

Psychosexual therapy

Sexual difficulties can make people feel very alone. Some people feel so fearful, self-conscious or ashamed of their sexual problem that they suffer for months or even years without discussing their worries with anyone, even their partner. Yet, sexual difficulties are very common and can have many causes. They may be:

- Physical (the effect of illness, accident, surgery, disability or medications)
- Psychological (anxiety, depression or other mental health problems)
- Emotional (unresolved grief or unhappiness due to other problems in the relationship)
- Situational (they only happen under certain circumstances such as when your in-laws are staying!)

Sometimes, when we are having trouble in one part of our life it can affect another part, which could seem completely unrelated.

Many sexual problems are like this. A very simple example of this is when you have a lot on your mind, you often don't feel like having sex (having sex goes on the 'back boiler' so that you have more space to deal with other stresses). This can be a mild and temporary situation, and soon goes away of its own accord.

However, if a problem is more severe it can have stronger and longer-lasting effects on your sex life. You may be suffering from stress for any number of reasons or you may have had a traumatic experience, or you feel unhappy with your life.

There are many life factors that manifest themselves through 'sexual problems' such as; having a complete lack of desire, to problems with erections, ejaculation or painful intercourse.

How does it work? Psychosexual therapy can help by understanding the root of the problem and then treating it, which can improve your sex life.

Depending on the sexual problem, 'treatment' might include some behavioural exercises for you (and your partner) to do in the privacy of your own home.

Simply by talking to you as a couple, or on your own if you prefer (however, if you are in a relationship, it is often more beneficial if both of you attend the therapy session) a qualified psychosexual therapist will help you find out what could be causing your sexual problems.

For some people talking about such personal issues can be difficult but your therapist will be professional and sensitive throughout.

Your therapist will also encourage an approach which does not blame either partner. In fact, sharing a problem makes it much easier to deal with.

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Psychosexual therapy is a 'talking therapy'. No physical examinations, tests or any sexual acts are performed. If it is felt that your problem is a physical one, then your therapist will ask your permission to refer you back to your GP, with a recommendation that your physical issues are checked out first.

Once we have identified what might be causing the problem, we can discuss possible ways of treating it. We'll devise a specific treatment program to help you cope and give you practical ways of dealing with it together.

Each therapy session will last one hour.

What problems can psychosexual therapy help with?

Psychosexual therapy can be an effective treatment for:

- General breakdown in a couple's sexual relationship
- Loss of sexual desire
- Painful intercourse (male or female)
- Sexual difficulties following abuse
- Difficulties with orgasm
- Sexual arousal disorders
- Premature or delayed ejaculation
- Erectile dysfunction
- Sexual orientation/gender identity issues

Are there any forms to complete? A contract and confidentiality agreement is signed in the first session. There is also a form to complete before each session, this is a set of questions to see how you're getting on and see whether there's any risk of harm to yourself. At the end of your sessions there is a feedback questionnaire.

How long and how often would you see a therapist? Your therapist will talk with you about the number of sessions you can expect to have. This will typically be 6 to 10 sessions. The therapy usually takes place once a week and a session is 50 minutes. Your therapist will discuss with you any planned breaks and what happens if you cancel sessions.

For more information about psychosexual therapy or for an informal chat about whether this type of therapy might be useful for you, please contact the counselling team, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on enquiries@mnessexmind.org or 01206 764500.

We're Mid and North Essex Mind, the mental health charity. We're here to make sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn to for advice and support. We are a local, independent charity connected to the national charity Mind. We have to raise our own money to run our services.

If you want to raise some money or donate to support the work we do in the local area, make sure you are clear on any fundraising or cheques that the money is for Mid and North Essex Mind. This means we can use this money locally. We cannot take donations to 'Mind'.

Thank you