Let's Talk About Sex

Have you ever been with that special someone and felt so connected that you thought you knew exactly what he or she was thinking? Have you ever been involved with someone who knew your most intimate needs and desires without a word being spoken? Well, if so, great. However, for the rest of the population, let’s focus on the situations that are a bit more ambiguous. You know, those real-life situations in relationships that never go quite as planned, the ones that are a little awkward, a little scary, or just a little confusing.

Believe it or not, intimate relationships are not quite as clear cut and easy as popular culture might have us believe. There are more than a few times when you just won’t have a clue what your partner is thinking, and despite grand hopes that your partner might possess telepathy, he or she probably doesn’t know exactly what you’re thinking either.

So when it comes to talking about sex, it’s easy to ignore the need to talk and rush ahead in hopes that everything will work out. We may use body language to express our desires and intentions, but is the message always clear? Sure, “the look” might get your message across once, but does it mean the same thing in every context? And if it does, how do you know?

So why don’t we talk about sex? One reason is that sex is a very intimate and personal act and can be accompanied by a variety of feelings, including fear, excitement, anxiety, and joy. No one enters a sexual relationship with the same experiences. Some people may have had very positive experiences with sex and feel very comfortable, while others may have unpleasant, even traumatic experiences in their past that make sex difficult, or even painful. Some may not have had any sexual experiences, positive or negative. As a result of these varied experiences, sharing openly can be very difficult, particularly as it involves a lot of trust between two partners. Opening up about our sexual desires, as well as fears we might be experiencing, can create vulnerability. As a result, hiding or suppressing these feelings is sometimes the response.

What’s interesting to think about when in this vulnerable situation is that if you feel awkward or unsure in a sexual situation, it’s quite possible that your partner might share the same feelings. He or she might not be saying something for the same reason you’re not saying something. Making a statement like “I think we should slow down” can have a tremendous impact, opening the door to increased communication.

If your partner isn’t feeling the same way you do, it’s important to the health of your relationship that your partner know how you’re doing and respond with care and respect. In fact, this can be a topic to address as you’re talking about sex beforehand. What boundaries do you want to make clear before you get started? And if things feel uncomfortable or unsafe for either of you, how will this concern be communicated?

The trap couples sometimes run into is that they skip talking about sex because it seems awkward and uncomfortable. And they’re right – it is awkward and uncomfortable for many and that’s to be expected. The problem though, is if we skip that conversation for the sake of not feeling that awkwardness, we can end up hurting ourselves and each other by not communicating. We end up sacrificing our own needs by not talking with our partners about feelings we’re having, we sacrifice their needs by not asking, and we miss an opportunity for true intimacy.
The challenge here is to recognize that we all feel certain fears and inadequacies with regard to sexual activity, and of course, we all have our own desires and interests that need expressing. So why not confront the confusion and embrace a little vulnerability for the sake of better intimacy with your partner? Recognize that it’s okay to talk before you touch. In fact, doing so could definitely improve your sex life and your relationship as a whole. Believe it or not, just talking about each other’s desires, being honest, and connecting with each other on a deep, intimate level can be very sexy!

Sex Under The Influence

Another challenge in supporting healthy relationships is recognizing the way alcohol and other drugs complicate sexual situations and take away one’s ability to give full consent. Alcohol can be used as a “social lubricant.” What this means is that consuming alcohol can make social situations feel more comfortable as it reduces one’s inhibitions. As a result, alcohol can be used to reduce some of the anxiety or fears associated with sex. The problem, though, is that alcohol and other drugs also take away one’s ability to think clearly, and as a result, can lead to very harmful consequences when mixed with sex (this includes regretted sex, pregnancy, and rape as well as sexually transmitted infections including HIV).

What’s interesting when thinking about alcohol in our culture is that we know very well that drinking and driving is a bad idea and that it can have devastating results. In fact, we have even developed a common response to this problem in the form of designated drivers. We aren’t quite at the same level of awareness, though, when it comes to sex under the influence which can be equally, if not more damaging. Just as being drunk is not an excuse for driving under the influence, the same is true for sex under the influence.

Also, just as we might try to prevent someone who is intoxicated from sitting in the driver’s seat, we shouldn’t be afraid to confront someone who is intoxicated and wanting to engage in sex. As someone who is under the influence of alcohol, engaging in sexual activity could put that person in danger, as well as whomever he or she might be involved with. When we drink to make things “easier” things just get more difficult – maybe not at that moment, but often afterwards.