

The crucial couple sexual dialogue: Five dimensions of touch- 2019

The core psychosexual skill exercise is to increase awareness of each partner's preferences for gears (dimensions) of touch. The majority of couples only use two gears- affection or intercourse. They fall into the trap of believing that sex = intercourse. This results in lower levels of both touch and intercourse.

In contrast, this psychosexual skill exercise focuses on five gears of touch (based on a ten-point scale of pleasure/arousal). Subjective arousal (feeling receptive and responsive) is more important than objective arousal (lubrication, erection, orgasm).

- First gear: Affectionate touch—this usually involves clothes-on touching, such as holding hands, hugging, or kissing. Affectionate touch is not sexual, but it provides the foundation for intimate attachment. Subjective arousal is anchored at 1.
- Second gear: Sensual touch—this involves non-genital pleasuring which can be clothed, semi-clothed, or nude. Sensual touch includes a head, back, or foot rub; cuddling on the couch while watching a DVD, a trust position where you feel safe and connected, cradling each other as you go to sleep or wake in the morning. Sensual touch is an integral part of couple sexuality. It has value in itself as well as a bridge to sexual desire at that time or later. Subjective arousal 1-3.
- Third gear: Playful touch—this intermixes genital pleasuring with non-genital touch (usually semi-clothed or nude). Playful touch can include touching in the shower or bath, full body massage, seductive or erotic dancing, games such as strip poker or Twister. What makes playful touch inviting is the enhanced sense of pleasure and playful unpredictability. Playful touch is valuable in itself and/or can serve as a bridge to sexual desire. Playful touch is part of non-demand pleasuring. Subjective arousal 4-5.
- Fourth gear: Erotic touch—this is the most challenging gear. Erotic, non-intercourse touch can include manual, oral, rubbing, or vibrator stimulation. Erotic scenarios and techniques are an integral part of couple sexuality providing a sense of vitality, creativity, and unpredictability. Erotic touch can be mutual or one-way. It can proceed to orgasm or transition to intercourse. Subjective arousal 6-10.
- Fifth gear: Intercourse—there are two crucial concepts in integrating intercourse into the approach of gears of connection. First, intercourse is a natural continuation of the pleasuring/eroticism process, not a pass-fail sex performance test. Second, transition to intercourse at high levels of erotic flow (7 or 8) and continue multiple stimulation during intercourse. Subjective arousal 7-10.

We suggest each partner fill out this chart separately. Then discuss feelings and preferences.



Touch Type	Current percentage of all touch	Percentage of touch desired
Affectionate touch		
Sensual touch		
Playful touch		
Erotic touch		
Intercourse touch		

The purpose of this exercise is to facilitate sexual dialogue with a focus on enhancing sexual desire and pleasure. Sexuality is more than intercourse. The essence of couple sexuality is sharing pleasure— oriented touch. You develop a common language to facilitate communication and embrace a variable, flexible approach to intimacy, touching, sexuality, and intercourse.

Resources: McCarthy, B. & McCarthy, E. (2012). *Sexual Awareness (5th edition)*