *Knowledge is another step to gaining sexual self-esteem.* An astonishing number of parents never used the word "vagina" when talking to their daughters. Euphemistic phrases like "down there" are

used to describe “that place where babies come from.” Considering that most women in America will have two or three children at most and many, none at all, to describe the vagina as the place where babies come from is severely limiting its function. Think back to your childhood. Did your parents ever use the word “vulva?” What about the word “clitoris?” The clitoris has a single function. *It is the only organ that is for sexual pleasure and nothing else.* And guys don’t have one! How many parents told you that?

Jamie says, “My Mom never talked about body parts at all. She probably didn’t know what all that stuff was called, anyway. I learned some of what I know in school and a lot of wrong stuff from my girl friends.”

Paulina says, “My parents never mentioned sex at all, like if we didn’t talk about sex, then I wouldn’t want to have sex with anyone. That kinda the same thing as not telling a kid there are Democrats, hoping we won’t become one.”

Kathy says, “My mom used the dirty words for the vagina, like twat, cooter, snatch and bush. She never used the word vagina because she didn’t like the way it sounded. What a weird double standard.”

Jeri says, “I was supposed to sleep with my arms outside the covers, even in winter, so I wouldn’t touch myself. My mom would even smell my fingers to make sure there was nothing sinful or dirty going on. Funny thing is, I had no idea what she was worried about.”

### **Should Masturbation be Forbidden?**

Since sexuality is learned, forbidding masturbation is interfering with one of the safest ways for us to learn about our sexual selves. Masturbation is about personal sexuality and doesn’t involve the complexities of a relationship with another person the

way that sex does. And there is no risk, for the male or the female, of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Also, in the case of women, learning to have an orgasm through masturbation facilitates having an orgasm with a partner.

Women who learned to orgasm through masturbation felt guilty in doing so. There is a strong social stigma against feeling personal physical pleasure and this stigma causes psychological harm. In America, masturbation doesn’t cause physical problems, per se, but the conflict and the struggle with guilt and self-assurance does. The practice of masturbation greatly conflicts with many people’s moral codes.

Mary says, “I thought I couldn’t orgasm with my husband because I could orgasm when I masturbated. I thought if I could just stop masturbating that I could actually have an orgasm during intercourse. It didn’t happen. I would get so sexually frustrated that I would continue to masturbate. For years, I thought masturbation was my problem and not the lack of clitoral stimulation during intercourse. I spent years deep in guilt, feeling dirty, ashamed and thinking I broke something because I masturbated.”

We can add this one to our list of conflicting ideas: The notion that masturbation is bad and will cause physical problems. We were taught, either directly or indirectly, that masturbation causes everything from an inability to have “real” sex, to getting addicted to masturbation, to masturbation causing blindness, uterine cancer, herpes, genital warts and likely global warming. All of these ideas are totally wrong and people were taught the wrong lessons. Throughout the nineteenth century, masturbation was thought to be the most degrading act a human being can commit. It was thought to cause all manner of health problems, from acne to dementia. Imagine the poor teenager with an acne problem and the ridicule they had to face from everyone in town.

Back then, there was a whole industry designed to keep children from engaging in masturbation. Bondage belts and mittens are just the beginning. Spiked penile rings that were used to prevent boys

from getting an erection and clitoridectomy were among some of the more horrifying things people did to prevent their children from touching themselves “down there.” The last clitoridectomy was performed in the United States in 1948. (English, 1978)

Most of us, either through the language our parents used, or the fact that our parents didn't say anything at all, grew up with the idea that sex and sexual organs were secret at best or nasty at worst. We were cautioned to not touch our genitals and were horribly embarrassed if we were caught “playing” with ourselves. All of this reinforced the idea that self-exploration is shameful or wrong. Too many people carry this idea well into adulthood. Many never get over it.

Unfortunately, we've inherited a boat-load of religious taboo ideas and negative cultural beliefs about masturbation. Most of our American attitudes are rooted in Judeo-Christian and Greek philosophies. Here's a little more history for you.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, people are encouraged to engage in only reproductive sex. The Israelite's population growth was literally their means of expanding their social and political power and the Israelites used dietary restrictions and sexual restrictions to distinguish themselves from surrounding cultures where homosexuality and prostitution were prevalent. Many times the assumptions and stories in the Bible are taken totally out of context. The story of Onan who was struck dead because he spilled his seed on the ground is often quoted as a deterrent to masturbation. The story is actually about Onan ignoring a tradition that stated he should impregnate his dead brother's widow because his brother died without an heir. Onan's crime was withdrawing before ejaculation as a form of birth control. Although the stories leave us with a sense that masturbation is wrong, the Bible, in fact, has nothing to say on the subject.

In Greek philosophy, Aristotle stated that semen is precious and is a finite fluid. Also, spending it sapped a man's strength. The idea that semen is a magical fluid that shouldn't be wasted is not just a Grecian idea, but can be found in many cultures around the world. For example, Chinese Taoist philosophy feels that a woman's Yin energy is inexhaustible, but a

man's Yang energy can very easily run dry. Taoist sexual techniques teach men to orgasm without ejaculation.

With all of this negative sexual philosophy inundating us, over coming seemingly inbred fears may appear to be impossible. Getting to know our sexual self may seem like a dream or something that happens only in movies.

Here is a newsflash for you! There is nothing nasty, shameful or wrong about your genital anatomy. Your genitals are a part of your body as much as your nose or your ears are. Repeat that about a hundred times or until you believe it. *The next step to gaining sexual self esteem is taking a good look at your genitals.*

*Solution:* Get a hand-held mirror and look at what you were born with. Take a good look. Open the vulva and look at the opening of your vagina. Look at the perineum and your anus. Look at the colors and the way the hair grows. Take a good, long, loving look at your body. You don't have anything that is new or special. You have what half the people on earth have: A vagina, vulva, clitoris, perineum, and anus.

### **What Every Woman Has**

Outside of a female's genitals is called the vulva. This consists of the labia, the clitoris glans, the vaginal opening and the urethral opening. The two plump lips on either side of the vaginal opening are the labia majora. The labium contains erectile tissue and is normally covered in varying amounts of pubic hair. The labia minora is the smooth inner lips that are hairless and enclose the vaginal opening and the urethral opening. If you are exploring with your hand held mirror, you will discover that your labia lips are probably not a matched pair. That doesn't mean you're deformed or odd. If you have looked at men's magazines, you may also note that labias come in many sizes, colors and shapes. Some women have suffered from embarrassment because their labial lips weren't tucked neatly inside their vulva or because one lip hangs lower than the other. Your labia is as individual as your face.

The labia minora come together at the top of the vulva right above the clitoris glans. If you pull back the

hood of skin over the clitoris, you may be surprised to see how much it resembles the head of a penis without the urethral opening. The clitoris is smaller than a penis, but powerful. It has 8,000 nerve fibers, which is a higher concentration than any other part of the body, including the head of a man's penis (which has only about 4,000) or the lips on your face which has a whopping 3,000. The extremely sensitive glans sits on top of the clitoral shaft which runs beneath the skin toward the pubic bone. You can feel the shaft rolling under your fingers if you exert a slight pressure to the area directly above the clitoris. The clitoral shaft branches and curves downward through the labia on either side of the vaginal and urethral openings. The legs consist of erectile tissue that becomes engorged with blood during sexual arousal. Also the tissue in the clitoris glans is rich in blood vessels that become engorged during arousal making the clitoris larger and firmer. It is not as dramatic as a man's erection, but it is close.

To "bust a myth" right now, there is no difference in a vaginal or a clitoral orgasm. In spite of the years of misinformation given us by Freud that all clitoral orgasms were "immature," *all orgasms originate with the clitoris*. In fact, a majority of women cannot orgasm without direct clitoral stimulation.

The urethral opening is between the clitoris and the vaginal opening. The skin around the opening is rich in nerve endings and many women find stimulation of this area highly pleasurable. The urethra itself is a slender, short tube that allows urine to discharge from the bladder. It runs above and parallel to the vagina and is surrounded by spongy erectile tissue. This urethral sponge isn't very large, but it swells during sexual arousal at which point you can feel the G-spot by pressing on the front wall of the vagina. Some women find G-spot, or Grafenberg Spot, stimulation to be highly enjoyable and some also find that G-spot stimulation can lead to ejaculation of a clear, odorless fluid that is ejected through the urethra. It is chemically distinct from urine. All women have a urethral sponge but not all ejaculate during orgasm.

In your journey of your anatomy, reach your fingers inside the vagina opening. The front wall of the vagina will feel slightly ridged. This is where the urethral sponge protrudes into the vagina. The rest of the walls are smooth to the touch. The outer third of

the vagina contains more nerve endings than the inner two thirds. The outer edges respond to touch whereas the inner two third respond to pressure.

Between the vaginal opening and the anus is a stretch of skin call the perineum. Another body of erectile tissue lies underneath this area. During arousal, it becomes sensitive to the stimulation of the back wall of the vagina and can also provide pleasure during anal penetration. The anus is also filled with nerve endings and anal penetration can be just as arousing vaginal penetration. There is a persistent taboo that anal sex is dirty or unnatural or dangerous. Anal sex is a natural, safe form of eroticism. Care should be taken if engaging in this form of sexual stimulation because the anal tissues are delicate and tear more easily than vaginal tissues. Lots of lubrication should be used because the anus doesn't self-lubricate. It is a good idea to practice relaxing anal sphincter muscles before anal penetration the first time. The external sphincter muscles are voluntary control, but the inner muscles are involuntary and will constrict if forced or rushed.

### **Is it Actually Dirty?**

As a society with Puritan beliefs, we weren't taught to have sexual pleasure. In fact, we were taught that self control is better than self expression and women in particular, shouldn't engage in sex for pleasure. Good girls have sex-for-procreation and bad girls have sex for fun and no one masturbates. It is surprising how often those antiquated ideas prevail in the twenty-first century.

Don't put your mirror away just yet.

Now that you know how you look, it's time to explore what feels good. The best way to make that discovery is through masturbation. Gasp! Never before has any form of sex been so denigrated. A truth your parents never told you is simply that self-stimulation, or masturbation, has a lot of good points. It's fun. It's easy. It's relaxing and it's available to everyone regardless of their age or sexual orientation. It's a great way to get rid of a tension head-ache. It's a great sleeping pill.

Masturbation is a healthy way for women to learn about their own sexual response and to satisfy sexual feeling. Masturbation is a good way for a woman

to understand her own sexuality, because it is not something that will be learned from a male lover. Okay, before I get a bunch of emails from guys reading this eBook, let me say that I'm sure there have been many men who have enlightened their female lovers and those women are fortunate to have encountered these men. However, to be safe, most women shouldn't depend on this method. It is not surprising that many women have been sexually active for years with male lovers but have never experienced orgasm, especially during intercourse. This definitely reinforces the importance of a woman being in touch with her own body and sexual response.

**Margo tells me, "I have been with Ron for almost fourteen years and the only way I can orgasm is through masturbation. Ron has pounded away for hours and I have never had a so-called vaginal orgasm."**

**Tiffany says, "I have never had an orgasm. I'm not married, but I have had a lot of partners. Most of the guys really try, but sometimes they just don't get it. There should be a book teaching guys how to please women. But, I am afraid of offending them, so I fake orgasms all the time."**

We will accept that more men than women masturbate and if you haven't done it before, you may be uncertain how to go about it. You know where your genitals are as a result of your exploration with the hand-held mirror. Masturbation is the next natural step in your self exploration. When you were examining yourself, was there anything that felt good as you touched it? Try massaging that same spot again. I will be more specific.

### **The Time and the Place and the Mood**

The first step to masturbating is to be relaxed and have a few distractions as possible. Think of this as your personal time. Wait for the baby to be napping, take the phone off the hook, lock the door and spend some quality time with yourself. I'm aware that this is not always easy as it sounds, especially if

you have older kids and a husband, but I really can't stress enough how important it is to try to find time. Please remember, taking time for yourself is not being selfish and is not something you should feel guilty about. Everyone needs to take some time away from the routine and pressures of the outside world once in a while.

Set aside at least an hour of time for your experiments. Although masturbation is the easiest way to discover your orgasmic preferences, if you stimulate yourself for ten minutes or so and don't feel anything special, you may be allowing negative feelings about masturbation to inhibit your activities. Try to remember that this time is for you and you are not going to "ruin" yourself and be unable to enjoy intercourse with your partner.

Masturbation is cool because you don't have to worry about your physical appearance when you get sexually aroused. You don't have to worry if it is taking you too long to get aroused or worry that your partner may get bored if you don't get going faster.

Since your brain is the largest sex organ in your body, it is helpful to be in a good sexual state of mind. When you are with someone, taste, smell, sounds all contribute to your arousal, but when you are making love to yourself, you have to set the mood yourself. You may want to think about a particularly pleasing sexual encounter or read an erotic story or two. Having some erotic pictures may help. Most people have a vague idea of things that turn them on and if yours is pictures of penises, then get some pictures of penises. If you like steamy stories, then have some unread or some favorite stories handy. If looking at erotic videos gets you aroused, then watch some videos. Remember everyone is different and what works for one person may not work for another.

Finding the time may be difficult. Finding a place is the next problem. I will tell you a secret. Everyone has a safe haven in their home: the bathroom. It has a nice long tub for you to lie in, but more importantly, it has a lock. Light some candles or leave the main light on. Take a glass of champagne in there with you. Take a book of erotic stories. The warm water will relax you. The candles, champagne, and the book set the mood. You are ready!

If you are fortunate, you have a very good masturbation tool in the showerhead. If not, a pair of hands will work.

While lying in a tub full of relaxing warm water, remember your tour of your genitals and do some more exploration. Just taking two fingers and rubbing the clitoral shaft will produce some delightful results. While rubbing your clitoris with one hand, try massaging your nipples with the other. The connection between those two anatomical parts is incredible. Keep massaging until you get that I-can't-stand-another-minute feeling. Whatever you do, don't stop massaging once the orgasm begins. Nothing is quite as frustrating as an interrupted orgasm.

Barbara says, "I use the shower massage. I put it on pulse and hold it so the water squirts onto my clitoris. I can usually come in about a minute. If I want more, then I just keep the shower massage squirting and I can orgasm a second time really quickly."

Sharon says, "I have a water proof vibrator. The combination of the vibrator and the shower massage is great!"

Ashley says, "My first orgasm was while I was masturbating. I had been married for a while and had been faking orgasms the whole time. When I started masturbating, I finally learned a lot about my body and what really feels good. It took a lot of experimenting in the bathroom, but I have a better sex-life with my husband."

Maybe you don't know if you have had an orgasm. Masturbation is a great way to find out how you orgasm. Have you suddenly stopped masturbating because you somehow feel relaxed and satisfied? Did you feel a rising in sexual tension followed by a sensation of release or relaxation? If so, you are probably having orgasms. If you have your finger in your vagina and feel the muscles contracting, you are most certainly having an orgasm. If your clitoris becomes unbearably sensitive after a feeling of warmth or release, you are experiencing another sign

of orgasm. While pelvic muscle contractions, feelings of warmth, clitoral tenderness or hypersensitivity are signs of an orgasm, if you have a relaxed, finished feeling, then you have experienced orgasm.

Another location option is the bedroom. Again, you have a ready-made multitude of tools at your disposal to help you with your goal. For instance, most bedrooms contain a mirror, in many cases a full length one. All have pillows that can help with positions; most have drawers or closets for stashing lubricant, sex toys and erotic books.

Both of these rooms are great choices for your private time and you can add lots of mood setters. For instance, change to your favorite bed linens, put your favorite soothing music in the CD player, light some candles. Find an environment that you can really be comfortable in. The truth is the more time you put into the preparation the more you'll get out of the experience. Preparation will also make you look forward to what's coming. I find the anticipation of spending time alone with me is sometimes half the fun.

So, the linens are fresh, the door is locked, candles are lit and now you're wondering what the hell to do next.

Many of the techniques listed are tried and tested, however it's important to remember that none of them are guaranteed. Everyone is different so, what works for one woman may not work for another. The secret here is to lie back take the time to get in touch with your own body. As I have stated, getting comfortable with your own body is an important first step to a better sex life and masturbation can aid in this.

Remember your genitalia tour? Let's take that a step further. In your bedroom, you probably have a full length mirror or at least a mirror over the dresser. Stand in front of it. Slowly begin to undress and watch each part of your body as it's revealed to you. Once you are completely undressed, begin to caress your body, still watching yourself in the mirror. Begin massaging your neck and then slowly begin to move your hands down your body towards your breasts. Keep doing this and take it slowly, step by step and you will find that you will become more comfortable with not only how your body looks, but also how it feels. Caress your belly, your buttocks, your

thighs. You may even discover erogenous zones you didn't even know you had. This is a time for gentle exploration and getting to know you a little better. This is your time, so there is no pressure and no reason to wonder if what you are doing is right. If it feels good to you then you're doing it right is the general rule of thumb when it comes to self-love.

Once you are very comfortable with your body and the way it looks, let's have a look at some different masturbation techniques that will work to help you orgasm. As stated before, the majority of women can only attain orgasm through manual stimulation. Here are some techniques that might add a little variety to your masturbation play.

- **Direct clitoral stimulation:** For this technique you need to place your thumb and forefinger around the clitoris and gently roll it in between your fingers. You can start off with a slow gentle roll and then gradually pick up speed and the pressure according to what feels good to you.
- **Tapping:** This technique is a little different and it's not for everyone, as with anything some things will work for some people and not for others. For this one use one hand to pull the labia back out of the way so that the clitoris is very exposed. Then with an index finger on your other hand lightly begin tapping the fingertip gently on the clitoris. It results in a sensation that builds to a point where you just can't hold back your orgasm any longer.
- **Combination:** Have your fingers from one hand playing with your clitoris, stimulating it however you wish. Take the other hand and place two or three fingers inside your vagina and begin thrusting. Basically you're simulating intercourse with this action and it works rather nicely in tandem with the clitoral stimulation and can bring you to orgasm!
- **Running Water:** Almost everyone has put their hands under the flowing water when they're filling the bathtub to check the water's temperature. Now, just imagine that same water flow landing on your clitoris. It is a fantastic feeling. The only thing you need for this one is some time and a bathtub. Hopefully

your bathtub will be shaped properly so that you can slide your bottom down against the end of the tub and position yourself so that the water flow will land on your clitoris. It's best to start off with a lighter water flow and gradually work up to a higher pressure flow. Be sure to check the water temperature before beginning your experiment. You don't want to get scalded. As you get more experience, varying the water temperature can bring delightful results.

- **Water Spray:** This one is just a bit of a variation on the one above. In this instance just place your thumb or finger over the faucet and then direct the spray so that it falls directly on your clitoris.
- **Shower Massage:** This is great if you've got one of those Shower Massage devices because you can pick whether it pulses or comes out in a steady spray. There are many options. You'll have to experiment with them to see what works best for you. Again, you can adjust the pressure and temperature of the spray to whatever you'd like them to be. I've found on occasion that using cold water produces a different feeling than the warm water.
- **Vibrators:** Vibrators are primarily used for clitoral stimulation but can also be used vaginally or anally if you prefer. You can try different combinations to see which you prefer. Vibrators are great for clitoral control since you can change alter the speed of the vibration easily and bring yourself to the edge and then slow it down again. Pressure is a key factor as well. You may also want to try rubbing the vibrator over your inner thighs and around your labia and even up over your nipples. Masturbation doesn't have to be confined to just the clitoral area. Vibrators can different sizes and colors. They can be insertable, clitoral, hands-free, or water proof.
- **Dildos:** Dildos offer a variety of possibilities. They can be used as a penis substitute, causing you to feel full when using them. They come in a variety of sizes for the vagina and another array that can be used as anal plugs. (I suggest anal plugs after you have been masturbating

for awhile.) You can use fresh produce from your refrigerator as a dildo.

- **Oil:** Using massage oil will lubricate your erogenous zones. When your clitoris, vagina, and labia are really slippery, new sensations are created.
- Try changing positions as you practice some of these suggested techniques. Try sitting, standing, squatting or laying on your belly as well as your back.
- Masturbation doesn't have to be done alone. You and your partner can masturbate each other or both of you can masturbate yourselves at the same time. You are only limited by your imagination!

The key here is to have fun and become comfortable with your own body and the feelings it can produce as you explore it. This is a way of learning to communicate with yourself, get in touch with your sexual side without fear of rejection or getting it wrong because remember there's no wrongs here. Being comfortable with your body is the first and most important step you will take on this journey of sexual discovery.

Even if you have studied the history of masturbation and you have carefully read and understand what is in this book, you still may be guilt-ridden about masturbating. Most people who are touchy or sheepish about masturbation are laboring under a stereotype: Masturbation isn't real sex.

Maybe people feel that sex doesn't count unless two people are involved. Maybe you think masturbation is only acceptable if you are exploring your sexuality so that you can report your discoveries to your lover. Maybe you think it is shameful to touch your own genitals. It is no more shameful to touch your genitals than it is to touch your arms, to feel how the skin feels under your fingers, to feel how silky and soft it is. If you are dealing with any of the issues, make every effort to confront them and deal with them, head on. You'll ultimately be happier.

Cathy Winks says in her book, *Sexy Mamas*, "If you are feeling sexual excitement, stimulating your genitals, arousing your senses and striving for the delicious release of orgasm, you are having sex. It

doesn't matter if there is nobody, one lover, two lovers, or a crowd of spectators in the room with you. (The crowd of spectators is a great fantasy enhancer.)" Please keep in mind, masturbation is a life long pleasure.

Before ending this section, I would like to point out an important fact: Not everyone has a problem with their sexuality after the birth of their child.

Lisa says, "After my baby was born, I was totally empowered and suddenly, I couldn't get enough sex from my husband. He loves it, of course."

Gina tells me, "I have never felt more like a woman than after I had a baby. It was like the most womanly thing I have ever done."

## Chapter Four

### Communication

#### You're Dying to Tell Someone

Where are we? You've had the baby, you are too tired for sex or you think you aren't worthy, you have taken a tour of your body and discovered it's not so bad even with dark circles under your eyes or stretch marks, and you've learned to masturbate so you can find out more about your own sexuality. You've got the knowledge, so what do you do with it?

Talking about masturbation is still one of the most unmentionable subjects, even among intimate partners. Many masturbate, but few talk about it. But, you've just had the greatest orgasm, ever. Who can you tell? The key to this is learning to communicate with your partner and then you will find that you can talk about everything, including masturbation.

Ellen Kreidman, in her book, *Is the Sex After Kids?* said, "If I want to know how good a couple's sex life is, I ask them about how well they communicate." A man and woman who spend quality time talking to each other every day are more likely to have a close sexual relationship than a couple who rarely discuss anything beyond what bills need to be paid and whose turn it is to take out the trash.

Real communication is more difficult than most people realize. It isn't because we aren't willing to communicate, but rather we don't know how. Few of us learned to communicate from our parents. In fact the messages that most of us received was that children's opinions do not matter. If your childhood was anything like mine, my early attempts to communicate were stifled. If you don't fall into this category, consider yourself very fortunate. What seems to have happened to most people is your parents were too busy to talk to you. Maybe they shooed you out of the room when it was time to discuss a family difficulty like a financial problem. Maybe they thought you weren't able to understand. Chances are they were trying to protect you. Through experience, many children learn to just keep their thoughts to themselves.

Jackie says, "The old story of children should be seen and not heard was the way I was raised. My Dad lost his job and we didn't have any money. I knew there was something wrong with my Mom and Dad, but they wouldn't tell me what it was. I thought it was something I did wrong. Maybe if they had just told me they were in trouble, I could have helped in some way... a lemonade stand on the sidewalk, or mowing lawns or baby sitting or just something."

Regardless of the reason, if you can't communicate now, this doesn't mean that all hope is lost. Communication can be learned.

Think back to the beginning of your relationship. You and your partner likely spent a lot of time just talking to each other. The subject didn't matter and nor did it matter how late it got. Your relationship was young and you wanted to be connected to your partner more than anything else. You wanted to know everything. You would go on a date and then spend hours on the phone after the date was over. When you weren't together, you spent a lot of time and energy planning what you would talk about. Something would happen in your day and you would unconsciously think, "I need to tell my boyfriend about that." Not just good things, but bad things, too. There was no limit to the things in your life you wanted to share.

Now, are your conversations something like this one?

"Why don't we talk any more?"

"What do you want to talk about?"

"I have to take a shower."

"Anything that comes up, I guess."

If you have similar conversations, or what I like to call non-conversations, then you and your partner have serious communication difficulties. If communication is thorny outside the bedroom, then imagine how close to impossible it will be in the bedroom.

## Let's Learn to Communicate

Here is something you may not have considered: The most selfish creature on Earth is a new born baby. The baby is only interested in their own care and comfort. They want to be warm, full of food, free from pain, dry and adored. When one of those things is wrong, the baby will cry to let the mother know there is a problem and one (or more) of those five basic human needs must be fixed. It is a survival instinct. The infant has no thought of “Well, I had better not cry right now because Mom is tired and she needs a nap.” In fact, most children will not nurture thoughts of that nature for many years. Some people never learn it.

So, we start out being extraordinarily self-centered and we have to unlearn that behavior. A toddler will still scream when the world isn't as comfortable as they would like. When a child is in school, that behavior will alter somewhat, but a child will still blame their problems on someone else. “Bobby made me drop my book!” Everything is still about them. As parents, we begin to change that behavior by responding to “Bobby made me drop my book,” by saying something like, “Bobby didn't make you drop the book. You did it yourself.” If this scenario is reinforced every time it occurs, then we learn to start taking responsibility for our actions.

What happens if we don't get that reinforcement? Too many times, this is carried over into adulthood because we were not taught a different way of dealing with life.

Imagine this conversation:

“When you walk into the house and just plop in front of the TV, you hurt me.”

“You hurt me when you totally ignore me when I come home. You wouldn't even notice if I'm not here.”

“You don't care about me.”

“You don't care about anything except the baby. Isn't there room for me in your life?”

*Solution:* Even though you may have had this conversation at one time or another, you can see some of the flaws in reasoning and you realize that maybe

this is not the best approach. One of the first steps to good communication is to change your tactics. Stop laying blame and pointing fingers by saying, “You hurt me.” That makes the other person responsible for the way you feel. If you were to say, “I am hurting,” then it becomes your responsibility and also opens the doors to communication. Your partner will be far more interested in learning why you are hurting than listening to accusations.

*Solution:* Suppose you have been home with the baby all day, you feel overwhelmed by all the things that need to be done and discouraged because you didn't get a chance to clean up, it is far better to say, “I have had a really bad day and I would really appreciate your help in the kitchen this evening.” However, if you attack the moment your partner comes home with “You never help me out around here,” you will not get much accomplished, except he will feel anger toward your unjustified, in his opinion, accusation. He is likely to reply with “If you had a real job, you would understand that I'm tired and I want to relax. You don't know what it's like! I wish I had your job.” Then, of course, in defense of yourself and your busy schedule, you reply in kind. “You don't know what it's like having a screaming baby and a filthy house to contend with all day!”

*Solution:* On the other side of the coin, suppose you have been at work all day and you were stressed by your job and you want to come home and relax. You walk in the door and your partner is in the room with the baby, and she barely notices you are home. If you attack and say, “All you care about is the baby and you never pay attention to me,” she will feel anger and resentment. Try telling her, “I had a rough day at work, but mostly, I missed you. I would love for you to meet me at the door and give me a big hug after a day like today.”

Every person has likes and dislikes. Unfortunately, we tend to do things the way we were taught. Our parents would tell us to “Go clean your room,” rather than saying “I would like you to clean your room and then we can work on your homework together.” Issuing a command worked on a child because they looked at their parents as the authority figure. But, as adults, you can't tell your partner to “Take out the trash,” and expect a favorable response. “Honey, when you get a chance can you take the trash out,” makes

it a request instead of a demand. Most people will respond favorably to a request and follow through. As soon as your partner feels the time is right—there is a commercial on the TV, or they have reached the end of the chapter in the book they are reading, or the bad guys are all finally dead in the video game they are playing—they will get up and take out the trash.

It was not unusual for parents to completely ignore a child's request. "I don't like peas. Do I have to eat them?" "That is what I made for dinner, so eat it! I'm not running a restaurant." And if we ask why we have to eat peas, the pat answer was frequently, "Because I said, so." There isn't much communication going on. However, if that is what we learned as children, we really don't know any other way to convey our message. "Why did you make peas for dinner? I hate peas." "If you don't like it, you make dinner next time."

As adults when we try to establish a relationship with our partner, too often we fall into the patterns we learned as children. Most people tend to criticize, blame, threaten, order about, or call each other names when we try to voice an opinion about why we are unhappy. It seems we hop in a time machine and take a trip back to first grade. Then we are actually surprised when we don't get the reaction we are hoping for. If you think about your own responses, you may find that you act in a negative way if you are approached in a negative way. And if you approach your partner in a negative way, they will respond negatively. It is the nature of humans.

Here are a few points to ponder. Do any of these statements sound like you and your partner?

- If someone blames, we tend to get defensive and return the blame. "You never take out the trash!" "Well, you never pick the dirty clothes up off the floor!"
- If someone criticizes, we tend to point finger and criticize right back. "You never mop the kitchen floor." "Is that right? You never clean the tooth paste out of the bathroom sink!"
- If we are threatened, we tend to threaten right back. "If you don't get this place cleaned up, I'm sending you back to your mother." "My mother? I'm sending YOU back to YOURS until you can learn to treat me like an adult."

- How do you react to belittling? "You're such a loser!" "You're a worthless jerk!"
- Or how about orders? "I told you to clean that up!" "You're not my mother. Clean it yourself."

*Solution:* Approaching these same issues a little bit differently will make all the difference. I think most would agree that these are better choices.

- "Let me help you with the dishes and we can get it done much faster."
- "I think it would be more pleasant for me if you would clean the toothpaste out of the bathroom sink."
- "Can you get this trash out for me when you get a chance?"
- "Can you help me pick up these clothes that we left on the floor?"
- "How about we both work on cleaning up for a few minutes?"
- "It makes me sad when I feel like I am the only one doing things around here."

### **Sending and Receiving Messages**

"The first part of good communication is sending a message and the second part of good communication is receiving the message." (Kreidman, 1993)

There is a 180° of difference between hearing and listening. Anything with two ears can hear. You can be watching TV, listening to the stereo, or playing a video game and hear that someone else is talking. Focusing isn't necessary to just hear noises beyond the TV. Listening, on the other hand, means your brain and your heart should be involved and not just your ears. To truly listen, you have to concentrate. It takes effort. You have to be focused in a way that is impossible with distractions all around you.

Have you ever been caught when your partner says, "Are you listening to me?" and you reply "Sure" without turning off the TV or putting down your book? Then your spouse replies with, "Then, tell me what I just said." Oops. Now, you're in trouble.

Becky says, “Sometimes I wanted to take the joy stick out of my husband’s hand and toss it out the window. He never wanted to talk to me. He just wanted to shoot aliens.”

Allan says, “I tried to get my wife to talk to me and she would just keep on doing what she was doing just like I didn’t say a word. You get frustrated with that.”

*Solution:* You love your partner and if your partner is ready to communicate with you, the kindest, most loving thing you can do is to turn off the TV, stop vacuuming the carpet, or turn off the video game. Your partner deserves 100% of your attention. You may even suggest:

“Let’s get comfortable on the couch so you can tell me what’s on your mind.”

“Can this wait until the baby is asleep? That way we won’t have any distractions.”

“I would really like to discuss some things with you. Can we go for a walk so we can talk?”

By doing these things or making these suggestions, you are telling your partner that you are really interested in what they have to say. You are conveying the message that their feelings are important to you. You are telling them that they are an interesting person. After all, isn’t it true that your partner is more important than a TV show? Isn’t it true that your partner’s feelings are more important than your own?

### **The Communication Problem**

One of the greatest disservices many parents do to their children is never allowing them to express negative feelings, such as anger, fear or sadness. In fact, most of us were taught that all of these feelings are unacceptable, so why would be caught expressing these feelings? From the first time a parent tells a child to “Stop crying,” those children get the idea that crying is wrong. This is my favorite: “Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.” What a strange double standard that is. In a perfect world, a parent

would tell the child, “It is okay to cry. Can you tell me why you are crying?” How about this one? “Stop having a temper tantrum.” You are telling the child that being angry is wrong. Perhaps telling your child, “Calm down a bit and we can talk about why you are angry.” This one is classic: “Don’t be a sissy. There are no monsters under the bed.” This teaches us that fearing something, real or imagined, is silly. A better approach may be: “Why don’t we put a night light in your room so things won’t seem so scary when you’re in here and alone.”

Because we were taught to suppress these negative emotions most people feel uncomfortable when a person near us or one we are close to feels anger, fear or sadness. Put quite simply, we can’t handle it. It is a two sided coin. At the same time, when we are taught to suppress negative feelings, our positive feelings get suppressed, too. That means we find it nearly impossible to show joy, happiness, and love.

I would like to insert a thought here. There are no REAL negative or positive feelings. Feelings are not good or bad. They just are. I use the term negative and positive, not as a value judgment, but as a reference. Putting a label on feeling inhibits communication as effectively as other factors.

Good communication skills do not mean that you will always know exactly what to say or how to say it. It means you may stumble over your words, or even say things you don’t really mean. But isn’t it good to know that if your partner really understands you, they can help you to say what you mean to say. An understanding heart listens carefully, doesn’t judge or ridicule, and tries, with all their heart, to understand your meaning. (Kreidman, 1993)

Here is an interesting point to ponder: Most of the time, when your partner confides in you or tells you their inner most feelings, they aren’t looking for a solution to their problems, but rather, they simply want a sympathetic ear. This is a difficult concept for some people, particularly men, to understand. Before you guys start sending me a bunch of email telling me that I don’t know anything about guys, I will tell you one of the deepest of women’s secrets, but one that is very important to learn. When a woman gets particularly emotional and cries and seems to be unreasonable and inconsolable, at least for that moment, what she really

wants is a man who will hold her and just be there until the fit is over. I want all the guys to read that sentence again. There is nothing worse to a woman than having the person she loves more than anyone else in the world to say to her:

“Why do you have to be so emotional?”

“You shouldn’t feel that way.”

“There’s nothing to worry about.”

“You really are negative.”

“Lighten up, it’s not the end of the world.”

*Solution:* You will be a much better communicator if you remember that when your partner or your children come to you with a problem, they don’t want solutions. They want love and understanding. I realize it is in a man’s nature to fix the problem and that will be a difficult one for many men to work on. But, the rewards are many if you can put it into practice.

Good communication is the key to any relationship you have, whether it is with friends, lovers, relatives or children. Good communication is very hard work. It requires courage, empathy and lots of practice. When faced with the challenge of communicating about sex, the task is even more difficult. Sex is subject that has been unmentionable for most of our lives. Even so, sustaining an intimate relationship requires that you learn to not only communicate effectively but that you listen carefully.

### **Don’t Be Afraid of Talking About Sex**

A survey conducted by Phillip and Lorna Sarrel, sex therapists at Yale University, concluded that good communication is one of the most important factors in a satisfying sexual relationship. The findings are interesting. Seven out of ten women surveyed indicated that those who told their partners what they liked and how they liked to be touched during sex had an orgasm nearly every time they made love. The couples who were good communicators had intercourse more often and were more likely to be satisfied with the frequency. (Sarrel, 1980)

You may argue, “People talk about sex all the time.” We see sex in advertising because sex sells more than

just sexy underwear or tight fitting jeans. Everything from cars, to perfume, to jewelry to houses are sold through sexy advertising. The headlines on the check-out line periodicals have one story after another having to do with sex. “Celebrity is Having Sex With the Nanny” or “We Never Had Sex” or “I had Sex With an Alien.” We listen to news reports about sex offenders in our neighborhoods. There are talk shows where you can call in and discuss sex with a perfect stranger on the TV. But the difference is, if you listen carefully, they are discussing sex in either a very dry clinical fashion or with almost near hysterical emotion. The missing factor is expressions of genuine sexual feeling.

Sex is all around us, but have you taken the time to tell your partner what about them really turns you on? In a strange contrast, as a society, we are assaulted by sex every day in a hundred different ways, but as an individual we are intimidated by it. How did this happen? A number of factors are involved from sexual stereotypes—good girls don’t do it, boys like sex and girls like romance, sex is only for reproductive necessity or a hedonistic delight—to sexual repression by religious leaders, to inadequate sex education in the schools.

Even with Hollywood’s depiction of perfect sex every time in the movies distorts our thinking on the subject. No one stops to discuss contraception or personal safety. “Hey, how about putting on a condom before we start this” or “You don’t have any STDs do you?” When was the last time you saw someone on the big screen say, “Put your leg here and move a little slower and don’t forget to massage my left breast while you’re at it.”

In romance novels, sex is perfect all the time. We don’t even stop to think that the action in the book is simply the author’s fantasy of a perfect sexual encounter. This distorts our thinking as much as anything else. What about the exciting sexual exploits found in men’s magazines? Few people realize that the adventures described in the magazines rarely happen in reality. In X-rated movies, the girl is always willing and never feels bad. The couple hops on top of each other and go for it, anytime day or night. This is the writer or the director’s imagination at work and not the way things really are. The conclusion we can get from this is: We can’t depend on the movies to

teach us anything.

In fact, we don't even have very good role models in those closest to us.

Rhoda says, "My mom thought she was telling me about sex, but she didn't. She told me about menstruation when I was about eight and only succeeded in scaring me half to death. She never told me about dating or kissing or holding hands. She never told me about making love. She was too embarrassed."

*Solution:* Inadequate sex education effects your sexual communication in another basic way. If your sexual anatomy is a mystery or your own sexual responses are simply something you only dream about, then understandably, you will have difficulty in telling your partner what you want. Learn about your body and learn to love your body and you will find it much easier to tell your partner what you want them to do to make you feel good.

Misinformation plays a big role.

Megan says, "How many of your girl friends in school thought you could get pregnant just by kissing a boy? I remember one girl who thought she knew much more than the rest of us in seventh grade, who said, "Kissing doesn't get you pregnant. The boy has to pee on you, down there." She was a little closer to the truth, but all of us squealed and screamed and thought it was gross."

Misinformation, thinking sex is dirty, lack of good sex education have all stifled our ability to discuss sex openly and honestly with the one person we are closest to: our sexual partner.

Holly says, "I felt really bad because I didn't have orgasm during intercourse. I thought there was something wrong with me. Because I thought there was something wrong, I was scared to talk to my husband about it."

Holly is a typical example of the persistent myth that clitoral orgasms are immature and vaginal orgasms are indicative of a mature sexual response. Although Freud advanced psychoanalysis tremendously, he was responsible for decades of people, mostly women, feeling badly about themselves. This misinformation created such fear that many women, like Holly, were too afraid to admit there was a problem because they feared they may be "crazy."

Casey says, "One of my old lovers asked me if massaging my clitoris was the only way I could orgasm. When I told him yes, he said, "That's too bad." I was like, shocked. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is incredible that thinking like that is still around."

Another huge barrier to sexual communication is fear. Frequently, fear will create a silent atmosphere. We are afraid of displeasing, insulting, hurting, threatening or alarming our partners. We are also afraid of being embarrassed or worse, being rejected. So many times, in the beginning of a relationship, we simply keep our mouths shut and don't complain or request anything.

*Solution:* Yes, it is true that discussing sex can cause deep emotions to surface that neither one of you enjoy. But, if you don't overcome this barrier, you will never get past the impasse you and your partner have created for yourselves. The best advice I can give you is to be brave and take the risk. Come on! You can do it! Communicate!

That being said, the next question will be, how do you communicate about sex? Some take the non-verbal approach, but that one has inherent risks because your actions can be misunderstood.

### *Sandy and Rhonda's Story*

Rhonda loved to have her breasts kissed, tickled, caressed or sucked on. So rather than telling Sandy that she wanted him to suck on her breasts or to kiss her breasts, she would do to Sandy what she wanted him to do to her. She would linger over his nipples, kissing, sucking and licking them.

It seemed the more she kissed his nipples or caressed his chest, the less he did it to her. It took several months, but she finally asked him why he didn't kiss her breasts any more. Sandy hated to have her kissing his nipples because it was irritating to him rather than feeling good, so to show her he disliked the attention there, he stopped kissing or fondling her breasts. After their exchange of information, they were both much happier. Rhonda left Sandy's chest alone and he spent a more time, fondling, kissing, sucking and caressing her.

As stated before, it is particularly difficult for someone to discuss their sexual preferences at the beginning of a relationship. At that stage, people feel too vulnerable or they feel as if they are opening themselves up to ridicule. Feeling safe with your partner takes time.

*Solution:* As difficult as it may be, discussing sexual likes and dislikes very early in a relationship will have many positive benefits. By letting your partner know early in your relationship what you enjoy will prevent negative habits from forming. When two people are in the honeymoon stage of their relationship, everything tends to feel good. We become more discriminating as time moves on. If we don't tell our partner what we want and what works for us, then we are allowing our partner to think everything they are doing is fine.

This is important to understand if you are faking orgasm. Many woman fake orgasm because they don't want their partner to feel inadequate or they are afraid their partner will think they can't satisfy her sexually. By faking orgasm, you are teaching your partner what doesn't work for you. Then, if you finally discuss your lovemaking, your partner may find it difficult to trust you after that. You may find that he is angry or he feels foolish because he thought he was satisfying you when he wasn't.

**Aaron says, "I thought for two years that I was pleasing Marie and then she finally told me she had been faking orgasm all that time. I was like dumbfounded. She should have been honest right from the beginning. My ego isn't that fragile. I really love Marie but when we have sex now, I can't help wondering, is she faking**

**again?"**

You have to remember that your partner is as unique as you are and sometimes, our approach is completely wrong for the person we are with.

**Janice says, "I used to tell my husband exactly what I liked or didn't like when we were having sex. After a few months of marriage, he finally told me, he didn't like the way I 'ordered him about' in bed, so I learned to make suggestions in a much gentler way."**

All these two scenarios tell us is communication is a delicate dance, especially when we are talking about our sexual preferences.

*Solution:* A good way to break the ice is to ask your partner how they prefer to communicate about sexual matters. Do they like non-verbal communication? Do they like to talk about it during sex? Do they like to talk about sex afterward? Do they prefer talking about what is going to happen before hand? When communicating about sex with an eye to pleasing your partner, it is almost always received well. Let's face it; the more you get out of sex, the more you will want to have sex.

In her book, *Shared Intimacies: Candid Discussions about Women, Sex, and Relationships*, Lonnie Barbach talks about communication. "Many men I've talked with have confessed that they learned to talk about sex from a female lover and remain indebted to her. Some of these men said that if it hadn't been for a particular woman, they might never have known what a woman liked sexually. These men were often too shy or too afraid of their lover's response to ask her directly, and they appreciated her willingness to take the lead."

If you are with a partner who is shy, ladies, don't automatically write him off as being hopeless or that he will never be able to tell you what he likes. Try not to let his shyness intimidate you. Try not to be self-conscious. Experiment with different communication tactics until you find the one that works the best. Sometimes becoming comfortable with someone takes time, but continued practice will make communication easier.

## Communication isn't as Easy as it Sounds

You understand there is a problem in your relationship and you may have taken the time to identify the specific problem, but you still don't know exactly how to change what you're doing. You have taken an incredibly huge step: You've made a request for a change in your sexual relationship. You stumbled and stuttered and finally got the words out, hoping your partner will be receptive and actually listen carefully to what you're saying. However, don't be surprised if your partner is less than receptive.

Initiating a sexual conversation after you've been in a relationship for a long while isn't easy. You have a level of trust with your partner, but many ingrained patterns and barriers may also exist. Altering a long term relationship often requires a lot of patience. It will take work to change ingrained habits.

*Solution:* Again, the key requirement is communication. With all the classes we take in school it is really a shame that they don't teach anyone how to communicate on an intimate sexual level. I have a couple of ideas to get you started. First, tell your partner you are afraid if you tell them what's on your mind you're afraid they will be angry. That will diffuse the situation right from the beginning. Even if your partner does get angry, they are less likely to fly off the handle. If you feel they may get angry and don't say so, you may unconsciously brace yourself for a negative reaction and communicate that non-verbally to your partner. Don't throw in the towel too soon. Be patient if the reaction isn't the one you wanted. If you give up too quickly, you will set yourself up to be a martyr and you will successfully create another problem in your relationship.

## Chapter Five

### Intimacy

#### What is the Real Problem?

**B**ack to the issue involving your life with your new baby and your partner...

Many new mothers tell me that their greatest complaint is a lack of time. With every moment of every day accounted for, the intangibles, like communication and intimacy fall by the way side. There is a simple solution. Plan to talk about sex. Whether your goal is to talk about sex in general so that you're more comfortable with this type of discussion or if you have specific issues to cover, you and your partner will benefit from advance planning. Pick a time that is convenient for both of you. It is probably not wise to corner your partner by saying, "Honey, there are some issues we need to discuss concerning our sex life, because I am totally miserable." It will work much better to say, "Honey, can we set aside some time this evening to talk about our sex life?"

If you have issues you wish to discuss, especially if you are frustrated or disappointed, then setting aside a specific time will give you an opportunity to think about what you're going to say and not get caught up in the emotion of the moment.

When the time comes for your sex talk, stick to the subject. Don't switch to other frustrations, like whose turn it is to take out the trash.

Do your best to figure out what the real problem is. It may take a day or two for you to dig into this and what you are truly feeling. Saying, "I am just not interested in sex," is simply reporting a symptom and not talking about the problem. Why are you not interested in sex? There are many possibilities. These are only a few cited by some of my clients:

- Perhaps you feel overly tired from taking care of your new baby
- Perhaps you don't feel attractive
- You may receive so much emotional satisfaction from caring for your baby that

you don't feel the need for intimacy with your partner and without intimacy, many women don't want to have sex

- You feel anger because you feel as if you are doing all the work caring for the baby
- You don't have time for sex
- Perhaps you feel as if your priorities have changed—you have gone from being self-oriented to baby-oriented.

Take time to think about. Think about what bothers you the most. This will help you to stay on track. Once you have pinpointed exactly what your particular issue is, you are ready to talk to your partner. You open your mouth to start the discussion and nothing comes out. Now, what? Obviously there are still some barriers, there.

#### Let Me Count the Ways...

**E**very person will experience sexual peaks and valleys at various times in our lives. There will be times when you can't get enough sex and times when you could care less. Being new parents will bring a multitude of challenges to the table, but keeping your partnered sex life alive is vital because it is too easy to lose that momentum. You will hear people say, "It's just like riding a bicycle. You never forget." While that is a true statement, what if that bicycle suddenly seems like it is on a high tension electrical wire?

Tracey says, "It's been so long since we did anything I am really scared that I will screw it up. We got out of the habit of having regular sex and all those fears I had before are back, with a vengeance."

Some barriers to sexual intimacy sometimes have very deep roots. A woman who was abused sexually or was severely sexually repressed may have problems in her adult life.

Bonnie says, "My husband and I are still really close, we just don't have sex."

Physical and sexual intimacy are two different things. Couples can be close and intimate without

having actual sexual contact. Hand holding in public, spooning in the bed all night long has their own rewards, but this kind of intimacy can distract you, as a couple, from sexual intimacy. In fact, it is easier to not have sex in your relationship because hand holding and spooning do not require the same level of self-disclosure and risk as a true sexual encounter.

Shelley says, “My husband and I are both really shy. We had to really work on intimacy in a hundred little ways to get over being incredibly sexually shy. We talked dirty to each other, we read erotic stories to each other, and we forced ourselves to touch and to endure touch of our genitals. Gradually we overcame our shyness.”

### **This is Normal?**

Patricia says, “Everything I’ve read about low sexual desire says it’s ‘Normal,’ but there isn’t any kind of solution to the problem mentioned. It’s great to know that I’m normal but I want to get back in the bed with some really good sex.”

OK. Your libido has gone on vacation, but that doesn’t mean you have to sit and wait for it to come back again. There are things you can do to end that vacation now.

*Solution:* First, stop dwelling on what you should be doing or who you should have for a partner. Instead, listen to what your body and your imagination are telling you. This isn’t easy to do because there are always people around who will try to tell you how your life should be. You hear it on the television, in women’s magazines, in mother’s magazines, from your friends, from your parents. You are the person you have to please. I will repeat that for emphasis. You are the only person you have to please.

*Solution:* As a new mom, you probably have a list of self-improvements you are determined to make: Everything from going to the gym three times a week, to eating properly, to getting in bed by 10 pm. And while these are great suggestions and I would never

tell anyone not to do any of these things, why not add masturbation to the list? In fact, I dare you to post it on the fridge with your other “To Do” lists. Masturbation is the single best way to stay connected to your own sexuality.

*Solution:* Whether you’re single or partnered, if your sex drive is low, masturbation is a low pressure solution. I know I sound like I’m a stuck record, but masturbation is the best way to keep you in touch with your body. It has only been in the past 25 years or so that people have admitted that masturbation is healthy and normal

Sarah says, “Even when my sex life is great, I never stopped flying solo. In fact, it seemed to boost my sexual energy rather than draining it away.”

### **Where Did All the Desire Go?**

You’ve gotten in touch with your own sexuality, you’ve gotten over some of the anxieties that happened after you had your baby, you’ve made a personal commitment to begin communicating with your spouse, but something is still wrong. You don’t feel as connected to your partner as you once did. You don’t feel close or intimate. Don’t let the red flags start waving, yet. You’re still normal.

Jeff says, “After the baby was born, my wife just forgot I was here. I felt like she didn’t love me any more and she didn’t need me because I gave her a baby and now, my job was finished. I don’t want to be my wife’s “stud.”

Brian says, “Sex? What is sex? Oh, yeah. It’s that thing that we used to do before the baby.”

Jeremy says, “I just want to be close to her again. She is very affectionate with the baby, but I am left out. I hate it. I hate coming home from work to see how happy she is with the baby. I want her to be happy with me, too.”

The number one problem that American couples have

is inhibited sexual desire. The second most common problem is sexual desire discrepancy. Contrary to what you may have heard, it's not the couples who have been together for twenty years that have these problems and they are not my focus. I am mainly concerned with couples whose desire levels have changed as a result of having a new baby in the house.

### **What is Intimacy?**

Intimacy comes in two parts: emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy.

In essence, intimacy is feeling emotionally close to someone. You can have emotionally close relationships to friends, brothers and sisters, parents, mentors and children. But it is the special feeling of oneness and being connected that defines intimacy between married people. In a marriage, a lack of intimacy can drain away feelings of love. Many things can diminish intimacy from sexual problems to an extra-marital affair. Regaining lost intimacy is one of the key factors in repairing a damaged relationship.

Solution: I am not saying it is easy to do, but it can be done. Many times couples will need the help and guidance of a counselor or trained sex therapist to get them back on the right track. Seeing a therapist early rather than later is the most beneficial. You have a lot of time and energy invested in your relationship with your partner and calling it quits should never be the first choice. As soon as you suspect a change in your relationship is the time to seek counseling. However, if you have waiting until you have many unresolved issues in our relationship, it is never too late to begin fixing what is wrong.

### **Emotional Intimacy**

**W**hy do people get married or decide to live together in an intimate relationship? Because their parents did? Because they think they are supposed to? Actually, most people get married so they can experience that feeling of oneness and intimacy. What is this intimacy that people seem to want so much? The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines intimacy as the fact or condition of being intimate, a close acquaintance, closeness, a familiar or intimate act, familiarity, and a euphemism for sexual relations.

Intimacy has been used by so many people to mean so many different things, the real meaning is all but lost. Real intimacy involves the entire range of individual feelings between two people. It means sharing everything, from fears, faults, unhappy experiences, and vulnerabilities to joys, strengths, and talents. An intimate couple shares their deepest feelings with each other. All of their feelings are involved including love, anger, joy, closeness, disappointment. Intimacy is at the center of a relationship. It goes hand in hand with respect and trust. Without these three elements, a marriage is unstable and weak.

**Carolina says, "When my husband had an affair, I lost trust in him. Without trust, I didn't feel close to him and I lost all my respect for him. Learning to rebuild all of that will be the hardest thing I will ever have to do. It is better to never lose it to begin with."**

There is another difficulty couples may have. Sometimes one or the other is afraid to become intimate with their partner because they fear a loss of individualism. This can cause severe problems in a relationship because if you are overly protective of your personal boundaries, then you are incapable of feeling close or of sharing your life. If this is your particular issue, please read this next sentence carefully. *True intimacy doesn't involve a loss of self.* It means always having the freedom to express feelings without fear of reprisal. It means you are enhanced because of the close connection and complete acceptance by your partner. The good, the bad and everything in between aren't obstacles for an intimate couple. A truly intimate couple accepts differences in opinions, ideas, likes and dislikes, attitudes, and beliefs. They accept that they don't have to always agree because each person has a right to individual thoughts and feelings.

**Lynnette says, "I totally love Jim, but he won't let me get close to him. I give him his space, but it never seems like enough for him. If I am totally leaving him alone, then that isn't a real relationship at all, but just something**

in my head. I don't think there will ever be a solution to this problem. I will have to settle for crumbs or move along."

Justine says, "Once my partner and I realized that we could be together and still be individuals with our own likes and dislikes, we were much happier. I used to think that being connected and intimate with him meant I would lose myself as a person and as an individual. I was totally wrong. Together, we are better than we ever were alone."

True intimacy allows for individualisms within the partnership. You are free to say what feel and you still feel loved. You are free to have opinions, quirks, weaknesses, as well as strengths and talents in many areas. A truly intimate couple will support each other, regardless. That doesn't mean they always agree. It means they have enough strength in their relationship to disagree and still love and be loved, but more importantly, we can be accepted totally for who we are.

Is this one of your goals? It will take some time, patience and work for both of you. True intimacy doesn't happen overnight. This can be achieved if you realize that every conversation, every moment, every encounter the pair of you have will bring you closer together. Every time you have sex, you be will be brought closer together.

### **Intimacy is Not Just Intercourse?**

**H**umans can have sex without any intimacy involved. If you ever had a one-night stand, you know what I mean. If you have ever had sex because you were angry, you know what I mean. You can be sexually responsive in these circumstances, but there is little or no intimacy involved. Sexual intimacy involves so much more than just touching genitals. Sharing all of yourself, from deep feelings to your physical self is the essence of sexual intimacy.

Increasing intimacy is not about more intercourse. You have to be aware of the many dimensions of intimacy. Many times, inhibited sexual desire is an

intimacy problem. Each person wants a different level of emotional intimacy. Couples find their own levels. Some couples prefer the best friend scenario with a lot of closeness. Some couples prefer only a moderate amount of closeness. Still others prefer a scenario where personal boundaries are strong and even others will adopt an emotionally expressive scenario, where there are periods of great closeness and periods of anger and distance.

Peggy says, "My husband is my best friend. There is nothing I won't tell him. We became very close in early in our relationship and we haven't lost that."

Michelle says, "My guy and I aren't really that close, but it works for us. He is really into hunting and fishing and I am into painting. We go on camping trips together but rarely see each other because he is trying to kill something and I am painting forest scenes. When he talks about hunting, I am totally lost and when I talk about painting, he gets this blank look on his face."

Tanya says, "We have separate bedrooms and we meet in one or the other if we want to have sex. When sex is over, he goes to his room and I get a good night's sleep."

Kelly says, "We fight a lot, but the make up sex is great! It almost makes the fighting worth the effort."

Sexuality is one way to express intimacy, but certainly not the only way. Sharing thoughts and feelings, being affectionate, cuddling on the couch, disclosing hopes and fears, sharing lives as trusted, respectful friends is the core of intimacy.

### **The Sensual Side of Intimacy**

**S**ensuality and non-demand pleasuring are the basis of broad-based sexuality. Sensuality involves pleasure-oriented touching—body massage, taking

showers or baths together, kissing, playful touching while clothed or semi-clothed. Touching is valuable by itself, taking place beyond the bedroom and beyond intercourse. A hug may lead to kissing and a deeper sexual encounter, but it doesn't have to. Being "in touch" with your partner is just as likely to involve a casual touch on the shoulder to intercourse. Touch is a way to stay connected and to feel connected to your partner.

Ryan says, "I love to just pat her arm when we pass in the hallway or while we are waiting in line at the grocery store."

Betty says, "He makes me feel special when he puts his arm around my waist or when his fingers lightly touch my hand when he wants to get my attention."

*Solution:* Remember, intimacy is a couple thing, not an individual thing. If you have lost your intimacy or you want to establish a new level of intimacy, then engaging in sensual touching is the foundation of re-establishing intimacy. Touch is so important in a relationship I have devoted the entire next chapter to the subject of touching.

## Chapter Six

### No Intercourse Intimate Touching

If I were to use the phrase “no intercourse intimate touching” what would it mean to you? Think about it for a moment. Simply stated, no intercourse intimate touching, sometimes called non-demand pleasuring, is a form of sexuality where the couple lovingly touches each other without that touch necessarily leading to intercourse. When a couple is trying to regain some lost intimacy, it is important to remember that sexuality is a mutual experience. It is important for couples to learn that not every intimate touch leads to intercourse. Sexuality is best when both partners feel free to initiate affection. Of equal importance is knowing that it is okay to say no without having to suffer any consequences as a result.

The two researchers, Masters and Johnson, are sometimes thought of as the pioneers of modern sexuality. These two first introduced non-demand pleasuring as a solution to many sexual difficulties from men with erectile dysfunction to women with orgasmic problems. Prior to William Masters and Virginia Johnson’s findings, long sessions of psychoanalysis were used to determine the underlying causes of sexual dysfunction. These sessions were arduous and frequently did nothing to cure the problem, further frustrating the individual and/or the couple involved. The Masters and Johnson Technique of non-demand pleasuring or, no intercourse intimate touching, was received with open arms as a groundbreaking solution.

No intercourse intimate touching exercises are meant to be a separate experience from intercourse or traditional sex. When teaching a couple to regain their lost intimacy, sometimes one of the first exercises I suggest is for the couple to refrain from intercourse for a specified period of time, making them realize that not every touch has to lead to intercourse. No intercourse intimate touching exercises helps the couple to reconnect better than many other techniques. By removing the goal of intercourse in their sexuality, the couple learns a far greater range of sensual feelings and possibilities. When intercourse is the goal of every sexual encounter, many times couple tends to have a “let’s hurry up and get this over with,”

attitude. While quickies have their place, if that is the only sex the couple is having, they are not deepening their intimacy. This is what no intercourse intimate touching is all about: helping you, as a couple, to become connected and intimate, again. When you remove the pressure of feeling like you have to have intercourse every time you touch each other, then many of the disruptions are removed that caused your sexual difficulties to begin with.

A very common response to my suggestion that the couple place a temporary ban on intercourse is a negative one.

**Daniel says, “Why would I want to try something this stupid? I’m not getting enough sex now, so why would I want to agree to something that guarantees that sex won’t happen?”**

**Becky says, “My husband would never agree to this. I’m not sure I like it, either. I mean, sure, I’m not totally into sex now, but what happens if that changes?”**

It is important to understand that when I make the suggestion to disallow intercourse to my clients, it is always a very temporary measure and never meant to be permanent. The ban on intercourse is just until the two, as a couple, learn other ways to be intimate and connected. In response to men like Daniel who don’t want a prohibition on sexual intercourse, I would ask him, “If you aren’t getting sex now, how is this going to be different from your current situation. In fact, it will actually help you.” He will likely remind me that if there is a prohibition on intercourse, then that means absolutely no sex, whereas he may get lucky without the ban. Then, I can tell him that no intercourse intimate touching is sex, too. That bears repeating for emphasis. No intercourse intimate touching is sex as much as intercourse is sex.

This is an important fact to remember. Sex is more than intercourse. Most people mean intercourse when they say the word sex and I realize that. Many people don’t realize that no intercourse intimate touching is very, very sexual, too. Read on to find out more!

## What do You Mean, No Intercourse Allowed?

Touching is a very basic human need. Every human, from the moment we are born, require touch to thrive. Touching is at the heart of sexual reaction. In marriages that experience declining sex, touching each other declines at the same rate. I'm not talking about just intimate touching, but affectionate touching, too. Those little pats on the arm, a gentle squeeze of the thigh when you're in the car together, hand holding before sleeping.

Caressing is a more intimate touch. I can't stress enough the great value of sensual caressing for pleasure alone, without it leading to intercourse. It is an important step to increased intimacy and ultimately sex that sizzles once again. This sensual caressing, which is the same thing as non-demand pleasuring, is a mutual experience that both of you will enjoy. Hand holding, kissing, hugging are affectionate forms of pleasuring each other. Massage, cuddling on the couch, spooning at night, cuddling in the bed in the morning, and showering together are forms of sensual pleasure. All forms of touching have tremendous worth in re-establishing lost intimacy.

Even though men don't really come from Mars and women from Venus, men and women do think differently and they communicate differently. To give you an example: When a man wants a hug, he initiates intercourse. When a woman wants intercourse, she initiates a hug. Is it surprising that we give each other mixed signals? When sexual desire declines, especially after the baby is born, maybe the woman simply needs a hug, but she grows afraid to ask for it or to initiate it because her partner may misinterpret the gesture and think she wants intercourse. When she stops hugging him, he begins to think she doesn't desire him any longer.

Linda says, "I needed to be held and reassured, but every time I tried to just hug my husband, he took that to mean I wanted sex. So, I stopped hugging him. Now, he thinks I hate him or something."

Krystal says, "Why does every touch

have to lead to intercourse? I can't touch my husband at all without him thinking he is going to get lucky."

Harry says, "She was so distant and so busy that when she hugged me, I thought, "Finally! I get a break and we are going to have sex!" I know she is busy with the baby, but is having sex once in a while too much to ask?"

## No Intercourse Intimate Touching Exercises

### Sensual Caressing

It is important for couples to reconnect if they have fallen into the habit of not touching and not being in touch with each other. It is so important, I am going to tell you exactly how to do this so you can start today. The first step is to always establish the ground rules. Tell your partner what you want to do and why. Make sure he agrees to join you. Don't know what to say to him? How about something like, "Honey, we have drifted apart and I would really like to get reconnected to you. Why don't we try this technique I read about in Toni Parker's book? It's called Sensual Caressing." If he doesn't agree immediately, don't be discouraged. He may need to take a little time to think about it. He may want more information and ask some questions. Take that as a positive sign. Remember, if a couple has been together for a while, certain patterns and behaviors are already established and it may take some time and patience to introduce new ideas into your relationship.

The very first exercise is a simple one. It is simply a sensuous caressing exercise. Make sure you have at least an hour for this exercise. Be certain the baby is fed and asleep, take the phone off the hook, lock the door. Do whatever you need to do to ensure you will have at least a full hour of privacy.

To begin this, the woman will caress the man, first. You will switch roles, later.

This is sensual caressing and not a massage, so you need to keep your touch very light. Massage can actually desensitize the skin, whereas sensual

caressing will activate and excite the nerve endings. Think of your partner's body as being very tender and delicate and even a slightly hard touch will severely bruise him. His body is a work of art for you love and enjoy, but never damage.

This is a time for you both to be relaxed and comfortable. The room's temperature should be warm so you won't get chilled during the exercise. Take a few minutes to make the room romantic. Light a few candles and put on some very quiet sensual music. Try music that is soothing like New Age music or Classical. Avoid anything with a driving heavy base beat. When you have your environment ready, then both of you should take off your clothes and then lie together on the bed. From this point on, maintain physical contact during the whole exercise, even when changing positions.

Lying close together, take a few moments to breathe deeply and to relax. Women, when you are ready to begin, sit beside him in a comfortable position, so that you can see his entire body. Now, ask him what he wants massaged, his face, his hands or his feet. Remember, you will get your turn in a few minutes and you will find this is as pleasurable for you as it is for him. When you first begin this exercise, because you are out of practice of being in touch with your partner, you may feel anxious or uncomfortable. Don't stop because of it. Both of you can hold each other until you feel comfortable enough to continue your non-demand pleasuring. Once you are completely comfortable with his body, then you can switch roles.

### **Come On and Touch Me, Babe**

The first time you try this exercise, it is a good idea to begin with the hand caress. Hands are more accessible than other parts of the body and while caressing his hand, you will both relax and get into the fun of the exercise. Choose a position where you are both facing each other. That is usually the most comfortable position for this exercise. Guys, while she is caressing your hand, allow it to remain limp and relaxed. Girls, begin by picking up one of his hands. Do not let go until you are ready to move onto the other hand. Use your entire hand to caress his hand: the palm, the fingers, the top, the bottom. Explore everything about

your lover's hand, noticing the texture of the skin, the shape of the fingernails, and the pattern of veins on the back of his hand. Use slow circular motions to very lightly touch the skin. This sensation will be delightful for both of you.

Once you both get more comfortable with the hand caress, it is good for you both to close your eyes and enjoy the way the caress feels. Closed eyes will allow you both to concentrate more fully on the exercise. Additionally, there will be fewer distractions and you can focus better on simply feeling and experiencing.

Spend at least five minutes on each of his hands, lovingly touching and exploring. When you have finished with one hand, just hold onto his hand for a few minutes and then move onto the other hand. Take your time. Enjoy the moment. There is no need to race through the exercise. Five minutes per hand is just a suggestion. Take as much time as you want, but remember that too much caressing can become irritating. Too little caressing and you will lose the desired effect. Practice will teach you how much is too much or too little.

### **Caressing Feet**

One of the most relaxing exercises you will do is a sensual foot massage. Because it is so relaxing, you may want to save this one for last. This exercise will begin with you washing your partner's feet. If you have decided to take turns, you will need several towels, enough soap, lotion, oil or powder for both of you. You don't want to stop in the middle of the exercise to run and get the lotion, so gather everything ahead of time. You will also need two buckets, or tubs of water. A foot massage, or pedicure tub works particularly well in this case, but is not necessary. These are available in many department stores and are not very expensive. As before, take time to set a romantic atmosphere with maybe some candles and some soothing music.

Fill two buckets or tubs with warm water, one for washing and one for rinsing. The water should be a few degrees above body temperature for the best results. If the water is too hot, it will be uncomfortable. Add a few drops of water softener to the warm water to give it a wonderful fragrance and to

give the water a soft, sensual texture.

Both of you sit in a chair, facing each other with the wash bucket on the floor between you. Place his feet into the water for a few seconds. Lift one of his feet and then slowly and carefully wash it with soap. Keep it wet and slippery as you wash all of the tiny crevasses and niches you find. When you have thoroughly washed one foot, place it back in the water and pick up the other one. Repeat the process. If you put a towel in your lap for his foot to rest on, you won't have to stop and rinse your thighs before going on to the next step.

Once you have washed each foot, put a clean towel in your lap and lift the first foot out of the water. Lather it again, feeling the way the soap feels on his foot. Enjoy the moment. Before the soap gets sticky, put his foot into the rinsing bowl and then lift the other foot from the washing tub. Repeat the process with the second foot. When both are washed and rinsed, move the wash tub aside and then take one of his feet out of the rinse water. Wrap it completely in a towel. Do the same for the other foot. Take a moment to move the rinse tub, so it won't be in the way for this exercise.

Lift one foot into your lap and dry it thoroughly, making sure you dry between the toes. Then lavish it with oil or lotion or powder. Repeat with his other foot.

Put the heel of one of his feet on your thigh so you can easily reach the top and the bottom of the foot. Hold his foot in your hands for a few moments to warm it and then begin rubbing his feet. To relax his foot, start with the lower leg and rub downward towards his feet. Then, very gently, in little circles, lightly caress from the heel to the bottoms of his toes. Use all of your hand to caress his foot. Pay particular attention to his toes, caressing each one and between his toes, too. If your partner isn't too ticklish, use very light feather-like strokes or use your fingernails to create wonderful sensations as you caress his feet. Also, he may be ticklish in the beginning, but try returning to the very light touch after a few minutes and he may be less ticklish, at that time.

When you have finished with one foot, go on to the second foot and repeat what you just did to his first

foot.

If you or your partner has extremely ticklish feet, you can try to desensitize them by going barefooted as often as possible. Being ticklish on your feet or anywhere else, for that matter, may be a defense on your part to avoid deep sensual feelings. Being ticklish allows you to avoid touch that may turn sexual.

## The Face Massage

A face massage is very relaxing and it is also very arousing. To begin this exercise, get into a comfortable position so that you will be able to have full access to your partner's face. Putting a pillow in your lap to give him something to relax comfortably on is a good idea. Don't worry if he is clean shaven or not because whiskers can actually add a dimension of sensation for both of you. If he wears contacts, it is a good idea to remove them before hand. Make sure you have a back support. If you are in the bed, lean against the head board so your back and neck won't get stressed. That also allows him to stretch out, comfortably.

Make sure he keeps his eyes closed. You should watch what you are doing until you get thoroughly familiar with your partner's face.

Begin by holding his face between your hands for a few moments. Then gently drag your fingers over his face, up into his scalp, and around his ears. Starting with the forehead, lightly use your thumbs to stroke from the center of his forehead outward toward his temples. Gradually move downward, caressing his eyebrows and very, very lightly caress his eyelids and eye lashes. If you have used lubricant, be sure you avoid caressing the eye area. For this exercise, it may be better to eliminate that part so you can completely massage his face. Gently touch his nose and across his cheeks, keeping up the movement from center to outside. Move downward toward his lips. Trace the outline of his lips and softly caress them. Caress his chin, allowing your fingers to light drag across his jaw line. Caress his neck, using upward strokes from the bottom of his neck toward his jaw. Move your hands upward and explore his ears. Feel the lobes, the tops and folds of skin on the outsides of his ears. Never

put your fingers inside his ears.

Finish by lightly resting your hands on his face for a few seconds and the very slowly move them away from his face.

When you finish each of these exercises, take time to talk about what you felt from a giver's point of view and from the receiver's point of view. Was there something you particularly enjoyed? Was there something that was uncomfortable? What were your feelings while the caressing was going on? Men should be very careful when they are caressing because they tend to have a rougher touch than a woman. Guys, you need to pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you are using so as not to cause her any pain or discomfort. This is supposed to be fun and a sensual exploration and not a form of torture. If either gets too rough, it is okay to ask them to be gentler. If you are tensed up from pain, then you will not enjoy the sensual massage.

### **A Sensual Shower**

Following is a fun, more advanced exercise. This should be used after simpler, gentler techniques have been mastered. Remember this exercise is not foreplay, leading to intercourse. This exercise is a technique for a couple to get in touch with each other without the demand for sex getting in the way. For this exercise, there is a prohibition on orgasm.

Take a shower together. I know that is simple to say, but I am suggesting really getting into showering or bathing together. Treat it as something special and not just a way to get clean. It can be a very sensuous activity. In the shower, try different water temperatures and different settings on the shower head. In the bath, use bubble bath or a new bath oil. Look at your partner. Gently take your fingers and trace the outline of muscles on the shoulders, chest and back. Don't do a rigorous massage, but rather tender kneading and caressing. Remember, this is a sensual exploration. Ask your partner to face you and look into his eyes. Eye contact will make you feel closer to each other and help you to develop trust.

Soap his neck and chest. Move downward to his stomach, taking your time, as if this is the most

important thing you have to do. Soap and touch. Don't forget the genitals. They are part of his body. The focus is not stimulation and arousal, but exploration and pleasure. Soap and touch his legs, his hips, his buttocks.

Now switch roles. The man should make sure he treats your breasts and vulva like any other body part. While he is massaging, soaping and touching, be aware of what feels good and what is particularly sensual.

Rinse each other, making sure all the soap is off the skin.

Drying each other is another sensual treat. Take your time and don't rub the skin too hard. Now is a good time to really look at each other and to note two or three things about your partner you really like. Is it his eyes? His hands? His chest? His shoulders? His legs?

Go to the bedroom without putting on clothes. Pleasuring is best done while you both are nude. Low light is good, but leave enough lights on so that you can see each other. Candles are a nice touch. (You can have candles in the bathroom while you're showering or bathing together, too, by the way.) To enhance the atmosphere, put on your favorite music making sure it is playing softly in the background. Different colors of candles add nice effects to the room. A red or blue light bulb in the lamp may be a nice thing to try.

Starting with a giving-receiving format is a good idea. In this scenario the woman will give and the man will receive, first. Later, you will switch roles.

As the receiver, his job is to do three things. First, is to be passive and simply receive pleasure. Second is to keep his eyes closed and focus only on what he is feeling. Third, is to be aware of what types of touch are pleasurable.

Begin by looking at his body, carefully, noting all the wonderful things about it: The texture of his skin and the color, the contours of the muscles under the skin, and the shape and design of his body. Appreciate it for the artwork it is. Don't try to second guess him. Rather, touch the parts you want to touch. Trace the

contours of his face with your fingers. Count his ribs without tickling him. How does he react when you caress his stomach? This is your opportunity to touch simply for the pleasure of touching. Don't be distracted by irritations of the day, past hurts or power struggles. Just enjoy the moment.

While he is lying there with his eyes closed and he is becoming more relaxed with your touching him, note how he looks in relaxation. Does he have an erection? This is an important fact: His erection is a sign of his pleasure.

### **Don't Point That Thing at Me**

**W**omen have been trained to see a man's erection as a demand for sex. It is a common myth that when a man has an erection that the woman must do something. She has to have intercourse with him or at least bring him to orgasm. It is interesting that the man feels the same way. He is trained to think that an erection must lead to orgasm and he rushes into intercourse even if he doesn't really want to have sex. In this touching exercise, no intercourse or orgasm is allowed, so you both need to accept that his erect penis is the result of him experiencing pleasure. During a thirty minute pleasuring exercise, his erection may wax and wane several times. This is a natural physiological response to pleasure and not a demand for sexual intercourse.

While you are touching him, don't be afraid to touch his penis. Make note of the different parts of it, the color, the shape. Treat it like any other part of his body.

Ok, guys, it's your turn to touch her. Without second-guessing her, just touch her where you want to touch her. Vary your pressure and your rhythm. Pay attention to all her body parts and not just her breasts and her vulva. Keep in mind that breasts are sometimes sensitive, so be careful not to touch her too hard there. The difference between pleasurable touching and irritation is sometimes just the pressure you touch with. Men, especially, have to be conscious of how hard you touch because men naturally have a heavier hand than women. The object is to touch her, giving her pleasure from your touch without irritating or hurting her.

If at any point, she gets uncomfortable or there is pain, stop what you're doing, but continue to hold her until she relaxes.

End this exercise by holding each other, experiencing the warmth and the closeness and the intimacy. Share your feelings with each other. What did you both learn from this intimate time together? Is one time enough or would you benefit from repeated non-demand pleasuring experiences? Is there something you would change? What was most pleasurable for you, being the giver or the receiver? Do you want more kissing? Do you prefer playfulness or slow and sensual touches?

The value of no intercourse intimate touching cannot be stressed enough. Non-demand pleasuring is a shared pleasure, it reinforces the intimate bonds you have with your partner, and it is a great tension reducer. You should repeat these exercises as often as necessary until both partners feel comfortable with the sensual side of touching as an exercise by itself and not as a prelude to sexual intercourse. Only when can you enjoy just the sensual massage should you begin using it as a prelude to intercourse.

The two of you must agree on the "rules" before you start. Many men don't like the idea of not being permitted intercourse as a natural finish. This is normal and you girls should expect a little initial resistance. Patience will prevail.

**James says, "I'm willing to give anything a try just so my wife and I can get back to the way we were before the baby was born."**

**Steve says, "Oh this stuff will be right up my wife's alley. She will love it because she won't have to have sex with me."**

Don't fall into the "Are we going to have intercourse or not," trap. Intercourse should be viewed as a valued option and not a demand or a necessary finale. Intercourse is a natural transition to pleasure and eroticism and not a test. Intercourse is a special pleasuring technique. Once the prohibition for intercourse has been lifted, both should understand that non-demand pleasuring can lead to intercourse but

it never has to lead to intercourse. When both people accept that it doesn't have to lead to intercourse, then you have a flexible style that prevents a relapse into the pattern of not having any intimate contact.

This is another caressing exercise you may want to try in addition to the hand, foot, face and showering massages. Remember to take things slowly. The best way to create a sensual, loving atmosphere is to move slowly and gently. You don't have to be in a hurry with any of these suggestions. Like the song says, use a "Slow Hand."

Take off your clothes and just lie close to each other, touching your bodies together, feeling the warmth of each other. When you are relaxed, one partner will sit beside the other. The still reclining partner will close their eyes during the entire exercise. Now, hold your hands just above your partner's skin allowing them to feel the warmth of your hands. Don't make physical contact. Just allow them to feel your heat. Then, place your hands on the same spot, gently resting them. Move to a nearby spot and do the same thing again. Hold your hands just above the skin for a minute or two and then gently touch the same area. Repeat this until you have covered many areas of your partner's body.

Next, add to this by telling your partner you are going to lift your hands and ask them to hold onto the memory of the sensation. When you lift your hands do so very, very, slowly and then give your partner a chance to really remember the feeling of your hands on their body before you move to another location. If you practice this touching technique, your partner may reach a point where they don't even realize you have lifted your hands from their body for up to a minute or so.

Cuddling in bed before sleep is non-demand pleasuring. If it transitions into intercourse, that is fine, as long as both look at intercourse as a choice and not a demand. If one of you gets aroused, request intercourse. As long as you both know it is just a request and that it is okay to say no, you both will feel good about yourself if one or the other declines.

Sometimes, women just want to cuddle. Sometimes women may want an erotic, no intercourse experience that may or may not culminate in orgasm. Sometimes

women will create the mood so that intercourse will occur. Other times, she goes along for the ride, knowing that intercourse is for him more than for her.

*Sex is pleasure. When sex becomes a demand, then the pleasure is gone for both partners and other negative emotions come into play.*

### ***Wallace and Cathy's Story***

When Wallace and Cathy finally came to my office, they were engaged in a power struggle of whose fault it was that they suffered from a low-sex marriage. They had been together for six years and their daughter was nearly a year old. Cathy wanted to plan for a second child because she didn't want to have her children too far apart and Wallace felt the only reason she wanted him around was for stud services. Because Cathy had been distant and not often willing to engage in sex since the birth of their daughter, this compounded Wallace's feelings of only being used as a stud when suddenly she wanted to have sex so she could get pregnant again. Wallace withdrew sexually. Cathy reminded him that they agreed to have two children before they were married and she attacked, feeling he had reneged on the deal.

**Wallace says, "After baby, she just wouldn't have sex with me. She avoided me. She was cold toward me."**

**Cathy says, "He was always demanding I give him sex, even if I was too tired. He didn't care about my feelings at all. Now, that I finally want sex from him so I can get pregnant, he won't come near me."**

Wallace and Cathy were not threatening divorce, however their sexual problems were weakening the marriage bond. Cathy wondered if she still loved Wallace and Wallace felt anger because their bedroom had become a battle ground. Cathy thought Wallace was irrational with regard to sex. Wallace was thinking that having an affair would be a way to get the affectionate sex he wanted.

**Solution:** The first step was to stop the cycle of blame

and guilt. It took several sessions to get through to them because they both had a lot to get off their chests. Once I convinced them to stop blaming and finger pointing, Wallace and Cathy had to begin to think of themselves as an intimate team that were working together to regain the closeness they had before the baby was born. Building marital sexuality would take a lot of communication and effort. It is never easy to rebuild lost sexuality. It is easier to prevent it in the first place. However, it was crucial that Wallace and Cathy approach the problem as a couple and not as individuals. They had to break the cycle of blame and of making it more important to point fingers at the bad guy than to solve the problem.

First the couple agreed to postpone pregnancy until their sexuality was re-established. Wallace was reluctant to agree to a cessation of sexual intercourse, but finally he recognized the reality of their situation. With the pressure of intercourse removed from the equation, Cathy and Wallace were free to explore touching as a means to regain their lost intimacy. Cathy was very enthusiastic about this approach because she finally admitted she missed the affection and the sharing of intimate feelings with her husband. Put quite simply, she was tired of fighting all the time.

Finally, there was a breakthrough when Wallace discovered Cathy wasn't punishing him by withholding sex from him. Her anxieties and inhibitions were real and not manipulative. Wallace also discovered that being an intimate spouse was better than being an angry, coercive person. When Cathy realized she could say no to Wallace and he would understand and not take it as a threat, her anxiety was greatly reduced.

Wallace and Cathy engaged in manual and oral stimulation and both realized that the rigid view of intercourse as being the only real sex was not true at all. At my suggestion, they began a study of Tantra Sex, and a whole new world was opened to them and they became much closer to each other as a result.

### **Sex Without Intercourse**

**A**s I have indicated, sex is so much more than intercourse.

People have been conditioned to think that sex is supposed to be a certain way. Again, my complaint about the media comes into play. Intercourse portrayed in movies, on TV, and in romance novels is not the way it really is. What we encounter is simply someone else's fantasy and unfortunately, we get caught up in that fantasy. Almost without knowing it, we often start to think that movie sex is the real world. Worse, we find ourselves thinking that intercourse is the only normal sex and all the rest is something else.

In our society, the word sex means the same thing as intercourse. What about fellatio? Or anal penetration? Or masturbation either with a partner or alone? What about dildoes? Vibrators? All of these things are examples of sex and are not just for foreplay.

**Muriel says, "After my baby was born, before I brought her home from the hospital, my doctor reminded me to refrain from sex until my next doctor's appointment. I wondered if she just meant intercourse or if she meant all forms of sex. My husband and I both love oral sex and I wondered if that is what my doctor meant. Maybe she didn't want me to orgasm. I didn't ask for a clarification because I didn't want her to think I was a sexual deviant."**

Is there some kind of conspiracy going on? I don't believe it is an organized effort in this county to reinforce the "intercourse is the only sex" idea, but the idea is certainly pervasive. It is not just intercourse that is considered normal, but a certain pattern must be followed. Anything beyond this pattern is not considered "normal" or else it is just a prelude to normal intercourse, as in foreplay. Even writing this can get boring really quickly. I get a mental image of a couple with a clip-board and a check list. Undress, check. Kiss for 15 seconds, check. Fondle her breasts and clitoris so she will get aroused, check. Get erection, check. Insert penis into vagina, check. Thrust for three minutes, check. Ejaculate, check. Bonus: Female orgasm, check, check.

We even have "helpers" to ensure that we achieve normal sex. Psychiatrists say, you have to be in love with your sexual partner and that love will automatically mean you desire them, sexually. Many

self-help books tell you to fantasize about whatever you can to stay aroused long enough to complete the sex act. Religions tell you that you should feel love, but not passion during intercourse. Women's talk shows tell you that men want sex more than women do and schools tell us since children can't have normal sex, they can't be sexual creatures. Movies and prime time commercial TV portray "normal" sex all the time and never ever anything beyond what America considers to be sex.

I am sure you've heard the old line that intercourse is the only real sex because it perpetuates the species and there are people who think that reproduction is the only reason to have sex. The fact is, over 98% of all intercourse in the United States is NOT for making babies. A further fact is, for most people, the possibility of intercourse leading to pregnancy is a drawback and not an exciting prospect. Today, sexual goals are very different than they were even as recent as 100 years ago. People want intimacy, connection, a feeling of competence, and a source of spiritual fulfillment. And still, there is a persistent idea that the word sex means intercourse. There is an unrelenting idea that sex for pleasure is dirty.

Now, let's talk about the spiritual side of sexuality.

### **Tantra and Tantric Sex**

Some time ago I started an individual study about tantrism. In my opinion it is a science really misunderstood by many so-called practitioners. Without claiming high expertise, I will attempt give you a few ideas that will help you to better understand Tantra and its purpose.

To give you a somewhat lofty definition: tantraism is one of the later Hindu or Buddhist scriptures dealing with techniques and rituals including meditative and sexual practices. I lifted that definition from the Merriam Webster Dictionary Online Version to help you understand a little better. The word Tantra, in Hindu, means *to weave*. So, Tantra is weaving or combining into a union. It weaves seemingly opposite forces of nature into one—male and female, yin and yang, light and dark—creating a passionate ecstatic union.

To understand the Tantric attitude toward sexuality requires a totally open mind and a reversal of perspective. Many of us hold to our puritanical mentality of seeing sexuality as a sin to be avoided. In order to fully embrace Tantra, we must first begin to view sexuality as a part of being a human as much as our personality is part of who we are. First, Tantric sexual union is a form of meditative discipline with deep spiritual effects. In other words, Tantric sex will have to be practiced before the couple can perfect the techniques. Whether through the Internet or from libraries and bookstores, a couple wishing to practice Tantra will find a wealth of knowledge available, from reproductions of the ancient scriptures to modern translations designed specifically for busy couples who are trying to get back in touch with each other.

For many people in America, Tantra is a buzzword, a quick identification symbol that means an interest in any sacred sexuality practice. Modern psycho-spiritual teachers tend to combine modern forms of psychotherapy with their version of "Tantric" practices. A slightly different slant, but still good information can be found in Deepak Chopra's new focus on the importance of integrating sex and spirit in his recent book *The Path To Love*. An Internet search will reveal many websites on the subject.

The American version of Tantra is designed to increase intimate communication, passion and pleasure for couples who choose to include and expand the love in their lives. It is a way to regain lost intimacy.

Before anyone writes me another series of nasty emails, I am not advocating anyone join a cult or move to a Tibetan Temple. The Tantra I'm advocating is two people getting in touch with each other on a deeply intimate level without having to wear a saffron robe.

A simple example of how to begin to reconnect with your partner with Tantra is the practice of eye gazing while toning. Sitting close together, bodies touching while facing each other, each participant looks directly into the eyes of the other, slowly and rhythmically breathing deeply together, exhaling a long sustained tone each time you exhale. Very relaxed, breathing and toning in this manner can go on for as long as is pleasurable. If you sit with your genitals touching, you can add an extra dimension to your eye-gazing and toning.

When beginning a practice of Tantra, a person makes the choice of directing the love thoughts they have each moment. What that means is to concentrate on your partner and how you feel about them and to not worry about who is supposed to take out the trash. This is a time for feeling love, only. *Tantra is a world of pleasure, shared adventures, bonded relationships, deeper intimacy and sensory delights.*

Sara says, “I am a 58 year old woman who first read about Tantric sex in 1962. It was not until 1975 that I met someone who wanted to try it. He had read about it, too, but neither of us had a teacher. It worked for us! It didn’t make us life-partners and it didn’t turn either of us into swinging singles, either. We did not join a religious cult. It did take us to spiritual vistas of sexual beauty and unity.”

John says, “In 1987, a life long friend said she wanted to try it (Tantra). We talked about it for thirty minutes and then we started eye-gazing, really getting connected before we had sex and it was a really spiritual experience. I haven’t see her very often since and I haven’t found anyone else who wants to try it.”

Remember to think about the wonderful body your partner has and how it is perfectly formed. Think about your partner’s eyes, nose, mouth, teeth and tongue. Think about the color and texture of their hair and their skin. Think about everything that makes your partner special. While looking into their eyes, try to see beyond the surface.

Listen carefully to their toning. You will find that your breathing will match theirs and your toning will compliment each other. You will begin moving closer together in a spiritual way. Once you feel you are fully joined with your partner, then you can proceed to other deeply intimate forms of contact that may or may not culminate in intercourse.

In strictly biological terms, the practice of Tantra becomes similar to the practice of biofeedback training. It is sort of like learning to pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time—it’s something you

have to work at, because the optional control of the muscles involved is not part of our usual training in life.

So where does the spiritual side come from? I believe is part of our neurological hard-wiring. Humans seem to be naturally outfitted to get in touch with the metaphysical world. Many ancient and ages-old techniques for getting in touch with the spiritual realm make use of repetition—of hymns, prayers, chants, dances—while engaging in single-minded attention to cosmic forces. Tantra provides both repetition and attention. It is not the only way to achieve spiritual ecstasy but it is one way, and that is good enough for me.

Another Tantric sex technique is called riding the wave and can either be practiced with a partner or while alone and masturbating. I will tell you more about this in a moment.

Before you can learn to ride the wave, you have to notice what your orgasm response is. Just pay attention to your own reactions a few times and pay attention to how your orgasm works. You might want to do this while masturbating, as it could prove distracting to a partner. Especially, notice that there is a moment at the beginning of orgasm when you are consciously aware that it is about to occur but it has not yet become unavoidable. That’s where you will later spend your time.

In the typical orgasm, in both males and females, there are 8 to 25 muscular contractions. Get to know how many contractions you experience.

Leslie says, “When I first started paying attention to my orgasms and the number of contractions, I discovered that my usual number is 18-20. It’s never fewer, but sometimes more, and that has not changed in 30 years.”

Now, try to let one or two contractions happen and then relax. If you can learn to let one or two waves of orgasmic contractions occur and then relax by breathing slowly, and being attentive, and relaxing your abdominal muscles, then you can learn to repeat this over and over again. Imagine yourself at the edge of a breaking wave of pleasure, not plunging over the edge. This technique is done specifically with relaxing and breathing and not with distracting yourself by

thinking of the Great Wall of China, for instance.

Once you've identified that one moment right before your orgasm, you can practice the next step with a partner or while masturbating. It's easier with a partner, because he or she can hold you at the wave-edge, gently changing what they are doing and thus slowing you from going into the stage of involuntary pelvic contractions.

While you are learning to ride the wave-edge, take turns with your partner. As one of you rides the wave of bliss, the other acts as a lookout, keeping the wave-rider from slipping into orgasm. When the wave-rider has had enough and relaxes, you trade roles. During the course of one sexual encounter, you may trade roles often. You may also rest and begin again later if you like. When you and your partner become attuned to one another, you will no longer think about who is riding the edge and who is guiding; the roles will blend and mesh and you will both simply be there. That is basically the secret teaching of Tantra.

According to many practitioners of Tantric Sex, the recommended time to achieve the ultimate spiritual experience is twenty minutes exchanging on and off waves between partners. Forty minutes will be pleasurable, but it will not produce the sought-after spiritual experience. Remember: This is time shared between the two of you. To perfect his technique so that it will only take a few seconds to switch from rider to look-out will take some time and some persistence, but the rewards are worth the effort.

Not everything works perfectly all the time. If either partner is drawn into orgasm, either by over-excitement or forgetfulness, neither should be alarmed, angry or distressed. It is important to remember that you have been close to the edge for a long time and it is very easy to lose that moment of control. If you are lookout and you see your partner slipping over the edge, why not dive in and join them or watch their pleasure from your calm vantage point and be happy for them. If one partner "fails" and is forgiven with tender kisses, then there will be no resentment or disappointment. Pleasure doesn't have an end. You have an endless supply and you can make the attempt again.

When you get good at these techniques, you may find you have achieved the satisfaction of an orgasm and

you will not necessarily want an orgasm or you may experience orgasmic reaction without the contractions. Still other couples will want to have an orgasm right now and finish the session with some quick hot sex.

What I am suggesting is strictly non-religious Tantric Sex. Now, here's the interesting part: these techniques are not simply a recipe for great sex. Believe it or not, you will have spiritual feelings while doing this.

I will give you a word of caution. If you are in a committed relationship and become interested in Tantric sex, you should be aware that your partner may not act favorably. Your partner may take your interest as evidence that you are disinterested in *normal* sex or may feel disapproving and his or her sexuality as not *good enough* for you. Be prepared to deal with these concerns patiently.

## Chapter Seven

### Desire as a Part of Sexual Functioning

The four parts of sexual functioning are desire, arousal, orgasm and satisfaction. *Desire* is positive anticipation and the feeling that you deserve sex. *Arousal* is being receptive and responsive to touching and genital stimulation. *Orgasm* is the pleasurable release of sexual energy and *satisfaction* is feeling bonded and connected to your partner after a sexual experience. (McCarthy, 2003)

When you are in a healthy sexual relationship, both people enjoy pleasure. In reality it is rare for both people in a relationship to feel the same desire at the same time. Normally, one is more into sex than the other and both learn to adjust to their partner's needs.

#### *Barbara and Ralph*

Barbara and Ralph have been married for five years. Of the two of them, she had lower sexual desire. After their twins were born, Barbara wanted sex even less. She declined sex and Ralph would get upset with her, feeling she didn't love him, or she found him unattractive. That wasn't the case at all. Like so many new mothers, Barbara was feeling the pressure of caring for twin boys.

Because she declined to have sex with Ralph so often, he began demanding she have sex with him. This caused her to withdraw from him even farther. They had lost their close connection and the intimacy they had once shared. Ralph began threatening divorce if she didn't have sex with him. She would capitulate sometimes, but afterward, she would feel resentful and very used. She felt like Ralph was the most insensitive person on Earth because he cared so little about her feelings.

When they came to my office, their lives were in shreds and divorce was looming large.

It was imperative to get the couple to talk to each other about what they were actually feeling. It came as a surprise to Barbara when Ralph said, "She hates me. She won't let me touch her. The only people she ever touches is our two sons. I thought it would stop after she finished nursing, but the twins are almost two and she still acts like she hates me."

Ralph was surprised to hear Barbara say, "When he demands I have sex with him, I don't feel romantic or close to him. I feel like I'm just doing my wifely duty. There is no pleasure in it for me. If he would let me choose the time and the place, then, I don't know. Maybe things would be different between us."

The two of them had never discussed their feelings with each other. Just knowing how the other felt was the first steps to their recovery.

Now, Barbara and Ralph laugh about the differences in desire between them. She often jokes that during sex she will say to her husband, "I think I will paint the ceiling beige," or my personal favorite, "Can you move a little to the left? I can't see David Letterman." This is, of course, exaggeration.

In this case, Barbara and Ralph have become comfortable with their sexual differences and when Barbara isn't in the mood, Ralph doesn't pressure her. As a result, she is more willing to have sex with him more often. It is not often enough in Ralph's opinion, but Barbara makes up for it. She does a hundred little things for Ralph every day to show him she loves him.

Barbara makes his breakfast every morning and sees to it he has money for lunch or else, she makes it for him. She sends "I love you," text messages to his phone. She leaves little scraps of paper with the words "I love you," all over the house.

The best thing she does for Ralph is four or five times a month, she gives him a sensual massage. (See Chapter 6) Sometimes the result is Barbara and Ralph have intercourse, which is what Ralph so deeply desires.

Ralph says, "It used to make me really angry when Barbara said no, but now, I take no with a grain of salt. I know if she isn't in the mood right that second, it doesn't mean she never will be again."

Barbara says, "When I tell Ralph I don't want to have sex, a lot of times we just hold each other. We even get naked and cuddle under the sheets. That's when I can get him to talk to me, too. You know, that intimate husband and wife stuff."

There is a myth floating about—this one along with about a hundred others—that every sexual encounter must end in orgasm. This idea has been propagated by movies, romance novels, and TV series. I know I have said this before, but it bears repeating. It is difficult to remember that in movies and on TV, there can be nearly endless retakes. Books often reflect an author’s particular fantasy of a perfect sexual encounter. Reality isn’t like that, at all. People sneeze, burp, pass gas, fail to orgasm, fall off the bed, and get tangled in the sheets. According to Barry McCarthy’s research, as many as 15% of all sexual encounters are mediocre, unsatisfying or fail completely. We are all human beings and none of us are sexual robots that get it right every time.

I asked some women in a group session to describe failed sexual encounters.

Cathy says, “I was with my then lover and was on top of him during intercourse. I got a terrible leg cramp, yelped in pain and he immediately lost his erection because he thought he had hurt me. He got up and got dressed. He was out of my apartment within three minutes. I didn’t mean to scare him that badly.”

Joanne says, “One night my husband and I thought it would be romantic to have sex in the bathroom. He tried to lift me onto the counter and threw his back out. We spent the evening in the emergency room instead in bed.”

Cindy says, “My husband takes it personally if I don’t orgasm. Sometimes he gets really angry about it. I wish someone would tell him that I enjoy being physically close to him and I don’t have to orgasm every time.”

Stella says, “Sex after chili dogs and beer is so bad because my husband and I are too busy farting to enjoy sex. I think we both need to be reminded of this about every three or four months because we keep trying it. The last time, we slept in the guest room because our bedroom smelled so bad.”

Here is another myth. Once romantic love is gone, the relationship is over. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Referring once again to the movies, we are shown that sex on the screen is explosive and passionate and totally uninhibited. That is a powerful message to send and unfortunately too many people get the idea that they are doing something “wrong.” Magical movie sex should be viewed as your favorite fantasy and not a sexual goal.

Initial attraction consists of romantic love. But you must be cautioned: Romantic love dwindles fairly quickly, seldom lasting beyond the first year in a relationship. It is unstable and isn’t designed to last. During this time, sexual energy is explosive and consuming. As the explosiveness ends, it is replaced by something deeper and more lasting. Lasting sexual desire is based on emotion and not chemistry.

Jon says: “I love that feeling I get when a relationship first begins. It is such a high! Better than drugs. But, that lasts only about 4 to 6 months and then it’s over for me, at least until the next relationship begins.”

Unfortunately Jon, like many other men, has never tried to venture onto the next step in any relationship because he assumes there is nothing after romantic love. If you believe this myth, perhaps reading this eBook will help you to understand there is far more to a relationship than romantic love. Having sex with someone you are truly connected to is better than romantic love. It is that special thing that happens that keep couples together after marriage, after babies are born and beyond. If you are stuck in the romantic love trap, your relationships will never last very long. How incredibly self defeating that is.

How about this myth: The way to rebuild desire is to reignite the sexual chemistry you felt in the beginning of your relationship. That cannot happen, even though movies, TV and romance novels lead us to believe it happens very single day. The key is building lasting desire by increasing your levels of intimacy, by performing non-demand pleasuring and/or creating erotic scenarios.

## Making Sex Sizzle

Desire is positive anticipation and the feeling that you deserve sex and it's the first step getting the sexual sizzle going again. Sexual desire is many different things. Desire is determined by surroundings, civilization, ideas, standards, mental factors, and bodily factors. Desire is different for every person. Sexual desire will fluctuate within a relationship at various times and during various circumstances.

This may seem like a conflict because we are talking about reconnecting or staying connected to your partner. Building anticipation doesn't have to be done as a couple. It can begin when you're alone, even hours before sex with your partner begins. For instance, men are generally very visual and may find their desire rising when they look at pictures of beautiful women in erotic clothes. Watching an erotic video falls into the same category. Sometimes, just seeing their partner undressed is enough to create desire in a man.

Women tend to be less visual, so reading an erotic story or a romance novel can get their desire to sizzle. What builds desire in most women is extended caressing and various forms of pleasuring to build an anticipation of sex. Put in simpler terms, this is what foreplay is.

I mention this at this time to reinforce the idea that you can regain your former enjoyment of sex, even if now it seems as if it will never happen or that you don't want it to happen. Having a baby doesn't mean an end to sex or sexual desire. The physical and emotional stress may curb desire for a short time, but it isn't and doesn't have to be permanent. Remember, you are a sexual being and you deserve to have sex.

*Solution:* Get into the habit of looking forward to sex instead of dreading it. Get into the habit of thinking that sex is going to be fun and exciting. Our culture has idealized romantic sex, making it seem as though spontaneous encounters, extremely passionate emotions, and being swept off your feet are the best sexual experiences of our lives. The real truth is, when you have a baby and a husband, spontaneity rarely happens.

**Margie says, "I used to use the excuse that we couldn't have sex because**

**the kids were a distraction. My husband sent the kids to his brother's house so we could have sex without interruptions. By getting a baby sitter, I found I really looked forward to having my husband all to myself. We returned the favor so my brother-in-law and his wife could have time alone, too. We have been doing this for the past fifteen years and we are both much happier couples."**

Don't ever allow your sexual encounters to become boring and routine. If you can predict your sexual encounters, then it's time for a change.

**Marcia says, "First thing in the morning, I get him going by giving him oral sex, for 7-10 minutes, then he gets on top of me for 5-6 minutes and is in the shower within four minutes after he orgasms. Predictable. It has become a morning routine, like brushing my teeth, and is almost as exciting."**

*Solution:* Knowing exactly what's going to happen doesn't nurture excitement or anticipation. Variety is the spice of life is an old and tired cliché, but it is still very, very true. Making a specific sexual request of your partner is a great way to enhance variety. For example, buy blank greeting card and write something you would like your spouse to do to you or for you in it. Put it in their lunch box or brief case so they can discover it during the day. Send a text message with your sexy request.

**Chelsea says, "I put notes in my husband's lunch box. Like, "When you get home from work, shower and put on those sexy blue boxer shorts that I love to touch." All day, I find myself thinking about those boxers and I am totally turned on by the time my husband gets home. I can't wait to get baby down for the night so he can strut around the living room with his silk boxers."**

*Solution:* You may be shy or feel silly at first, but making requests of your partner will get easier the more you do it. If one partner begins the practice,

the other will generally join in the fun. Also, this will get easier when you have improved your sexual communication with your partner. Many people begin by requesting their spouse act out some of their fantasies. For instance, a woman may fantasize about having sex with her gynecologist—he has seen more of her genitals than anyone besides possibly her husband and it's not unusual for a woman to fall a little bit “in love” with her gynecologist. She can act on this fantasy by having her husband put on a white lab coat and they can pretend she is in the doctor's office with her feet in the stirrups. A routine medical exam could turn into a sizzling sexual encounter you both will enjoy.

A common myth, brought on by our Puritanical roots is: All your sexual arousal has to come from only your spouse. The truth is, most sexual arousal comes from other places, such as erotic literature, sexy pictures, X-rated movies, or our own fantasies. It has long been thought that if you fantasize about sex with a movie star or any other person you aren't married to, you are being disloyal. Nothing is farther from the truth. Most fantasies involve people or situations that are impossible, not socially acceptable, unethical, or against the law. If our fantasies were known, most people would be in jail right now.

It is these same fantasies that will add sizzle to sex with your partner. Try it! Ask your partner to pretend he is Jon Bon Jovi and you can pretend you are Angelina Jolie for him.

Maintaining sexual desire isn't the same thing as rekindling the sexual sizzle. Once you have begun to get some of that sizzle back, don't make the mistake of falling into the boring sex trap. Routine, dull sex will subvert all your efforts. Continually make your encounters with your partner exciting and varied. Anticipating sex with an exciting, aroused, willing partner reinforces intimacy.

*Solution:* Make certain you explore a variety of positions, locations, turn-ons, times, and initiation patterns to keep your newly discovered sizzling sex from fizzling into the same routine you found yourself it. It takes effort, planning, work, creativity, inventiveness, but the result will be an ongoing relationship of exciting, sizzling sex with your partner for years to come.

Just because you're on the road to making your sex life sizzle, I cannot stress this enough, *keep finding ways to make your sex life sizzle.*

Always remember, when you begin experimenting with new ways of pleasuring each other, it is okay to veto any action that makes you feel uncomfortable, goes against your moral framework, or hurts. Sexual coercion has no place in partnered sex. It doesn't build intimacy and desire. Coercion will kill desire very quickly. Rebuilding the sizzle in your sex is about playfulness and sharing. It is never about competition.

## Appendix One

### 46 Solutions to Help You Gain a Greater Sense of Sexual Self Esteem

1. If the problem of low sexual desire persists after the first few months after the baby, then, please seek counseling to get your relationship back on track. Contact [www.aasect.org](http://www.aasect.org), the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) for the name of a sex therapist near you.
2. Take a few moments to imagine what your life would be like if you truly stopped worrying about your imperfections. Envision how free you would feel when relieved of the burden of self-deprecation. No matter how long you've felt badly about yourself, you can make a decision that will change your life forever. Stop striving to look like a perfect model and accept yourself right now.
3. Every time you look in the mirror, tell yourself, "You're a gorgeous babe, aren't you?" Keep it up, making yourself do it for about three weeks. You will notice that almost from the first day, you will feel better. After about three weeks, it will be a habit to tell the woman in the mirror, "You're a gorgeous babe, aren't you!"
4. Self love, which is genuine concern, interest, and respect for yourself, is the first step in having a satisfying intimate relationship.
5. You may be thinking that it's too late to solve self esteem problems, especially if you have made some bad choices as a result of your diminished esteem. The answer lies inside you. You have to spend some time identifying and then changing your negative ideas about yourself. A sex therapist can definitely help in this area, because changing ingrained thoughts and ideas is never easy.
6. If what you're doing isn't working for you, then do something else.
7. The key is building lasting desire by increasing your levels of intimacy, by performing non-demand pleasuring and/or creating erotic scenarios.
8. The first thing to do is to identify your self esteem problem and then to begin to change your thinking. For some, this seems like a big task, but don't try to tackle the whole problem at once. If you picture your problem as a pie, cut the pie into many smaller pieces and deal with only one piece at a time.
9. A trained therapist can give you suggestions of how to take small steps to your own self improvement because each individual is unique and each solution will be unique.
10. Talk to your partner. Don't assume he automatically knows what you are thinking and feeling. You have to talk to him. He chose you for his life partner and he will be there for you during these times if you tell him what is going on in your head to make you feel as you do.
11. Being sexy is a state of mind. If you feel sexy you're sexy, then you will dress and act like you're sexy. That is a simple truth of life. Other people around you will respond your sexiness, too.
12. Get a hand-held mirror and look at what you were born with. Take a good look. Open the vulva and look at the opening of your vagina. Look at the perineum and your anus. Look at the colors and the way the hair grows. Take a good, long, loving look at your body. You don't have anything that is new or special. You have what half the people on earth have: A vagina, vulva, clitoris, perineum, and anus.
13. One of the first steps to good communication is to change your tactics. Stop laying blame and pointing fingers by saying, "You hurt me." That makes the other person responsible for the way you feel.
14. Suppose you have been home with the baby all day, you feel overwhelmed by all the things that need to be done and discouraged because you didn't get a chance to clean up, it is far better to say, "I have had a really bad day and I would really appreciate your help in the kitchen this evening." However, if you attack the moment your partner comes home with

- “You never help me out around here,” you will not get much accomplished, except he will feel anger toward your unjustified, in his opinion, accusation. He is likely to reply with “If you had a real job, you would understand that I’m tired and I want to relax. You don’t know what it’s like! I wish I had your job.” Then, of course, in defense of yourself and your busy schedule, you reply in kind. “You don’t know what it’s like having a screaming baby and a filthy house to contend with all day!”
15. You walk in the door and your partner is in the room with the baby, and she barely notices you are home. If you attack and say, “All you care about is the baby and you never pay attention to me,” she will feel anger and resentment. Try telling her, “I had a rough day at work, but mostly, I missed you. I would love for you to meet me at the door and give me a big hug after a day like today.”
  16. As adults, you can’t tell your partner to “Take out the trash,” and expect a favorable response. “Honey, when you get a chance can you take the trash out,” makes it a request instead of a demand.
  17. Approaching these same issues a little bit differently will make all the difference. I think most would agree that these are better choices.
  18. “Let me help you with the dishes and we can get it done much faster.”
  19. “I think it would be more pleasant for me if you would clean the toothpaste out of the bathroom sink.”
  20. “Can you get this trash out for me when you get a chance?”
  21. “Can you help me pick up these clothes that we left on the floor?”
  22. “How about we both work on cleaning up for a few minutes?”
  23. “It makes me sad when I feel like I am the only one doing things around here.”
  24. You love your partner and if your partner is ready to communicate with you, the kindest, most loving thing you can do is to turn off the TV, stop vacuuming the carpet, or turn off the video game. Your partner deserves 100% of your attention.
  25. You will be a much better communicator if you remember that when your partner or your children come to you with a problem, they don’t want solutions. They want love and understanding. I realize it is in a man’s nature to fix the problem and that will be a difficult one for many men to work on. But, the rewards are many if you can put it into practice
  26. If your sexual anatomy is a mystery or your own sexual responses are simply something you only dream about, then understandably, you will have difficulty in telling your partner what you want. Learn about your body and learn to love your body and you will find it much easier to tell your partner what you want them to do to make you feel good.
  27. The best advice I can give you is to be brave and take the risk. Come on! You can do it! Communicate!
  28. As difficult as it may be, discussing sexual likes and dislikes very early in a relationship will have many positive benefits. By letting your partner know early in your relationship what you enjoy will prevent negative habits from forming. When two people are in the honeymoon stage of their relationship, everything tends to feel good. We become more discriminating as time moves on. If we don’t tell our partner what we want and what works for us, then we are allowing our partner to think everything they are doing is fine.
  29. A good way to break the ice is to ask your partner how they prefer to communicate about sexual matters. Do they like non-verbal communication? Do they like to talk about it during sex? Do they like to talk about sex afterward? Do they prefer talking about what is going to happen before hand? When communicating about sex with an eye to pleasing your partner, it is almost always received well.
  30. Experiment with different communication tactics until you find the one that works the best. Sometimes becoming comfortable with someone takes time, but continued practice will make communication easier.
  31. Tell you partner you are afraid if you tell them what’s on your mind you’re afraid they will be angry. That will diffuse the situation right from the beginning. Even if your partner does get angry, they are less likely to fly off the handle.
  32. Don’t throw in the towel too soon. Be patient if the reaction isn’t the one you wanted. If you give up too quickly, you will set yourself up to be a martyr and you will successfully create another problem in your relationship.
  33. Plan to talk about sex. Whether your goal is to talk about sex in general so that you’re more comfortable with this type of discussion or if you have specific issues to cover, you and your partner will benefit from advance planning.
  34. Do your best to figure out what the real problem is. It may take a day or two for you to dig into this and what you are truly feeling. Saying, “I am just not interested in sex,” is simply reporting a symptom and not talking about the problem.

- exciting.
35. Stop dwelling on what you should be doing or who you should have for a partner. Instead, listen to what your body and your imagination are telling you. This isn't easy to do because there are always people around who will try to tell you how your life should be. You hear it on the television, in women's magazines, in mother's magazines, from your friends, from your parents. You are the person you have to please. I will repeat that for emphasis. You are the only person you have to please.
  36. As a new mom, you probably have a list of self-improvements you are determined to make: Everything from going to the gym three times a week, to eating properly, to getting in bed by 10 pm. And while these are great suggestions and I would never tell anyone not to do any of these things, why not add masturbation to the list? In fact, I dare you to post it on the fridge with your other "To Do" lists. Masturbation is the single best way to stay connected to your own sexuality.
  37. Whether you're single or partnered, if your sex drive is low, masturbation is a low pressure solution. I know I sound like I'm a stuck record, but masturbation is the best way to keep you in touch with your body. It has only been in the past 25 years or so that people have admitted that masturbation is healthy and normal
  38. Many times couples will need the help and guidance of a counselor or trained sex therapist to get them back on the right track. Seeing a therapist early rather than later is the most beneficial. You have a lot of time and energy invested in your relationship with your partner and calling it quits should never be the first choice. As soon as you suspect a change in your relationship is the time to seek counseling. However, if you have waiting until you have many unresolved issues in our relationship, it is never too late to begin fixing what is wrong.
  39. Intimacy is a couple thing, not an individual thing. If you have lost your intimacy or you want to establish a new level of intimacy, then engaging in sensual touching is the foundation of re-establishing intimacy. Touch is so important in a relationship I have devoted the entire next chapter to the subject of touching.
  40. "Honey, we have drifted apart and I would really like to get reconnected to you. Why don't we try this technique I read about in Toni Parker's book? It's called Sensual Caressing."
  41. The first step was to stop the cycle of blame and guilt.
  42. Get into the habit of looking forward to sex instead of dreading it. Get into the habit of thinking that sex is going to be fun and
  43. Making a specific sexual request of your partner is a great way to enhance variety. For example, buy blank greeting card and write something you would like your spouse to do to you or for you in it. Put it in their lunch box or brief case so they can discover it during the day. Send a text message with your sexy request.
  44. You may be shy or feel silly at first, but making requests of your partner will get easier the more you do it. If one partner begins the practice, the other will generally join in the fun.
  45. Many people begin by requesting their spouse act out some of their fantasies. For instance, a woman may fantasize about having sex with her gynecologist—he has seen more of her genitals than anyone besides possibly her husband and it's not unusual for a woman to fall a little bit "in love" with her gynecologist. She can act on this fantasy by having her husband put on a white lab coat and they can pretend she is in the doctor's office with her feet in the stirrups. A routine medical exam could turn into a sizzling sexual encounter you both will enjoy.
  46. Make certain you explore a variety of positions, locations, turn-ons, times, and initiation patterns to keep your newly discovered sizzling sex from fizzling into the same routine you found yourself in. It takes effort, planning, work, creativity, inventiveness, but the result will be an ongoing relationship of exciting, sizzling sex with your partner for years to come.

## Appendix Two

### Exercises

#### Positive Self Talk Exercise

First, make a list of at least three things you like about yourself. More is better. Is it your hair? Your eyes? Your smile? Your personality? Your honesty? Your skill with computers? When you get your list made, put them in order of importance to you. These are the qualities you will learn to dwell on. By nourishing the parts of you that you like the best, the parts you don't like will start to seem very unimportant. Dwell on this list of positive traits. Think about it. Concentrate on it. Talk to yourself, telling yourself "I have the prettiest eyes!" and "I am a very friendly person!" Tell yourself these things several times a day. Your brain believes what you tell it, so never tell it, "I have the ugliest nose, ever!" Tell it only the good things. Always only the good things.

#### Positive Self Image Exercise

Next, imagine you have just met a terrific person and you want to impress them, and you have suddenly gained full access to a TV studio. Design a commercial that sells YOU as the product. This commercial should only show your best qualities and what you would most like that person to see in you. Once you have designed your commercial and you thought about it and you know exactly what it looks like and what it says, then play your commercial over in your head about 20 times a day, just like a real commercial on TV. You will start to feel pretty good about that person in the commercial, I promise.

#### Identifying Negative Patterns Exercise

Get another piece of paper and make two columns. In one column write the heading, "Bad for Me," and in the other column write, "Reason This Person/Idea is Bad For Me." OK. I know you can see where this is going. In column A, write down everything in your life you feel is bad for you, like bad habits. Do you smoke? Do you get angry easily? Do you mistrust people? Do you secretly binge on pizza every Friday night? Include people who are bad for you. For example, do you have any former boyfriends or husbands who abused you? Do you have friends who

take advantage of you? Do you have relatives who belittle you? Is your present partner abusive? As you make you list, do you see a pattern forming?

Study this list and then you can start working on eliminating the bad things in your life *one at a time*. You cannot conquer the whole world all at once. Even the Romans conquered the world in tiny steps, one piece of the pie at a time, without trying to do it all at once. Over time, as you eliminate bad beliefs and bad people on your list, the list will get smaller and smaller. Just the act of overcoming bad habits will empower you as a person and that is a big hurdle to overcoming low self esteem.

## Appendix Three

### Quiz: How is your Sexual Self Esteem?

What do you see when you look at your naked body in the mirror?

- A. A sexy, desirable woman
- B. A sexy woman who has a few things to work on to be even sexier
- C. A sexy woman with a lot to work on
- D. A woman who would like to be considered sexy
- E. A woman who will never be sexy

How is your relationship with your lover?

- A. It is the best ever.
- B. It is pretty good, but there are some things that could be better
- C. It is okay most days, but there are other times when it is miserable
- D. We fight a lot, but make-up sex is okay.
- E. Relationship? That's what other people have. I have a constant war.

What is your relationship with your parents?

- A. We are really good friends
- B. It is a good relationship most of the time, until my Mother starts treating me like I am twelve
- C. My parents are critical of what I do sometimes
- D. My parents don't like me very much
- E. My parents constantly criticize me about everything... my friends, my looks, my apartment, my eating habits.

Do you like to be touched?

- A. There is nothing better than hugs and kisses
- B. Hugs and kisses are okay
- C. I like to hug or kiss right before making love
- D. I can take it or leave it
- E. No. I prefer to be left alone

Do you masturbate?

- A. Yes! It is a great way to get in touch with me and to stay connected with my lover.
- B. Sometimes, but it is not that important to me
- C. Yes, but I would never tell anyone
- D. Yes, but I always feel guilty afterward
- E. Never

Do you fantasize about sex?

- A. Yes, I imagine scenarios that my lover and I can

act out

- B. Yes, I think about sex when other things don't get in my way
- C. Yes, occasionally
- D. Only in my dreams
- E. Never

Do you talk to your lover/partner about what turns you on?

- A. Yes, it makes sex much better for us
- B. Yes, I tell him sometimes
- C. Yes, I told him once
- D. I would like to
- E. No

Do you think most things about sex is dirty?

- A. Not at all
- B. Once in a while
- C. Only things like anal sex or some other deviant behavior
- D. Sure!
- E. Sex is dirty and dangerous

Do you wear sexy clothes?

- A. Almost all the time, if it's appropriate.
- B. I like to dress in sexy clothes when I go out
- C. I dress in sexy clothes sometimes
- D. Once in a while
- E. I don't feel comfortable in sexy clothes

Do you wear sexy underwear?

- A. Always!
- B. If I want to have sex
- C. On special occasions like my lover's birthday
- D. Rarely
- E. I don't own any sexy underwear

Do you own any sex toys?

- A. Yes and my lover and I use them frequently to enhance our sex
- B. Yes and my lover and I use them some times
- C. Yes, but they don't get much use
- D. No, but I want to get some
- E. None at all

Do you like the way sex feels?

- A. You bet I do!
- B. Yes, most of the time
- C. We get it right sometimes
- D. I would rather do it myself
- E. Almost never

Do you and your partner shower together?

- A. All the time
- B. Yes, if we want to have sex
- C. Sometimes
- D. A few times
- E. He likes the water too cold and I like it hot

Do you like your body?

- A. Yes! It is perfect just the way it is
- B. For the most part, I do
- C. There are some things I really want to change
- D. Not really
- E. What's to like?

Are you comfortable with your body?

- A. Yes
- B. Most of the time
- C. Sometimes
- D. Once in a while
- E. Almost never

Do you like to have sex with the lights on?

- A. Sure!
- B. Sometimes I do
- C. I do when he insists
- D. I don't like it, but I will do it occasionally
- E. Never

If you answered 13 or more question with either A or B, you have excellent sexual self esteem.

If you answered 8 – 12 questions with either A or B, then you have some work to do to improve your sexual self esteem

If you answered 0 – 7 questions with either A or B, then you have to improve your sexual self esteem, the sooner, the better.

## Appendix Four

### Resources

#### Sources for sensual or sexual products

Good Vibrations  
1210 Valencia St  
San Francisco CA 94110  
800.298.8423

<http://www.goodvibes.com>

Xandria Collection  
Box 319005  
San Francisco CA 94131  
800.242.2823

<http://www.xandria.com/>

#### Sources for sex educational or erotic videos

Sinclair Intimacy Institute  
Box 8865  
Chapel Hill NC 27515

<http://www.bettersex.com/>

Focus International  
1160 E Jericho Tpke  
Huntington NY 11743

[ms@focusint.com](mailto:ms@focusint.com)

#### Sources for finding a therapist near where you live

AASECT – American Association of Sex Educators,  
Counselors and Therapists  
P.O. Box 1960  
Ashland, Virginia 23005-1960  
Phone: 804.752.0026  
Fax: 804.752.0056  
general email inquiries: [aasect@aasect.org](mailto:aasect@aasect.org)

<http://www.aasect.org/default.asp>

The Gottman Institute, Inc.  
P.O. Box 15644  
Seattle, WA 98115-0644  
888.523.9042 or 206.523.9042

<http://www.gottman.com/>

American Association for Marriage and Family  
Therapy  
112 South Alfred Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703.838.9808

[central@aamft.org](mailto:central@aamft.org)  
[www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)

#### Information about STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases)

American Social Health Association  
P.O. Box 13827  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709  
919.361.8400  
Fax: 919.361.8425

STI Resource Center Hotline  
1.800.227.8922

<http://www.ashastd.org/index.cfm>

#### Toni Parker's Websites:

<http://realsolutionsforlove.com/>

<http://www.theromancetour.com/>

Email Toni Parker at [info@realsolutionsforlove.com](mailto:info@realsolutionsforlove.com)

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