



Resource accompanying "In Conversation" Podcast Episode 1: Intimacy After Sexual Violence

TRIGGER WARNING:

This resource includes content discussing both sexual violence and issues around intimacy. Please look after yourself, and only read on if you feel comfortable to do so.

INTRODUCTION:

Some survivors of sexual violence can experience difficulty or changes regarding intimacy; however, this is not an issue that impacts everybody. This is a resource for those who want to learn more about intimacy after sexual trauma and find ways to work towards a healthy and positive relationship with intimacy.

To note: Intimacy can also be affected by factors such as:

- Mental health

- Physical health
- Medication
- Environment

WHAT IS INTIMACY?

Often, when people think about intimacy they think about physical acts, but there are also other types of intimacy, such as, emotional intimacy, intellectual intimacy, and spiritual intimacy. However, for this resource we are mainly going to be referring to physical and emotional intimacy.

Intimacy can include: (**note:** these are just some examples, but intimacy will look different for each person).

- A feeling of closeness and togetherness
- Hugging
- Holding hands
- Kissing
- Shoulder rubs
- Dancing with someone
- Eye contact
- Going on a date
- Listening to music with someone
- Writing love notes
- Sexual intercourse and foreplay
- Reading to each other
- Running a bath for a partner
- Talking about wants and needs together
- Playing with partners hair
- Going on a trip with a partner

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is any form of unwanted sexual act or activity.

Legislation in Wales defines sexual violence as rape, contact and non-contact sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual assault.

There are many forms of sexual violence, and every person who experiences sexual violence will be affected differently. There are also many myths and misunderstandings around sexual violence. This can make it difficult to know if what happened to you was sexual violence.

Sexual violence can be committed by someone you know, including members of your family, and can happen within relationships. Sexual violence can also be committed by a stranger.

(**note:** sexual violence can affect anyone of any age, gender, or sexuality)

WHAT INTIMACY ISSUES MIGHT PEOPLE FACE AFTER EXPERIENCING SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

note: everybody who experiences sexual violence is impacted differently, however, these are just some of the intimacy issues a person may experience:

- Discomfort with touch in certain areas of the body
- Experiencing difficulties in achieving sexual arousal
- Feeling distress, shame or guilt about a sexual response, interest, or fantasy.
- Low libido or avoiding sex altogether.
- Altered body image
- Fear of sexual relations or sexual intercourse (Genophobia)
- Hypersexuality
- Feeling disconnected.
- Difficulty trusting partners.
- Experiencing panic attacks, disassociation, or flashbacks during intimacy.
- Issues maintaining or understanding healthy relationships and boundaries.
- Confusion around sexual identity and orientation

note: These examples are only issues if they impact you in a negative way. If intimacy is not something you want to engage with, that is completely okay.

Things to try

SELF-INTIMACY

For some people intimacy can seem big and scary, especially if your attempting intimacy with another person. A good place to start is with yourself and what feels good, or not so good when you are on your own

If you don't enjoy touching a certain area of your body, the likelihood is you probably won't enjoy somebody else doing it. So, spend some time thinking about what you like and what you don't.

Remember intimacy is a spectrum and what feels good on one day may change the next.

SELF-CARE

When thinking about intimacy it's also important to consider your self-care.

By considering self-care we can think about how we can look after ourselves during intimacy. Self-care around intimacy could include:

- Discussing boundaries with partners
- Discussing feelings and emotions around intimacy partners (try writing these down if it's difficult to say out loud)
- Creating a safe space for intimacy
- Have a backup plan in case you are triggered during intimacy
- Journalling about your intimacy
- Listen to music that makes you feel good
- Stopping if it's no longer enjoyable.
- Grounding exercises (please see New Pathways resources)

GREEN AMBER RED ACTIVITY

Try breaking your intimacy down into three sections, green, amber and red.

Red - Intimate acts you do not feel comfortable with and do not want to try.

Amber - Intimate acts you are apprehensive about but are willing to try.

Green - Intimate acts you feel comfortable with and are happy to try.

note: This can be done independently or with a partner(s) and remember, you can stop at any time and come back when you're ready. By using this method, you can better understand your boundaries and share those boundaries with intimate partners.

Over time you may want to move activities into different boxes.

Green	Amber	Red
E.g. <i>Holding hands</i> <i>Stretching</i> <i>Moisturising my skin</i>		

Start with the activities you have placed in the green box and focus on these, if you feel safe and comfortable to do so you can try something you have placed in the amber box.

note: Intimacy does not require an end goal (sometimes the fear of there being an “end goal” can prevent other acts of intimacy from taking place)

Where to go for advice and support

[Psychosexual Help \(friskywales.org\)](http://friskywales.org)

Sexual health information for Wales

[Our workshops - My Body Back Project - My Body Back Project](#)

My Body Back Project run workshops to help us learn about loving our bodies after violence and provide a safe space to talk about enjoying sex again. These sessions are in London and Glasgow; however, they are open to anyone in the UK.

[Fumble - Your Handy Guide To Sex](#)

An online platform that has advice and resources on the challenges that we face when it comes to sex, relationships, our identities, and our mental health.

[Talking about sex and intimacy | Disability charity Scope UK](#)

Sex and relationship support and advice for those with a disability

[Counselling – LGBT+ Cymru Helpline](#)

Counselling service can help with: Relationships, Family Issues, Bereavement, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity (including systemic family transitioning counselling), Stress & Anxiety, Emotional Issues

[Sexual violence - Galop the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity - Galop](#)

Galop works directly with thousands of LGBT+ people who have experienced abuse and violence every year.

[Welcome to The Mix – Click Relationships](#)

Support and advice for under 25

New Pathways

We are the largest sexual violence support provider in Wales, with 30 years' experience of delivering specialist therapeutic support to adults and children affected by the trauma of rape, sexual assault or sexual abuse.

As a charitable organisation, we offer a full range of free specialist **crisis, advocacy, wellbeing and counselling services**. We are widely regarded throughout the UK as a leading organisation in our field.

Contact us by telephone: 01685 379310

Email us: enquiries@newpathways.org.uk

Website: www.newpathways.org.uk