

AOSW 2026

YES YOU CAN!

Addressing sexual wellness in short-term oncology counseling / support

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AGENDA

We have loads of things to cover today! We're excited to be here with you to cover the basics of how to include sexual health in your practice.

There is a Q&A at the end, but feel free to ask questions throughout. Thanks for joining us!

01

INTRODUCTION

02

ASSESSMENT

03

INTERVENTIONS

04

RESOURCES

SEXUALITY IS COMPLEX

OSWs ask about so much of an individual's life that is interconnected with sexuality

- body image
- body changes
- body trust
- relationships
- stressors
- social & emotional context



One of the most reported
yet underaddressed sexual
concerns: **DESIRE**

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

LOW DESIRE

Contributing factors to cancer-related reduced sexual desire

Body image

Self-schema

Relationship dynamics

Physical wellbeing & physiological changes

Mental health

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF LOW SEXUAL DESIRE



Increased distress, anxiety, and depression

Diminished body image and self-esteem

Decreased relational intimacy

Decreased sexual intimacy

Reduced quality of life

INTRODUCTION

(Kingsberg, 2014)

ASSESSMENT



OPENING THE DOOR



PERMISSION &
DOUPE

INTERVENTION

HOW TO OPEN THE DOOR



ASSESSMENT

ASK THE QUESTION

Patients don't know that they can ask you about sexual concerns. Asking them, while normalizing, will open the door.

REPEATEDLY AND OFTEN

Just like all the other invitations we provide, we want to invite our patients repeatedly and often to talk about their sexual concerns.



PERMISSION

Comfort

Asking permission before follow up questions or psychoeducation can allow the client to stay in the lead.

Choice

By asking permission you create a pause that invites choice and self awareness.

INTERVENTION

DOUPE

Assessment model to support determining next steps

Description

Description problem/challenge in their own words

- Can you tell me a little bit more about ...
- You mentioned that there have been changes in your sexual health, can you tell me a bit more

Onset

Assessing the time frame of the challenge.

- When did you first notice this challenge. When did it begin?
- Paired with any other life changes?

Understanding

Curiosity about the understanding of the concern.

- "What's your understanding of why this is happening?"
- "What is the typical situation when this happens?"
- "Does this concern happen every time?"

Past

What have they already tried to resolve the concern

- What strategies have you tried already to resolve...?"

Expectation

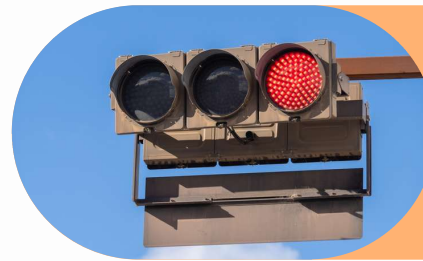
What are their expectations from doing this work

- "What are you hoping to get out of our work together?"
- "Let's talk more about your sexual health goals..."

INTERVENTIONS



DESIRE MODELS



KNOW THEIR WHY



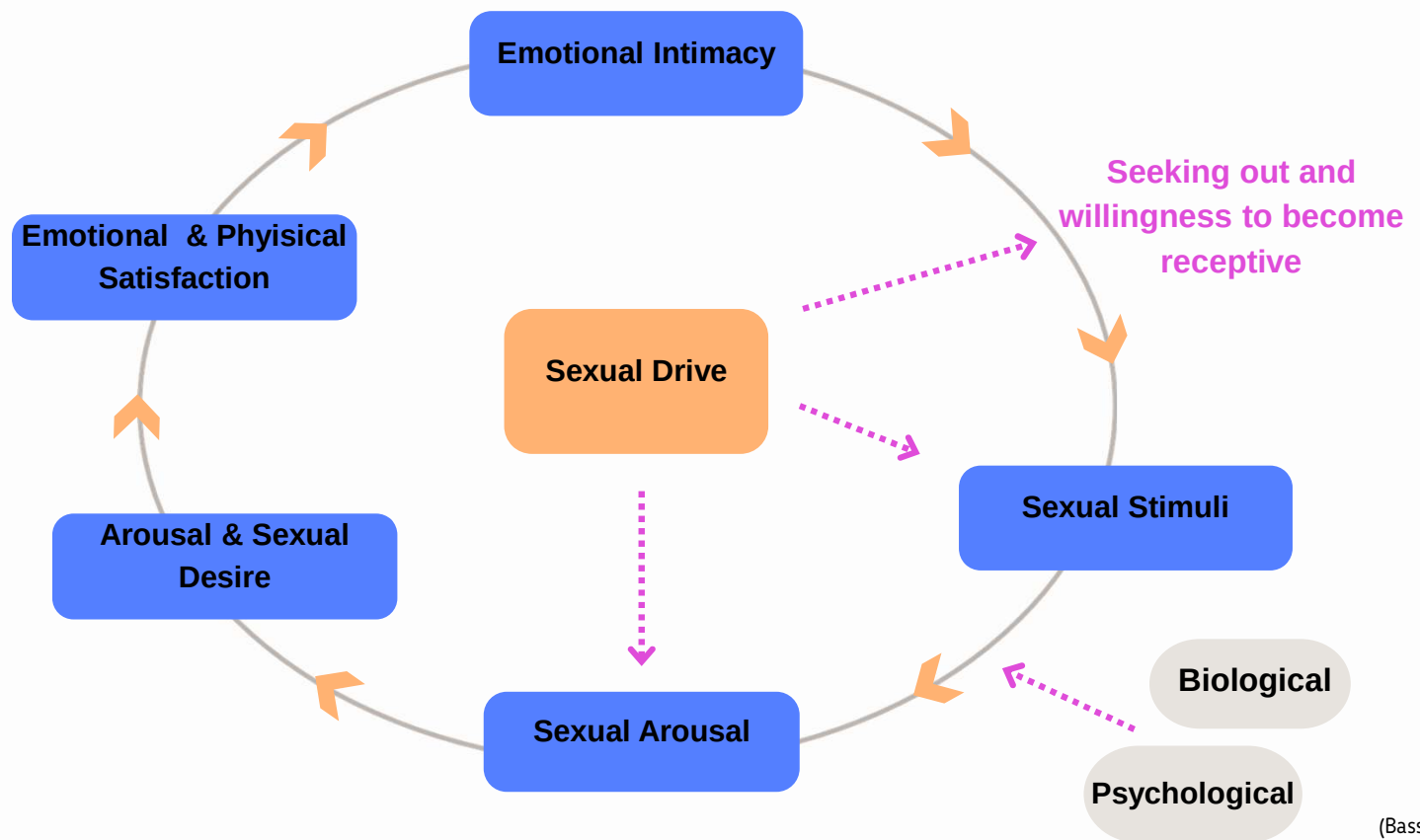
EXPLORING GOAL
SHIFTS



REFERRALS

INTERVENTION

RESPONSIVE DESIRE



(Basson, 2001)

DUAL CONTROL MODEL



Gas

Gas pedals turn us on and get us interested in sex. Examples: Respect, trust, confidence, emotional connection, humor, sensual massage, etc.

Brakes

Brake pedals turn us off and become barriers to interest in sex. Examples: Stress, anxiety, fatigue, medications, feeling obligated, nausea, etc.

INTERVENTION

(Janssen & Bancroft, 2023)

KNOW THEIR WHY



INTERVENTION

EVERYONE HAS A REASON

Everyone has a reason for wanting to have sexual intimacy. Help your clients discover what their reasons are.

HELP THEM CONNECT

When times get tough, desire feels impossible to find, or like sexual intimacy is disappearing, help your clients reconnect to their reason(s).



INTERVENTION

EXPLORING GOAL SHIFTS

Many people operate under a “performance and outcome” approach to sex.

- AKA: sex looks like X, and ends like Y.

Although this may have worked for many in the past, it can become challenging to use after cancer and body changes.

Shifting to a **PLEASURE & PLAY** approach can reduce pressure and increase comfort and pleasure

EXPLORING PLEASURE

Questions to help your clients explore pleasure

I feel pleasure when I see ...

I feel pleasure when I hear...

I feel pleasure when I smell ...

I feel pleasure when I touch ...

I feel pleasure when I taste ...

I feel pleasure when I imagine...



Exploring pleasure is a playful exercise to help clients explore themselves, their relationships, and their bodies in a new, non-pressured way.

INTERVENTION

“Pleasure is an affirmation of life ... It can add a sense of connectedness to the world or to each other.”

BENEFITS OF PLEASURE

Pleasure is associated with:

Improved Health

Pain Management

Longevity

Self-esteem

Improved Immunity

Stress reduction

(Ford et al., 2021)



INTERVENTION

REFERRALS

Medical

SEXUAL MEDICINE PROVIDERS

[Sexual Medicine Society of
North America](#)

[American Board of Sexology](#)

Physiological

PELVIC FLOOR PHYSICAL THERAPY

[The Academy of the American
Physical Therapy Association](#)

[Pelvic Global](#)

Mental

SEX THERAPISTS AND COUNSELORS

[American Association of Sex
Educators, Counselors, and Therapists](#)

[Society for Sex Therapy & Research](#)

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

General educational resources

CANCER SEX NETWORK

[The Scientific Network for Female Sexual Health and Cancer](https://www.cancersexnetwork.org/) global interdisciplinary network who work to promote sexual well-being in women and girls affected by cancer.
<https://www.cancersexnetwork.org/>

SEX & INTIMACY STUPID CANCER

[Stupid Cancer is an organization that focuses on adolescent and young adult cancer survivors. Has lots of great resources around dating and cancer.](https://stupidcancer.org/sex-intimacy)
<https://stupidcancer.org/sex-intimacy>

EMILY NAGOSKI TED TALK

A prominent sex educator talks about context and ways to fulfill sexual well-being.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

American Cancer Society provides evidence-based, general information on sexual health for all cancers.

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Sexuality resources to support your clients in navigating their sex life after cancer

SEXUAL MENU

The Sex Menu Site has a sexual menu template, along with other resources, that can be downloaded for free. This can be especially helpful when navigating the pleasure-play approach.

PARTNER COMMUNICATION

This counseling blog entry provides easy-to-access, real-world guidance for partners on how to talk about sex and pleasure within the relationship.

ESTHER PEREL BLOG

This is Esther Perel's blog. She is a world-renowned intimacy therapist, and this entry specifically review eroticism and explores using the senses to increase pleasure.

ONCOLINK PFPT

Oncolink has a brief article about pelvic floor physical therapy. It includes what the pelvic floor is, how it is impacted by cancer, treatments used in PFPT, and how they can help,

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Moisturizers

This information is not written or provided as a treatment guideline but rather suggestions for your sexual health. Please consult with your health care professional if you have concerns or questions.

WHY?

Moisturizers are used to bring moisture and hydration to the vulva-vaginal tissues. Similar to a moisturizer you may use on the rest of your body, this is a product you would apply on a regular basis to maintain moist and hydrated vulva-vaginal tissues.

HOW?

If a moisturizer is not currently being used, it is recommended that the moisturizer is used on the vulva (external anatomy) and vagina (internal anatomy):

- Every day for two weeks
- Every 2-3 days after the two weeks has been completed

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Moisturizers

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WHAT ?

A few companies where moisturizers can be purchased include:

| | |
|--|---|
| AH! YES® - Making Vaginas Happy®! https://www.ahyes.org/ | Hylafem: Amazon or other sites |
| Aloe Cadabra https://aloecadabra.com/ | Hyalo Gyn (https://hyalogyn.com/) |
| Bonafide Health https://hellobonafide.com/ | Welcome Luvena : https://luvenacare.com/ |
| Femigel: Amazon or other sites | Vaginal Moisturizers and Vaginal Lubricants Replens : http://www.replens.com/ |
| Good Clean Love : https://goodcleanlove.com | |

*Hyaluronic acid is an important component of vulva-vaginal moisturizers.

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Lubricants

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WHAT ?

A few companies where lubricants can be purchased include:

| | |
|---|---|
| Aloe Cadabra https://aloecadabra.com/ | Vaginal Moisturizers and Vaginal Lubricants Replens: http://www.replens.com/ |
| Astroglide https://astroglide.com/ | Sliquid http://sliquid.com/ |
| Good Clean Love: https://goodcleanlove.com | Slippery Stuff: Amazon or other sites |
| Hyalogyn https://hyalogyn.com/ | Sylk: https://silkusa.com/ |
| PINK® https://www.pinksensuals.com/ | Wet: Amazon or other sites |
| Pjur https://www.pjur.us/ | Uberlube https://www.uberlube.com/ |

RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Lubricants

This information is not written or provided as a treatment guideline but rather suggestions for your sexual health. Please consult with your health care professional if you have concerns or questions.

WATER BASED

- Safe with latex
- Does not stain other materials
- Generally easy to clean
- Generally non-irritating to skin
- May need to be reapplied

SILICONE BASED

- Safe with latex
- May stain other materials
- May be more difficult to clean
- Generally non-irritating to skin
- Likely does not need to be reapplied
- Waterproof
- May break down other silicone products such as toys or vibrators

OIL BASED

- Not all are safe with latex; not recommended with condoms
- May stain other materials
- Generally non-irritating to skin
But some may be allergic
- Possible risk of bacterial or yeast infection

SPECIALTY LUBRICANTS

- Examples include: flavored, warming, tingling lubricants, etc.
- May stain other materials
- May irritate skin
But some may be allergic
- Possible risk of bacterial or yeast infection *sugar based products

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THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?

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