

Things you can do

TAKE A BREAK

If you need to take a break from sexual activity – take it. It could relieve any pressure you might be feeling and provide space to process emotions and rediscover your sexuality in new and healthier ways. You may need to stop all kinds of sexual activity or just things you are struggling with. It can be a brief break or longer term, it is your choice.

TAKE A BATH

Creating intimacy with yourself can feel hard. A bath can help you feel more comfortable naked. At first, you can cover yourself with bubbles. Over time slowly start to observe your body and love what is beautiful about it. If you feel fearful or judgemental towards yourself, bring your attention back to the water surrounding you.

SELF-TOUCH

Touching your body is a good way to reclaim ownership of it. Explore different types of touch on your body. Try to notice if something tickles or how strokes feel on your stomach or legs. You do not have to touch your genitals or breasts if you don't want to. You are in control, send your body the message that touch can be pleasurable and safe.

TALK WITH A PARTNER

You have the right to communicate how you feel and what you are experiencing around sex and intimacy. It can be useful to read this brochure on your own and then share some of the things you have learned. This is especially important if there are certain activities which are triggering. Establishing clear boundaries with your partner will increase trust and safety in your sexual relationship.



Sex and Intimacy



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Finding Intimacy

Sex and intimacy feel good and it is ok to want to experience pleasure. Sex and intimacy are two very different things. Sex is really about the physical act and often refers to the specific act of consensual intercourse. Intimacy on the other hand is an emotional connectedness or exchange of energy with another person. It allows us to be authentic and share the deepest parts of ourselves. When our vulnerability is heard and validated by another we feel closer to them. There are lots of other kinds of sex and intimacy that feel pleasurable and can help you feel close to someone you trust.

BRAINSTORM PLEASURE

Write a list of everything you find pleasurable that isn't triggering. Think about different kinds of sex and touching or even things that make you feel sexy.

CREATE SAFETY

Pleasurable sexual experiences need you to feel relaxed and calm. List the things you need to create safety. Consider lighting, room layout, time of day, and even the person you are with. Revisit your first list, there might be more pleasurable things that you could do if you felt safe.

SET GOALS

It can be helpful to work out what you hope to get from sexual activity in the short term. Do you need closeness, love, control, or just an orgasm? Once you work out what your goal is, you can select activities that will help you get there.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT INTIMACY

Intimacy doesn't have to lead to sex. This is important if you are struggling with the physical act of sex. Communicate what makes you feel safe and your need to go slow. It can be difficult to explain boundaries, you might need to just say stop or wait. Exploring non-sexual touch can help to build this trust.

True intimacy is about togetherness. Working with a partner to build trust and understanding can be sexy too.



When sex is a trigger

Sexual violence is NOT sex, it is non-consensual assault and feels traumatising. Sometimes it is hard to exist in a body that has experienced physical trauma. As part of healing you will learn to be forgiving and patient with yourself. When sex is a trigger, it can be a challenge to overcome. Remember, you deserve to enjoy sexual activity and intimacy.

DISSOCIATION

Dissociation is a survival mechanism. The mind detaches from the body to try and protect you. If you feel numb or spaced out during sexual activity you may be dissociating. It is important to only have sex when you really want to. If you can't stop dissociating during sex you could take a break from sex. Once you start to recognise the signs of dissociation and work through them in a safe place you can slowly reintroduce activities. Your counsellor can help you with strategies to focus on how your body feels.

LOSS OF DESIRE

A loss of desire can happen to anyone. However, when you have experienced sexual trauma it is easy to see that as the cause. It can help to look at other reasons why you might have lost interest in sex. Some things to consider: Are you doing sexual activities that you previously enjoyed? Are you attracted to your partner? Are there other kinds of intimacy in your relationship? Is your pleasure important to the other person? Do you feel like you can say no at any time? What else is going on for you right now? You can talk about your experiences with your counsellor.