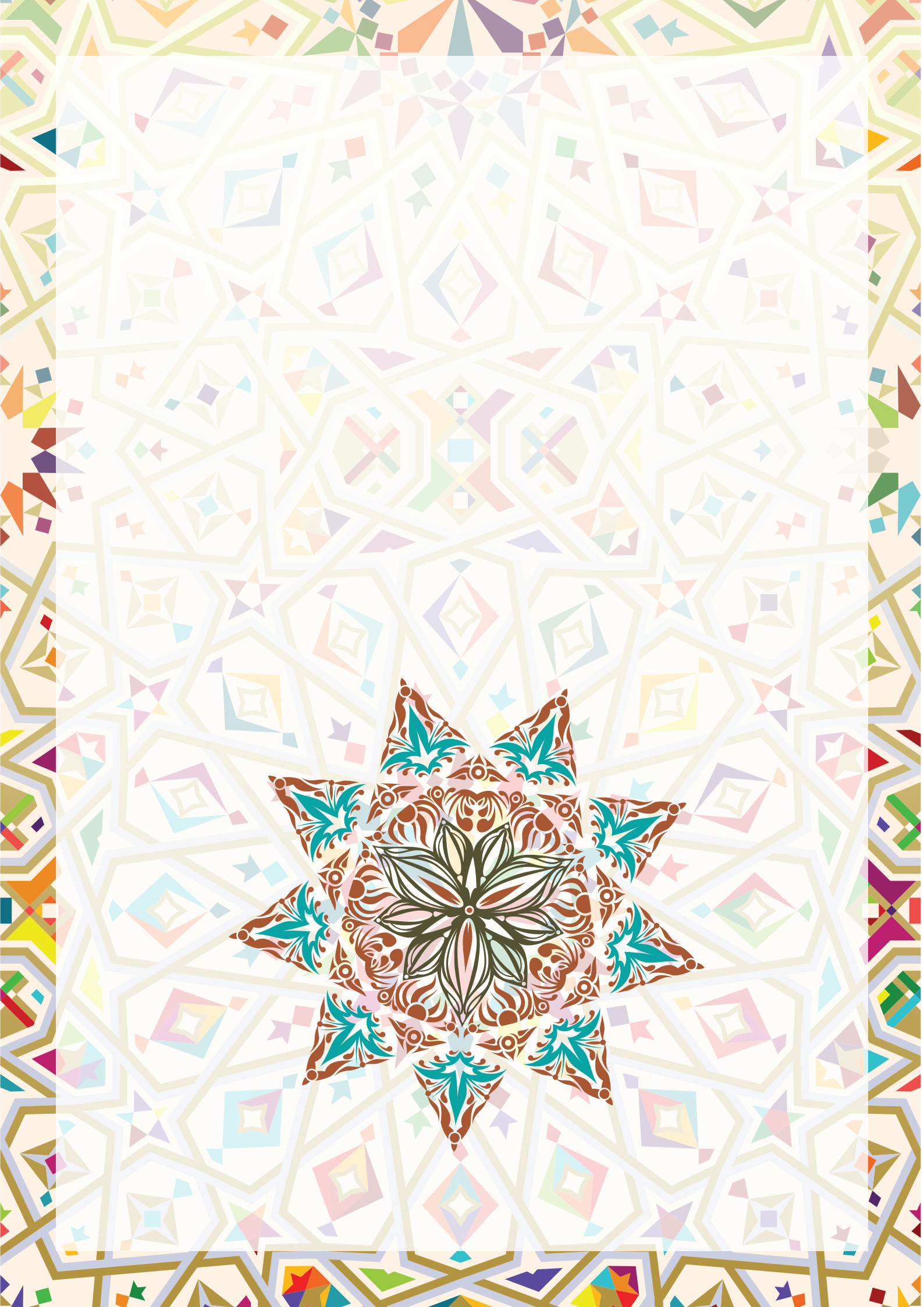


**YOUR SEXUAL PLEASURE
MATTERS!**



**MUSLIM WOMEN'S THOUGHTS
ABOUT LACK OF SEXUAL DESIRE
AND DISCREPANCY**





YOUR SEXUAL PLEASURE MATTERS!

In Islam, a sexual pleasure of a married couple together is seen as a part of practicing the religion, and it is compared to giving alms sadaqa.

It is especially important that also the woman feels her sexual needs are satisfied. A pleasurable sex life in marriage makes the relationship stronger, makes you more connected to your own body, increases satisfaction with life, and supports health as well.



*And He has put affection and mercy between your hearts.
Verily, in that are indeed sings for people who reflect.”
Sura Ar Room, verse 21.*



Common problems of sexual life are lack of sexual desire and problems caused by sexual desire discrepancy between spouses. Sexual desire varies throughout life, and from time to time, even the lack of it is completely normal. On the other hand, a prolonged lack of desire often causes problems. They are caused also by sexual desire discrepancy, which is also very common – there is no couple whose sexual desires always match.

Problems in intimate life will have inevitable impact on marriage, which is why you should seek help to these common problems of sexual life from maternity and child health clinics or sexual therapist. By building a stronger connection and constructing a good intimate life with your spouse, a married couple will be likely to face other future challenges supporting each other.



“And we have created you in pairs.” Sura An Naba, verse 8.



This guide was written by sexual therapist Tiina Alakärppä and Muslim women representing Amal ry, who work in social services and healthcare and who want to help other Muslim sisters struggling with the lack of sexual desire. In the making of the guide, 25 Muslim women were heard about their thoughts and experiences about lack of desire and desire discrepancy in marriage. The majority of these women had returned to Islam and had a Muslim husband. Nearly all of them were living busy parenting years. In addition, almost all of them underlined the important role of Islam in their marriage.

“(In our relationship, religion has) a very big role. Faith is the foundation of our life, and all our everyday activities are based on our faith. The way I see it, is that we are serving each other in one of the greatest manifestations of our religion. We can trust each other, because we know what the intentions and values of the other are. My husband often recites Quran to me, for example when I feel sad. We remind each other for example to pray, and we talk about our faith every day. The religion acts like a glue between us, and we both experience God’s guidance as strong foundation of our marriage. We feel happy to be a part of our destiny determined by God.” - 24 years old, 1 child

1.

LACK OF SEXUAL DESIRE AND ITS POSSIBLE CAUSES



SEXUAL DESIRE, LACK OF IT, AND DISCREPANCY

"(I experience lack of sexual desire) often. It has been going on for several years already. (The way my lack of desire shows is that) I am not willing to have intercourse, or on my part it is lame and forced." - 39 years old, 5 children

"(I experience lack of sexual desire) all the time. My husband asks for sex and I am reluctant." - 20 years old, 2 children

"I experience lack of sexual desire mainly when my husband points it out. He is not that happy with the situation, and I get to feel pressured, because I don't want it that often." - 32 years old, 4 children

"(I experience lack of sexual desire) maybe once or twice a month. Sex is not that enjoyable, when I don't really feel like it. It also makes my husband a little irritated or frustrated sometimes." - 26 years old, 0 children

"Now that my husband started to work nights, I don't feel sexual desire the time we have the possibility to have sex. I would like to have sex at night before going to sleep, but my husband goes to work. When he comes home, I wake up in the middle of sleep and I am not really in the mood to have sex." - 24 years old, 1 child

Sexual desire includes sexual thoughts and images as well as a will to put them into action. Desire is always a personal experience, and everyone should define it themselves.

Sexual desire is a part of human sexual response. It is the mental phase of sexual response, whereas arousal and orgasm / other physical or mental feeling of satisfaction are the physical phase of sexual response. Sexual response does not need to be linear, starting from one point and ending at another, nor ascending - it is more like a circle, where sexual desire can be found, decrease and increase at any point. Usually, the desire increases for example through feeling of intimacy, positive feedback, different sexual stimulation and previous good sexual experiences.

Discrepancy of sexual desire between spouses is natural. A marriage has always two individuals, and to have fully matching sexual desires is nearly impossible. It is very common that one spouse wants more, in a different way or at different time than the other spouse. Lack of sexual desire can make discrepancy challenges even more difficult. When this kind of situation is prolonged, it often causes crisis in marriage.

Lack of sexual desire can also be a consequence of a crisis due to natural discrepancy. It is very common that at the beginning of a relationship the one who wants less tries to keep up with the one who wants more, in order to avoid problems in relationship. At some point, the situation changes, and the one who wants more demands sex and the other agrees to it. It can also be that there is an argument about it before even getting to sex. These situations that are unpleasant for both spouses are avoided or there are bigger arguments about it. Through this, the one who wants less will experience lack of sexual desire. Usually, couples try to solve these situations on their own, but that can cause even more problems. Therefore, it is no wonder that couples struggling with discrepancy of sexual desire are a common sight at therapist appointment.

EXERCISE: SATISFACTION WITH SEX LIFE

The objective on this exercise is to help the reader to evaluate a little their satisfaction with their sex life. At the same time, it can give new viewpoints on how to change their sex life to make it more satisfying.

	YES	NO
My lack of sexual desire is a problem for me. I would like to want more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My lack of sexual desire is a bigger problem for my spouse than for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My lack of sexual desire is involved with certain kind of sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In my opinion, my lack of sexual desire is not normal for my age.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In my opinion, my lack of sexual desire is not normal for the length of my marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex is an important value for me in my marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the quantity of sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the quality of sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our sex is performance-oriented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our sex life is one-sided.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The time we have sex should be changed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wish there was more expressions of affection in our marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My pleasure is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not as sexual as I used to be.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what I like in sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally, I get aroused during sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally, I have an orgasm /		
feel other physical or mental satisfaction in sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would need more time for sexual pleasure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In sex, I am more willing to experiment than my spouse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have secrets about sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am always honest about my sexual feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am afraid I am not satisfying my spouse sexually.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My spouse's pleasure is very important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what my spouse likes in sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

REFLECTION:

WHAT THOUGHTS DID YOU HAVE AFTER COMPLETING THIS EXERCISE?

EXERCISE: THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION IS, WOULD YOU LIKE TO WANT MORE?

If the answer is "yes", you are probably also motivated to work towards increasing your sexual desire. Without this motivation, it is nearly impossible to increase desire. The objective of this exercise is to reflect on goals related to your own lack of desire, as well as psychological and behavioral barriers blocking you from reaching a goal.

Below you can see a fourfold table, where there is one arrow away from a goal and another towards a goal. When you fill in the empty squares, you'll notice what kind of behaviour is taking you away from a goal and psychological barriers you should try to avoid. In addition, you'll notice what kind of behaviour helps you to reach the goal. Start to fill in the fourfold table from bottom right corner "goals related to sexuality and sex".

BEHAVIOUR TAKING YOU AWAY FROM A GOAL	BEHAVIOUR TAKING YOU TOWARDS A GOAL
PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS, THOUGHTS, PREJUDICES AND ATTITUDES TAKING YOU AWAY FROM A GOAL	GOALS RELATED TO SEXUALITY AND SEX

REFLECTION:

EXERCISE: LINE REPRESENTING SEXUALITY

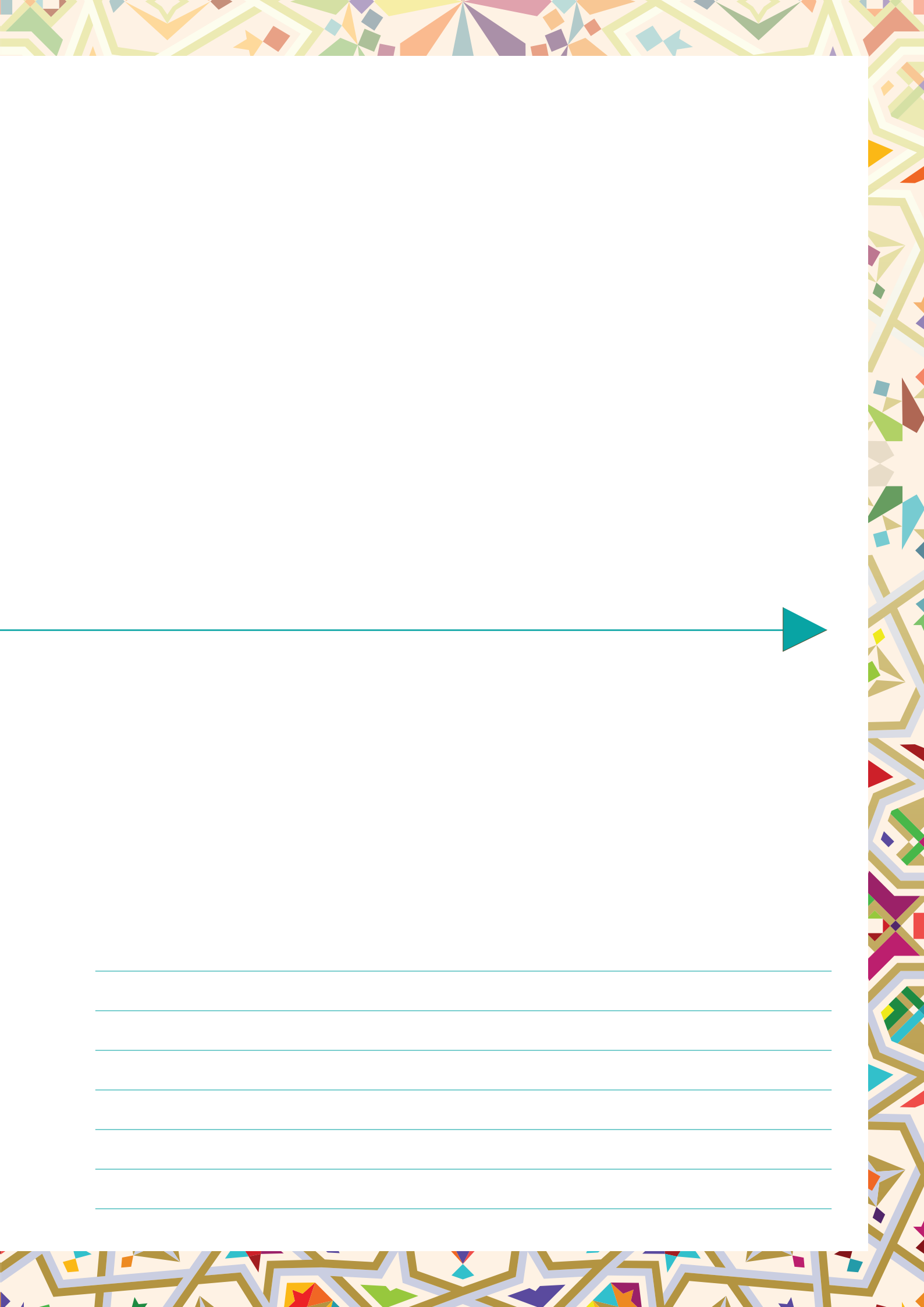
"At the beginning of our relationship, I was enjoying it and there was more desire, but for some reason it changed and I don't know why." - 20 years old, 2 children

Reflect on your and your spouse's journey from the start until today. What was your sexual desire like at the beginning of your marriage, what has happened along the journey, and how these events have impacted your sexual desire?

Draw your sexual desire on the line and mark on this line especially those events through which your sexual desire either increased or decreased.



REFLECTION:



WHAT CAN CAUSE LACK OF DESIRE?

The definition of a lack of sexual desire is impacted by, among other things, the person's thoughts about normal and familiar sexual desire. In other words, what for one person is a lack of sexual desire, can be completely ordinary for another. The personal nature of lack of desire is strongly connected with the constantly changing characteristics of sexual desire.

Sexual desire is a very complex matter, which is why the causes for lack of desire can be very complex as well. It is always important to schedule a doctor's appointment to make sure that the lack of sexual desire is not due to biological factors, such as hormonal function, ageing, illness, pain or fear of pregnancy.

Menstrual cycle and hormones

Women usually have the most sexual desire at the start of menstrual cycle and mid-cycle. At the start of cycle, as the oestrogen levels are on the rise, the sexual desire increases as well. At mid-cycle during ovulation, the testosterone levels in women's body are at their highest, and because of that there can be especially much sexual desire. For women, testosterone plays an important role in creating sexual desire and arousal. During other phases of menstrual cycle, women can have less sexual desire.

Problems in marriage

Usually, problems in marriage are reflected in the bedroom one way or another. This is when other challenges in marriage should be addressed, and sexual desire can be restored in the process.

"The daily routine takes a lot of time. It does not bother me that I do more, but it would turn me on, if he would for example notice the sacrifices I make in everyday life. Everything that increases spiritual connection would for sure increase sexual desire as well." - 32 years old, 4 children

Busy parenting years

It is very common that during busy parenting years there is an increase in lack of sexual desire. I can be difficult to find time to have sex, taking care of children takes energy and there is a lot of sleep deprivation.

"The children take the most of my time and energy." - 33 years old, 3 children

"We are living in a whirlwind of parenting life, and we are just trying to make it somehow." - 32 years old, 4 children

Constant worry about sexual desire

A person experiencing lack of sexual desire might think that there should be more desire. These thoughts can come to mind for example if previously there was more desire. The thoughts are increased also if the spouse who wants more thinks that the spouse who wants less has lack of desire. Constant worrying about sexual desire makes it decrease.

"He is not that happy with the situation, and I get pressured, because I don't want it that often." - 32 years old, 4 children

Sexual dysfunctions

Sexual dysfunctions, such as arousal and orgasm disorders or painful intercourse, can cause lack of sexual desire. In these situations, it can be difficult to differentiate whether for example arousal disorder is the cause of lack of sexual desire or its consequence. Challenges in arousal can be due to, among other things, too little or no sexual stimulation, and then stimulation should be added or diversified.

EXERCISE: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE CAUSE OF YOUR LACK OF SEXUAL DESIRE?

The objective of this exercise is to help to reflect which factors are impacting your lack of sexual desire.

	YES	NO
I don't feel my satisfaction is necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not interested in sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Different problems in marriage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of time together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties in intimacy and commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overreaction in situations where the spouse disagrees about matters related to sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overreaction in situations where one has been rejected by their spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced criticism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed feelings about your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties in sexual communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Routine-like ways to have sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of foreplay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of afterplay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low self-esteem, for example negative thoughts about own body	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bad, unpleasurable sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual dysfunctions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involuntary infertility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilt and shame	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disparagement or experience of worthlessness in childhood or youth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Untreated sexual abuse, molestation or violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threat of rejection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Depression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prolonged or excessive stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constant fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heavy use of intoxicants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in hormonal function	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medicine side effects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Different illnesses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Problems related to birth control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phase after childbirth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ARE THERE ANY OTHER FACTORS THAT COME TO YOUR MIND WHICH COULD ALSO IMPACT YOUR LACK OF DESIRE?

2.

**COMMUNICATION, INTIMACY
AND BODY IMAGE AS A PART OF
SEXUAL PLEASURE**



COMMUNICATION AND ARGUMENTS

“Sometimes there are misunderstandings, when we express things in different ways.” – 33 years old, 3 children

“For my husband, certain things are insulting/distressing and for me as well, things that are normal for the other. There are misunderstandings about what the other wants and how they see you.” – 20 years old, 2 children

“The cultural differences are most apparent in my husband’s expectations of me as his wife. I must follow him “blindly” and kind of be without any dreams, because he makes the decisions, and his dreams are important since he is a man. As a Finnish Muslim woman, I demand my husband to respect me and to talk with me about different matters. This of course creates small conflicts every now and then.” – 30 years old, 5 children

“Sometimes, we might have even quite heated conversations, but in the end we both make a lot of compromises, which we consider to be best for all.” – 39 years old, 5 children

“Arguments are never completely resolved.” – 43 years old, 1 child

In marriage, the best way to increase any problems is not to talk and to pretend that there is no need to talk about anything. In marriage, there might be silence and misunderstandings for example because of different cultural backgrounds. Discussion might also be difficult, because everyone’s natural ways to act and react come to play. Therefore, it is important to reflect the communication in marriage more generally, not only concerning sex life.

Each relationship has their own “negative circles”, where both spouse’s own ways to act react have an effect. If they remain long in the negative circle, arguments become deeper and more difficult. It is important to recognise negative circles, to become aware of them, and react to them when they appear.

One very common negative circle is created when the other person with their natural way of action clings and the other withdraws. “The more I complain, the more you withdraw. And the more you withdraw, the more I complain.”

In this situation, spouse A would like to for example have a discussion and receive intimacy. He/she tells B about this, from whose point of view A is complaining. B withdraws and doesn’t want to get into discussion. A is not satisfied with the situation, but goes after B. From B’s point of view, A is complaining even more. B is not satisfied with the situation and withdraws even more.

Another example of a negative circle has two people who withdraw: “The more I withdraw, the more you withdraw. And the more you withdraw, the more I withdraw.”

Third example has two clingy people: “The more I complain, the more you complain. And the more you complain, the more I complain.”

Behaviour involved in negative circle (e.g. clinging, complaining, withdrawal, silence) and visible/audible emotions (e.g. rage, anger, frustration, irritation) are however only a part of the truth. They are visible, or so to speak “above the surface”. What remains beneath the surface are different meanings, unexpressed emotions and deeper needs. Interaction is therefore multidimensional and complex, which is why it can be very difficult.

EXERCISE: NEGATIVE CIRCLE

It is important to recognise a negative circle in order to intervene. Especially, to understand one's own role in negative circle is essential - to make the necessary changes to break the negative circle of an argument early on.

In your opinion, what is your typical negative circle like? Use simple words of action to describe your ways of acting (for example pressure, withdrawal, complaining, shouting, criticizing, rejection).

Fill in the gaps of the text:

The more I _____
the more you _____
And the more you _____
the more I _____
and this is how our negative cycle is created.

In Islam, it is important to remember that good change often begins within yourself.



“Indeed Allah will not change the condition of people as long as they do not change their state themselves.”
Sura Ar Raad, verse 11



REFLECTION:

EXERCISE: BENEATH THE SURFACE

With the help of this exercise, you can reflect on your needs, emotions and thoughts you have behind your arguments. What kind of behaviour and expressed emotions would an outsider see in your argument situation? And what remains under the surface, i.e., what an outsider would not see? There can be, for example different meanings (I will be left alone, I will be left with nothing, I am always wrong, I am not good enough), unexpressed emotions (fear of rejection, helplessness, insufficiency, sadness), and deeper needs (affection, security, acceptance).

Think back to your most recent argument. Write on top of the iceberg above the surface emotions, words and behaviour, which an outsider would see in your argument situation. Next, think about your needs and emotions that remain under the surface. Often, they are those needs and emotions that can be hard to recognise, which an outsider cannot see, and those which can be hard to say out loud to your spouse.



REFLECTION:

COMMUNICATION IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT SEX TRICKS

"This is something I have struggled with and I am still working on. I wish I was more satisfied." – 32 years old, 2 children

"I might express myself also by writing to my husband." – 31 years old, 2 children

For many, it is challenging to talk about sex. Only few people have received comprehensive sexual education and it is rare to have an image of a woman who wants pleasure and expresses her sexual wishes. Thus, it is very natural that it is difficult to find justification that your own thoughts, experiences, desires and wishes have priority in sexuality. Therefore, it is no wonder that talking about sexuality and sex might be challenging. In addition, the intimate nature of sexuality brings into the conversation the history of both together with past wounds and feelings of guilt.

Often oral communication is too big a leap to take. You should also think alternative ways to communicate about matters related to sexuality and sex. In this guide there are various exercises, which you can go through with your spouse as well. The exercises could be a good way to start a conversation.

One good way to initiate and hold a conversation can be writing – you can for example write your husband a letter about what awakens your sexual desire. You can also come up with a sign, for example to touch the other's hand, when he does something that makes you feel especially good. In communication, you can and often should be creative.

Often after an argument, when spouses make up, they tell each other things they wish to change. These can be about very ordinary things, such as hoping the other to take part of house chores, talk in a different way or to come home on time. As the life settles again, matters agreed might be forgotten. In Islam, it is important not to take anything for granted. It is good to tell the other about your wishes over and over again.



["And remind, for verily the reminder profits the believers." Sura Adh Dariyat, verse 55]



It is also important to remember that you can talk about matters several times, but the way you speak and say it is sometimes more important.



"And speak good to people" Sura Al Baqara, verse 83



EXERCISE: OUR SEX LIFE AND COMMUNICATION

With the help of the following questions, you can reflect on communication concerning your sex life.

	YES	NO
I am satisfied with the communication concerning sex in our marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For me it is easy to express my wishes concerning sex to my spouse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I trust that my spouse listens to my wishes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I tell my spouse my real wishes during sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I express my satisfaction after a successful sexual experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If communication leads into an argument, we know how to solve it the way that satisfies us both.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

REFLECTION:

EXERCISE: DO YOU KNOW THE EROGENOUS ZONES OF YOUR BODY? DOES YOUR HUSBAND KNOW THEM?

Draw outlines of the human body front and back. Choose two pens of different colours - one colour you like and one colour you don't like. Mark on this drawing with the colour you like those erogenous zones of your body you would like your spouse to touch you. Erogenous zones are the ones where touch or caress gives you sexual pleasure. Next, mark the zones of your body where touch does not feel good to you. To do this, use the colour you don't like.

Ask also your spouse to mark on his drawing the erogenous zones of his body, as well as the zones he does not want you to touch. After you both have coloured a human body, show them to each other. Discuss your new insights and thoughts.

REFLECTION:

HOW WOULD YOU COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES?

Over the years we

Do you remember that wonderful time we had sex, when

Nowadays, our sex life is

I am turned on by

I get aroused when

My sexual desire is turned off by

I wish to have more

I am shy to tell

I would like our sex life to have more

I want you to

I believe we

Examine the sentences you wrote. Mark at the end of the sentence whether the sentence is positive (+) or negative (-). Reflect on how you could yourself change the negative sentences to make them more positive?

If you wish to, show your sentences to your spouse, and ask him to also complete his sentences. Discuss his sentences as well.

REFLECTION:

INTIMACY

"Intimacy is one of the cornerstones of marriage. To give and receive intimacy is super important. But also, if you want to keep distance. That should be respected as well." - 32 years old, 1 child

"If I want to express intimacy to my husband, I hug him or kiss or hold his hand. I look into his eyes and smile. I might tell him how much I love him or how happy I am that it is he, who is my husband alhamdulillah. Sometimes I go in front of him, my back to him, when I long for security and intimacy." - 24 years old, 1 child

"Intimacy is being together, doing things together, snuggling on the couch and sleeping together side by side, hugging, caressing. I can show that I want/need intimacy by just saying it verbally, or for example I go to give him a hug, massage his shoulders or head or peck him a kiss." - 26 years old, 0 children

Oxytocin hormone, which is produced during touch, caresses and orgasm, is an important originator of sexual response. Therefore, it is no wonder that often for women and men the initial force leading to sexual response is the perceived feeling of intimacy. Oxytocin is also involved in the experience of attachment to a spouse.

For women, low levels of oestrogen are related to weak effects of oxytocin. Women's oestrogen levels decline naturally with ageing. Therefore, it is normal that after the menopause, intimacy will not create the same kind of oxytocin rush as before.

However, it can be difficult to surrender to intimacy and touch. Behind this, there can be for example a fear of losing control. In these kinds of situations, therapy can be very helpful, but you can examine possible obstacles to surrender at home as well with the help of different touching exercises. Touching exercises are recommended, among others, to those struggling with their own body image and the lack of sexual desire, to those who fear losing control as well as to those who suffer from arousal, orgasm and erection disorders.

The objective of touching exercises is to focus on the present moment and different bodily sensations, not the performance or the goal. With these kinds of exercises, you can explore your own body and its different sensations. Often these exercises are helpful in getting new positive sexual experiences, through which they can for example ease the anxiety related to sexuality.

EXERCISE: OUR INTIMACY

With the help of the following questions, you can reflect on intimacy in your relationship.

	YES	NO
Between me and my spouse, there is respect and trust.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to have more intimacy in our marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy other kind of intimacy more than sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to have more non-sexual touching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to have more touching during sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



“Among His Signs is that He created spouses for you of your own kind so that you might find tranquility in them. And He has placed affection and compassion between you. There are certainly Signs in that for people who reflect.”

Sur Ar Rum, verse 21



REFLECTION:

EXERCISE: INTIMACY CV

You are applying to Academy of Intimacy. You write them your CV, where you explain your life from the point of view of intimacy. What kind of experiences of intimacy have you had before your current marriage? And during your marriage? Write down both good and bad experiences. What kind of intimacy would you like to have in the future?

You can write your Intimacy CV in free format or using the following example format. However, you should write your CV on a separate piece of paper, because often there are a lot of thoughts and experiences that come to mind. It is good if you can complete your CV later as well.

Reflect after writing your CV: What did you realise? Could you show your CV to your spouse?

Intimacy CV

Name:

Birth date and place:

E-mail:

Läheisyys ennen nykyistä avioliittoani:

Form of intimacy:

(E.g. "Touch")

Experience:

(E.g. "I remember when I was little and asked my mother to stroke me.
It felt really good.")

Intimacy during my current marriage:

Form of intimacy:

Experience:

In the future, I would like the following kind of intimacy:

Form of intimacy:

Experience:

REFLECTION:

BODY IMAGE AND SEXUALITY

"(My lack of sexual desire is affected by) disgust of my own body (obesity). I don't find myself beautiful or desirable." - 39 years of age, 5 children

"Low self-esteem and insecurity about my body and about not being good enough for him is a real turn-off on both sides." - 30 years old, 5 children

Body image means general satisfaction about looks or function of own body or a certain part of it. Sexual function is often especially influenced by thoughts about one's own genital area and breasts. These thoughts might be influenced by for example previous traumatic experiences, mean and criticizing comments, illness or overweight.

Thoughts about one's own body image can take over the mind during sex. The essential question is, how much a person thinks about their body image during sex. The more you think about it, the more there will be dysfunctions in sex. This decreases sexual desire and pleasure and contributes to arousal and orgasm disorders. For men, disturbing thoughts might manifest in form of erection and ejaculation disorders. At the same time, a demand of your own sexual pleasure decreases, and you might even lose the respect of your own boundaries. This way sex becomes one-sided, which is often also noticed by the spouse.

As you reflect on your own body image, it is important to think what the thoughts about your own body mean to you and whether you think they are true or not. Sometimes you also need your spouse's support to work on positive thoughts related to your body image. If your spouse is the one who for example says mean or critical things about your body, you should examine your marriage more generally and work on its problems.

To interrupt disturbing thoughts about your body image there are physical exercises that are often very useful. For example, increasing intimacy through touching can be important in acceptance of your body image. In addition, it is important to take notice of all senses involved in sexuality.

REFLECTION:

EXERCISE: YOUR OWN BODY IMAGE

With the help of the following questions, you can reflect on your own body image.

	YES	NO
I am generally happy with my own body and its function.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am happy with how my genital area looks and its function (e.g. lubrication).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am happy with my breasts and their function.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't usually think about my body image during sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not afraid to indulge in my sexual feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my spouse is happy about how my body looks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In Islam, it is important to be thankful to Allah for your body. Thankfulness decreases excess self-criticism and improves self-esteem. How perfect our body is, when we cannot regulate the majority of our body's functions! With our body we can express ourselves and our sexuality, but with it we also do the most important i.e. worship Allah.



“Verily, We created man in best stature” Sura At Tin, verse 4.



REFLECTION:

EXERCISES: SENSES AS PART OF SEXUAL PLEASURE

Get to a peaceful place and sit or lie on your back. Breathe a couple of times to relax your body. Close your eyes and for a moment, be present for yourself. If your mind starts to wander with your thoughts, take notice of it, and return back to the present moment by focusing on breathing. At the same time, think for a while about the senses of your own body.

Hearing - As you close your eyes, concentrate on observing the environment by hearing. What sounds can you hear right now? Think what kind of sound do you find pleasant? Visit your imagination to hear a pleasant sound. Is it the sound of your loved one breathing calmly? Can you hear rain drops in autumn or is your hearing filled with pleasant nashid? Remain with this pleasant sound for a moment.

Smell - Do you recognise different smells in your environment right now? What smells do you find pleasing? In your imagination, find a smell that has pleased you before. Is it the smell of your spouse's skin or a certain perfume? Or can you catch the smell of summer's first flowers? Remain for a moment in your imagination, and let the smell invade you.

Touch - Think how your body is touching the surface you are sitting or lying on. Is the sensation against your body pleasing? Think also in your imagination, what kind of touch feels good on your skin. Stay with this touch for a moment, and let your body enjoy.

Taste - Think back to a situation, where you tasted something good. Did you taste sweet chocolate in your mouth, or did you have a sip of good tea? How did the taste spread in your mouth? Taste this pleasant taste in your imagination for a moment.

Sight - As you open your eyes, what do you see? Do your eyes recognise different hues? Which tones do you find pleasant? What kind of a picture can you see? Let your eyes linger for a while in this picture.

Stay for a moment to reflect which senses are the strongest for you.
Think how you could better make use of these strong senses in your sex life?

(Lempi Terapia 2019, edited by Tiina Alakärppä)

REFLECTION:

3.

**TIPS FROM ONE MUSLIM SISTER
TO ANOTHER**



TIPS FOR LACK OF SEXUAL DESIRE

Always first check possible medical causes for the lack of sexual desire

"You should at least have hormones/medical causes checked, to make sure the lack of desire is not caused by hormonal reasons." – 20 years old, 2 children

Reflect regularly on your lack of sexual desire

"You should systematically examine your own lack of desire. When did it start, how do you find your marriage otherwise, what about other aspects of life? To enjoy your sexuality is too big a thing to let go in your life." – 24 years old, 1 child

Remember that in Islam, foreplay is recommended

"Beautiful words, massage and talking together are foreplay to me." – 32 years old, 4 children

"To touch and caress the other. Foreplay is an important part especially if there is not much desire. Foreplay helps your mind to focus on the present moment and push away other thoughts." – 30 years old, 5 children

"Surely, for example kissing, touching or massage help you to want sex." – 26 years old, 0 children

"Almost the best foreplay is, when we have been out as a family and my husband has taken part of taking care of the children. Also making myself beautiful with clothes/accessories, as well as basic kissing and hugging is good foreplay." – 37 years old, 3 children

"Flirting / naughty talks / touches throughout the day." – 20 years old, 2 children

"I have bought pretty underwear and sex games, both of them have worked well." – 31 years old, 2 children

"To spend time together, and explore each other's bodies." – 24 years old, 1 child

Talk with your spouse and share the struggles of your daily life

"Most importantly you should probably try to open the communication with your spouse and talk about things without shame and to have the courage to express your own wishes and preferences." – 33 years old, 4 children

"Try to arrange you to have one-on-one time without pressure to have sex. Do all other nice things together. It might help the desire to come back. Also share your daily life and its struggles with your spouse." – 30 years old, 5 children

Be healthily selfish

"As a woman, I find it very important that intercourse gives pleasure for me as well, and that it is not only for him." – 39 years old, 5 children

"I have gone a long way to realise that I too have the right for pleasure and that my husband enjoys to see my pleasure. My advice is, get to know yourself and what gives you pleasure, and tell it to your spouse. In bed, you are allowed to be healthily selfish as well. Your pleasure matters." – 30 years old, 5 children

Lack of sexual desire is sometimes normal

"It is not the end of the world, if you don't feel like having sex. You can still have sex for example using lubricant, and sex doesn't always have to mean intercourse." – 20 years old, 2 children

"Lack of sexual desire is sometimes normal, for example after giving birth. Then it is important to focus on different kind of intimacy than sex." – 19 years old, 0 children

Seek for professional help before the situation gets too bad

"Seeking help is a service for you as well as your marriage. Well-functioning marriage demands work and seeking help when needed." – 39 years old, 5 children

"I also believe that sexual therapy has its place. If you are stuck with it, outside help can be useful to get past the worst. It can help you to understand each other." – 30 years old, 5 children

"If the problem is big, sisters, seek for help. It can save your marriage. In Islam, it is recommended to ask for advice from specialists." – 32 years old, 4 children

"When you experience (lack of desire) as a problem, you should seek help from the right specialist, not a doctor." – 42 years old, 3 children

"You should seek for professional help, because sexuality is such a big pleasure, joy and gift from God in this life." – 24 years old, 1 child



"You (alone) we ask for help" Sura Al Fatiha, verse 5.



**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE MAKING
OF THIS GUIDE!**

"Satisfaction with own life come to different sisters from different things. In principle, we Muslims know that life is not perfect, and you cannot make it perfect. However, our body, soul and mind long for satisfaction. In Islam, your own faith and its practice brings compassion to your life, which no other worldly pleasure can give you."

- Muslim sister



"Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest."
Sura Ar Ra'd, verse 28.



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