

Sensate Focus

Sensate focus is a therapeutic technique designed to help patients reduce anxiety around sex, enhance emotional and physical intimacy. This technique is often used in the treatment of sexual dysfunctions. Sensate focus helps overcome challenges such as arousal difficulties, erectile dysfunction, and low libido.

The approach involves a series of structured exercises where partners take turns exploring each other's bodies in a non-sexual way. The goal is increasing awareness of touch and sensory experiences.

Purpose of Sensate Focus

- To have you get more in touch with your senses
- To keep you in the moment
- To improve self-image
- To help you keep an open mind
- Improving connection
- Remove your expectations

Preparing for a Session

Before You Start

Talk to your sex therapist about any trauma, sexual dysfunctions, gender variant, kink, ENM, identity related factors, etc. Flexibility and accommodations are encouraged to meet each couples' needs.

Choose a Setting

Find a private, quiet setting with:

- Some lighting
- A good temperature
- Few distractions
- A door that locks, if you can

The bedroom is the best place for some couples.

Remove Distractions

Remove common distractions such as:

- Pets
- Children
- Telephones
- TVs
- Music
- Any other distractions

Planning

Set aside some time together before starting the touching session. This is best done when you are alert. **Avoid having a session right before you go to sleep or have just finished a large meal.**

Try to schedule touching sessions as you would any other appointment. Allow the sessions to happen at least every 48–72 hours (2-3 days).

Choosing Who Will Start the Session

Decide who will plan and start each session. Take turns each time. Start the sessions by using verbal cues. You can say something like, "I would like to do sensate focus / the touching session now." This decreases the chance that your partner will misread your cues when to begin.

Clothing Options

Wear little if any clothing. Include nightwear, underwear, or any other covering on any part of the body. This may help to calm anxiety.

Talking During the Session

We want you to focus on touch and feeling during these sessions, without talking. There are two exceptions to this.

1. The first is when you have finished touching and are ready to switch roles or stop during the session.
2. The second is when using a code word if you are feeling very anxious. Choose this **code word** before the session. It should be positive or neutral in nature.

How the Sensate Focus Session Works

1. **Starting:** Figure out which partner will start.
2. **Positions:** Choose positions to start and change positions as needed:
 - Lying side by side.
 - One person kneeling above or next to the partner.
 - One standing next to the bed while partner is lying down.
3. **Timing:** Each partner (the person touching and the person being touched) has 15 minutes. Then, switch places.
4. **After: See “Record Keeping” below.** Avoid talking about the sessions. We do not want you evaluating them. We want you to focus on what you felt during the session.

Dealing with Anxiety

You might find yourself talking or chuckling during these early sessions or feeling anxious, which are both normal. One purpose of the session is to learn how to manage your discomfort. When this happens, try the one of the methods below.

Focus on Touch

If you feel nervous or get distracted, focus on **temperature, pressure, and texture**. As you practice this, you may come back to the present moment.

Deep Breathing

When you feel nervous or have the urge to laugh, try taking a deep breath instead.

Handriding

If you are uncomfortable with the touch, you can move your partner’s hand away from that area. You can also place your hand under or over your partner’s hand. This may help you regain a sense of control.

Sample Session Schedule

Session 1

The person who is doing the touching has contact with all the partner’s body. Front and back. **Avoid breasts, chest, and genitals. Also avoid any other part of the partner’s body that represents something sexual.** The partner touching should focus on “feeling” such as temperature, texture, and pressure of the partner’s skin and hair. If you find your mind is wandering during this time, try to bring your focus back to these things.

Session 2

The person touching has contact with all the partner’s body. Front and back. **Includes breasts, chest, genitals, and any other part of the partner’s body that represents something sexual.** The partner touching should focus on “feeling” such as temperature, texture, and pressure of the partner’s skin and hair. If you find your mind is wandering during this time, try to bring your focus back to these things.

Session 3

Both partners are touching and receiving touch at the same time. Both have contact with all the partner's body. **Includes breasts, chest, genitals, and any other part of the partners body that represents something sexual.** Both focus on "feeling" such as temperature, texture, and pressure of the partner's skin and hair. If you find your mind is wandering during this time, try to bring your focus back to these things.

Session 4

Both partners are touching each other, including the rubbing of **genitals**. Both focus on "feeling" such as temperature, texture, and pressure of the partner's skin and hair. If you find your mind is wandering during this time, try to bring your focus back to these things.

Record Keeping

Keep a record of each session and write notes. Your notes should focus on sensations (feeling), distractions and what you did to manage those distractions. Write down the answers to each of these questions:

Sensations

These questions will help us know whether you can touch for your own interest. If you can describe sensations, then you are touching for yourself as opposed to for your partner.

- What were you able to focus during the sessions?
- What sensations were you able to focus on, and where?
- Were you able to focus on your senses when touching? Were you able to focus on temperature, pressure, and texture?
 - Example: What was the temperature of your partner's left hand as opposed to their right upper arm?

Distractions

This question will help us know the extent to which your mind or distractions get in the way of your experiences.

- What were some of the distractions (did you notice or think about anything other than temperature, pressure, and texture)?
 - Examples: Am I doing this right? Is my partner having a good time? I forgot to buy milk at the grocery store!

Managing Distractions

These questions will help us know whether you are able to manage distractions.

- When you noticed your mind wandering to anything other than the touch sensations, what did you do?

Were you able to focus back on the sensations? If so, on what sensations, and where?