

Negotiate Sexual Differences

It's not uncommon for the two members of a couple to have some different sexual desires, in both what they want to do and how often they want to do it. Hopefully there is enough overlap that you can create a good sex life together, but even in the best couples there will be some differences of opinion or at least desires in the moment. After all, do you and your partner agree about every other thing all the time?

As much as these disagreements can cause strife, there are ways to negotiate out the differences between you and your partner so that you both feel like you get more of what you want, without feeling pressured to do what you don't want to do. This process of negotiating in good faith and coming to a mutually satisfying agreement, especially about something as potentially sensitive as sex, will benefit your relationship outside of bed, too.

Disagreements about What We Do

There are many, many ways that people can get turned on sexually—what is exhilarating for one person may be a total turn-off for another. There are plenty of theories, but we still don't know definitively why people develop the turn-ons and turn-offs that they do. It's probably more likely that we can add things to our turn-on list more so than remove them, but our sexual desires can evolve over the years and decades. Sometimes this is the influence of our partners and our experiences with them, sometimes it's part of our overall development.

So, wherever they came from, we can divide our sexual interests into four categories:

1. What I know I like to do. These are the activities that we are comfortable with and enjoy doing.
2. What I am willing to do for you. Some activities may not be all that inherently interesting, but we are willing to do them because our partner enjoys them. Sometimes our partner's pleasure makes an otherwise uninteresting activity much more exciting.
3. What I might be willing to try. These are the activities that, under the right circumstances, we would consider trying. Sometimes the hesitation has to do with our own comfort about this desire, sometimes we're concerned about how our partner would react to the suggestion.
4. What I am not interested in trying (at least at this time). These are the activities that actively turn us off because they feel threatening, uncomfortable, or just weird. While most of these activities probably won't go from a yuck to a yum, perhaps some of them will.

You may find it helpful to think about which activities fit where for you, as well as discuss it with your partner. Your current sex life probably consists mostly of the overlap between things that you and your

partner both like to do, with perhaps a few things that you are each willing to do for the other. The activities that at least one of you would like to try (and the other is willing) are your areas of potential experimentation and the activities that at least one of you is not interested in trying are your current sexual limits.

Good behavior from our partners, by not being demanding or guilt-inducing, will make us more generous and willing—as will general good behavior outside of bed, too. Direct requests, with an ability to handle rejection, tend to get us more of what we want. If there is something that you would like to try but your partner isn't so into it, ask what would make it more interesting or safer for them? Perhaps explain why it turns you on and why you would like to do it with *them*—help them find a way to be turned on by it. If there is something that you would like to try but your partner is really not into it, then think about and explore if there are other ways to have a similar experience or get that same feeling from doing something else that would be acceptable. Happy couples find ways to ensure that both partners are getting enough of what they want without either feeling coerced.

Disagreements about How Often We Do It

It's not uncommon for the two members of a couple to have at least somewhat different desires for the frequency of sex—and it's not always the man with the higher drive. There's probably a fair amount of biology at work that determines our desired frequency, but some people also feel more comfortable acting on those sexual desires. But even if a couple has exactly the same drive, they won't always want sex at exactly the same times, so there is still a need to negotiate out those differences.

Whether you're the partner who wants more sex overall or just wants it more right now, or the one who wants it less, it all comes down to generosity. You may generously offer to do something to give your partner a good time, even if you're not in the mood. This may be different from what your partner was hoping for, so that is where their generosity comes in—to graciously be happy about what is being offered, rather than get stuck on what isn't. At other times when one of the partners is not interested in any sexual activity at that time, then the act of generosity involves allowing your partner to meet their own needs if they choose to and, for the other partner, to be good about it, making a shared sexual experience more likely next time.

Sexual desire can be both spontaneous and responsive. Sometimes desire arises on its own or quickly from passing sexy thoughts, without much effort. Sometimes though, desire takes longer to build and you may find that you don't start wanting sex until you have already started flirting, kissing, and touching. In other words, sometimes desire follows activity. This should absolutely not be used as a justification to push someone to do something they don't want to do, but if you know that you tend to get in the mood if you allow yourself to start down that road, then you can try to start things on good faith, with the idea that you may wind up wanting it. Of course, you still retain the right to change course if the spark never turns into a flame, but you can educate your partner on what to do to help you find that interest. As in so many other ways, good sex is a collaborative process.

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