

Transcript

Anne reads Sam

Tammy reads Laurie

Martha reads Therapist

Therapist: Laurie, what would you like to experience in your sexual relationship with Sam?

Laurie (speaking to Therapist): I really would love if we had ease with one another when we talk about sex and intimacy; it seems so tense and difficult. I feel like we both are imagining stuff that is inhibiting our ability to connect.

Sam: (thinks about this for a minute) What would be an example of a comfortable conversation about sex for you?

Laurie: How about "I've been fantasizing about you today, can we take a shower together?"

Therapist: How did it feel to verbalize that?

Laurie. It felt good. Easy.

Therapist (to Sam): Sam, how did it feel to hear her verbalize that so clearly?

Sam: I felt pressured.

Therapist: Oh, interesting. You had such different responses. Could we try an experiment?

Sam and Laurie: Sure

Therapist: Let's play a game. Laurie, you ask the very same question three more times. Sam, you respond in three different ways. One time you say yes. One time you say no, but keep your no pretty warm. And the third time, you say not now, or I'm not sure. Ok?

Sam and Laurie: Ok.

Laurie: I've been fantasizing about you all day; can we take a shower together?

Sam: (lighthearted) Sure! Let's hop in the shower.

Therapist: Ok, great. Do it again.

Laurie: I've been fantasizing about you all day; can we take a shower?

Sam: (sounding hesitant and worried) Not now, maybe later on this afternoon? Or I'm sure we can make it work tomorrow.

Therapist: Well, that was a little waffly. Try that one again but this time actually say no, and don't sign up for anything. Just say no. Find a way to be warm without waffling.

Sam: (laughing) Oh! I'm not sure I've ever done that! Ok...

Laurie: I've been fantasizing about you all day; can we take a shower together?

Sam: No, but thank you for asking. I'm not in the mood for a shower right now, I'm in the middle of something, but I really appreciate you thinking about me during your day.

Therapist: Nicely done! Do it again with the third response.

Laurie: I've been fantasizing about you all day; can we take a shower together?

Sam: I'm not really sure right now because I'm involved in this project. Can I think about it and get back to you in a little while?

Therapist: Great job! Ok. Laurie, what was your experience with this exercise?

Laurie: Good! I enjoyed being able to share my feelings freely, and particularly after the first time it became more mine, more clear that it was about me and it didn't matter so much what his response was. I didn't feel hurt by it or rejected; I just thought, ok, I'll just go take a shower by myself.

Therapist: Wonderful. And how about you, Sam?

Sam: I think it was a good experience. I think where I went before when I said I felt pressured was because I wasn't really in that place of wanting to have a shower or be intimate, and I don't want to disappoint her. Going through different responses helped me see those are all valid responses.

Therapist: Great. Those are both great realizations. Laurie, I love that you realized you can just go take a shower yourself. You could even have an entire erotic interlude by yourself if you wanted to. And Sam, I really love that you are beginning to see the connection between waffling on no and morphing it into a reluctant yes, and feeling pressured. I have a theory that as you move into using all of these responses and get really good at all of them, the part of you that is worried if you give her an inch she'll want a mile and you'll have difficulty delivering will relax. My big message to you is that you don't have to deliver anything you don't want to. When she makes a request, your only job is to look inside yourself and figure out what you actually want, and then express that warmly and also very accurately. What would that be like for you?

Sam: I think I'd feel a lot less pressure, and probably enjoy our times together a lot more. It will take some practice to do it, though.

Therapist: I think you are right that it will take some practice to get truly comfortable, but you made a great start here. I'd love for both of you to have lots of opportunities to practice initiating something (and it doesn't have to be something sexual) and then hearing yes, no, and not right now, and also to have lots of practice having your partner initiate an activity and then you respond with yes, no, and I'm not sure, or not right now. There are a lot of experiences to be had on both sides of the interaction, and with all of the possible responses. You can do this playfully, like a game, just to get some familiarity with the process and put some language to all the responses, and you can also do it for real, knowing that when one of you initiates, all responses are possible and equally valid. Then you can just see how it goes.