

Sensate Focus

Introduction

The aim of Sensate Focus is to build trust and intimacy within a relationship, helping to give and receive pleasure. It emphasizes positive emotions, physical feelings and responses while reducing any negative reactions.

The program can help overcome any fear of failure that may have existed previously, building a more satisfying sexual relationship in which both partners feel able to ask for what they want and are able to give and receive pleasure.

Sensate Focus is not a race to an end. Continuous reinforcement is needed to overcome negative reactions to intimacy. How long a couple spends on the program is up to them. Typically, sessions last twenty to sixty minutes, two to three times a week, spread over six or more weeks.

Ground Rules

- Choose a time and place acceptable for both where the couple won't be disturbed.
- Make the surroundings as pleasant as possible, with relaxing music, lighting and aromas.
- Turn off the phone and, if necessary, lock the door.
- Take turns giving and receiving touch, allowing equal time for each of member of the couple.
- The goal is enjoyment and pleasure. Enjoy the journey rather aiming towards any specific destination.
- Take as long as desired with each phase. Often, a slower pace, is more rewarding.
- Only move from one stage to the next when both partners agree.

Instructions

- When it is your turn to touch, take plenty of time to explore the other person's body. Experiment with different sensations and types of touch. Take pleasure in experiencing the texture, form and temperature of the other person's body.
- Try to discover the degrees of pressure and types of touch your partner finds most appealing by encouraging feedback or by placing your hand under their hand so they can show you what they want.
- When it is your turn to be touched, make sure you let the other person know what you like and what you don't. You can tell your partner how you feel, make appreciative noises, or move their hand to where you want to be touched.
- Avoid saying, 'don't ...' as it can be discouraging. It's more encouraging to say things like 'it feels better when you...'
- You might find it useful to talk about your experiences afterwards, e.g. 'I really liked it when you...'
- If there is something you would like to try, don't be afraid to suggest it.

Phase 1: Non-genital Sensate Focus

Ground Rules

- Couples can be naked, or wear underwear or relaxed clothing if that feels more comfortable.
- A book or DVD about massage can be useful, and helpful in learning different techniques.
- At this stage, avoid touching the obvious erogenous zones: breasts, nipples, vulva, clitoris or vagina, penis or testicles.
- Only move from one state to the next when both individuals feel ready. Sexual intercourse and orgasm are not permitted during this phase.

Instructions

- During first sessions concentrate on touching the parts of the body normally visible: the hands, arms, feet, scalp and face.
- When you are ready, include the back, neck, arms, buttocks and legs, not neglecting the hands, feet and face.
- Finally bring in the chest, stomach, shoulders and thighs, but avoid the breasts, tops of legs and the groin area.

Phase 2: Genital Sensate Focus

Ground Rules:

- Having spent some time on non-genital sensate focus couples can bring in touching of the breast and genital areas.
- Continue to pay attention to the parts of the body explored in the previous sessions, as well as the new areas being incorporated.
- The main aim of these stages is to increase each person's pleasure and awareness of each other's responses to different types of stimulation. It's fine to become aroused, but this is not the aim of the exercise.
- During genital stimulation it is often useful to use a water-based lubricant. Oil-based products should not be used near condoms.
- Sexual intercourse and penetration is not permitted during this phase.

Instructions:

- First incorporate touching of breasts and nipples. Remember, men have nipples too.
- Next include the areas around the genitals, including the testicles of a man. Then introduce touching of the genitals themselves (the labia, clitoris and entrance to the vagina on a woman; the penis, shaft and glans on a man)
- After a while one may also want to incorporate oral as well as manual touching (kissing, licking and sucking) into both non-genital and genital touching.
- You may want to try the 'teasing technique'. Manually stimulate the other person's genitals, gently at first then increase the speed of stimulation. Take a rest for a few minutes and then begin again.
- If orgasm occurs at this or later stages, that is fine, but that is not the aim of the process.

Phase 3: Penetrative Sensate Focus

Ground Rules:

- Having spent some time on non-genital and genital sensate focus you can begin to include penetration, using fingers, toys and the penis.
- Continue to pay attention to the other parts of the body that you explored in the previous sessions.
- The person being penetrated should be in control of the depth of penetration and the amount of time spent on it.
- While orgasm and intercourse is permitted in this phase, this is not the goal: the aim remains to enjoy the growing intimacy between the partners.

Instructions:

- Remember to use a lubricant.
- First begin to incorporate forms of gentle penetration, initially try this with little or no thrusting, just enjoying the sensation of containment.
- Try it first with one person on top and then the other.
- Later you can incorporate more thrusting, again with the person being penetrated in control.
- You might find some books of sexual positions useful at this point so you can find out which positions are most comfortable and pleasurable for you, according to the part of the body being caressed.