

Couples Talk Takeaways

14th March 2022

Between the Sheets

With Emma Waring

Emma's website: <https://www.emmawaring.com/>

Why is sex so important?

Sex is a very powerful way to connect with our partner, to show love and also how we delight in them. Physical touch is a powerful way to convey a message. Sex sets the relationship apart from any other relationship you have.

Good Communication

Whether we feel we have problems with our sex lives or not, it is important to have good communication about our sexual relationship. If we can learn how to talk about sex when things are going well, we'll be much more able to communicate when problems arise.

Some couples may never have talked about their sexual relationship. This is because we need to be vulnerable to talk about it. It can feel risky to open up about personal details, you may fear rejection or shame.

Emma's tips for talking about sex:

1. *Don't talk about it in the bedroom.* It can be difficult to address the topic when one of you might be feeling vulnerable (if you've just initiated sex, or if you're naked). Give your spouse the heads up that you'd like to talk about this. Say you'd like to talk about your sexual relationship and arrange a time that's good for both of you. You don't necessarily have to have a problem to address - you may just want to chat about it.
2. *Own your feelings.* Talk about the issue from your own perspective, not blaming or embarrassing the other person. For example, "I noticed we have not had sex for a while, I feel sad about that. Is there anything you'd like to talk to me about?"

For more information on developing good communication habits, we recommend the [Toucan Together App](#) communication module.

So you want to talk about sex with your partner but you're not sure where to start.

Here are some suggested questions to get the conversation going:

- What do we like about our sex life at the moment?
- How do we feel about the frequency of our love-making?
- How do we feel about what we do before love-making?
- How do we feel about the variety in our sex life?
- What is something my partner would like me to do (or stop doing) to make our sex life even more enjoyable?

Seasons of Sexual Intimacy (see Emma's book at the end)

Spring

This is typically the early years of your relationship when sex can be passionate and frequent. But our sex-saturated culture can lead to unrealistic expectations of what sexual intimacy should be like. Couples or individuals may feel ashamed to talk about difficulties early on and suffer in silence when there is often

a simple solution to a problem. If the problem is physical, go and see your GP straight away. They can signpost you to the help you need.

Summer

Life is busy, you're in a comfortable routine in your relationship, sex can be enjoyable but sometimes life gets in the way. In this season the risk is that sex can feel humdrum and you make assumptions about what your partner likes. It is very important to talk at this stage and to be intentional in making time for sex.

Autumn

This will often co-incide with the aging process and the impact physical changes in our bodies have on our sex life. Maybe the woman is experiencing menopause which will affect her physically and emotionally. Maybe you have a very narrow repertoire in the bedroom! You don't want to slip into *winter* where it is bleak and cold and you don't know where to go. Talk to each other and get medical help for those changes (eg HRT).

What if we're having difficulties?

Isolate the variables:

1. Is it Functional/physical? Is there something impacting your body in having sex (eg erectile dysfunction, vaginismus)
2. Is it relational? What's the state of our relationship like? Are there hurts or unresolved conflicts?
3. Are we enjoying what we're doing? Is it boring or unpleasant?
4. Are we making time for sex? Are we being intentional in scheduling in time for sexual intimacy?

If you can identify the specific issue(s), you're much more able to deal with it.

Common Questions:

How regularly should we have sex?

Emma talked about the importance of intentionality. The media would have us believe sex should always be spontaneous and often! But actually talking together about when is a good time to have sex for both partners is really helpful. Agree on the days and time (a time when you're not tired, when usual distractions are not there). Forget spontaneity! Scheduling in sex creates a sense of anticipation which can fuel desire.

- Emma recommended the book "Mating in Captivity" by Esther Perel
- https://www.ted.com/talks/esther_perel_the_secret_to_desire_in_a_long_term_relationship?language=en

We need to move to meet our partner, not just in the mundane. So seeing your partner in a different context to the everyday will remind you of what first attracted you to them and fuel that desire.

What if we both disagree on how often we want/should have sex? What if we have different sex drives?

Listen to each other. Find out each other's desire for sex and then have a conversation around when to have it. There will need to be compromise on both sides, but agree and commit to the regularity.

Otherwise the one with the lower drive may withdraw in case any physical contact may be misinterpreted as a sexual advance and the one with the higher drive will feel rejected. But if you both agree on when and how often you can eliminate both these problems.

What does God think about sex?

God created sex and he created it as something to be celebrated and enjoyed. He created it good. God doesn't blush, neither does he leave the bedroom during sex. Often we inherit a script of what sex is or

what our bodies are like from our parents or culture. Sometimes that can be negative. It's helpful to relearn that script according to God's design and intentions for sex.

How do we rewrite a negative script?

Emma suggested reading Emma Parel's book and learning about 'erotic intelligence'. Esther writes about the importance of being playful in sex. Laughter can bring arousal but it can also bring shame. Being playful will be different for each person so you will need to experiment and talk about what you enjoy. You need to purposely challenge that internal script.

Sex needs to be:

- Consensual
- Respectful
- Pleasurable

But we also need to challenge ourselves. So if your partner suggests something different we need to challenge ourselves and ask 'could I do that?'

Should we feel emotionally close to have sex? Or, do we need to have sex to feel emotionally close?

How we are emotionally and psychologically will impact how well our bodies respond in sex. For one partner (often the woman) distance in the relationship will make sex difficult or undesirable. For the other partner, sex may be a key thing for them to feel close to their spouse. So you have a chicken and egg situation! Communication is key again! You may need to take a risk and move into ground where you feel uncomfortable. If physical intimacy enables your partner to open up emotionally then it might be good to engage in sex which would open up the space to talk about the relational side.

What if sex is painful? Coping with menopause

Sex can be painful at any stage but particularly around the menopause which brings significant change in a woman, especially in the physiology of the genitals. Whatever stage you are at, there is help! See your GP, they may discuss different lubricants or HRT as an option. For a guy, there can be common causes to painful sex with often a simple remedy. If there is past trauma, seeing a counselor may be helpful.

Emma recommended Louise Newson's website:

<https://www.balance-menopause.com>

Emma also recommended this particular brand of sexual lubricants and vaginal creams.

<https://www.yesyesyes.org>

Is it ok to use sex toys?

Men, did you know that 96% of women will need clitoral stimulation to reach orgasm? Emma suggested trying a clitoral vibrator to aid in this. Sex toys are to be enjoyed together, so looking on websites, choosing, buying, unwrapping and using - do it as a couple! These can be particularly useful at significant stages in a woman's life eg after having a baby or during menopause. They can revolutionise a couple's sex life and can be a helpful add-on. Further reading: "Becoming Cliterate" by Laurie Mintz.

What if sex feels like a job?

Foreplay is coreplay! Spend time on the arousal. Be creative, looking at new ways to stimulate each other.

Sex can be really good, good or just ok. That's normal. Further reading: "Enduring Desire" by Metz & McCarthy - the 'Good enough' sex model.

Further Reading:

This Couples Talk will have only scratched the surface on this topic. If it something you feel you need more help with then we highly recommend Emma's book "**Seasons of Sex and Intimacy**".

This book is divided into two parts. The first part covers important information for everyone, whether experiencing a sexual problem or not. It looks at the importance of becoming an intimate team by exploring good communication, understanding our bodies better, and ways to increase sexual enjoyment as a couple to nurture a lifelong desire in marriage. It also covers the damaging impact of pornography. Finally it looks at ways to seek professional help if you feel you need it.

The second part covers specific sexual difficulties. All of this is done in a sensitive and clear way and based on Emma's extensive experience of helping couples with these difficulties.

Emma's book is available at most bookshops and from Amazon for £15:

<https://tinyurl.com/CouplestalkEmmasbook>

Differences Between Men and Women

All of us have different ideas and expectations about sex. It can be really difficult to talk about sex but if we make the time and effort to understand each other's needs this can help us to have deeper physical intimacy. Although there are not always gender stereotypes for sexual desire and practise, it may be helpful to understand some general differences between men and women. These certainly don't always apply but this document will give you some starters for discussion with your spouse in helping to understand each other better.

<https://tinyurl.com/differencesinmenandwomen>