



BOOKS ON SENSUALITY

Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence by Daniel Siegel

Bodyfulness: Somatic Practices for Presence, Empowerment, and Waking Up in This Life by Christine Caldwell

Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Mark Williams and Danny Penman

Better Sex through Mindfulness by Dr. Lori Brotto



BASIC MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness can be thought of as the ability to be present in the moment without being overly emotional or reactive to what is happening around us. When we are mindful, our nervous system is at rest. This state helps us be more aware of our body and makes it easier to have relationships with others.

However, sometimes we have an experience or thought and we latch on to it, turning it into a big deal and allowing it to overwhelm the system.

Try this little mindfulness exercise to help you detach from intrusive thoughts.

You Try It:

Close your eyes and bring your attention to the thoughts, images, emotions, and body sensations that want to grab hold of your attention. Notice which ones have a stronger pull on your energy. Now zoom out of your body and imagine that you're looking at yourself from a chair on the other side of the room. Take a few deep breaths in and out and notice how your body feels. Now zoom further out and picture the house or building that you're in. Again, breathe in and out several times. Zoom out further and imagine that you're flying overhead with a bird's eye view. Notice again how your body feels as you begin to move further away from your thoughts and emotions. Now zoom even further out and imagine you're looking down from an airplane high in the sky. Notice how light you feel. Take several deep breaths in and out. Finally, zoom even further out until you're just a speck in the Milky Way Galaxy. Notice how small and insignificant your thoughts are from this distance. Take several deep breaths in and out, in and out. Now. Maintaining the sense of peace you have with this newfound space, begin to float back down into your body. Notice if your *emotional* response to your thoughts has changed in anyway. Notice if you have more clarity about what to do now that you've discovered a more spacious presence. Take one final deep breath in and out, and then open your eyes.

(continued on next page)

You Try It:

A mini mindfulness exercise that I love goes like this:

Close your eyes and think of a negative thought you've had recently. This might be a thought about you, someone else, or a situation you're in. Notice what feelings and body sensations you have when you think about that thought.

Repeat the thought several times.

Now, to the beginning of the thought, add the phrase,
I am having the thought that _____.

Now add, *I notice that I am having the thought that* _____.

This simple addition of phrases should help create a safe emotional distance between you and the distressing thought.



USING OUR BODIES TO EVOKE EMOTION

Clinicians are always considering the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Sometimes thoughts and feelings are hard to change. Changing behavior (even if you feel like you're faking it to make it), like in this exercise, can be a powerful tool to ignite desired emotions.

Most people believe that our bodies respond to our emotions. For example, if you feel sad, you frown, cry, and turn inward. If you feel happy, you smile. If you feel excited, your eyes open and you stand taller.

But what many people don't realize is that by positioning or moving our bodies in certain ways, we have the power to evoke emotions that we want to feel.

You Try It:

Begin by identifying the emotion you want to feel. Here are a few ideas:

Content
Happy
Confident
Thrilled
Sexy

Now, think of how someone looks or moves when they are feeling that way. Do they sit taller; do they walk slowly, yet confidently; do they stride quickly, eyes bright; do they smile; do they jump up and down?

Now position your body in a way that connects you to your desired emotion. Pay attention to the following: Facial expression, spinal posture, breathing, and movement.

Notice how simply adjusting your body changes your emotional state. You might not notice a huge shift right away; perhaps it's more subtle, or perhaps the first time you try this, you don't notice anything at all. Don't worry. Establishing this connection takes time, but is possible for everyone.



TURNING FEELING INTO E-MOTION

I'm always working with clients to strengthen the mind-body connection. It's helpful to notice how emotions are expressed in our body. This is why the word *feeling* is often used synonymously with emotion – we feel it in our body.

While feelings tend to get stuck in the body, emotion can be thought of as energy-in-motion (e-motion). It moves. Often times, we aren't even aware of the feelings or body sensations that are present at any given moment. Let's learn to listen.

You Try It:

Close your eyes and bring your attention to the different parts of your body, starting with your head and working down. Notice any area you find any tension, tightness, or unusual sensation. Usually if we can identify something, it means that part of our body is holding on to a feeling.

See if you can identify the feeling. Perhaps you notice a lump in your throat. Or maybe you notice a pit in your stomach. This can indicate shame that is stuck in the body. Perhaps you notice a warm opening in your heart. This sensation indicates love. Now see if you can turn that feeling into an e-motion. Does a lump in your throat mean you have something to say? Perhaps the warmth in your heart indicates that you need to wrap your arms a little tighter around your beloved when they get home. Maybe a scream into your pillow will help release the tightness in your chest.

If the only area you can feel tension is your "head" and by head I mean your mind, that is a sign that you are disconnected from your body. Repeat this exercise until you can connect more specifically with your body.

Check out this interesting link on a study that mapped where research participants felt emotions in their body. <https://www.fastcompany.com/3024327/an-atlas-of-the-human-body-that-maps-where-we-feel-emotions>



STOP AND SAVOR

We live our lives in a way that disconnects us from our bodies more than ever before. If you think about it, you can probably admit to “going through the motions” most of the time.

But you can probably also think of times when you’ve stopped to savor a moment. Perhaps you can think back to a vacation when you simply sat and focused on the feel of the ocean waves gently lapping onto your toes. Or maybe you’re a nature person and can think of what it’s like to stop and notice the sunlight streaming through the trees after a hike.

Stopping to savor *everyday* experiences can have profound effects on our ability to stay connected to our bodies. My research found that being sensual in life outside the bedroom can translate to stronger sensuality inside the bedroom.

You Try It:

Choose a scenario:

- Eating something (I usually suggest starting with something small like a handful of berries, a piece of chocolate, or a cup of tea)
- Relaxing in some way (taking a bath, getting a massage, or simply lying down for 5 minutes to rest)
- An activity (going for a walk, playing with your children, snuggling with your partner)

Remove all distractions and focus solely on the experience. Imagine that you’re engaged in the experience for the first time of your life. Notice each of the five senses. Notice what emotions or body sensations are evoked. Notice what thoughts you have. Practice gratitude for the moment you’re savoring.

Now write 10 words or phrases to describe the experience. This part is important. Writing helps strengthen neural pathways.

Try this exercise a few times per week and notice how your sensuality shifts.



IGNITING SHARED SENSUALITY

If you're not used to engaging the five senses with your partner on a regular basis, it can feel awkward to do so during sex. This exercise can help begin the process of creating a stronger sensual connection with your partner.

You Try It:

Begin by sitting or standing in front of partner. Now, look into your partner's eyes. Really look at them.

Next take your partner's hand in yours and feel all parts of their hand. You can advance this step by choosing other parts of your partner's body to touch, perhaps their lips or feet (both of which are loaded with nerve endings).

Next, close your eyes and take turns listening to the beat of each other's heart or sound of each other's breath. Put your head on their chest and just listen.

Keeping your eyes closed, take a moment to inhale your partner's scent. Get right into their neck and breath in their skin.

Finally, kiss each other and savor the taste of your partner.

In each step, pay close attention to what is happening in your body.



EMBODIED SELF-PLEASURE

Stop to think about the last time you masturbated. How much time did you spend exploring your body? If you're like most people, you've probably found a way to fast-track an orgasm so you can get on with your day or night. Perhaps you rely on a trusty vibrator, a sure-fire fantasy, or porn to propel arousal so that you can achieve the goal of having an orgasm. There is nothing wrong with this, but periodically slowing down and practicing embodied masturbation can do wonders to strengthen the mind-body connection and enhance solo and partnered sexual pleasure.

You Try It:

Set the mood. Think about what environment helps connect you to your body. Do you need to soak in the tub? Does it help to have freshly laundered sheets? Does candlelight or soft music help you feel relaxed?

Undress. Remove your top and look at yourself in the mirror. Notice the color and texture of your skin. Take deep breaths in and caress your upper body with your hands. Remove your bottoms and do the same. Move your body in the mirror. Close your eyes and move your body again. Notice what comes up emotionally. Do you feel self-conscious? Empowered? Warm? Cool? Remember, you are developing *as*-body awareness, not *of*-body awareness. See what happens to any poor body image concerns as you make this mental shift.

Lie Down. Close your eyes and take a moment to tune into the body. Take several deep, slow breaths in and out. Don't progress until you feel completely relaxed. If any intrusive thoughts try to make their way in, simply notice them, take a breath, and draw your attention back into your body.

Explore Your Body. Begin touching different parts of your body. Explore with different kinds of touch. Perhaps you gently caress your skin, or you apply a deeper pressure. Maybe you tap your fingers in a pitter patter as you move up and down your body. When you feel ready, begin touching your genitals. Don't use any toys, porn, or other external stimulus during this exercise. This is just for you and your body. Don't worry if arousal doesn't build or orgasm doesn't come. That's not the point. The point is simply to strengthen neural pathways and turn on pleasure.

Take as much time as you need.

SENSUALITY AND EROTICISM FOR COUPLES

In my video, I explained the power of Sensate Focus – one of the oldest, yet most effective sex therapy techniques. In this technique, couples are encouraged to forget any goals or outcomes they may have for sex. The reason for this is that when the sole focus during sex is on the outcome, there is a loss of pleasure for the rest of the experience. In this exercise, you'll learn to focus on the sensations, which can be savored throughout the whole experience.

Usually this exercise is broken down into three stages. However, if you have sexual anxiety, I encourage you to break it down further. For instance, you'll see in Step 1 that couples take turns touching each other excluding the breasts and genitals. You may want to try this step wearing a tank top and underwear a few times until your comfortable trying it fully naked. You can add or take away as many steps as you need.

You Try It:

Consider your environment. (Go back to your handout in the Introduction section for tips on this.) Do you need fresh sheets, dim lighting, or an organized room? Is it better to try this on a week night or weekend? Would candlelight or soft music help set the mood?

Take turns being the giver and receiver of touch. Whether you're giving or receiving, try to focus on your own experience during the process. Only talk if something is uncomfortable or you need to stop. Otherwise, practice savoring the five senses throughout the experience. You can try different positions, such as sitting facing each other, lying on your stomach, or lying on your back.

Step 1: The first time you do this, exclude breast and genital touch. You may want to wear a tank top and underwear or perhaps you're comfortable being nude. Don't advance until the next step until you feel totally comfortable with the current step.

Step 2: You may include genital touch. Keep in mind all the principles from the first step.

Step 3: Penetrative sex may be included. Again, keep in mind all the principles from the first step.

While you're not trying to avoid orgasm, that shouldn't be the goal. If you notice an intrusive or distracting thought, practice your mindfulness strategies. Simply notice distracting thoughts without judgment or reaction and let them pass. Bring your attention back to your five senses.

Savor, and enjoy!



BOOKS ON CURIOSITY

The Power of Curiosity: How to Have Real Conversations that Create Collaboration, Innovation, and Understanding by Kathy Taberner and Kristen Taberner Siggen

Mindsets: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck

Private Thoughts: Exploring the Power of Women's Sexual Fantasies by Wendy Maltz and Suzie Boss

The Erotic Mind: Unlocking the Inner Sources of Passion and Fulfillment by Jack Morin

Tell Me What You Want: The Science of Sexual Desire and How It Can Help You Improve Your Sex Life by Justin Lehmiller

ADOPTING A BEGINNERS MIND

Adopting a beginner's mind is a technique from Zen Buddhism called *shoshin*. This technique encourages the adoption of a completely fresh, open mind when studying anything, especially if it's something you consider yourself an expert at.

The more strongly we believe in something, the more likely we are to have what's called a *confirmation bias*. For example, if you believe that people who have pets are happier people, you're more likely to notice evidence that supports your belief and completely (and unconsciously) ignore evidence that refutes your belief.

The unintentional biases and preconceived notions we develop over time can limit the amount of flexibility we have in our relationships with others. In the expert's mind, the potential outcomes are very narrow; yet in the beginner's mind, the possibilities are endless.

You Try It:

Choose a person, activity, or situation that you consider yourself an expert in. Now apply some of the following recommendations and notice what shift that creates.

- Remove words like *good, bad, always, never, and should* from your vocabulary.
- Stop trying to add value or "expertise." If in a conversation with someone, simply listen and use follow-up statements like *Tell me more about that.*
- When engaging in an activity or conversation with a beginner's mind, be very present in the moment and pay attention to little details you may have missed if you had gone in as "the expert." This may be something as subtle as noticing facial expressions or sensations in your own body.
- Slow down. As an expert, we tend to look for shortcuts and move as quickly as possible. Notice what happens when you pump the breaks and do something as if it were the first time.

What activity, person, or situation did you choose? _____

In what ways did you adopt a beginner's mind? _____

What did you learn about yourself through the process? _____

A NEW POINT OF VIEW

New experiences are a great way to channel your inner curiosity. But a more subtle, yet profound, approach is to simply talk to someone who has a different point of view or perspective from you. With the country so politically divided, many of us are guilty of socializing only with those who hold the same political beliefs as us. Perhaps you have a friend who practices a different religion from you. Or maybe you can think of a friend who is a different ethnicity from you. How much time have you spent really asking curious, open questions about their experience, beliefs, viewpoints, and perspectives?

You Try It:

Initiate a conversation with someone who has a different perspective, experience, belief system, or set of values from you. It is important that you go into this conversation with a completely open, nonjudgmental mind. Set aside your own beliefs and be receptive to whatever information they share. Tell them that you realize you've never really tried to understand their experience/paradigm/value system. Ask *how*, *why*, *when*, and *where* type questions.

How did you feel going into the conversation?

What did you learn?

What surprised you?

How did you feel throughout the dialogue?

How did you feel after?

What can you take away?

CREATING NEW SHARED EXPERIENCES

Finding ways to be open to new experiences comes in many forms. If you've always been the kind of person to cozy up in a nice hotel while on vacation, try going on a camping or RV trip with your partner instead. If you typically prefer to dine at one of three favorite restaurants, push yourself to try a new spot at least once a month. If you are season ticket holders to your local sports team, try going to a play or the ballet once in a while. Sign up for a class you can do together like dance, cooking, or painting. Register for a lecture at your local university.

You Try It:

Try something new and then answers these questions:

Activity:	
What I thought/felt before:	
What I thought/felt during:	
What I thought/felt after:	
What I learned about myself:	
What I learned about my partner:	
How this affected our relationship:	

REVISITING A CONFLICT

We are all guilty of going into conflict with our mind made up that our point of view is “right.”. Clever authors have even titled books something along the lines of, *You Can Be Right or You Can Be Married*. Going into a conflict with this kind of “fixed mindset” kills our ability to grow and ultimately problem solve. The intensity of the conflict can be diminished greatly if we spend more time understanding our partner’s point of view rather than jumping to blame or criticism. This exercise is designed to help you remain open when faced with a relationship challenge.

You Try It:

Sit face-to-face with your partner and make sure to remove any distractions.

Identify a conflict you’ve had in your relationship. It may be something from the past or an on-going issue.

The dialogue might go something like this,

Partner A: I would like to talk about _____.

Partner B: I hear you saying you’d like to talk about _____.

Partner A: When you said/did/expressed _____, the feeling that evoked in me was _____.

Partner B: I hear you saying that when I said _____, that made you feel _____.

Partner A: The reason I felt _____ was because _____ (you may express a related concern, something from your past)

Partner B: I hear you saying that the reason you felt _____ was because _____. Did I get that right?

Partner A: Now let me hear your point of view.

Partner B: When you said/did/expressed _____, the feeling that evoked in me was _____.

Partner A: I hear you saying that when I said _____, that made you feel _____.

Partner B: The reason I felt _____ was because _____ (you may express a related concern, something from your past)

Partner A: I hear you saying that the reason you felt _____ was because _____. Did I get that right?

Now that you’ve had a chance to understand your partner’s point of view and emotion, see if the intensity of the problem changes. Is it easier to come up with a solution?

IDENTIFYING SEXUAL LIKES AND DISLIKES

If you've never shared your sexual preferences with your partner, now's your chance. Sometimes we don't know how to articulate our likes and dislikes, and sometimes there are things we've never even considered. This exercise should help jumpstart that conversation.

Note that this is divided into GIVING, RECEIVING, MUTUAL, POSITIONS, and SOLO. Take your time with this exercise. IMPORTANT! Do not compare notes yet. We will come back to this in a few weeks.

You Try It:

GIVING TO PARTNER

ACTIVITY	WE CURRENTLY DO IT	I WANT TO DO IT MORE	I DEFINITELY WANT TO TRY IT	I MIGHT CONSIDER TRYING IT	I DEFINITELY WON'T TRY IT
Caressing Body (excluding breasts and genitals)					
Caressing whole Body					
Looking into Eyes					
Licking Lips Ears Neck Arms/Legs Back Breasts Genitals Anus					
Sucking Lips Ears Neck Arms/Legs Back Breasts Genitals Anus					

Biting Lips Ears Neck Arms/Legs Back Breasts Genitals Anus					
Caressing with breasts					
Scratching with nails					
Vaginal Penetration with: Fingers Mouth Tongue Penis Sex toy					
Anal Penetration with: Fingers Mouth Tongue Penis Sex toy					
Clitoral Stimulation with: Fingers Mouth Tongue Penis Sex toy					
Spanking Partner					
Tying Partner Up					

Blindfolding Partner					
Other:					

RECEIVING FROM PARTNER

ACTIVITY	WE CURRENTLY DO IT	I WANT TO DO IT MORE	I DEFINITELY WANT TO TRY IT	I MIGHT CONSIDER TRYING IT	I DEFINITELY WON'T TRY IT
Caressing Body (excluding breasts and genitals)					
Caressing whole Body					
Looking into Eyes					
Licking Lips Ears Neck Arms/Legs Back Breasts Genitals Anus					
Sucking Lips Ears Neck Arms/Legs Back Breasts Genitals Anus					
Biting Lips Ears Neck Arms/Legs Back Breasts					

Genitals Anus					
Caressing with breasts					
Scratching with nails					
Vaginal Penetration with: Fingers Mouth Tongue Penis Sex toy					
Anal Penetration with: Fingers Mouth Tongue Penis Sex toy					
Clitoral Stimulation with: Fingers Mouth Tongue Penis Sex toy					
Being spanked					
Being tied up					
Being blindfolded					
Other:					

MUTUAL ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY	WE CURRENTLY DO IT	I WANT TO DO IT MORE	I DEFINITELY WANT TO TRY IT	I MIGHT CONSIDER TRYING IT	I DEFINITELY WON'T TRY IT
French Kissing					
Taking a bath or shower together					
Sex in bathtub or shower together					
Sex outside					
Sex in public					
Sex in office					
Shaving each other's pubic areas					
Role Playing specify:					
Watching porn together					
Masturbating while partner watches					
Reading erotica together					
Threesome					
Group Sex					
Masturbating together					
Sharing fantasies					
Nonmonogamy (specify parameters)					

POSITIONS:

ACTIVITY	WE CURRENTLY DO IT	I WANT TO DO IT MORE	I DEFINITELY WANT TO TRY IT	I MIGHT CONSIDER TRYING IT	I DEFINITELY WON'T TRY IT
Missionary					
Woman on top (sitting)					
Side-by-side facing					

Side-by-side spooning					
Woman on top facing away					
Woman on top lying down (facing)					
Woman on top lying down (not facing)					
69					
Coital Alignment Technique					
Other:					

SOLO ACTIVITIES

Fantasizing					
Reading erotica alone					
Watching porn alone					
Masturbating alone					
Other:					

Initiating Sex:

I like it when you....

I like to initiate sex by....

Talking during sex:

I like my genitals to be referred to as

When it comes to talking during sex, I like.....



Lube:

My thoughts on lube are....

Other:

Use this blank space to make any additional notes.

UNLOCKING YOUR EROTIC MIND

The beauty of sexual fantasy is that it's always accessible, it's completely safe, the possibilities are limitless, and it's totally free! As far as we know, our ability to fantasize is one of the most profound differences between our species and other animals. Yet many of us try to shut off our erotic minds. Perhaps we have preconceived notions that fantasy means you aren't happy or sexually satisfied in your relationship. Or perhaps you feel shame about a particular fantasy you have. The truth is, most sexual fantasies are about things we wouldn't actually want to do, but that's what makes them fun! We can explore options in the safety of our mind. And doing so can keep the proverbial wheel greased for partnered sex. The largest sex organ is the brain, after all. It's important that you learn how to use it.

You Try It:

Find some quiet time to relax. It may help to light a scented candle, dim the lights, or play some soft music. Make sure your environment is free from distractions or interruptions.

Now, set your mind free. You might have a go-to fantasy already. If so, go ahead and let your mind wander there. See what variations you can create.

Don't worry if you aren't sure what to think about. Sometimes fantasies don't come right away. You can begin by imagining yourself in a setting that feels relaxing to you – maybe the beach or the woods. Or perhaps a new bedroom. Now imagine someone else entering the scene. Notice how your body feels. And then just relax as you imagine different scenarios playing out. Don't judge yourself for anything that comes to mind. Allow yourself to enjoy.

Now take some time to answer the following questions. (Don't worry, I'll never ask you to write down your private thoughts. And it's totally up to you whether or not you share them with anyone else.)

How did you feel before beginning the process? _____

What surprised you about your fantasy? _____

What feelings or ideas can you carry over into your next live sexual experience? _____

*There are some cases in which it is helpful to address problematic fantasies. It could be helpful to talk to a therapist if you consistently use fantasy to tune out your partner or disconnect from your relationship or if your fantasy is unwanted for some reason (perhaps it revolves around a past trauma).



CREATING NOVELTY THROUGH MEANING

We have the power to use the emotional climate of our lives to create a sense of intense meaning to our sexual experiences. The variations of this meaning, emotion, and energy can add to the “sense” of novelty in our sex life without having to actually try anything new. In safe, loving relationships, sexual connection can be an opportunity to heal, celebrate, connect, and comfort.

You Try It:

Reflect on the current emotional climate of your relationship. You can even think more broadly. What are you feeling at work? What is happening with your extended family? What is happening nationally or globally?

Now think about what you need right now. Do you need compassion or comfort? Is there something you want to celebrate? Is something going on from which you need an escape? Have you gone through something painful and you need healing energy?

Talk to your partner about what you’re experiencing. Discuss ways you can use your sexual connection to provide what you need. Maybe you want a long, slow, nurturing massage before progressing further. Perhaps you need the adrenaline rush of a quickie in a place you could get caught. Perhaps you need to enact a spanking scenario to relieve pent up energy. Come up with ways that you can use sex to give you what you need emotionally OR to express an emotion you may be experiencing.



BOOKS AND RESOURCES ON ADAPTABILITY

Books

Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

Emotional Agility by Susan David

Resilience by Eric Greitens

Videos

Sex as a Jam Session by Karen B. Chan

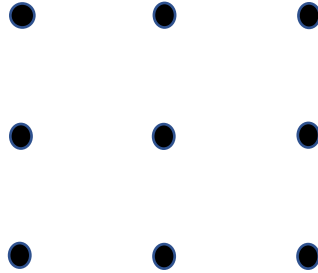
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgd3m-x46JU>

THE NINE DOT EXERCISE

One of the key ingredients to adaptability and resilience is the ability to think outside the box. This exercise is a little brain teaser to test your skills.

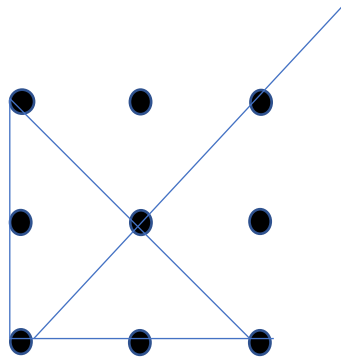
You Try It:

Connect these nine dots with four continuous lines. Answer on the following page.



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create connection. cultivate passion.



YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

We expect more out of our romantic relationships than ever before. But expecting our partner to be our lover, our best friend, our birth partner, our financial partner, our co-parent, our strongest support, our shoulder to cry on, our partner in crime, the person we share hobbies with, our intellectual equal, our (you get the idea) can put an enormous amount of pressure on a relationship. One of the key factors that resilient people share is have a strong social support system, a rich resource into which they can tap when life feels overwhelming.

You Try It:

Make a list of people, groups, or organizations that you consider to be a part of your social support system. Write down what you get from each source of support.



USING LESSONS IN RESILIENCE TO LEARN FROM OUR OBSTACLES

We all face obstacles in life. But when we lose our innate sense of resilience and adaptability, everyday obstacles have the power to knock us down. And worse, they can negatively alter our worldview or our perception of ourselves.

You Try It:

Think of a setback from your past. Try to identify something that really knocked you off your feet.

What was the incident? _____

What was the emotional/physical effect on you? _____

How did it make you think about yourself/others/the world? _____

Now imagine applying skills in resilience, emotional agility, and adaptability to that incident. Even if the negative outcome was the same, the overall *effect* on you could be different.

What lessons can you learn from your experience? _____

How might your thoughts/feelings about yourself change? _____

How does might that change affect your behavior now? _____

RELATIONSHIP VALUES

It's easier to navigate the ebbs and flows of life when you feel like you and your partner can work as a team. Part of that is periodically checking in with each other on values and beliefs. As you've learned by now, principles and standards can evolve over time. Without periodically reassessing where you stand on certain issues, you'll be less prepared to face challenges as they arise.

It's also helpful to think about how important your stance is on any given issue. For example, your partner may feel very strongly about where you choose to live. But that may not be as important to you. By comparing notes on how strongly you feel about various issues, you can more effectively prepare to practice emotional agility when faced with an unexpected challenge.

You Try It:

Write a sentence or two for your thoughts and feelings regarding each value. Then scale its importance with 0 being unimportant and 10 being the most important. Use your responses to open a discussion with your partner. Talk specifically about what strategies you might employ if something gets in the way of your value.

Value	Description	Importance 0-10
Spending time together		
Spending time alone		
Spending time with family		
Spending time with friends		
Employment		
Work/Life balance		
Where you live		
Travel and Vacations		
Parenting		
(Continued on next page)		

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Spirituality/Religion		
Health and Fitness		
Mental Health/ Counseling		
Hobbies		



FORGIVENESS TO MOVE FORWARD

Is there something you need to forgive? If you're holding on to resentment about something from the past, it will make it harder to maintain resilience in the future.

You Try It:

Part 1: Make a genuine apology. If you have yet to practice integrity and own up to your role in the conflict, now is your chance. At a minimum, express empathy for how your actions made your partner feel.

Part 2: Cut strips of paper. Write down things from the past, present, and future that you need to let go of. For instance, something from past might be, "Your distance during my miscarriage." Something from the present might be, "The lingering resentment I still hold from it." Something from the Future might be, "My expectation that you handle stress the same way I do."

Part 3: One-by-one, say goodbye to each item you wrote down on your strips of paper. I suggest doing so ritualistically. For instance, you might throw them into the fireplace or drop them into a stream of running water.

REDEFINING SEX

By now you should have a firm grasp on the importance of expanding your definition of sex. When we narrow down sex to a mere function of the body, we can feel totally thrown for a loop when something happens that limits the bodily function.

This exercise is designed to remind you of everything you enjoy about sex that **doesn't** require genital function or orgasm. Fill in the blanks. Assuming sex is usually a positive experience, I bet you'd still feel these things even after spending time holding each other or simply kissing passionately.

You Try It:

I love that sex makes me feel _____ (list 3 feelings)
in my relationship.

When my partner and I are sexual, I feel _____ (list 3 feelings)
about him/her.

When we have sex, I feel _____ (list 3 feelings)
afterwards.

Sex gives me an opportunity to _____ (e.g.
escape my busy life, relieve stress, connect emotionally).

FLIP YOUR SEXUAL SCRIPT

It's important to know that the sex you share over the course of a long-term relationship is going to evolve. The sex you have during the honeymoon period of the relationship is going to feel different than the sex you have a couple years in. It will feel different again when you're trying to conceive, when pregnant, or soon after having a baby. You may have to make modifications to accommodate for an injury or physical illness. And it's extremely probable that there will be times when your partner experiences some sort of sexual difficulty like loss of erection or inability to orgasm. The list of factors that can potentially affect the way in which you have sex goes on and on.

Because sex is so dynamic, it is important to remain flexible and open to whatever happens. Yet many couples get locked into one sexual script. That is, they fall into a routine for the way sex plays out. When we become too locked in our scripts, our rigidity increases and our ability to be flexible to changes in sexuality diminishes.

This exercise encourages you to flip the script.

You Try It:

In the first column, write down the steps you typically follow when you have sex. For most people, it goes – undress, kiss, genital stimulation, intercourse, orgasm, done.

In the next column, imagine that your partner has a wrist fracture in their dominant hand. What modifications would you make? How can you work around their limitation to keep sex fun and exciting?

In the 3rd column, imagine one of you is struggling with a sexual dysfunction. Perhaps your partner has an off night and just can't get an erection. Or perhaps you went on a long bike ride and vaginal penetration feels like it would be too uncomfortable. How can you create an enjoyable sexual encounter that doesn't include intercourse?

In the 4th column, simply imagine a variation in the way you have sex. If your partner typically climaxes first, imagine the steps you'd have to take for you to come first. If you typically initiate, write down how it would feel for your partner to initiate.

(Continued on the next page)

CURRENT SCRIPT	PHYSICAL LIMITATION	SEXUAL LIMITATION	ALTERNATE SCRIPT



BOOKS AND RESOURCES ON VULNERABILITY

Books

Any book by Brene Brown will offer a powerful lesson in vulnerability.

Any book by Kristen Neff will provide insight and tools to foster self-compassion.

Hold Me Tight: 7 Conversations for a Lifetime of Love by Sue Johnson provides an overview of attachment theory with a focus on how various attachment styles play out in romantic relationships.

Assessment

Experience in Close Relationships (ECR) This assessment, which takes about 4 minutes to complete, will give you an idea of your attachment style in your romantic relationship.

<https://openpsychometrics.org/tests/ECR.php>

SOFTENING YOUR INNER VOICE

It is hard to feel comfortable with the range of our emotions without first learning self-compassion. In essence, self-compassion means treating yourself with kindness when confronted with personal inadequacies, mistakes, or failures. Kristen Neff, who has written and researched extensively about self-compassion identifies three interaction components: self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification.

The best way to begin practicing self-compassion is to soften your nagging inner-critic. This exercise is designed to jumpstart that process.

You Try It:

Think of something you tend to criticize yourself about. Perhaps it's your appearance, the way you eat, feelings of relationship or sexual inadequacy, the way you perform at work, a physical limitation, or the kind of parent you are. What short-coming do you identify?

Now imagine your inner voice as it currently is. What is the tone of your inner voice? What does it sound like? If you imagined this part of you sitting in a chair across from you, what would it look like?

What kinds of messages do you give yourself? What beliefs about yourself does this create?

Now soften the inner voice. Imagine that instead of this nagging part, a kind friend, relative, or therapist is sitting in that chair across from you. What would he or she say instead?

(continued on next page)



How do your thoughts and feelings change when you respond to your perceived inadequacies with loving kindness; when you remember you're not the only one with this limitation; when you create a mindful, spacious presence with this voice?

How does that change the sensations in your body? How can you position your body or adjust your posture to reflect the kindness you've expressed to yourself?



TILLING THE SOIL FOR VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability can't be forced. It happens over time in the presence of safety and trust. This is an exercise in building emotional safety and trust in your relationship. You'll apply what you've learned about mindfulness and self-compassion to this exercise to create an environment of comfort and peace for yourself and your partner. Emotional vulnerability can only blossom once trust and safety is established.

In this exercise, you'll prepare a foundation of safety in preparation to be vulnerable with your partner.

You Try It:

Spend some time reflecting on whether or not you currently cultivate a safe space for your partner to open up about their feelings. Now that you've practiced self-compassion, you should be able to be honest, yet gentle with yourself. What do you do that might foster an environment of openness? What do you do that might create an environment that makes your partner shut down?

Think about integrity. To what degree do you hold yourself accountable for your actions? What is it like to make amends or apologize after a transgression?

How do you respond when your partner shares a concern, fear, or hope?

To what degree do you ask questions to fully understand your partner's feelings? To what degree do you dismiss your partner's feelings or experience as being unimportant?



PLANTING THE SEED OF VULNERABILITY

Now that you've reflected on how you typically create an environment that fosters openness, closeness, and sharing, let's put it to the test. In this exercise, you'll practice planting one small seed of vulnerability.

You Try It:

Without agenda or expectation for change, share a personal thought, feeling, concern, or hope. Notice how it feels to put that out there now that you've nurtured a safe environment. What does your body feel like? How would you describe the connection with your partner?



ALLOWING VULNERABILITY TO BLOOM

This exercise will really test to what degree authentic vulnerability has bloomed in your relationship. There is perhaps no greater vulnerability than simultaneously sharing your emotional, physical, and spiritual self with another person.

Only try this exercise if you feel there is enough emotional security in your relationship. It might feel silly and awkward but trust me – the results can be powerful (and very revealing).

You Try It:

Create an environment that is conducive to relaxation and intimacy. Undress to your level of comfort. Face your partner, and begin by expressing a positive feeling word or appreciation. Hold each other's hands and begin eye gazing. Look into their left eye. Look into their right eye. If you need to laugh let it out. If you need to cry let it out. But try not to talk. Sit like this for as long as you're comfortable. You can also do this while sitting together in the bath or any other environment that feels intimate for you and your partner.

After you've completed the exercise, answer the following questions.

What hopes, wishes, fears, or apprehensions did you have going into this exercise?

What outcome did you expect?

What emotions were evoked during the exercise? How did your body feel?

What was it like interacting with your partner after completing the exercise?



SHARING SEXUAL PREFERENCES

It's time to pull out your sexual likes and dislikes handout from a couple weeks ago. If you haven't looked at it since initially completing it, I suggest reviewing your answers and making any changes. In fact, put an asterisk next to anything you changed since first completing it. It will be interesting to spend some time reflecting as to why you adjusted your response.

You Try It:

It's time to compare notes. Put everything that you've learned into practice to ensure you can *withhold all judgment* (verbal and nonverbal) as you exchange your responses. If your partner shares something that surprises you, shocks you, or turns you off, thank them for feeling safe enough to share. *Practicing mindfulness and remembering the safety you've worked so hard to create in your relationship*, gently tell them that that activity is not one of your preferences.

Be sure to monitor your reactions. We will learn more about examining our reactions next week, but just notice what evokes a strong automatic reaction in you. It's not uncommon to have an impulsive *no* reaction without really asking ourselves *why* we feel so strongly. If it feels reasonable, try replacing *no* with *let me think about that*. See if your feelings change. If not, that's okay. But by pausing and reflecting, you've done a great job practicing mindfulness.

EXPANDING YOUR SEXUAL COMFORT ZONE

It's time to try something new! This exercise should be fun. Reflect back on your sexual preferences exercise and identify something you haven't tried before. This may be something as simple as making out in the laundry room or having sex in the guest room. Or it may be something a bit more adventurous like experimenting with role play or being tied up. Perhaps it's something in the middle like talking dirty or reading erotica.

By now you should feel safe enough to let go and bring a sense of playfulness into your erotic encounter. At the end of the day, this may or may not become something that becomes a part of your usual sexual repertoire. The only goal of this should be to have fun and create a new experience together.

You Try It:

1. Discuss and make any preparations ahead of time. Share any concerns, hopes, or other feelings you might have.
2. Time to experiment!
3. Discuss the outcome and answer the following questions.

How did you feel before, during, and after the encounter?

What shift, if any, did you notice in your relationship leading up to this encounter?

What did you notice in the days following this encounter? About yourself? About your relationship?



BOOKS AND RESOURCES ON ATTUNEMENT

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ, by Daniel Goleman

Flow: Living at the Peak of Your Abilities, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance, by Steven Kolter



UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF ATTUNEMENT

Technology has many advantages. But it also clouds our ability to pay attention to all of the cues needed for effective mirroring – facial expression, tone, body language, etc. This can be problematic when trying to close a business deal, online dating, or even catching up with a friend.

You Try It:

My challenge for you is – the next time you are tempted to be more efficient by having a meeting, catching up with a friend, or establishing a new romance using technology, push yourself to meet that person in the flesh instead. Notice how the interaction plays out when you connect in-person versus your device.

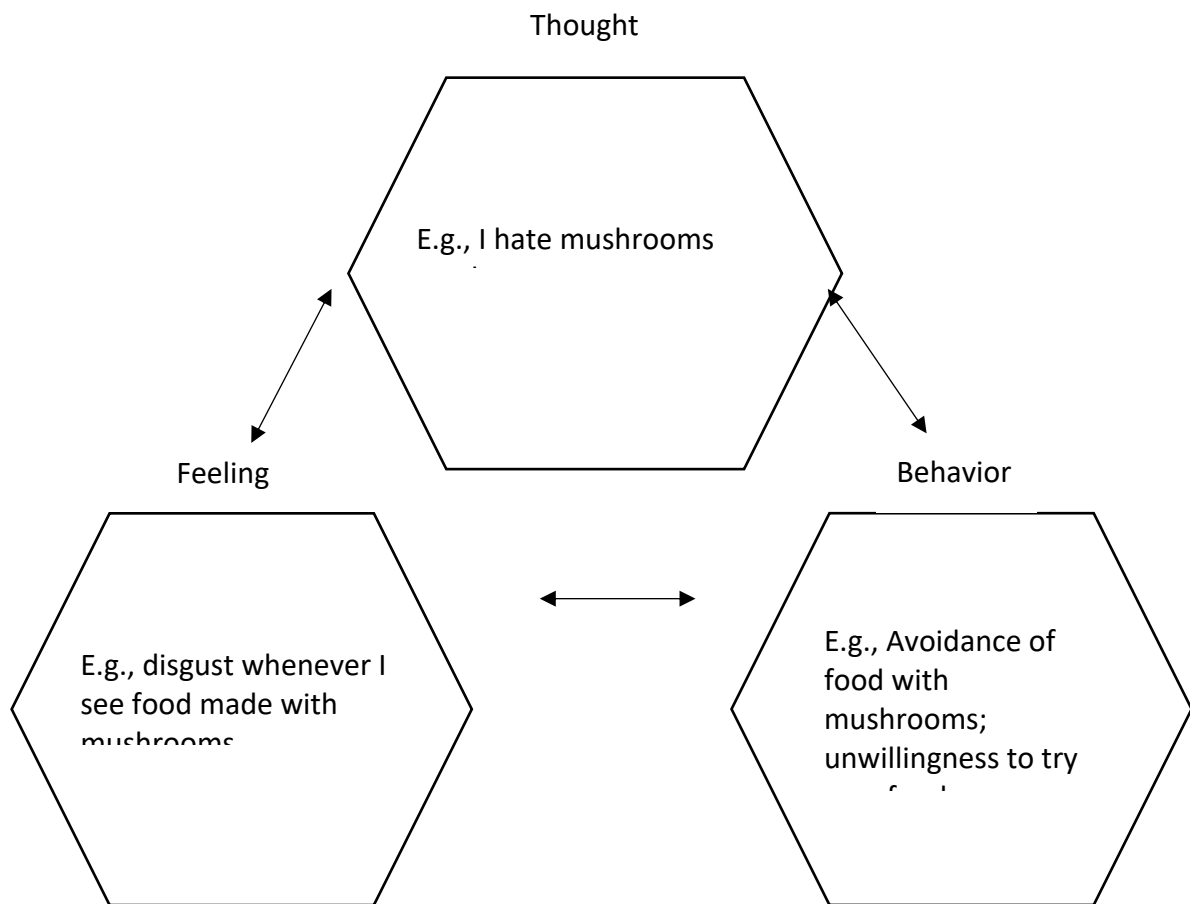
Then reflect on the following questions.

- How would you describe the richness of the interaction?
- How would you describe your connection to the person?
- Do you feel more certain, perhaps, that the relationship *won't* work? Why?
- How would you describe the person's energy?
- What nonverbal cues like tone or facial expressions did you notice?
- What feelings and body sensations were evoked in you while in that person's physical presence?

FINE TUNING YOUR AUTHENTICITY

Before we can learn to tune into others, we need to do an honest inventory of ourselves. We all have automatic reactions to things in life. Usually these are formed over time through experiences that have shaped us. But this can become problematic if we don't periodically reassess who we are. What made us authentic 10 years ago may be different from what makes us authentic today. And without full authenticity and strong self-awareness, it's hard to effectively tune in to our relationship with others. In other words, we have to clean our internal mirror before we can turn it out to catch the reflection of those around us.

One of the best ways to check your automatic thoughts, feelings, and behavior is by applying basic cognitive-behavioral therapy skills. Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors all affect each other, and not necessarily in any one direction. Take the example below.



Continued on next page.

You Try It:

Pick something that evokes a strong reaction in you. If you can't think of something, ask a friend or your partner if they've noticed anything. (Sometimes those around us are more tuned into our own reactions than we are!). Then fill out the chart below.

Emotion(s) How did you feel? (score 1-10)	
Situation(s) Who? What? Where? When?	
Automatic thought(s) What exactly were your thoughts? How strongly do you believe that thought? (0-10)	
Evidence supporting the automatic thought	
Evidence refuting the automatic thought (flip to the next page for ideas if you're having trouble coming up with evidence against)	
Alternative or balanced thought	
Outcome How much do you believe the balanced thoughts (0-10)? How do you now feel (0-10)? What can you do?	

Continued on next page.

Some questions to ask yourself to help find evidence against your automatic thought are:

- ➔ Have I had any experience that would suggest that this thought is not true **all** the time?
- ➔ If my best friend or someone I loved had this thought what would I tell them?
- ➔ When I am not feeling this way, would I think about this type of situation differently?
- ➔ When I have felt this way in the past, what did I do or think about to make myself feel better?
- ➔ Are there any small things that contradict my thoughts that I might be discounting as not important?
- ➔ Am I jumping to conclusions with my automatic thought?
- ➔ Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?



MIRRORING IN ACTION

Deep within our brains we possess cells called “mirror neurons.” When we see another person engaging in a type of behavior, say enjoying a warm chocolate chip cookie, these cells have the capacity to make us feel as if we ourselves are enjoying that same cookie – so much so that when brain scans are conducted on those observing such behavior, the areas in their brains involved in taste, smell, and pleasure light up almost as much as if they were the ones who had just savored a bite. These cells are crucial to the development of empathy and, ultimately, to attunement. Yet many of us are so distracted that we don’t even pay attention to the subtle cues of those around us. Interestingly, we often mirror those we are close to without even realizing it. The first step is noticing all the mirroring that’s happening around you all the time. Next we’ll learn how to use it to our advantage.

You Try It:

The next time you’re out at place where people are interacting closely (a restaurant is a great test lab), pay close attention to the behavior of those around you. If you watch a couple together at a table, you’ll probably notice the following types of behaviors: she takes a sip of wine, he goes for his beer; he scratches his head, she tosses her hair; he leans back in his chair, he leans back in his chair.

What mirroring behaviors did you notice? Did you notice anything within your own relationship?

MIRRORING YOUR PARTNER

Couples who have a high degree of attunement use words like *in-sync*, *we get each other*, *it's easy* to describe their every-day interactions. Imagine you've had the day from hell, and without you saying anything, your partner comes up to you and give you a little neck massage or puts the tea kettle on. And what if eventually, when you're making love, your partner makes micro adjustments that amplify pleasure based on barely imperceptible changes in your body. Sounds nice, right?

You won't be able to transition to automatic attunement if you don't start with intentional mirroring first. The following exercise may feel silly or awkward, but trust me – the more finely sharpened your attunement skills, the less you'll have to “think” about this kind of thing in the future. And the less you have to think, the more relaxed you'll feel and the more in sync you'll become.

You Try It:

Think of something you'd like to discuss with your partner.

- Partner A: Today, I would like to talk about _____.
- Partner B: I hear you saying that you'd like to talk about _____.
- Partner A: (Explain the issue – keep it succinct). Now tell your partner how the issue makes you feel.
- Partner B: I hear you saying that _____ makes you feel _____. (As you verbally repeat back what your partner said, be sure to *match your expression to theirs*. If they said they felt confused, make a confused face. If they said they felt surprised, make a surprised face. This may feel silly or forced at first, but you'll be amazed at what happens in your body and in the outcome when you match their experience. Ask for clarification about anything you are unclear about.)
- Partner A: When I feel _____, I express that emotion by _____.
- Partner B: When you feel _____, you express that emotion by _____.
- Partner A: What would be nice in that moment is _____.

By matching their tone, facial expression, and body language, you begin to learn how to embody their experience. The more you can embody your partner, the more easily you can work together to take not just your relationship, but also your sex life, to a higher plateau.



SHARPENING YOUR ATTUNEMENT SKILLS

Now it's time to put your attunement skills to the test.

You Try It:

Over the next week, pay very close attention to your partner's body language, tone, and facial expressions. If you think you notice something worth paying attention to, ask your partner. You might say something like:

I'm wondering if you are feeling like you have a lot on your plate. I noticed you weren't very responsive when I texted you earlier and you seem a bit distant tonight. If they confirm your observation, try to remember what they said they needed from the last exercise. I remember you saying you needed space when you feel this way. I'm going to take the dog out for a walk. If your perception was off, discuss what cues were missed or misinterpreted.

It's equally important to pay attention to the signals sent by your own body. For example, if you feel tense when you walk through the door, first tune into yourself – reflect on your day and assess whether the tension is related to your own experience. Next, pay close attention to the signals being sent by your partner. Is your nervous system picking up on something in the environment before you're even consciously aware?

FINDING YOUR SEXUAL FLOW

If you recall, *flow* is a state in which people experience a loss of sense of self, distorted sense of time, a feeling of effortlessness and ease, and intense control and concentration. You might have heard this term used by artists, musicians, athletes, or your friend who is addicted to the runner's high.

The latest research on *optimal* sexual experiences found that people report reaching such a state when they have peak experiences. These individuals will use words like *transcendent* or *spiritual* to describe such encounters.

This is where you draw together everything you've learned through this workshop and apply it to your sexual interactions. The good news is that the latest research on Flow has found that there are things you can do that will help trigger a flow state. In his book, *The Rise of Superman*, Steven Kolter identifies 20 triggers for flow. I've listed them here for your reference.

Individual Triggers	Group Triggers
Passion/purpose	Complete concentration
Risk	Shared goals
Novelty	Shared risk
Complexity	Yes, and...
Unpredictability	Close listening
Deep embodiment	Autonomy/A sense of control
Immediate Feedback	Blending egos
Clear Goals	Familiarity
Challenge/skills ratio	Equal participation
Creativity/pattern recognition	Open communication

You Try It:

First think of your environment. What needs to be in place so that you're more likely to access flow? Do you need freshly laundered sheets, dim lighting, or mood music?

(Continued on next page.)

Dr. Emily Jamea

create connection. cultivate passion.

Next think about yourself. Review the list of individual triggers. Think about the exercises you've done so far to access a sense of personal novelty, sensuality, and openness. How can you connect with these qualities in a way that is more likely to trigger flow?

Third, consider your relationship. Do you and your partner need to discuss your goals for your next sexual experience? Do you need to feel a heightened level of emotional attunement? Perhaps a weekend get-a-way or date night is in order.

Once you've prepared yourself and your relationship, channel all that wonderful energy into your next shared sexual experience and notice what emerges...