

When sex brings anxiety

Making room for comfort, choice and conversation



You may want closeness and still feel tense, embarrassed or unsure. Perhaps your mind starts checking your body or wondering what a partner expects. These feelings deserve kindness. People want different kinds or amounts of intimacy, including none. Begin with what feels right for you. This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

1 Make room for a real choice

Ask yourself what you want today, what you do not want, and whether you feel free to say so. You can choose closeness without sexual activity, or no contact at all. A relationship or a previous yes does not remove your right to change your mind. [1]

Something that would help me feel comfortable and respected

2 Talk at a calmer moment

If it feels safe, choose a time outside sexual activity to discuss comfort, worries and boundaries. You can share one concern without explaining your whole history. Agree that either person can pause or stop, and take that seriously. [1, 4]

Words you could adapt

I would like us to slow down and talk about what feels comfortable. I may want to pause, and I need that to be okay.

3 Take pressure off an outcome

If you both want closeness, it can be as simple as a conversation or affection you each welcome. There is no required sexual activity, body response or finishing point. Keep checking that each person wants what is happening. [1]

If there is pain, fear or pressure

Stop what hurts or feels unwanted. If a person freezes, seems frightened or stops responding, stop and check in. Seek help with recurring pain rather than pushing through it. Consent and comfort matter more than completing an exercise. [1, 3]

These suggestions are optional. They are not instructions to tolerate coercion, carry out exposure to sex, or work through traumatic memories on your own.



Finding the right support

You can ask for help without having all the words

Your body deserves attention too

Sexual difficulties can involve physical health, medicines, stress and relationships. Pain, a persistent change in desire or body responses, or another worrying symptom is a reason to speak with a GP (family doctor) or sexual health clinician. Do not assume it is all anxiety. Medication decisions need to be discussed with a qualified prescriber. [2-4]

A starting point for an appointment

I feel anxious around sex, and it is affecting me. Could we look at possible physical causes and what support might help?

Ask about the kind of help available

A clinician can discuss whether a qualified psychosexual therapist or another specialist would fit your needs. You can ask what an appointment involves, bring a note and discuss comfort before an examination. Partner involvement is your choice. [3, 4]

If past experiences or a current relationship feel unsafe

You deserve support that respects your pace. If sexual violence has affected you, support is available: in Ireland, the National Rape Crisis Helpline is 1800 77 8888, free and available 24 hours; elsewhere, findahelpline.com lists sexual-abuse support by country. You do not need to confront someone or disclose details to a partner to seek help. [1, 5]

One question or need I would like help with

Someone to talk to, day or night: in Ireland, Samaritans 116 123 or text HELLO to 50808; in the UK, Samaritans 116 123; in the US and Canada, call or text 988; in Australia, Lifeline 13 11 14; elsewhere, findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country. For urgent concerns, contact your GP, an out-of-hours doctor or your mental health team; for immediate danger, use the emergency numbers below. [6]

Sources and further reading

Original practical prompts informed by independent guidance.

1. [Dublin Rape Crisis Centre: Consent and communication](http://www.drcc.ie) (www.drcc.ie)
2. [NHS: Changes in sex drive](http://www.nhs.uk) (www.nhs.uk)
3. [NHS: Vaginismus and pain](http://www.nhs.uk) (www.nhs.uk)
4. [Berkshire Healthcare NHS: Psychosexual support](http://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk) (www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk)
5. [Dublin Rape Crisis Centre: Sexual violence and support](http://www.drcc.ie) (www.drcc.ie)
6. [HSE: Urgent mental health support](http://www2.hse.ie) (www2.hse.ie)

Sources checked 3 October 2026. The organisations cited have not endorsed this resource. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

More free information and support routes

[More about sexual anxiety and specialist help](#)

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