

The crucial couple sexual dialogue: Five dimensions of touch-2016

The core psychosexual skill exercise is to increase awareness of each partner's preferences for gears (dimensions) of touch. The majority of couples only use two gears- affection or intercourse. They fall into the trap of believing that sex=intercourse. This results in lower levels of both touch and intercourse. In contrast, this psychosexual skill exercise focuses on five gears of touch (based on a ten point scale of pleasure/arousal).

1st GEAR: Affectionate touch--this usually involves clothes-on touching, such as holding hands, hugging, or kissing. We do not consider affectionate touch as sexual, but it provides the foundation for intimate attachment. Subjective arousal is anchored at 1.

2nd GEAR: Sensual touch---this involves non-genital pleasuring which can be clothed, semi-clothed, or nude. Sensual touch includes a head, back or foot rub, cuddling on the couch while watching TV, a trust position where you feel safe and connected, cradling each other as you got to sleep or wake in the morning. Sensual touch is an integral part of couple sexuality. It has value in itself as well as a bridge to sexual desire at that time or later. Subjective arousal 1-3.

3rd GEAR: Playful touch---this intermixes genital pleasuring with non-genital touch (while semi-clothed or nude). Playful touch can include touching in the shower or bath, full body massage, seductive or erotic dancing, games such as strip poker. What makes playful touch inviting is the enhanced sense of pleasure and playful unpredictability. Playful touch is valuable in itself and/or can serve as a bridge to sexual desire. Subjective arousal 4-5.

4th GEAR: Erotic touch---this is the most challenging gear. Erotic, non-intercourse touch can include manual, oral, rubbing, or vibrator stimulation. Erotic scenarios and techniques are an integral part of couple sexuality providing a sense of vitality, creativity, and unpredictability. Erotic touch can be mutual or one-way. It can proceed to orgasm or transition to intercourse. Subjective arousal 6-10.

5th GEAR: Intercourse---there are two crucial concepts in integrating intercourse into the approach of gears of connection. First, intercourse is a natural continuation of the pleasuring/eroticism process, not a pass-fail sex performance test. Second, transition to intercourse at high levels of erotic flow (7 or 8) and continue multiple stimulation during intercourse. Subjective arousal 7-10.

Fill out the chart separately and then discuss your feelings and preferences with your partner.

Touch Type	Current percentage of all touch	Percentage of touch desired
1st GEAR: Affectionate touch		
2nd GEAR: Sensual touch		
3rd GEAR: Playful touch		
4th GEAR: Erotic touch		
5th GEAR: Intercourse touch		

The purpose of this exercise is to facilitate sexual dialogue with a focus on enhancing sexual desire and pleasure. Sexuality is more than intercourse. The essence of couple sexuality is sharing pleasure-oriented touch. You develop a common language to facilitate communication and embrace a variable, flexible approach to intimacy, touching, sexuality, and intercourse.

Resources: McCarthy, B. & McCarthy, E. (2012). Sexual Awareness (5th edition).