

The Ladder of Healthy Intimacy

"Take one step at a time to build a healthy scaffold of intimacy together"

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain." Psalm 127:1

Step 1: Abide in Christ Together

Healthy intimacy begins long before the bedroom, and grows from a foundational step of pursuing Christ together.

***God has a plan for sex in marriage** – the first thing couples need is to know His purpose, plan, and boundaries for their sexual intimacy together. Does this involve giving and receiving physical pleasure? Yes!

***God wants you to not carry shame about healthy sexual intimacy.** He wants to be invited into your bedroom without shame.

***Make a plan** to stay on track spiritually together daily, weekly, monthly, yearly.

***Ways to cultivate spiritual intimacy:** Pray together, read scripture together, read faith based marriage books together, cultivate Christian community, serve with acts of love to others together, spiritually encourage one-another

Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." John 15:4

Step 2: Build Emotional Safety

Physical vulnerability follows trust, emotional security, and feeling loved and respected.

***Healthy sexual intimacy** is cultivated outside of the bedroom.

***Develop Emotionally Healthy Skills:** Listening empathetically, sharing authentically, resolving conflict skills, having healthy boundaries, demonstrating consistent care, love, and respect for your spouse in the way THEY need all lead to emotional safety and vulnerability.

***Communicate well** about emotional needs and then sexual desires together.

***When spouses feel emotionally safe,** their ability to experience sexual desire is increased and sexual intimacy can be healthy.

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Step 3: Non-Sexual Touch

Build physical touch without expectations.

***Expressing** physical affection to your spouse that does not lead to sexual touch is needed for both men and women to feel emotionally safe and connected for healthy sex.

***Communicating** "I cherish you and love you apart from what you can do for me sexually" is important. This can be communicated through words and non-sexual touch.

***Consider** long embracing hugs, hand-holding, non-sexual caresses, hair and head massage, foot / back massages, snuggling, mirrored touching (the practice of left hand to left hand, or each hand on each other's hearts, etc.).

***Ask** your spouse if they need more non-sexual touch or receiving enough.

Step 4: Cultivate Desire

Build mindful anticipation rather than disconnected sex.

***Responsive vs Spontaneous Desire:** Men typically experience more spontaneous desire which means they heat up fast for sex. Women often have a more responsive desire pattern. This means it's normal for them to experience a slower, more deliberate touch in order to cultivate sexual desire. It's ok to not feel in the mood. Many times, the "mood" will grow with slow foreplay of sensual touch.

***Set the Stage:** Stress, and chaotic environments can dampen sexual desire. Focus on helping your spouse eliminate distractions and stress. Set your sexual environment for romance and pleasure.

***Communicate** about sex frequently. Start outside the bedroom in a relaxing environment. Discuss what is going well, desires you have, teach each other what feels pleasurable, how your sexual connection is honoring God, and meet each other in a supportive, non-judgmental way.

***Be embodied** during sexual connection. This means that you are aware of the sensations in your body, your thoughts, your surroundings. Use your 5 senses and also think about your spouse and your emotional connection rather than on performance pressure, fantasy, or the laundry list.

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Step 5: Sexual Intimacy Skills

Learn each other for a lifetime.

- ***It takes time** to develop the skills together that enhance sexual pleasure.
- ***Focusing on technique** above connection is not going to increase sexual satisfaction. Instead, be attuned with your spouse, ask questions, and explore together.
- ***Understand** your spouse's body and pleasure zones. Don't just stick to the main sexual anatomy. Ask your spouse what types of movement, touch, intensity most bring him or her pleasure.
- ***Teach** your spouse gently what you like sexually, be as specific and patient as possible as you teach them. Avoid criticizing, but don't pretend to like something if you don't.
- ***Understand** that desires and needs change over time and in different seasons in marriage. Communicate those changes and needs with your spouse. Learn what to expect generally in different sexual stages of life.

Remember, the ladder of sexual intimacy is important for healthy, long-lasting, God-honoring connection in marriage. Whether you're preparing for marriage, or been married a long time, it's not too late to incorporate this method of building healthy intimacy together.

If you need extra help, you can reach out to me, Kristi Claudel at Abiding Love Intimacy Coaching, LLC.

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