



# Facilitators Guide

## Healthy Approaches to Sex

Prior to facilitating this group the leader should read the attached and recommended material. The more familiar one is with the topic the more comfortable you will be delivering the material.

### Session 1-Welcome & Introductions & Establishing Group Norms (Establishing report)

To begin, welcome all participants and thank them for joining this group. Take the time to allow participants to introduce themselves and give one thing that they want to get from the twelve sessions that they will attend. It is customary to introduce yourself first as it helps people to become comfortable in the space with everyone as well as models what you are asking of them.

*“Let’s go around the room and introduce ourselves. Tell us your name and one thing that you want to get from this group.”*

Put these questions and statements on a white board or flip chart. Be sure to answer any questions that you can and keep those listed that will be addressed in the future.

Icebreaker activity –

*“Not everything that is **faced can be changed**, but **nothing can be changed until it is faced.**” (James Baldwin)*

Present the quote and the question and ask participants to express their answers in whatever way they feel comfortable. Remember that some of your participants are not comfortable with writing. This is an opportunity for you to let the participants know that they can express themselves in whatever form they feel is necessary. (i.e. drawing and speaking). If everyone is comfortable, a verbal response to this question is preferred as it helps to build rapport and connections between each participant.

You may also ask participants what they hope to learn from this course?

*“We will keep a record of our questions and important comments here on the whiteboard or flipchart for our recollection.” It is preferred to add the questions without identifying which participant asked the question. This helps to maintain a safe environment to share for all.*

*“Who would like to go first?”*

Tell a little about yourself and your experiences facilitating groups and why you want to facilitate this particular group.

Tell the participants that this is a sensitive topic and should be handled maturely. While it is ok to have fun while talking about the subject, you do not want to make fun of others, or laugh at their expense.

*“We will be discussing some topics that are sensitive and even some things that you do not agree with. We understand this but this is a space of safety where everyone, whether we agree with them or not, is treated with the utmost respect. We will treat everyone with kindness and respect. That means no taunting, laughing at other’s expense or making negative comments about one another. As human beings we recognize that the path to recovery and wellness leads to overall happiness. We reap what we sow. Be kind to others... accept others... and understand that everyone has the right to live as they choose. It is our job, for our happiness and theirs, to be kind and respectful to one another and by doing this, we accept everyone as they are. Our responsibility in this course is to listen, to learn, to ask questions and to do all of that very respectfully. Everyone here is afforded the dignity to live their life as they choose. We emphasize this because this course will bring up things that you may find uncomfortable or that you just disagree with. When creating a comfortable space for people to share, we ACCEPT EVERYONE.”*

*“Let’s review this topic and come up with a list of ground rules that we think are important to create so that we create and maintain a safe environment where all people can participate in.”*

You will lead this activity and synthesize all of the information that the participants give to create a list of ground rules for the course. You can also decide to create group norms or group expectations if that is more comfortable than rules.

The ground rules that are available in your attachments are to be reviewed with the participants. Allow for adjustments’ based on group dynamics.

These are some questions to ask the group as you explore people’s feelings, thoughts, and curiosity for this topic. As you facilitate these questions, remember to assist the members in speaking with each other so that mutual aid can begin and supportive relationships can form.

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

## Session 2-The language

Your tone and passion for the group will help set the tone. Go ahead and create a positive anchor with all of the participants. You can do this by being present in the room before the group starts and saying hello to each person. By doing this, participants will see your pride and eagerness to facilitate the group. It will also provide an opportunity for people to ask you questions. You can support them by encouraging them to share the question when the group begins, or depending on the situation, of course, answer as you see fit.

“Good morning, everyone. How are you today?”

This will give you the chance to see each person and gauge whether they are emotionally ok and whether there are small things that you may need to address. For example, someone may have missed the first group and need to be brought up to speed.

Take the time to welcome everyone.

*“Welcome everyone. I am glad to be with you again and I am thankful to you all for participating.”*

Review the rules or standards that your group has established. Remind everyone that this is a safe learning space and a place where they can ask any questions. Remind the group that it is each of our responsibilities to keep this a safe place for learning and for sharing. It can be a difficult topic for some and we are all here to support one another. The responsibility for this is ours.

*“Good morning/afternoon. We are going to take the time to review our rules/standards. Remember that these are in place to keep us all safe.”*

After you’ve revisited this topic, ask for questions or feedback.

*“Ok are there any questions or remarks before we move on to the next activity?”*

Allow for time to address this possibility, if there are no questions or remarks move on to vocabulary.

*The words that we use to refer to the human anatomy can make a conversation fruitful or embarrassing to our listener. We want to only use words that are accurate and help us identify the nature of the comments or questions in this course.”*

*“It is not our intention to teach you the various body parts. However, throughout this course we should all feel free to discuss sex and anatomy and we ask that we all use the proper terms as we have those conversations.”*

Introduce vocabulary words.

*“These are the words we will use to describe female anatomy:”( see slides)*

*“These are the words that we will use to describe male anatomy:”( see slides)*

*“There are terms that you may have heard at home or in the community, but in this group we are only using those listed here.”*

Stop here to address questions and concerns.

**Parking Lot Questions:** Parking lot questions are questions that you do not readily have an answer for. You use this to keep track of what will be researched so that the group never has a question unanswered. That being said, remember that Group Work is not just teaching information, providing facts, or answering questions. Group Work happens when every person is involved and participating. YOU, the facilitator are not the expert, and we value the knowledge and experience of everyone in the room. Group Work happens when you ask people in the room for their opinions, what do they think this means? Does anyone have experience that you are interested in sharing about this particular question?

Create a “parking lot” page. This is a sheet of paper that you will record any questions that you do not readily have an answer for.

Place your paper where everyone can see it and watch as the questions are added and answered.

This will go far in generating trust and respect from your group. They will see that you follow up and are not afraid to say that you do not know everything. Again, remember to ask them too as we value their knowledge.

“We’ve reviewed a lot of information today. I know this can be a bit overwhelming. First, just know that we do not need to know everything that we just covered. You have the handouts so you can review this on your own time and return to the group with questions or concerns.”

Additional Questions:

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

Thank your participants and remind them of the next class.

Tell them what to expect the next time you meet.

*“In next week’s group will be covering intimacy. Think about what that means to you for next time.”*

“Great job everyone see you next time”

## *Session 3-Toxic Relationships*

*Greet your participants*

*“Welcome everyone!”*

*Now is a good time to address parking lot questions.*

*“Today’s topic is Toxic Relationships and how to avoid them.”*

*Introduce the first activity.*

*“We will begin with a brief discussion on what things are toxic. We are going to make a list as we work”*

*Introductory conversation: Open a conversation about things that are unhealthy. Explore what they think ‘toxic relationships’ means. Then explore with them some examples of behaviors that make a relationship toxic. Finally, ask, why are toxic relationships unhealthy for us?*

*Review with the group the slides on Signs that a Partner is Abusive.*

*How do you think one feels when they have a partner that is toxic?*

*Have you ever known anyone who was in that kind of relationship?*

*Additional Group Questions:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*“These things that you have mentioned are all problems for our health. That is why we want to avoid them we are looking forward to do the work it takes to maintain healthy relationships.”*

## ***Session 4-Intimacy***

*Greet your participants.*

*Reflect on previous lesson.*

*“Last week we talked about ....Today we are going to explore Intimacy in a relationship.”*

*Now is a good time to address parking lot questions.*

*“Let’s each share one thing that was important from our last meeting on ‘Toxic Relationships’.*

*Introduce your new activity.*

*“Today folks we will discuss intimacy.*

*What is intimacy?*

*Who can I be intimate with?*

*Why would you want to be intimate with someone?*

*And*

*“Am I capable of being intimate?”*

*“Welcome back everyone, this week’s topic is intimacy. Let’s all say a few words about what we believe Intimacy means to each of us.”*

*Give participant time and encourage them to speak freely. Be ready to assist them with words/vocabulary for the things that are trying to relate.*

*They can tell a story or give examples of people who are in intimate relationships.*

*Additional Group Questions:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*Move the discussion forward with the idea that intimacy can and should come in many forms.*

*Encourage participants to be honest about why we want to be intimate and the simple answer is that it feels good/enjoyable.*

*Introduce final activity of the day:*

*Now we are going to take an assessment. That's a fancy word for a quiz. At the end you will receive a number as your score. Now this score will have a short sentence next to it, which will generalize your score. Do not be alarmed. (See directions and slides for further guidance)*

*Be sure to minimize the importance of the score in making decisions. This score is not the final answer. You should talk to those you trust and those who care about you.*

*"Are there any questions or final remarks?"*

*Next session we will be discussing What We Bring to the Table: Let's Talk About Sex. Think about what that means to you and any questions you may have about that topic."*

*"Have a great time. See you next session."*

- *If you have read the attached material about domestic violence and abuse you may take some time out here to address some of those issues as barriers to closer relationships. If not, ask them to read it for homework and then process it at the next session.*

## *Session 5: What we bring to the table/Let's Talk About Sex*

*Greet Participants*

*"Hello everyone. Welcome back."*

*Review the topic from last session and review their homework on Domestic Violence if there was no time last class..*

*Now is a good time to address parking lot questions.*

*"Last time we talked about Toxic relationships are there signs that a relationship is toxic? (Yes)*

*"What are those signs?"*

*Additional Group Discussion Questions:*

*"How do you feel about this topic?"*

*"What are your general thoughts on this topic?"*

*"What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?"*

*"Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?"*

*"Who can you go to for more information?"*

*"What is your goal in this subject area?"*

*Move on to the session for the day:*

*Today's topic is "Talking about Sex"*

*Allow participants to watch both of the videos linked in the power point.*

*Ask participants:*

*"What is the overall message of these videos?"*

*"Why do we need to change the narrative about sex?"*

*"Think about whether you may have some bad ideas about sex."*

*"If you have bad ideas and /or no ideas sex what could this class teach you."*

*The answers to these questions will vary. Try to move the conversation towards a conclusion by saying "one more comment or last question" and wrap up the group.*

*Thank everyone for their participation and bring up the next topic.*

*"Nest session we will be discussing Sexual Consent"*



## *Session 6-Sexual Consent*

*Greet everyone.*

*“Hello and welcome back. Today we are discussing Sexual Consent and last week we discussed ‘Let’s talk about sex’.”*

*Now is a good time to address parking lot questions.*

*“Are there any questions that we should address from last week before we move on?”*

*Additional Questions for Group Discussion:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*Allow the participants to give feedback and questions that they are still experiencing from the previous sessions. Allow for no more than about 10 minutes for this discussion and at any time you feel necessary you can move the conversation towards this week’s topic.*

*“This topic is, at its core, about giving permission for the partner to continue to move towards a sexual act”*

*“Today’s topic is sexual consent and this is important because you want to be sure that moving towards the act of sexual activity that you are in agreement with your partner.”*

*“Are there any questions about the reasons that we may give or look to receive permission to participate in a sexual act?”*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*If there are questions that are answered by the content you can just tell the participants to look forward to the content and their questions will be answered. Also remember that if there are questions that you are not sure about that you should put them in the parking lot area to be reviewed once you can research them. Before you leave the group to research the questions on your own, ask the participants to respond and they can even research the questions right in the group with their smartphones, etc.*

*Complete the wrap up process and tell the participants what is coming up next.*

## *Session 7-Gender roles and Identity*

*Hello and welcome back.*

*Are there any questions or comments that we should address before we move into Gender and Gender Identity?*

*Review the Objectives of the session – slide 40.*

*Additional Questions to facilitate discussion:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*Now is a good time to address parking lot questions.*

*Remember, everyone should address any questions they can, direct some questions that apply to the content and to parking lot any that need to be.*

*Along with the group members, read and review the content on slide 41.*

*Review slide 42 including the video.*

*After watching the video with the participants give them an opportunity to offer feedback.*

*Some of you may have noticed some things that you do not agree with. As we said in the beginning of the course, people live very different lives and we take the stance that it is up to each person to decide what that is for themselves. Our role here, is to listen, to learn, and to ask questions but most importantly, to do all of that very respectfully. Everyone here is afforded the dignity to live their life as they choose.*

*Allow participants to discuss their thoughts and guide them through anything that may be new for them or that they now think differently. This is a sensitive topic and the group will need you to maintain the group rules and keep this a safe space for all. Encourage supportive talk, encourage connections, and encourage community.*

*“Are there things that this video that made you change the way you thought before? Are there questions that you now have that you did not before?”*

*“Did you enjoy the speaker?”*

*“Did the speaker explain things well?”*

*Implement the Wrap up process and refer to the topic that is next.*

*“Next week’s topic is going to be Sexual Preferences.”*

## *Session 8-Sexual preferences*

*“Hello and welcome back.”*

*“Are there any questions or comments you all want to present before we move on to today’s topic?”*

*Additional Questions to facilitate discussion:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*Now is a good time to address parking lot questions from the previous week.*

*We are going to discuss sexual preference. In this case we are going to talk about sexual preferences.*

*Review the objective for the session found on slide 44.*

- *To understand diversity in sexual preference*

*Review slide 45 that identify several factual information on this subject. Afterwards, remind everyone that everyone has the freedom to live differently. Review the facts and address any misinformation reminding everyone to be respectful as this is a very sensitive topic and our role in this course is to learn about ourselves and others. It is not our place to judge others. By educating ourselves and believing that people have the right to live as they choose, we all in this world would be happier. This is our goal in life, each and every one of us.*

*Address questions and comments as they occur.*

*Review slide 46 and introduce the video and as a group watch the video.*

*Prior to wrapping up, discuss the video and people’s reactions, always remembering to maintain a safe environment for all regardless of people’s beliefs.*

*Wrap up the session in the say way you have each week.*

# *Session 9-Contraception*

*Greet participants*

*Review the information from the prior session*

*Address parking lot questions*

*Introduce this session topic and request prior information*

*Review the objectives for this session found on slide 48:*

- *Identify at least one method of contraception.*
- *Identify where to obtain contraceptives.*
- *Identify one reason that a person would give for not using contraception*

*Introduce contraception and why people use them and why other's do not. Remember to introduce ideas in case the group does not.*

*People choose to use them because ...*

- *They don't want to have a baby*
- *They don't want to get a venereal disease*
- *Females may be prescribed oral contraceptives in an effort to manage painful menstruation and endometriosis, and/or polycystic ovarian syndrome.*
- *Etc.*

*People choose to not use contraceptives because:*

- *Because condoms to some don't feel natural*
- *Some people have religious objections to contraception in general*
- *Some people are allergic to certain forms of contraception*
- *Some people have unacceptable side effects from contraception – e.g. excess growth of hair, mood disorders, lack of access or insurance, etc.*

*Process with the group the reasons why people choose to use and others choose not to use contraception. Remember, to elicit everyone's reactions and contributions.*

*Review slide 51 – the benefits of using contraception and again, process the information with the group.*

# *Session 10-Sexually Transmitted Infections*

*Greet participants*

*Review the information from last session.*

*Questions for discussion:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area?”*

*Address any parking lot questions*

*Introduce the week’s topic and request prior information.*

*Let participants know that the diseases are preventable if safer sex practices are employed and that screening from a health care professional is a reasonable request to a new partner.*

*Sexually transmitted infections with couples is very complicated because:*

- People don’t “see” infections and may think someone is clean*
- I can already be infected with an STI and think that it’s okay but a person can get more severe symptoms through reinfection.*
- My infection will infect all of my partners if I engage in less safe sex. Condoms in the case of STI’s is a barrier method to reducing the likelihood of infecting a partner. – there are condoms and dental dams that can be used to reduce the likelihood of infecting another person.*
- There is embarrassment and stigma and shame with people not choosing to be tested or to share with their partner or potential partners what condition they have.*
- HIV, Hepatitis-C, Herpes, Syphilis, Gonorrhea (etc.) – all have the capacity to be permanent and lethal.*

*Review slides 55 to 62.*

*All of these conditions require a doctor's intervention for treatment. Most infections can become symptom free over time, however, in order to prevent infecting your partners it is important to get treated and to use barrier contraception.*

*It's important to know that one may be infected with an STI and not even know. Therefore, it is always preferable for people to use a barrier protection (condom or dental dam).*

This is an important opportunity in the group session to process people's reactions to these facts. Most especially to the embarrassment and stigma which prevents people from sharing their illness with others. People long for intimacy and to a sexual relationship and may feel too self-conscious and embarrassed to bring up their condition.

**This is an important portion of this course.** When you want sex, a relationship (whether 'in love' or not) it's always important to protect the other person from potential infection. We all would be safer if our partner protected us.



# *Session 11-Sexual Dysfunction*

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/sexual-health/sexual-dysfunction.aspx>

*Review the objectives of this session:*

- *Identify the sources and causes of sexual dysfunction*

*Review slide 66 that provides information on sexual dysfunction.*

*Many people have concerns over sexual dysfunction because of the barriers they create to having a fulfilling sexual life.*

*People's idea about sex and dysfunction are confounded and require a deep conversation. It only takes a small change to affect desire. Almost any emotional reaction or thought or memory can affect sexual desire. This is most especially found in males whose sexual life with regards to intercourse rely on the ability to get and keep an erection. It also affects females as well with respect to their desire and willingness to engage.*

*One out of every 4 women have experienced sexual trauma in their lifetime. Regardless of the actual research or statistics, a person's reaction to intimacy and their sexual life is impacted by their experiences and that includes trauma.*

*The facilitator's role continues to be that of needing to maintain a safe environment for participants. Engagement with the people in the room and maintaining a safe environment continues and is even more important during these difficult conversations. This course is not just teaching, it's processing people's feelings around these topics. This is a session about what is normal. That means that people in the room will be wondering if they are normal. What is normal is people having relationships that include sex that's enjoyable, intimate and reciprocal and where partners work together to address issues around performance and desire in a supportive way that is not shaming and recognizes that human sexuality is a profound intimate interaction.*

*Define for participants:*

*What does it mean for sex to be enjoyable? Each person has to decide that. This gives room for lots of expression and interaction. Enjoyable means that it's not painful, enforced and is reciprocal.*

*Reciprocal means that there is a give and take between the partners that is equal that recognizes and values that each person is a person and not an object.*

*What does it mean to be intimate? It means I share myself with my partner but does not necessarily need to connect to sex. Being intimate does not mean having sex. Being intimate means that I care about you and I share myself with you without filter or reserve. It's enjoyable it's intimate and reciprocal.*

*It is not necessary for people to divulge or disclose during this session. These are extremely difficult and personal topics to discuss. Just be aware that bringing these questions and defining these for everyone allows them to personally process for themselves and how this relates to their lives. This is an important aspect of our work and probably the most important for this course. Give people room to share what they are comfortable sharing and give them the space and dignity to express however they choose.*

*Everyone deserves to have a life that includes sexual intimacy and so when faced with the problems with dysfunction people have a right to ask for help and receive support from partners and professionals.*

*Review slide #67 regarding substances that can cause sexual dysfunction. There are many people that are not happy with the sexual side effects of these medications, especially those prescribed by medical or psychiatric professionals. Our role is to support people in this process. They are trying to live their life while also managing their psychiatric illness. If they choose not to take their medication, they are NOT non-compliant but they are deciding that their life is best lived with sex than without it. This is NORMAL. We can help them to work with the medical professional to help them live the life of their choosing while also working on their psychiatric symptoms. If medication causes sexual dysfunction, it's important to address that with their medical professional. Having a sexual life is IMPORTANT to a person's overall mental well-being. It would be antithesis to mental wellness if one denies that aspect of normal human existence.*

## *Questions for Discussion:*

*"How do you feel about this topic?"*

*"What are your general thoughts on this topic?"*

*"What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?"*

*"Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?"*

*"Who can you go to for more information?"*

*"What is your goal in this subject area?"*

In an effort to assist people in improving their health and in making concrete plans for the future, encourage them to create a list of the questions that they want to ask their doctor at their next visit.

There is also the possibility to ask a Medical Doctor to visit the class and be willing to answer some general questions for the class.

The facilitator should only do this if you first ask the participants if this is a service they want (and they agree to this) and second know that there will be questions available for the Doctor to answer. Without these two components the discussion will falter.

## *Session 12-*

This is the final session and should redirect participants to what they have learned over the twelve weeks. This is the perfect opportunity to review what people have learned, but also to discuss what they will take with them that will impact their future behaviors.

This session hopes to return to a discussion of intimacy. Intimacy, in the way defined, protects all of us from having a relationship that is toxic. That is to say, protecting us from a relationship that is unhealthy and not in our best interest. Having a relationship just for the purpose of sex or intimacy does no one any good unless both partners are willing and interested in creating a relationship based on respect. Desire alone can get us all into trouble.

Review with everyone, some concrete things they have learned to keep themselves emotionally and physically safe with respect to sexual relationships.

The article below will give you the opportunity to reiterate the goals and values they have for a partnership.

*Read this article:*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/196912/intimacy-the-art-relationships>

### *Questions for discussion:*

*“How do you feel about this topic?”*

*“What are your general thoughts on this topic?”*

*“What have you experienced that gives you information on this topic?”*

*“Do you think there is more that you should learn about this subject?”*

*“Who can you go to for more information?”*

*“What is your goal in this subject area.”*

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# Conversations That Build Intimacy BIBI DEITZ

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## 1. Go First

Share something personal, and this may inspire your partner to do the same, in an I'll-show-you-mine, you-show-me-yours situation. Even if things don't go exactly that way, opening up can only foster intimacy, dating, relationship and lifestyle expert Steven Ward tells Bustle. "Intimacy, by definition, is shared secret knowledge," he says. "Emotional and physical intimacy involve sharing something deeply personal."

So — go out on a limb, and see what happens. "I always recommend that you give to get," he says. Tell your partner something that you've never revealed. "Be vulnerable to see vulnerable. Be open to see open. If you want to get closer to someone tell them something that very few, if any, other people know." And you don't have to bare it all, end of story. If your partner doesn't reciprocate, you're totally allowed to query them. "You can then ask them about the same subject in turn," says Ward.

## 2. Drum Up Some Fantasy

Try mainlining some intimacy with a specific question, psychologist Nikki Martinez tells Bustle. Martinez has one question in mind: "What is your fantasy?" This can spark a connected conversation — but only if you're willing to do the legwork too. "You have to be willing to be open and honest, and the partner has to be willing to grant and try what they share," she says. "If this can be done without either party made to feel awkward, and the episode is enjoyable, more conversations like this are likely to take place, and intimacy can grow between the two of you."

"Fantasy" in this context doesn't have to read in any particular way; rather, discussing fantasy can lead to a conversation about life, love, money, career, the future — really, the possibilities are endless. And don't forget to express your fantasies too. "The conversation should go both ways, meaning you should mutually be discussing and fulfilling the other's wants and needs."

## 3. Be Grateful

"A great way to build intimacy is expressing gratitude for something thoughtful your partner did that day," Samantha Burns, relationship counselor and dating coach, tells Bustle. But she doesn't mean a here-and-there hit of gratitude; she's talking every damn day. "Aim for a daily gratitude challenge — when you cozy up in bed, say thank you and take a moment to appreciate your significant other," she suggests.

If gratitude doesn't do it for you, try nostalgia. "Another great way to increase intimacy is to reminisce about your first date or the first time you slept together," she suggests. Bringing scent memory or visual cues into the narrative is the way to go: "Share as many details as possible," Burns says. "Maybe you remember what she wore, or how he smelled. This can help to bring those butterflies back."

#### 4. Invite Them In

"One conversation that can help build intimacy with your partner is inviting them into your life as a guest, relationship coach Jase Lindgren tells Bustle. "What this means is that while your partner is in your life, you want to be a good host to them, helping them to achieve their goals and dreams, rather than focusing on what you want from them."

Eschewing selfishness as a route to intimacy: Yes to that. "In order to be the best host, you need to know what it is your partner truly wants in life," says Lindgren. In fact, Martinez's question, "What is your fantasy?" could be a path to this ongoing discussion. "This is a conversation you can have many times, checking in with them about their goals, aspirations and hopes," says Lindgren. Just because you've had such a conversation once or twice doesn't mean the topic is closed. "We are always changing, and you can help increase intimacy by always staying up-to-date about your partner, rather than assuming they will always stay the same," Lindgren says. Keep making it apparent that you care, and keep asking.

#### 5. Be A Comfort

Find out how your partner likes to be comforted when times are tough, and try to show up in that way when the sh\*t hits the fan, clinical hypnotherapist, author and educator Rachel Astarte, who offers transformational coaching for individuals and couples at Healing Arts New York, tells Bustle. "The one conversation a couple can have in order to build intimacy is to ask: How can I help you when you're suffering?" says Astarte. Or: "How would you like me to react ... when you are in pain?"

Though no one can magically remove anyone's pain, you *can* be there for your partner when they are upset. "The truth is, we all know how to treat each other when things are going well," says Astarte. "But when someone is depressed or frustrated or upset, oftentimes we try to fix the problem, rather than simply lend an ear." This goes really well for some — and terribly for others. "Some people like 'fix-it' partners. Others just want to their partners to hold space for them in their down times," she says. So ask what your partner prefers — beforehand, when all is calm.

#### 6. Be Practical

Intimacy isn't always some sweet, mystical, fa-la-la unicorn to be chased down via long, deep talks. Quite simply, intimacy that connectedness that arises when you feel truly bonded with your partner, and this can happen in the most practical of ways, New York-based relationship and etiquette expert and

author April Masini tells Bustle. "If you're married, or you've been living together for some time, you should create an estate plan, or, simply, wills," she says.

This may sound incredibly boring, but, as she points out, "most people don't approach this topic because they think it's unpleasant, but the reality is, it's a way to learn the depths of your love and how you want to take care of each other if life throws you a curve ball." Wait, that's really sweet. And practical. Who knew?!

Also, this isn't just for preparing for the absolute worst, Masini says. "Estate plans aren't just about death — they're about what happens if you're incapacitated temporarily or permanently, and they allow you to focus on each other and the future," she says. And there's nothing more intimate than getting real about such serious topics, exploring them with your partner and finding out how they plan and react.

## 7. Talk About Your Childhood

And now for a very sweet suggestion. "I feel that discussing each other's childhoods can really build an intimate bond between partners," Rob Alex, who created Sexy Challenges and Mission Date Night with his wife, tells Bustle. "Expressing how you felt as a child and things that hurt you when you were young gives your partner a real insight into what shaped you as an adult," he says. Get the party started by breaking out old photos and taking a trip down memory lane with your partner, telling them stories as you go.

"That understanding of how you felt in good times and bad times as a kid really allows your partner to see your vulnerabilities," says Alex, aka the Guru of Getting It On. "Sharing those feelings and seeing your partner as that kid, either sad or happy, can evoke deep feelings and connections with each other."

## 8. Discuss Self-Improvement

To sidle up next to your partner emotionally, talk about the things you have seen your partner do to grow. A good way to begin? "Each partner shares one new thing that they have noticed that their partner has been working on to improve themselves and/or the relationship," Carlyle Jansen, author of *Author, Sex Yourself: The Woman's Guide to Mastering Masturbation and Achieving Powerful Orgasms*, tells Bustle.

Don't stop there, though. In the course of discussion, tell your partner one thing that you "have been reluctant to bring up, and why," and ask them to do the same, Jansen says. There are plenty of reasons one might not broach certain subjects — Jansen lists a few, such as "fear of being petty, repeating oneself, rejection, judgement," and the like — but if you and your love give each other permission to talk about anything, then everything is fair game (as long as it is healthy, rational and reasonable).

## 9. "Tell Me Things"

It doesn't have to be that deep. "A basic tenet of solid relationships is really listening to each other, and I've found that putting my phone down, turning off the television and simply saying to my significant other, "Tell me things," has really strengthened our bond," Danielle Sepulveres, sex educator and author of *Losing It: The Semi-Scandalous Story of an Ex-Virgin*, tells Bustle.

"Focusing your attention on each other in such a basic way just leads to greater trust and communication," she says. "Even when it starts out as an unimportant stream of consciousness, like, 'You wouldn't believe the guy in front of me at Starbucks today,' 'I tripped coming off the elevator at work,' [or] 'I think I called someone by the wrong name all day,' it leads to more questions and answers, and the conversation can veer off anywhere you want," she says. It's foolproof, she adds: This has "always worked for myself and anyone I've ever suggested this to."

## 10. Be Vulnerable

Vulnerability is the speediest shortcut to intimacy — "and it can be a game changer," Dr. Ramani Durvasula, author of *Should I Stay or Should I Go: Surviving a Relationship With A Narcissist*, tells Bustle. "If you can share your vulnerabilities, and your partner is still there, and in fact even more close — the ground just shifted," she says. Truth.

Then again, if uncovering your shell leads to anything else, red flag. "If your vulnerability distances your partner, or they mock you, or somehow disrespect it — it may be a *strong* sign to reconsider," Durvasula says. "In a healthy relationship, each person is the custodian of the other's vulnerability." You can't save anything that your partner tells you in an uncensored moment to use it against them later, or use it criticism them, she says.

"We all have vulnerabilities, it is a part of being human," says Durvasula. "If your partner can feel brave enough to share with you, and respectful enough to receive yours with warmth and kindness, then you have gone to the next level." A relationship level-up! "This sharing of vulnerability can deepen all kinds of intimacies within your relationship — romantic, sexual, spiritual, psychological, and intellectual," she says. "Don't fall for the fear of losing someone because you share a vulnerability. If sharing your vulnerability results in someone leaving, then there wasn't that much of a relationship to begin with, and you just saved yourself from time wasted." Preach!

## 11. Admit When You First Fell In Love

"Nothing builds intimacy between a couple more than to open up and share with each other that moment of surrender, when each of them knew that they had fallen in love with each other," Cindi Sansone-



Braff, author of *Grant Me a Higher Love*, tells Bustle. Even if you each realized your love at different times, which is 99.9 percent likely, don't try to cover up how when knew you were in love.

"How great it is to get confirmation that you saw that moment in her eyes, or how wonderful it is for a woman to hear how her man knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he loved her on the night, when he was sicker than a dog, and she came bearing homemade chicken soup," she says. "These earth-shattering revelations, shared at an intimate moment, will create a memory of love that will last forever" and foster deep intimacy.

## 12. Ask Questions

Play your own personal rendition of 20 Questions, suggests relationship counselor Crystal Bradshaw to Bustle. Ask questions such as, "How would you spend your days if you didn't have to work?"; "If you could have your dream job, what would that be?"; "What is your ideal vacation?"; "How would you prefer to spend your weekends?"; "Of the people we know who do you think has the best relationship?" and "What is a dream you have that you want to chase but are afraid to?"

From there, you can spiral off into other topics — the point is just to start a real conversation, and learn more about your partner. "These types of questions facilitate a deeper sharing and vulnerability," says Bradshaw. "We feel connected, heard, understood. We feel like someone has our back and supports us. When we share our inner worlds, we allow our partners to know us in a way that only we know ourselves."

Not into it? There's another option. "I recommend using the couples version of Table Topics, which I keep on my office coffee table and often have couples draw a card and ask each other a question," says Bradshaw. "Dr. John Gottman also has a deck of cards to help couples share their inner world and become better acquainted with their partner's inner world." Intimacy games! Will wonders never cease?

## 13. Eat Some Pie

Not actual pie. Well, actual pie optional. The kind of pie relationship coach Chris Armstrong recommends to Bustle has nothing to do with apple, blackberry or Key lime: "There are three different types [of intimacy]: physical (seduce my body), intellectual (seduce my mind) and emotional (seduce my heart)," Armstrong says. "You need the whole *pie* (physical, intellectual and emotional), not just a piece of it."

Armstrong stresses that this trifecta is vital. "Without all three of these, there is no true intimacy," he says. "The one conversation I think partners can have with one another to build intimacy starts with stating an appreciation for all three." So this echoes back to Burn's suggestion of gratitude, but with specifics. "I imagine a great conversation where someone says to their partner, 'I love when you hold me

when I'm just having a stressful day. It's such a great emotional high for me," says Armstrong. He suggests a hug after such a statement. "In a lot of cases where intimacy is stagnant, it's because physical intimacy has become mechanical," he says. "Couples must realize that stagnant physical intimacy will never fully rekindle without bringing the intellectual and emotional back." So — start with the emotional, and go from there.

#### 14. Give Them A Reason

It couldn't get simpler than this, nor sweeter: "Tell them why you love them," marriage and family therapist Esther Boykin tells Bustle. "I know that can sound like just stroking their ego, but the truth is that intimacy is built, in large part, on trusting that someone loves and accepts you for all of who you are," she says. And who doesn't love hearing the exact reasons one's partner loves them?

"It's easy in a relationship to assume that your partner knows you love them and why," she says. But this is not always so: "After the early phase of love, we rarely share the 'why' with each other." This is the time to go deep. "Focus on the aspects that make them unique and special to you — not just the superficial characteristics that other people probably compliment them on too," she advises. "If your boyfriend has a generous spirit, tell him how much you cherish that. If your wife is quirky and you find her oddball humor adorable, let her know.

And just like that, you're building closeness. "Intimacy is a secure emotional connection that lets us feel free to be our wonderfully strange selves, and when you remind your partner just how much you love those parts that they don't show the whole world, the deeper our connection will become," Boykin says.

#### 15. Ask More Questions

Questions really seem to be where it's at, as far as intimacy-building goes, according to relationship experts of every stripe. There are "a few great, classic questions to ask your partner to build intimacy and bonding," Dr. Fran Walfish, Beverly Hills child, parenting, and relationship psychotherapist tells Bustle. "You can even revisit these wonderful queries every few months and see if your partner responds differently," says the author of *The Self-Aware Parent* and costar We TV's *Sex Box*.

There are tons of these types of questions, but here are the classics she's referring to: "If you could have three wishes, what would they be?"; "What is the best/worst thing that ever happened to you?"; "What most frightens you?"; "If you could change one thing about yourself what would it be?"; "If you could turn back the clock and be any age, what was the happiest time in your life you'd want to return to?"; "Regarding life regrets, is there anything you wish you could redo differently?" and "Who do you think you know and understand better — yourself or your spouse?"

#### 16. Discuss Your Romance

"The most intimate moment between two people is when they are discussing their relationship with each other," life coach Kali Rogers tells Bustle. So meta. "These 'meta moments' add a deep emotional connection to any conversation," she says. "So the best conversation to have as a couple isn't about sex or love or romantic gestures — it's just about how they feel about each other."

Perhaps a good jumping-off point might be the questions suggested by Bradshaw and Walfish. Couples should talk about how they work together and how they live together, says Rogers. "If they can discuss them as a unit out loud to each other, that will automatically build a sense of intimacy and togetherness."

## 17. Just Be You

Tell your partner who you are, bruises and all. "Conversations that involve sharing private parts of your life, things that only those in your inner circle are aware, build intimacy," professional matchmaker Samantha Daniels tells Bustle. "For example, if a family member passed away, sharing your feelings about that can build intimacy. Or if you were bullied as a kid ... sharing that with your partner can build intimacy," she says.

You can feel free to discuss your romantic past too, says Daniels. "Talking about prior relationships and exes who hurt you can build intimacy," she says. "All of these topics are private to you and are things that random people do not know about you; once you share these types of things with your partner, you cross a proverbial line, and your connection to each other deepens and strengthens."

But don't just blurt all of this out at the laundromat. "You need to be careful to choose the appropriate time to share things of this nature," says Daniels. "You want to make sure you feel safe and connected to the person, and equally that the person is ready to be told these things and see you in a vulnerable position," she adds. "If you share things too soon, it can scare the other person off and also make you feel too vulnerable." So go slow. But once you feel ready, don't hold back too much.

## 18. Keep Expectations In Check

"Fighting happens more often in marriages in which the intimacy and bonding aren't working," Tina B. Tessina, aka Dr. Romance, psychotherapist and author of *Love Styles: How to Celebrate Your Differences*, tells Bustle. "Don't let your expectations get out of line." Instead, aim for a plain, old-fashioned good time. "Fun and intimacy do not depend on spending money or going to extremes; they don't depend on a particular setting or activity, and they don't have to take a lot of time." If you make it all about the external, you're bound to be disappointed.

"Enjoying yourselves is an internal process," Tessina says. Basic activities like singing, dancing, and playing a sport are all routes to intimacy. "Yes, you can create intimacy with special occasions, something that requires a bit of advance planning," she says, "but when you look back on your most

intimate experiences, they are more likely to have been spontaneous and simple rather than elaborate and expensive."

## 19. Have A Fight

Most people are scared of fighting, but that's not necessarily wise. "Some people shy away from conflict or think that conflict is bad," relationship coach and therapist Anita Chlipala tells Bustle. "Actually, talking about conflict and working through it can build intimacy for a couple," she says. If you have a fight, work through it. After you patch things up, you'll be stronger than ever — as long as the argument is healthy, and there are no abusive or below-the-belt qualities to it. Says Chlipala, "Any conversation that requires vulnerability will build intimacy, as long as the partner is supportive and responds positively."

## 20. Pen A Letter

"My favorite exercise with couples is to have them write a letter to each other as if they are speaking to the child within their spouse," psychotherapist and neuromarketing strategist Michele Paiva tells Bustle. "It creates an unconditional love feeling, shows compassion [and] vulnerability, and can be erotic after, as this brings deeper emotions," she says. So write such a letter to your mate, and ask them to respond. Intimacy incarnate!

*Want more of Bustle's Sex and Relationships coverage? Check out our new podcast, I Want It That Way, which delves into the difficult and downright dirty parts of a relationship, and find more on our Soundcloud page.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## WELLNESS WORKSHEET 29

### How Capable Are You of Being Intimate?

Determine how closely each statement describes your feelings. Circle the number in the appropriate column.

|  | Strongly disagree | Mildly disagree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. I like to share my feelings with others.  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 2. I like to feel close to other people.   | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 3. I like to listen to other people talk about their feelings.                             | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 4. I am concerned with rejection in my expression of feelings to others.                   | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 5. I'm concerned with being dominated in a close relationship with another.                | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 6. I'm often anxious about my own acceptance in a close relationship.                      | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 7. I'm concerned that I trust other people too much.                                       | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 8. Expression of emotion makes me feel close to another person.                            | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 9. I do not want to express feelings that would hurt another person.                       | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 10. I am overly critical of people in a close relationship.                                | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 11. I want to feel close to people to whom I am attracted.                                 | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 12. I tend to reveal my deepest feelings to other people.                                  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 13. I'm afraid to talk about my sexual feelings with a person in whom I'm very interested. | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 14. I want to be close to a person who is attracted to me.                                 | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 15. I would not become too close because it involves conflict.                             | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 16. I seek out close relationships with people to whom I am attracted.                     | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |

(over)

WELLNESS WORKSHEET 29 — continued

|  | Strongly disagree | Mildly disagree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 35. Being open and intimate with another person usually makes me feel good.  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 36. I usually can see another person's point of view.  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 37. I want to be sure that I am in good control of myself before I attempt to become intimate with another person. | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 38. I resist intimacy.   | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 39. Stories of interpersonal relationships tend to affect me.  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 40. Undressing with members of a group increases my feelings of intimacy.  | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 41. I try to trust and be close to others.   | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 42. I think that people who want to become intimate have hidden reasons for wanting closeness.                     | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 43. When I become intimate with another person, the possibility of my being manipulated is increased.              | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 44. I am generally a secretive person.   | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 45. I feel that sex and intimacy are the same, and one cannot exist without the other.                             | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 46. I can only be intimate in a physical relationship.   | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 47. The demands placed on me by those with whom I have intimate relationships often inhibit my own satisfaction.   | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 48. I would compromise to maintain an intimate relationship.   | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 49. When I am physically attracted to another, I usually want to become intimate with the person.                  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 50. I understand and accept that intimacy leads to bad feelings as well as good feelings.                          | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |

(over)

WELLNESS WORKSHEET 29 — continued

|  | Strongly disagree | Mildly disagree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 17. When people become close, they tend not to listen to each other.                               | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 18. Intimate relationships bring me great satisfaction.  | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 19. I search for close intimate relationships.   | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 20. It is important to me to form close relationships.   | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 21. I do not need to share my feelings and thoughts with others.                                   | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 22. When I become very close to another, I am likely to see things that are hard for me to accept. | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 23. I tend to accept most things about people with whom I share a close relationship.              | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 24. I defend my personal space so others do not come too close.                                    | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 25. I tend to distrust people who are concerned with closeness and intimacy.                       | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 26. I have concerns about losing my individuality in close relationships.                          | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 27. I have concerns about giving up control if I enter into a really intimate relationship.        | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 28. Being honest and open with another person makes me feel closer to that person.                 | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 29. If I were another person, I would be interested in getting to know me.                         | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 30. I only become close to people with whom I share common interests.                              | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |
| 31. Revealing secrets about my sex life makes me feel close to others.                             | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 32. Generally, I can feel just as close to someone of the same sex as someone of the other sex.    | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 33. When another person is physically attracted to me, I usually want to become more intimate.     | 1                 | 2               | 3                          | 4            | 5              |
| 34. I have difficulty being intimate with more than one person.                                    | 5                 | 4               | 3                          | 2            | 1              |

(over)

WELLNESS WORKSHEET 29 — continued

**Scoring**

To calculate your total score, add up the items you circled. Find the score on the table below that is closest to your total score.

|     |                             |
|-----|-----------------------------|
| 150 | Significantly below average |
| 161 | Somewhat below average      |
| 172 | Average                     |
| 183 | Somewhat above average      |
| 194 | Significantly above average |