



# SEXUALITY AND INTIMACY ISSUES AS WE AGE

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# Friendship Line for the Elderly

24-hour Friendship Line for the Elderly –

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# Sexuality

According to Robert Butler –

- Is the physical and emotional responsiveness to sexual stimuli – goes beyond the sexual urge and the sex act
- Offers the opportunity to express not only for passion but also for affection, esteem, and loyalty
- Allows a general affirmation of life (joy!)

# The Importance of Sexuality and Aging

- Older adults are diverse individuals who may engage in a variety of sexual behaviors
- Sexual orientation of older adults includes heterosexual as well as LGBT individuals
- Older adults date, cohabitate, engage in affairs, have protected or unprotected sex, may be sexually abused, masturbate or may abstain

# The Importance of Sexuality and Aging

- Older adults may be negotiating new sexual situations after a divorce or death of a spouse or partner – or after breast or prostate cancer or other chronic illnesses
- Older adults may be using the internet or other forms of social media to seek relationships

# Sexuality and the Aging Body

- The act of sex is complex, encompassing the body, the mind, and the emotions.
- Sex involves the nervous and circulatory systems and the hormones as well as specific organs of the body.
- Sexual response cycle – sexual desire, followed by excitement or erotic arousal, orgasm or climax, and resolution or recovery – similar cycle for both men and women.

# Portrayals of Sexuality and Aging in US

- According to ageist attitudes, older adults either do not engage in sexual relationships or that this experience is dirty, disgusting or taboo
- The ageist stereotype suggests that older adults are helpless, depressed and sexless
- Sexuality and its pleasures are reserved for the young

# Aging and the Media

- Older people are frequently portrayed as annoying, lonely, stubborn, depressed, cognitively impaired, and sick
- Unless older people are healthy, wealthy and sexy, they do not appear on television screens



# Barriers to Sexuality & Aging

- Sexual function is often affected in individuals and couples living with chronic illness – particularly cardiovascular disease, pulmonary conditions, and cancer
- There are physical concerns and psychological concerns – anxiety and fear regarding sexual activity are prominent among those with heart problems

# Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

- Despite the increased risk of STIs among older adults, health care providers do not routinely discuss STIs or HIV with this pop.
- Older adults may not ask questions or raise concerns about risk factors, prevention, or symptoms of STIs

# Sensuality

- The experience of pleasure from one's senses leading to an increased awareness of and appreciation for one's own body
- Sensual pleasure can be experienced with or without another person
- The goal of sensuality is not necessarily sexual intercourse or climax

# What is Intimacy?

- According to Erikson (Vital Involvement in Old Age): The capacity for eventual commitment to lasting friendships and companionship and, in particular, love.
- A balance between the capacity for intimacy and the need for some isolation enables the individual to engage with others whom he/she can love and be loved by, with true mutuality.

# Erikson Continued

- The older person must reconcile a sense of closeness with the experience of being alone, consolidating once more the capacity for love.

# What is Intimacy?

- Woititz (Struggle for Intimacy):
- Intimacy means that you have a love relationship with another person where you offer, and are offered, validation, understanding, and a sense of being valued intellectually, emotionally and physically.
- The more you are willing to share, and be shared with, the greater the degree of intimacy.

# Woititz Continued

- A healthy relationship is not a power struggle
- A healthy relationship is not symbiotic. You don't have to feel the same way about all things
- A healthy relationship is not confined to a sexual relationship which must end in orgasm, but celebrates the sharing and exploring.

# What is Intimacy

- According to Dowrick (Intimacy & Solitude):
- Closeness to yourself in times of solitude or closeness to others in moments of sharing and connecting—reflects your inner world as almost nothing else does. And intimacy begins from the inside; it begins with your own self



# Necessary Skill to an Intimate Relationship

- Hendricks & Hendricks (Centering and the Art of Intimacy Handbook):
- The central communication skill in an intimate relationship is **telling the truth**
- This skill includes telling the truth in any given moment in a way that does not blame the other

# Skill Continued

- Stay with the communication until the other person comprehends your words and your intention
- It is important to maintain truthful communication especially during times of distress and upset

# Intimacy and Caring

- Caring is a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development – mutual trust and a deepening and a qualitative transformation of the relationship
- Through caring for others, a man/woman lives the meaning of his/her own life
- A person is at home in the world – not through dominating, explaining, appreciating – but through caring and being cared for

# Friendship and Gender

- Males tend to have an extensive network of relations with others, but women tend to establish closer, more intense ties with a smaller number of people
- Friendship between women has been found “emotionally richer” than friendships between men
- Men find it difficult to express their feelings, to reach out, to ask for help

# The Importance of Friendship

- Nurses' Health Study from Harvard Medical School – the more friends women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged, and the more likely they were to be leading joyful lives
- Women who had a close friend were more likely to survive traumatic losses without any new physical impairment or permanent loss of vitality
- Women without friends were less fortunate
- Friends are helping us live longer

# What Interferes with Intimacy

- Intimacy is negatively affected by:
- Isolation imposed by the death of a lifelong partner and longtime friends
- Adult children and/or grandchildren live at distances that inhibit an intergenerational intimacy based on daily interactions
- Alcohol or medication misuse eliminates opportunities for intimacy

# Continued

- Illness, pain, suffering can contribute to isolation and negate the need for intimacy
- Fragility can interfere with the spontaneous demonstration of affection for an older person by others

# Fear of Death

- Recurrent thoughts of death and/or suicide is another factor that can affect intimacy and/or sexuality
- Currents of anxiety, depression, and hostility can accompany these fears as intimacy and sexuality are inhibited



# Intimacy and Women

- Women tend to complain about **lack of intimacy, lack of communication and shared feelings**
- Essential intimacy – the ability to share feelings and the presence of a confidant
- If single, an older woman is likely to outnumber the single men in her age cohort (at times as high as 10 to 1)

# Continued

- Most older women who outlive men by 8 years end up alone (5.3 times as many widows as widowers)
- If she is still married but her partner has withdrawn from sexual activity, or has become involved with others, or he is ill, she may be starving for affection, attention, and touch

# Transformation

- Enduring bonds of intimacy between friends can occur through travel as well as other adventures
- Without bonds of intimacy people can feel very lonely
- Bonds of intimacy include – sharing one's real self without masks; sharing feelings, joy and pain, fear and anger

# Sharing Ourselves

- Sharing all that pain and fear and joy, and the unlovely wrinkles and bulges of one's naked person, can strengthen our respect for and delight in that naked self "regardless" ...

# Intimacy and Grief

- Be aware of age based assumptions that are incorrect: “She’s too old for that” or “He doesn’t need that anymore”
- We need to talk about past, present and potential sources of intimacy
- We need to explore the loss of intimacy and affection when friends/partners become ill or die

# Intimacy and the Formal or Informal Caregiver

- Many older people fall in love with their care providers – they choose them as substitutes for the intimate others no longer in their lives
- Older people can become very vulnerable – we do not want to add to their intimacy losses

# Love as Affirmation of the Human Self

- Is the problem – the fear and denial of age itself which reaches its apex in sex and intimacy?
- Can one really talk honestly to other women, to men, even to oneself, about that need to touch and be touched?
- Intimacy with whom?
- Can we deepen our ties with men and women in ways that may not at all resemble our previous models of romance or intimacy?

# Continued

- Can we develop different bonds with our adult children, old friends, and keep making new friends to renew that vital intimacy?
- Woman or man, we need a new way to touch, know, love each other **as we are now not as we were 40 or 50 years ago**



# Trust

- According to Dowrick :
- Trusting ourselves, we feel alive
- Feeling alive, we can reach out and trust others
- Trusting others, we can cherish what they have to give
- Taking what they have to give, we feel more alive

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