

Is This the Way Marriage is Supposed to be?

There are certain questions that couples will ask that I have been asked hundreds of times before. When I receive an email that really sums up what I hear over and over again, I respond, but also save it for the “Ask the Sex Therapist” articles here in LWM each year. In the past, I’ve addressed multiple questions and problems in the same article. This time, however, I have tried to focus on questions specifically about love & relationships, and will spread them out over three issues so I can go into more depth with my answers for each one. All names and identifiable information have been changed or omitted to protect the source(s).

Dear Dianna,

I’ve been married to my husband for six years and we’ve been together for nine. In the past two or three years, I’ve noticed my attraction to him waning and our sex life has slowly dwindled in frequency. To make matters worse, even when we do have sex, it feels like it’s the same thing every time. There’s nothing new or different or exciting anymore. Many times it just feels like we’re going through the motions. I’ve talked with other women about this, and I keep getting the same response: “That’s just what happens in a marriage.” I get reminded of all of the good things we have in our relationship and almost feel bad for complaining at all. When it comes to sex—is this really the way marriage is supposed to be?

-Sex Life SOS

Dear Sex Life SOS:

Distress signal received. ☺ Nine years is a long time to be in a relationship with someone. Yes, there will be ebbs and flows in your attraction, as well as in the frequency of your sex life (depending on a lot of other factors like: having children, financial stability, life changes, etc.). That is generally to be expected. However, there are two points in what you’re asking me that warrant a closer look. First, I hear you saying that you feel like part of the issue for you is that there is nothing new or exciting. You are bored with your sex life—and that boredom may be leading to feeling a lack of attraction toward him. If you are like most of the clients I’ve worked with, I’m willing to bet that you probably have not talked with your husband about this. I’m also fairly confident that chances are he may be a bit bored too. After several years together, it happens. However, the second issue you’re addressing here I believe is of paramount concern: “Is this really the way marriage is supposed to be.” While it may be *normal* for things to get boring after a long period of time, it doesn’t mean it needs to stay that way. Moreover, who gets to decide what anything in life is *supposed* to be? The question I would urge you to ask yourself

is, “Is this the way I *want* marriage to be?” I think you already know the answer, because you’re writing to me for help.

First, I would suggest you spend some time thinking about what you want it to be like with your husband. Perhaps you might sit down with a pen and pad and just write down some thoughts you have about your “ideal sex life” with your husband. When you feel like you have some solid ideas, then you can talk with him about them and see if he has some ideas of his own. It is up to you and your husband to work on making it what you both want it to be. Yes, that means you will actually have to have an open and honest conversation with him about your sex life. If that seems like a daunting task, I suggest you seek out the help of a professional therapist, like me, to sit with you as a couple and help you learn how to communicate your sexual thoughts and feelings with one another. If you want your sex life to be more exciting, it’s up to you and your husband to learn how to make that happen. With a little hard work, effort, and willingness to change, you can rediscover a much more fun, exciting, and passionate sex life with each other.

~Dianna

If you are feeling like the person above, I imagine you might feel overwhelmed with how and where to start. The first question, as I’ve suggested, is to ask, “**Is this the way I want our sex life to be?**” Then, with a pen and paper, write down your answers to the following questions:

- What would need to change in order for things to be more as I’d like them to be?
- Are there specific behaviors that one or both of us need to change?
- What is more important to me, frequency or quality of sexual intimacy?
- What would I find more sexually exciting? How do I ask for this?
- Since there resources available to help us better understand how to make things more passionate, exciting, fun, etc., how do I find them?

When you feel like you have a good idea of how you *want* your sex life to be, you can then talk with your partner about those ideas. You may find that you both share the same desire; however, you don’t know how to change things or how to learn new skills. Rest assured that there are plenty of self-help resources—both books and DVDs, available to help you create a more fun and exciting sex life (search amazon and you’ll get an idea of just how many resources are out there). If part of the issue is about making your sex life a priority (i.e. - carving out time for sexual intimacy) you may want to look at how you are currently spending your time and consider what is less important that can be replaced by quality time spent with your spouse.

If you find that you are able to articulate with yourself what you want, but you don’t feel you can talk to your partner about it, then it is time to seek out the help of a couple’s counselor to help you build the communication skills you need to navigate your way to a more exciting, happier, healthier sex life.

Dr. Dianna Palimere is a Psychosexual Therapist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She has been working in the field of mental health for the past 13 years, dedicating the past eight years to specializing in clinical sexuality. She holds a Bachelors degree in Psychology, a Masters degree in Social Work, a Masters degree in Human Sexuality Education, and a PhD in Clinical Human Sexuality. Utilizing a holistic approach to therapy, she incorporates a variety of clinical interventions in her work with individuals, couples, and families. She is devoted to helping people achieve sexual health and healing through her work as a psychotherapist in her private practice in Pike Creek, DE; as well as in her work with local nonprofit organizations. To learn more about her or to schedule an appointment, visit her website:

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