



## Redefine How Your Intimacy Unfolds or Re-Writing Your (Sexual) Script

Contributor: Jill McCullough-Squire, BSN, RN, OCN

**Note: This handout is offered as a communication aid for patients and their providers. It is not a substitute for professional examination, diagnosis, or treatment.**

This handout aims to help readers understand the sequence of emotional, physical, and psychological interactions, a sexual script unique to each intimate couple that leads to an intimate encounter. And how to realign these steps to their new reality after cancer.

### NEW REALITY

Here you are on the cancer journey. Your body and or body image and how you feel about yourself are altered by your cancer, treatment, and or surgery. You find that engaging in sexual intimacy the way you and your partner have in your “before cancer” life—also known as **a sexual script**—is a struggle. You may find physical, emotional, and or psychological barriers that cause your sexual script to no longer work. You might be inwardly (or even outwardly) turning away from your partner, feeling like you are letting them down.

Research shows that when intimate couples work together to redefine how their intimate encounters unfold, they have increased satisfaction with their intimate encounters. They benefit from growing closer to each other and enjoy a higher quality of life.

### It Is OK to Grieve What Was

It is natural to mourn what was. Support groups, positive self-affirmation, and counseling can help work through that grief.

Chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery, and the cancer experience change your body, your body image, and your self-perception.

Avoid assigning blame for the need to change your sexual script or for the old script not working. [Dr. Ian Kerner](#), sex therapist and author of *She Comes First*, suggests that you instead look at the barrier to your prior sexual script as a problem to be solved together.

## HOW TO REWRITE YOUR SEXUAL SCRIPT

### **Identify and work through your barriers to your prior script**

Understand your prior sexual script. Did it start with cooking dinner together with shared kisses? How did one partner signal to the other that they were ready to move to the next phase of your joint sexual script?

- There are many elements to a sexual script: emotional, physical, and psychological. When one goes off the rails, it can leave people feeling inadequate and not sexy.
- Journal your thoughts as to what your barriers are to your prior sexual script now working.
- Look up ways to overcome these barriers or work with a couple's therapist or sex therapist.
- Come to the table with compassionate, respectful, and workable solutions.

After Cancer has patient education handouts on many solutions for various aspects of sexual health and intimacy.

- Some solutions can be relatively simple, such as addressing vaginal dryness with vaginal moisturizing and the use of lubricant. The solution can be made part of the sexual script, with intimacy in discussion and intimacy in applying the lubricant.
- Some things can be more challenging, such as body alterations and vaginal stenosis. While intimacy may not be the same, it can be enjoyable.

Many solutions don't work overnight and are a combination of physical, emotional, and psychological strategies. Working together through them can be intimate, an investment in each other.

Some solutions involve bypassing a previously enjoyed form of intimacy altogether and replacing it with a solution that both intimate partners enjoy.

Example: Marybeth found herself with irreparable vaginal stenosis (which is preventable with early intervention and continual practice of vaginal health) after treatment. Vaginal penetration could no longer play a part in her and her spouse's sexual script.

They worked together to rewrite their script, bypassing vaginal penetration.

They continued to enjoy intimacy.

Mary and her spouse mourned what was; they worked together, rewriting their sexual script to move forward.

Without assigning blame, articulate your solutions. Allow your partner to come up with solutions they are comfortable with. Work collaboratively with your partner on rewriting your script.

It can be tough to start these conversations, Articulating thoughts in a journal first, coming to the table with solutions, avoiding blame, and using warmth, compassion, and respect can be effective.

- Listen well to your partner's response and solutions.
- You may both find this collaboration an intimate experience.
- Consider working with a couple's therapist or sex therapist if you find yourselves at an impasse.

## **The brain is your largest sex organ**

It's in our mind

The brain is the largest sex organ. [Dr. Logan Lookoff](#) explains that psychology is just as important as our physical makeup when it comes to sexual intimacy and pleasure.

Fantasizing can help rekindle desire. It's OK to share your fantasy with your intimate partner, and it's ok not to, according to Dr. Kerner. The point is that it works for you.

The mind-based intimacy of talking with each other and enjoying activities together can be effective in helping couples feel more intimate with each other.

## **We enjoy touch**

Certified Sex Therapist Dr. Sabitha Pillai-Friedman shares that touch makes one feel loved; it is soothing and comforting.

- Touch has many qualities.
- With good communication, you can work together to make touch pleasurable for one another.

[Rachel Baxter](#) of the Sexual Medicine Society of North America describes the intimacy technique of **Sensate Focus**.

- Sensate focus is an exercise where one partner takes a turn being the toucher, and the other partner is the person to be touched.
- In the first couple of sessions, Sensate Focus is designed to avoid touching the genitals and breasts, instead concentrating on non-sexual touch.
- Touching gradually becomes more intimate as each participant's comfort and enjoyment with touching and being touched grows.
- Each partner is to communicate about what is enjoyed or not.
- Sensate focus decreases performance anxiety

## **Consider exploring the adventure and advantage of intimate toys**

Intimate toys, also known as sex toys or sexual enhancement products, can add enjoyable physical sensation, sexual stimulation, a penetrative experience, and intimacy.

- Cancer support sites recommend using a higher-end shop to ensure you receive a quality product. Start with something simple, easy to use, and with good review ratings.
- Communicate with each other. Share how to shift or move the toy for a better sensation.

- Communicate discomfort immediately.
- Ensure you include irritant-free lubricant (After Cancer has a handout on lubricants). Clean your toy(s) well after use, per manufacturer instructions, to avoid the risk of infection.

## CONCLUSION

Using the strategies described above, you and your partner can rewrite your sexual script. The possibilities can be endless.

[Dr. Ian Kener](#) explains that discussing and planning intimate encounters does not diminish their intimacy. It can enhance them by ensuring the intimacy of the discussion, avoiding surprises, and comfortably incorporating your wants, desires, and adventures.

The willingness to work together on the process of rewriting your sexual script paves the way for you and your intimate partner to be successful.

## OTHER RELEVANT HANDOUTS

Sensate Focus

Rediscovering Intimacy with an Ostomy

Let's Slide Into Lubricants

The Miracle of Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

Penile Rehabilitation with a VED

Ways To Reduce the Impact of Cancer Treatment On The Vulva & Vagina

Practical Considerations for Anal Intimacy

Practical Suggestions for Tackling Low Libido

For Partners of Those Affected by Cancer

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pg. 4

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