

## On the Couch at the Sex Therapist's

When to talk to a counselor about your sexual health.

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When many of us hear the term "sex therapy," what comes to mind is the controversial practice of surrogate therapy, where clients have sexual experiences with sex surrogates in hopes of improving their own sexual abilities. Not to worry (or sorry to disappoint you): The majority of sex therapists do not offer any type of "hands-on" treatment.

### The Sex in Sex Therapy

The term "sex therapy" can be misleading; just the inclusion of the word "sex" can make some people shift in their seats. But ask yourself this: Am I a sexual person? Is sexuality important to me and/or to my relationship? Sexuality is an intrinsic part of the human experience, and it's often ignored in traditional therapy settings. Having problems related to sexuality is completely normal; it's nothing to be embarrassed about.

According to sex therapist George W. Turner, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at the [Turner Professional Group](#) in Overland Park, Kan., what happens during a typical sex therapy session is similar to what happens in other types of therapy: you'll talk to your therapist about problems having to do with yourself or with your relationships. You may be asked to do homework assignments to help you reach your goals, and if you need a referral for another type of treatment, a sex therapist can provide that too. "Some of my clients also need to see a urologist or a hormone specialist, and I can help them find a qualified person in the area," says Turner.

### How Can Sex Therapy Help?

In addition to dealing with a specific issue such as childhood sexual abuse, some common goals of sex therapy are to improve a couple's intimacy or help an individual deal with body image issues.

More reasons why a person or couple might visit a sex therapist:

- Uneven desire in a relationship
- Guilt or fear around sexuality
- Erectile dysfunction
- Performance anxiety
- Painful intercourse
- Ejaculatory control
- Lack of sensation
- Shame about body parts
- Sexual orientation issues
- Gender identity issues
- Lack of sexual experience
- Lack of dating or social skills
- Insecurity regarding a particular desire
- Orgasm difficulties
- Relationship conflicts and power struggles
- Communication issues
- Anger and resentment issues related to sexuality

### A Specialized Approach

You might be wondering why you can't see a general therapist for any of the above issues. The fact is that you can bring up any issue you choose with any therapist, of course, but you're better off finding someone with the training and experience in the area of human sexuality. Also, there's a chance that you or your regular therapist may not feel completely comfortable talking about issues related to sexuality. A good sex therapist will offer a sex-positive approach to your concerns, and help you feel at ease when you're talking about them.

### Choosing a Sex Therapist

Depending on your reasons for seeking therapy, you may be looking for a therapist of a certain gender, age, or even sexual orientation. If those things matter to you, then they're valid. Turner suggests finding a therapist who is certified by the [American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists](#) and, if possible, someone with an advanced degree in human sexuality.

Turner suggests, "Don't be afraid to ask what classes or workshops they've taken in the past year." In addition, you may want to ask your sex therapist about her or his approach to therapy, and whether or not they have experience dealing with your specific issues.

Once you meet with a sex therapist, continue to evaluate that person. If you don't feel like you're making progress after 10 sessions, you might want to get a second opinion. Also, it may seem obvious, but it bears pointing out—under no circumstances will a certified sex therapist engage in any kind of sexual activity with a client, whether in the office or elsewhere. It's not only a breach of ethics, it's a crime in some states.


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