

10 Good Ways to Work at Sex

By Jim Burns, Ph.D.

When a young couple begins their life together as husband and wife, they usually don't spend too much time talking about their sexual knowledge or experience. Quite frankly, they typically take this aspect of their relationship for granted – and why not? They're young, they're in love and they're *married*. Isn't that the perfect recipe for passionate and fulfilling physical intimacy?

Well, the reality is that many of the more common reasons for a *lack* of satisfaction in this area really have *nothing* to do with age, marital status or physical fitness. Just like any other aspect of the marriage union, physical intimacy can either be a functional part of the relationship or it can be a deeply meaningful form of expression. The difference lies in how much work a couple is willing to do.

Dr. Cliff Penner and his wife, Joyce, get my vote for being two of the most knowledgeable “sexual therapists” and educators. Cliff is a clinical psychologist with a M.A. in Theology and a Ph.D. from Fuller Seminary's Graduate School of Psychology. Joyce is a registered nurse and holds a Master's Degree in Psychosomatic Nursing and Nursing Education from UCLA. They've written and lectured extensively on this topic of sex education and sexual enhancement for married couples. They've also developed a list of what I like to call “10 Good Ways to Work at Sex.”

- 1. Remember that our sexuality is a gift from God.** This is more than just a physical response we're talking about here. Sexuality is part of God's plan of creation. Our sexuality as husbands and wives has been wired-in by God. It's nothing to be ashamed of, so embrace this gift!
- 2. Sexual pleasure within marriage is encouraged – and expected.** If your times of physical intimacy with your spouse aren't all you'd hoped they'd be, take the steps necessary to find out what's not working for the two of you. No one is expecting you to have the “ultimate” sexual experience every time, but this is too important of a measure of your connectedness to ignore if there is a problem. Sex is for unity, procreation and pleasure, so keep your priorities straight.
- 3. Keep “mutuality” as the central force of your “sexuality.”** We are expected to give ourselves to each other in marriage; this is a mutual command (it's not for wives only!). Each passage in the New Testament that teaches about the husband-wife sexual relationship either begins or ends with a command for mutuality. Not only are husband and wife equal in God's sight, but they have mutual rights and responsibilities.
- 4. Do all you can to resolve “body image” problems.** You know the drill: a husband pays his wife a compliment (“You're beautiful”) and she doesn't believe him. That might seem like a modest response on her part, but it actually could be a hindrance to their physical intimacy over time. Each spouse needs to bring a healthy self-image into the bedroom, or your sex lives will suffer.

5. Get to know your own body. This might sound a bit obvious, but it's important for this reason: the vast majority of us did *not* receive positive, value-centered sex education from our parents. As a result, what little we actually *do* know about our bodies we learned in high school biology class. Understanding how your body works and what uniquely influences your sex drive will definitely improve the quality of the physical intimacy you share with your spouse.

6. Allow for "Couple Time" regularly. This may sound pretty basic, but one of the best ways to get "in the mood" for physical intimacy is to simply spend time with your spouse. This isn't always easy with the demands of modern life – work, kids, church obligations and the like can really pack a family's schedule. But Mom and Dad need some regularly scheduled "alone time" for just you two...so make that a priority!

7, Conserve energy. And this does *not* refer to using less electricity in the home! Sexual desire is a manifestation of our sex drive, so if that energy is being spent on building a new business, engaging in sports or any other worthwhile, but time and energy-consuming, activity, your sex life may suffer as a result. Save your strength – your spouse will thank you for it!

8. Clear out distractions. This is another "basic" requirement to be sure, but the breathless pace of modern life doesn't always make this an easy principle to follow! Very few of us can "multi-task" all that well, and the more you "have on your mind," the less interested you'll be in physical intimacy with your spouse. Ruthlessly eliminate stress and distractions in your home, and your sex life has a much better chance of improving.

9. Assume responsibility. When a couple is experiencing sexual dysfunction in their relationship, it's too easy for one spouse to blame the other for the problems. Not only is that unfair, it also demonstrates a lack of responsibility. Each spouse must assume responsibility for his or her own body and related sexual issues. It's the only way for a couple to truly come together as one, building the kind of physical intimacy into their marriage that they each desire.

10. Have fun! If you've never heard or read this anywhere else, read it here – sex was created by God for the *enjoyment* of a man and woman in marriage. It's supposed to be fun – so enjoy it!

Those are just a few suggestions on how to work at improving the quality of physical intimacy in your marriage. You may need to go a step further and seek professional help if needed – and, if you do need help, I hope you will. A good place to start is with the website of Clifford and Joyce Penner and Associates: www.passionatecommitment.com.

So get to work – and have fun!

(Based on principles included in the book, [*The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment*](#), by Dr. Cliff and Joyce Penner)