



# SEX THERAPY

## Essentials of Sex Therapy

1

### **Talk therapy for sexual well-being:**

Sex therapy is a form of talk therapy that addresses issues related to sexuality, intimacy, and sexual function. It's for individuals or couples who want to improve their sex lives, resolve sexual problems, or work through concerns about sexual feelings or experiences.

Importantly, it's about discussion, education, and exercises to try. This is a professional, safe setting to talk about and explore things that might feel awkward to discuss elsewhere.

2

### **Common issues addressed:**

Sex therapy can help with a wide range of issues. Some examples:

Difficulties with arousal or orgasm (like erectile dysfunction or anorgasmia), pain during sex, differences in libido (maybe one partner has a higher drive than the other), performance anxiety (nervousness about sexual "performance" that actually interferes with enjoying the moment), or resolving emotional baggage around sex (perhaps from past trauma or cultural/religious shame). It's also a space to explore things like sexual identity, orientation, or kinks in a nonjudgmental way if those are on your mind. The goal is to make sexual experiences healthier and more satisfying, both physically and emotionally.

3

### **Focus on communication and education:**

A big part of sex therapy is education - learning about how bodies and minds respond during sexual activity (for instance, you might learn about the sexual response cycle, which includes desire, arousal, orgasm, etc.). Many people have misconceptions from porn, peers, or lack of information, and clearing those up can itself solve some problems (like realizing it's normal for women to take longer to orgasm, or that anxiety can affect arousal). The therapy also emphasizes communication skills: being able to talk to your partner about what you like or don't like, setting boundaries, expressing your needs, and listening to theirs. Lots of sexual issues stem from partners not feeling able to discuss things openly, so learning to communicate can be a game-changer.



## Addressing Sexual Trauma

Many people come to sex therapy because they have experienced sexual trauma. If this is part of your story, you're not alone, and healing is possible. Our therapists will approach this topic with a lot of care and go at a pace that feels right for you. You'll have control over what you share and how we move forward, and we'll check in often to make sure you feel safe and supported. If it might help, your therapist can include special trauma-focused techniques like EMDR (a therapy to help process trauma memories) in your sessions.



## Emerging Approaches: Somatic Sex Therapy & Sexological Bodywork

Somatic sex therapy and sexological bodywork are new, body-focused approaches to sex therapy. They involve paying attention to how your body feels and responds during safe, guided exercises like breathing techniques, gentle movement, or even some guided, safe touch. If you and your therapist decide it's a good fit, that therapist might refer to a CSB provider for some of these body-based techniques in your sessions.



### Exercises and homework:

In sex therapy, you often get specific exercises to do in the privacy of your own home (either alone or with your partner, depending on the issue). These could range from reading educational materials, practicing mindfulness to stay present during intimacy, to sensate focus exercises (a structured series of touching exercises that couples do to rebuild physical intimacy without pressure).

For someone with performance anxiety, homework might include self-exploration to learn what feels good without the pressure to “perform” for someone else. For a couple struggling with mismatched desire, an assignment might be scheduling intimate, but not necessarily sexual, time together to rekindle connection. These exercises are always at your comfort level - a good sex therapist will tailor them and never pressure you to do something that feels wrong to you. Over time, these homework activities can help reduce anxiety, increase pleasure, and build confidence. It's like physical therapy for your sexual relationship - gradual practice and exercises lead to improvement.





## What will I do in Sex Therapy?

- **Discussion and history:** Initially, you'll talk about what's bringing you in. If you're solo, you might discuss things like your relationships, any sexual experiences, worries, or symptoms (e.g. "I never had an orgasm" or "Sex always hurts" or "I feel zero desire lately"). If you're a couple, both partners share their perspectives on the issue. The therapist will likely ask some standard questions to get a full picture: physical health (any medical issues or medications can affect sex), sexual history (not every detail, but key points like past trauma or when the problem first started), relationship dynamics (how do you communicate, any trust issues?), and beliefs/attitudes about sex (for instance, maybe you grew up in a very strict environment that taught sex is shameful, which is affecting you now). It might feel weird to lay all this out, but remember, the therapist has heard it all and it's truly not awkward for them - it's their job. Often just getting it off your chest feels relieving.
- **Education and myth-busting:** As you talk, the therapist will provide information. For example, if a teen client says, "I think something's wrong with me because it takes me a long time to orgasm," the therapist might explain how common that actually is, especially for people with vulvas, and how media gives unrealistically fast timelines. If a guy is worried about losing an erection occasionally, the therapist will reassure him that happens to everyone and stress can make it worse, which is a normal response. They'll fill in gaps in knowledge about anatomy, arousal, contraception, STIs – whatever is relevant. If you're unsure about something (like "Is it normal to have X fantasy?" or "Can a certain practice cause harm?"), you can ask and get a fact-based, non-judgy answer. A lot of sex therapy for young adults is about building a healthy, shame-free understanding of sex.
- **Goal setting:** You and the therapist will clarify what success looks like for you. It might be "I want to feel less anxious and enjoy intimacy more," or "We want to reignite our sexual spark," or "I'd like to stop feeling pain during intercourse." Having a goal helps guide the therapy. Then therapist might also check in on broader goals like improving self-esteem or reducing any guilt/shame around sex.
- **Communication practice:** If you have a partner, some sessions may involve practicing talking to each other about sensitive topics. A therapist might do a role-play where one of you practices saying, "I would love if we could try more of X" and the other practices responding positively. It can feel a tad awkward but think of it like a safe rehearsal for real life. The therapist will coach you on using "I" statements, being honest yet kind, and listening without defensiveness. They might point out patterns – e.g., "I notice when she mentions a problem, you look down and get quiet. What's going on for you then?" That could reveal hurt feelings or embarrassment that need addressing.





- **Exploring psychological factors:** Often, sexual issues have emotional components. So you might work on anxiety reduction techniques if nerves are the issue, or body image and self-confidence if those affect your intimacy. If past trauma or strict upbringing messages are interfering, part of therapy is healing those wounds – maybe through some cognitive techniques (challenging negative beliefs, like “sex is dirty”), or learning grounding skills if trauma memories intrude.
- **Assignments (homework):** After discussing and understanding the issue, the therapist usually gives you things to try between sessions. For example, a super common one for couples is sensate focus. The therapist will explain it: initially, it means setting aside time where you and your partner take turns touching each other’s bodies (non-genital areas at first) just to feel sensations, with a rule of no sex or orgasm as a goal. It sounds counterintuitive, but removing the performance pressure often helps people relax and enjoy physical touch again. You then discuss next time how that went – maybe you realized you actually loved having your back stroked, or you felt weird at first but then relaxed. The therapist then guides you to the next phase (gradually including more sexual touch in later sensate focus stages).



If you’re an individual, homework might be solo. For instance, if you have trouble with arousal, they might suggest a mindfulness exercise: during masturbation, try focusing on the sensations and when distracting thoughts come, gently bring your mind back (kind of like meditating). Or they might have you read or watch some educational content about sexuality that could help you feel more informed and less anxious.

Every week, you’ll report back on these exercises – only in as much detail as you’re comfortable. You might say, “We did the exercise; at first it was awkward but then it was actually fun and we laughed a lot.” Or “I tried what you said, but I got in my head and felt embarrassed.” All that info helps the therapist tweak the approach.

Over time, as you do these activities, you often start seeing progress: maybe increased desire, less pain, orgasms become possible, or intimacy feels emotionally closer. The therapist will highlight improvements: “You mentioned you initiated sex this week for the first time in months – that’s a big step!” And if you slip or have a bad week, that’s okay; they help you figure out why without blame (maybe stress was high, or old fears crept back).

Overall, what you do in sex therapy is learn, communicate, and practice. You learn accurate info and new ways to think about sex, you practice talking openly about it, and you try new behaviors or exercises at home to change things physically and emotionally. It’s a team effort: you, (maybe your partner), and the therapist all working together toward a happier, healthier sex life that you define (it’s not about some societal ideal, but what truly feels right and satisfying for you).



# What can I expect from my Sex Therapist?

## Our sex therapist will:

- Be non-judgmental and open-minded:

This is **HUGE** in sex therapy. Your therapist has likely worked with individuals across the spectrum of sexual orientations, identities, and lifestyles. You can talk about any sexual topic – from masturbation habits to kinky fantasies to fears of intimacy – and they should react with professionalism and empathy, not shock or disgust. For example, if you say, “I feel ashamed because I watch porn,” they might respond, “Let’s explore those feelings. Many people watch porn; what about it makes you feel ashamed?” Normalizing is a big part of their job. They’ll help you see that you’re not “weird” or “broken” (in fact, almost every issue you bring up, they can probably say, “I’ve worked with others on this too”).

- Ask personal questions respectfully:

To help you, they might need to ask some very direct questions about your sex life – “Do you orgasm during intercourse?” “How often do you attempt sex and have to stop?” “What exactly happens when you try?” It can feel embarrassing to answer these with a stranger at first. A good therapist will acknowledge that: “I know this might be uncomfortable, but remember this is a safe space and I ask only to understand how to help.” You always have the right to say, “I’m not ready to talk about that yet,” and they should respect it. As trust builds, you’ll probably open up more.

- Provide accurate information:

Sex therapists are trained in human sexuality, so expect some “sex ed” moments. They’ll correct myths (like “size matters” or “girls don’t like sex as much as guys” – they’ll set those straight). They can explain medical aspects too: for instance, if vaginal pain is an issue, they might educate you on conditions like vaginismus or lubrication, and advise a medical check if needed. If your issue overlaps with medical stuff (like hormonal problems, medication side effects, etc.), they often know quite a bit and can coordinate with or refer you to a doctor while addressing the emotional side in therapy.

- Maintain professionalism and boundaries:

Talking about sex can sometimes be arousing or emotional. Therapists are professionals - they won’t flirt with you, make inappropriate remarks, or violate boundaries. If you’re a couple, they won’t take sides. If you’re an individual, they won’t overshare about their own sex life; the focus stays on you. If any touch is used for therapeutic reasons (like teaching you a relaxation technique), they’ll always ask permission and it’s non-sexualized (though even that is rare in talk therapy). They adhere to confidentiality strictly - knowing this is sensitive stuff, they ensure what you say in therapy stays in therapy.





- Be sensitive to embarrassment or cultural factors:

A sex therapist is usually skilled at making you feel comfortable with uncomfortable topics. They might use correct terminology or the slang you're comfortable with – if you giggle when saying “penis,” they might say “okay, penis or whatever word you like – it’s up to you.” If you have cultural or religious background factors, they’ll be respectful and integrate that understanding. For instance, if you grew up in a conservative environment, they won’t push you to adopt some liberal view of sex; they’ll work within your value system (unless those values are causing you distress and you want to change them). They create an environment where you can blush, laugh, or cry about sexual matters and it’s all okay. They often normalize the awkwardness with a smile: “Lots of people find it hard to talk about this, you’re doing great.”

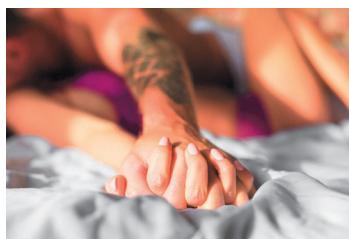
- Give homework and follow up:

Like other structured therapies, sex therapists often assign tasks or exercises. They’ll explain them clearly – the what and the why. For example, “I suggest you try this couple’s exercise where you cuddle without any pressure for sex. This can help rebuild safety and connection. How do you feel about trying that?” They’ll ensure you’re comfortable with the plan. Next session, they’ll ask how it went. If you didn’t do it, they won’t scold you; they’ll explore why. Maybe you felt silly doing it, or schedules didn’t align. They’ll adjust if needed: “Would it help if we wrote down the steps? Or is there a different approach you’d prefer?” If you did do it, they’ll be enthusiastic hearing the results – even if the result was “It was awkward.” They’ll analyze that with you (“Awkward how? Did it get easier after a while?”).

They essentially serve as a guide, tailoring the journey as you go.

- Encourage at your pace:

A sex therapist wants you to improve but also knows rushing can backfire. They won’t push you to do something you absolutely dread. Instead, they might gently encourage expanding comfort zones. Say you’re terrified to talk to your partner about a fantasy; the therapist might role-play it with you a few times first, or have you write it in a letter. They celebrate incremental progress. If you’ve had past trauma, they’ll likely take things slower and maybe incorporate some trauma-informed techniques (like ensuring you have coping skills before delving too deep). Their approach is collaborative - they’ll often ask, “How did that suggestion feel for you? Think you can try it?” If you say no, they pivot. The aim is to build trust and ensure you feel in control of your own therapeutic process.



In short, you can expect a sex therapist to be someone you can talk about the most personal, intimate topics with someone who remains calm, knowledgeable, and caring throughout. By demystifying sex and creating a supportive environment, they help you work through problems that might have felt very isolating or embarrassing, and turn them into solvable challenges with education, communication, and a bit of practice. Many clients leave sex therapy saying it was such a relief to finally talk openly and get help, rather than silently worrying. With the therapist’s help, sex (or thoughts about sex) gradually becomes less stressful and more enjoyable - which is exactly the point!