

# Don't Allow Touch Deprivation to Creep Into Your Marriage

Nonsexual touch is extremely important. Even men need to be hugged, kissed and enjoyed physically by their wives. Did you grow up without any of your physical intimacy needs being met? Many people do. If so, you may have a deficit in the area of physical touch, as well as a skewed perception of the value of physical touch.

Fortunately, God often puts an individual who hasn't been touched together with a spouse who likes to be touched and likes to touch. This gift is not always received well and can even be a source of contention. This was exactly the case in the following story.

Mary Alice grew up in a Mennonite home in Pennsylvania where everyone did their chores, got good grades, walked the straight-and-narrow road and, of course, went to church. She couldn't remember hugs or kisses from her family as she grew up. Mary Alice met Daniel, a fine Christian man who grew up quite differently. He was hugged, touched regularly and kissed often, even throughout his teenage years. Hugging his mom, dad, sister or brother was normal for Danny.

Danny and Mary Alice fell in love and married after dating a couple years. Soon into the marriage it became obvious that they thought very differently about physical intimacy. Sex was OK with Mary Alice because she believed that was her Christian duty toward her husband, but she wanted no part of Danny's desire to hug, kiss and be playful.

Three years went by and Mary Alice told him that she felt the only reason he hugged her and wanted her attention was for sex. Although he adamantly disagreed, she sincerely believed she knew "the real truth." After their second child came

along, Danny gave up on trying to be physically close with his wife.

Danny stayed married, stayed faithful—and stayed mad.

His issue wasn't sex; it was touch. Through counseling, Mary Alice was convinced to try nonsexual touch. Under the guidelines that Danny could not use it to initiate sex, she felt safe to experiment physically. Eventually, Mary Alice not only accepted Danny's need for legitimate nonsexual touching, but she also began to discover her own need for touch as well.

Touch deprivation is painfully real today in marriages. Some couples touch only during sex. How sad when God has given us the wonderful gift of our physical bodies with which to enjoy one another. Touch is a great way to express intimacy. Fewer things are better than a time of cuddling or massaging or scratching your spouse's back.

Sexual intimacy is the ability to engage your spouse spiritually, emotionally and physically. This pleasuring and exploring of one another is God's will and God's design.

Have you thought about the thousands of changes your body goes through during the sexual act? Your organs become enlarged, fluids change, nerves are excited and pleasure is experienced at an almost traumatic rate. God designed this. He designed our bodies so that we could enjoy the ultimate pleasure within a marriage.

But just as sex within the marital relationship causes ultimate pleasure, problems in the marriage bed cause ultimate pain, especially with men. Issues pertaining to sexual preferences, sexual appetites and sexual differences often come up during marriage-counseling sessions. At these times I like to bring up what I call "sexual personalities."

Our sexual personalities are often similar to our nonsexual personalities. If you marry a woman who drives the speed

limit, doesn't take many risks and is pretty conservative in her beliefs and behaviors, don't expect her sexual personality to be exotic or bizarre. She probably won't be what you created in your imagination as a teenager.

Take a minute here and think about this. Is your wife more conservative in her approach to life or more appetite driven? Is she a risk taker? Is she loud? Whatever her personality is outside the bedroom, it will most likely be her personality inside your bedroom. Accepting her sexual personality will give you a better perspective of your precious spouse.

Let's look at three basic developmental stages of sexuality. Depending on the individual's emotional or behavioral development, an adult can sexually be in any one of these three stages. When we discuss a "sexual child" or "sexual adolescent," we are referring to an adult who exhibits behaviors or attitudes from this stage. This is important, for not everyone who is an adult physically is automatically an adult spiritually, emotionally, financially or sexually.

### **Stage 1: Sexual Childhood**

An adult whose behavior and emotions are consistent with a child's, regardless of age, will have beliefs about sex that are childlike. Such individuals tend to avoid sexual responsibility in their marriages. They rely on their spouses to initiate all sex and often put it off as much as possible.

They refuse to grow, experiment or explore sexually. They are uncomfortable, awkward and even ashamed when discussing sex. Adults behaving as sexual children make it difficult for their spouses to reach higher levels of sexual intimacy. If you find yourself in these descriptions, try to reach beyond your fears and awkwardness so that you and your spouse can enjoy sexual adulthood together.

### **Stage 2: Sexual Adolescence**

Those at stage two, the adolescent stage of sexual

development, are all too willing to be sexual. They enjoy sex, but sex is primarily about them having a good time. This individual refers to the sex act as “it,” “some” and other object-type terms. When sexual needs are not met when this person feels they ought to be, he or she may pout or get angry.

Those stuck at stage two are often disconnected emotionally and spiritually during the sex act. They are capable of one-dimensional only. One-dimensional physical sex is what I call “squirt gun” sex. It’s simply two bodies having physical sex, but their spirits and souls are not connecting.

Three-dimensional sex is what I call “atomic bomb” sex. The intensity of all three dimensions of your beings touching and experiencing sex is explosive, and will make you want to be spiritually and emotionally close regularly. This kind of sex will keep you together for life, and it gets better and better over the years.

### **Stage 3: Sexual Adulthood**

Mature sexual adults accept their sexuality. They understand that sex is a normal, ongoing and committed part of an adult marriage. They accept their fair share of sexual initiation in the marriage. Sexual adults give themselves spirit, soul and body and receive their partners’ sexuality as well.

A sexual-adult couple recognizes that they will enjoy sex thousands of times throughout a lifetime together. Mature sexual adults learn to communicate their sexual needs, desires and preferences, and they can be creative during sexual encounters within the limits of their personalities. Feelings about sexuality can be discussed without shaming, blaming or belittling the other spouse.

Of course, reaching sexual adulthood—as with spiritual, emotional or financial adulthood—takes time, correct information and a willingness to grow. But all things are

possible in Christ Jesus. He can carry us from stage one through stage three into sexual adulthood. His grace, love and patience are with us as we ask Him to change us, and they are available to all who ask.

Don't use this information about the stages of sexuality as ammunition to aim at your spouse. Instead, use it for your own self-awareness. If areas of your spouse's sexual struggle have been revealed, use this information as points of prayer, not points of manipulation.

Sexual intimacy is a journey, not a destination. As you walk out that journey together, learning to balance your sexual personalities, personal preferences and sexual maturity, you will soon discover that you never arrive. Sexual intimacy is a constantly evolving, wonderful journey of exploring and celebrating each other all the days of your life.

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