

Intimacy and disability

Guest: Jennie Williams

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Alex Howard - [00:00:09]

Welcome everyone to this interview where I am super excited, and I say super excited at the start of most interviews, this interview, particularly I'm super excited to be doing.

I'm talking with Jennie Williams, who is founder of Enhance the UK. Jennie's also an ex-girlfriend of mine, so an unusual turn of events of how this interview came about.

Jaia, Meagen and I were talking about possible topics for the conference and we were talking about the fact we didn't have anyone talking about sex and disability. Jaia then did some research and reached out and ended up talking to Jennie unbeknown to me. And Jennie said, I know who Alex Howard is. Alex is my ex-boyfriend. So then I said to Jaia, I want Jennie on the conference, but only if I can do the interview.

So that's probably not the best intro I can give because my ex-girlfriend is probably not how you want to be introduced, but welcome Jennie and thank you for being here.

Jennie Williams

Well, it's a good job it was amicable.

Alex Howard

Exactly.

Jennie Williams

I would have been like, Alex Howard, I'm not chatting to him. No, it's lovely to see you, Alex, it's been a long time. Thank you for having me. Letting me chat about all things sex and disability.

Alex Howard

And just to give people Jennie's background beyond the fact that we share some history. Jennie is the founder of Enhance the UK, which is a user led charity aiming to educate people of all ages about disability as well as assist those with disability in playing a full and active role in society.

Enhance the UK wants disabled people to be recognized as an active part of society with equal access to education, health care, support and social interaction.

Also, Jennie and the team at Enhance the UK are behind the Undressing Disability, a global campaign which aims to raise standards in sexual health and sexual awareness for disabled people. And as part of this they run the Love Lounge an online forum providing free advice on all things sex, love and disability.

Jennie Williams - [00:02:18]

I'm so impressed you memorized all of that.

Alex Howard

I mean, I wasn't reading any of it.

Jennie Williams

Not at all from a script.

Alex Howard

So I think a good place to start would be just to talk a little bit about some of your background, how you became interested in the topic of sex and disability.

Jennie Williams

Well, it's a mixture of a few things. I've always worked in social care for all my working life really, since the age of 16 working in care homes. And I was working in a particular care home that you actually helped me get a job for, helped me with my job interview and helped me prep and helped me choose my outfit, etc. And I did get the job.

Alex Howard

I contributed to your outfit choice clearly was the most important thing I added.

Jennie Williams

I still have that dress. That shows how old it is.

And I was working with this particular care provider, and they've got lots and lots of care homes. And I was looking at people's care reviews and care plans and just kept coming across the same thing. Why is there nothing in people's care plans about their sexual needs or their relationship status? Why is everybody sleeping in single beds? Why is there no encouragement for people to go out and go dating?

And it's interesting that you and I talk about this now that you know you were my boyfriend at the time and that is prevalent really because I was thinking, well, I'm in a relationship. I'm having fun. I'm going to gigs, I'm doing all these things. Why is nobody else having the opportunity to do that? It's really important.

And then the more I tried to bring that up, the more the doors got closed in my face. People just didn't want to speak about it within the organization. It was just too much, it was opening a can of worms.

And particularly when I started talking about sex toys and anything more than that, anything that makes people feel uncomfortable, that was very, definitely shut in my face.

So I just got really angry with the whole thing. And I'm also a hearing aid user and I found that when I was going into meetings things weren't accessible for me. Subtitles weren't on any of the films that were being played, people weren't giving me eye breaks, people just weren't taking into account at all that hearing loss was a disability, and that wasn't really acknowledged. It really felt like you're either a wheelchair user that's got a disability or you just don't.

I just got really angry with it all, really. And then I thought, do you know what? I'm going to set, as one does, I knew it was going to be hard and it has been hard, but I'm going to set up my own charity. And then I realized that no one was ever going to give me money for that.

So very naturally, and I'm glad it worked out this way because it's the best way, I decided to try and set up a bit like social enterprise. So we are not relying on any funding whatsoever. And what we do is we sell disability awareness training. It's got nothing to do with sex disability. And it's really looking at attitudinal barriers. Physical things as well, but really attitudinal barriers, like what's stopping people communicating effectively with disabled people?

And the more I looked into that, I was like, well, actually, you can't have sex and disability, and you can't want to try and empower disabled people to be sexually active and go out dating if non-disabled people aren't ready for that either, if places aren't accessible, if non-disabled people are going, oh, I don't want to go out with you, you're different. So actually, the two marry really, really well. And they go really well side by side.

So all the money that we make from the, we work with organizations like Tottenham Hotspurs, the BBC, large organizations and teach them how to employ disabled people, how to work effectively with customers. And we make the training really fun and interactive and there's no PowerPoint is banned from all of our training. And then the money we make from that goes back into the Undressing Campaign, and that's just growing. It's getting bigger and bigger.

Alex Howard - [00:06:28]

I think one of the most helpful ways to understand the stigmas and the lack of awareness is within personal narrative and personal journey. I'd love to hear a bit more about some of your own experiences.

I remember when we first met, it was a gym in Muswell Hill where I still live. I know that you said to me afterwards that because we were in the swimming pool and there was an echo with the sound, that the only way that you could hear me, because you weren't wearing your hearing aid at that time, was by lip reading. I obviously had no awareness at that point. That must be quite challenging when you're talking to someone in a potentially romantic, there's some sort of attraction that's there and you're already at a significant disadvantage, and how to navigate with that.

Jennie Williams

I mean, you can't really whisper sweet nothings if you're a deaf person. It kind of kills the mood. You want to do what to me? Turning on the lights. What?

I mean, absolutely. As I said, I'm a hearing aid user so I do have some hearing, but I really do rely very heavily on lip reading. It's a very hidden disability, and most disabilities are actually hidden. And you don't just want to go up and go, oh, hi, my name is Jen, and I'm a hearing aid user, nice to meet you. You don't want to do that and you want to have a natural chat and rapport.

But there does come a point, I remember when I was dating and going online, first going out on dates, and I was saying, maybe we just go for a dog walk, that's nice, and actually wasn't really thinking that going on a dog walk wasn't helpful because you're walking like that. You can't actually see the person that well. I'm really thinking about where it is you're going.

Another date. I went on with a guy. I mean, I was a serial dater at times.

Alex Howard

Maybe that's why we got on.

Jennie Williams - [00:08:31]

Well, after we split up Alex, what was left? It all went downhill.

Alex Howard

Marriage and kids for both of us.

Jennie Williams

Yeah, well, exactly. Don't tell my partner that.

But I went into a pub and the guy was chatting to me and I was getting a candle. Putting it under his face, he had organized the pub because I live in Brighton now, and he organized the pub. And he was just like, what are you doing? And I didn't even, sorry, I'm actually hearing aid user, I'm just trying to hear what you're saying. And you could see his brain going, see and what?

It's easier for me because I guess I'm used to talking about it more. But even then, in social situations, I still find it really hard at times to be able to say, sorry, I'm just not catching up with this conversation, or I don't understand, or I know you're saying something nice to me and I don't want to ruin the moment, but I'm going to ruin the moment by doing the nodding head or going with it.

I think lots of people can probably relate to that. And I think probably, especially during COVID times, people who thought they didn't lip read or read facial expressions have realized actually how much they do, by people wearing masks and how much you kind of miss that social interaction to being able to read people's facial expressions.

Alex Howard

I think one of the things that you're speaking to that I think is really important, is being able to have honest and open dialogue and conversation around things.

I think that on all sides of the situation there's a lot of awkwardness and not knowing what to say and not knowing how to say it, that somehow gets in the way of just having open conversation.

Jennie Williams

You know, it's human nature because people, we're really led by our egos and people think that as a really negative thing, like people taking selfies. But if you think about it, we're led by our egos by everything. Even if we say, oh, we've got a guilty pleasure about the music that we listen to, for example. Why is that guilty pleasure? Just like it or don't like it. Or if our children are being naughty, they're not us, if they're being naughty they're an extension of our ego we're still embarrassed by that.

The same comes with communicating. If somebody then turns around to you and says, oh, I can't do this. Or I'm unable to do this because I've actually got a disability. What happens is the person on the receiving end of that puts it upon themselves, oh I'm sorry, and then starts internalizing it and then starts thinking about, oh God, that's really embarrassing, I should be able to understand what they're saying or I should be able to, what do I do? And then suddenly you're not concentrating on that person anymore. You're thinking about yourself and your own ego and about what you're going to do right or going to do wrong.

And that normally comes from a really good place because most people are good. I believe that. Most people are good than they are bad, for want of a better word. But we are led so much by what we're thinking.

So it's a bit of a discipline by listening and saying, alright, so if there are any access needs that you need me to be aware of then just let me know. Oh brilliant, thanks. Actually at the moment I'm fine,

but maybe over there it's a bit loud. Could we just stand away from the speakers? Or whatever it is. That is just such a nice way of taking on board, just saying, any access needs, let me know. Or anything you need me to do, let me know, in the conversation.

Alex Howard - [00:12:04]

I remember we once went and saw a, we had a shared love of loud rock music, although I think we have some disagreements of certain bands, but that's probably a nuanced conversation that's not relevant for this interview. But I remember we were seeing a band in Camden, I think it was it. It was a band called Funeral for Friend, which is one of my favorite bands. And I remember, I think it was relatively early on in us meeting, and I remember being quite mindful that you'd said that being in a loud concert can be quite intense.

And there was a point about half an hour from the end, you said, actually it's a bit much, can we go? And I remember being really relieved that you were able to speak your needs and feel able to do that. Because it then meant for me from that point that I didn't feel this constant need to be second guessing because I learned to trust the fact that you would tell me what was and wasn't okay for you.

And there's something about people I think can be shy sometimes to say what they need because they don't want to be difficult or awkward. But I think often the experience people have is the opposite, that it's a relief that someone is being comfortable enough with their need and communicating it.

Jennie Williams

That's really nice that you said that because I wouldn't even, obviously I remember we went to the gig, but I wouldn't even have remembered that detail. And it's nice to hear that. And it's nice for people who don't have the confidence to be able to hear that from your perspective. Because you're right. I think we're always worrying about putting someone else out. And I think a lot of people who have disabilities, especially if they're not comfortable disclosing, want to do everything to cover that up.

And if you think about that, that means there's a lot of other people doing the same thing, and there's a lot of other people in situations pretending to have a great time, and actually they're not or they're back is really hurting standing up in a gig or whatever it is.

So actually it's about being honest. And it doesn't mean that that person has to leave when you want to leave. Say, you absolutely stay or whatever the example is. But we have to start communicating, we have to start being more honest and letting people know what our needs are. And then once we start doing that we will actually realize that other people go, oh yeah, that's a relief, I want to go too, or whatever it is. But there is still this very British stiff upper lip, we don't say anything, we muddle through, we don't communicate very well. Whereas with other countries, actually, you tend to get that less. People say, this is my issue, this is what I want to do. And that happens.

I say again and again and again, ask someone. Sorry you can hear my dog barking. It's never an interview unless you have a dog or a cat come in. But, I always say the same thing. Ask and tell. Ask and tell.

Alex Howard

And it's so interesting. Everything that you just said about disability, I also realized, applies to sex. People don't talk about what they want. They don't ask what they want, they don't, so it's almost like we're taking two taboo subjects, disability and sex, and putting them together. No wonder that becomes a challenge for people.

Jennie Williams - [00:15:25]

You're so right. And I think we recently did a lot of work around bondage, for example, can be quite similar. Because people think that planned sex cannot be sexy. And everything, you have to have impromptu sex. Well, that's lovely but after a while, especially if you've been in a relationship or whatever, that just isn't a given. That's for a very small percentage of time, if you're single or you're just going out meeting people.

So particularly if you've got a physical disability you have to plan things more. But it's the same if you're into BDSM, it's planning, it's having safe words, it's having certain equipment that you use, it's communicating, it's all of those things.

So it's actually, again, about you can still have that intimacy, you just need to be able to have the confidence to say, this is what I want. And actually, most of the people that I work with, I've been doing this for a long time now, I see people with really quite severe physical disabilities, I would say, objectively, have way better sex than I do because they communicate with each other and tell each other what they want. And it's more non-disabled people who don't think they have to do that. They think they should just know. And you just get on with it and you don't talk. Most of the people, including my team, talk about it all the time. That's what we have to do, not necessarily we, but that's what we have to do. But you're absolutely right. That comparison is bang on.

Alex Howard

And what helps that dialogue? Because I think there is so much cultural stigma around disability and sex. And it's like, taking the sex example, I remember being a teenager and in my 20s and just assuming that people got to middle age and stopped having sex. You get to middle age and you go really? And it's like, I think there's just so much, particularly as you say in this country, where we just don't talk about sex. But it's like those stigmas and those perceptions then cause us to not talk about it.

And as you say, not only does it inhibit our capacity to be enjoying sex, but also the quality of the sex that people are having. So if you're working with an individual or a couple and they're not communicating and they don't really know how to do that, where do you start? What helps begin these conversations?

Jennie Williams

Well, I think the first thing you've got to do is take a step back and look at, depending on what kind of background you've had, whether you've always had a disability or if you haven't. A lot of people that have always had disabilities never necessarily have any kind of basic sex education, but not even sex education, experiences to going and getting it on behind the bike shed or whatever you used to do when you were younger.

Obviously, you never did that, Alex, you were very well behaved.

All of those things. But I think a lot of the time it's about taking a step back and going, actually, what is it that I like? What is it that I like to experience? Whether that be from masturbating using sex toys, have I got kinks? Have I got fetishes? What are they? And not to feel embarrassed by that because we've got this kind of like, you meet someone, you get married, you have the same vanilla sex. Actually we're really conditioned to what society thinks and how we should think.

So whether you've got a disability or not that's completely by the by. So again, that comes back to my point. I think lots of disabled people have better sex lives because they have to talk more. And they have to say, I like that, I don't like that, that hurts, that doesn't hurt. But by being able to communicate and saying, this is what I like for my body. There are so many amazing sex toys out there. We're actually bringing out our own sex toy range on the 14th February, which we're really excited about. It's not specifically for disabled people, it's a fully inclusive sex toy range.

And, by finding what you like yourself, that's the most important thing, and then being able to be open with your partner and say, these are things I like, can you try this? And if they don't like that, that's okay. But why don't they like it? And having a conversation and narrative around that. And if you can see if you can find some kind of compromise.

And there's no magic wand to it, we're humans, and it's going to take time. Especially people who are older. A lot of young people are way more liberated. But I think people who are older actually find that we've been almost told, I think there's a difference between facts and beliefs. We were brought up with two people getting married, who have sex, who really love each other. Well, that's not true. A man and a woman get married. Well, that's not true. Things that we've been told.

And actually, if you look back at what you've been told about sex. I challenge everybody right now to sit and write down all the things that have been told about sex and actually put down next to it, what is fact and what is a belief that has been put on to them? Actually, most of it probably won't be factual.

So I think it's about ridding yourself of this ridiculous guilt and shame, as long as it's legal, as long as it's like you know, and as long as everybody agrees and everybody that's involved is agreeing. Rid this shame of going actually, this is something that I enjoy, and this is something I want to do, this something how I connect with my body and then be able to have that conversation.

Alex Howard - [00:21:27]

And I think sometimes to break free of that shame, it takes a level of courage. It takes the willingness to take some risks. And taking risks, I mean, in a carefully considered way, not being reckless. But thinking, actually, this is something that I want to try. This is something that I want to experience. And I don't know if my partner is going to be into that, and I'm never going to know if I don't take the risk of actually expressing that. I wonder what you find helps people build that courage to express those wishes and those desires?

Jennie Williams

I think it takes, the answer is I don't really know. But again, I keep coming back to the world that I know and the fact that I find it really interesting that the people that I, my colleagues and the people I work with and the people that I support are way more sexually liberated than the non-disabled people by a mile, by a mile.

And it's frustrating when I hear some of my friends talk that are not, don't have a disability or not involved in the world that I am. I just think I feel really sorry for you guys. You don't have the opportunity to have the conversations that we all do, like, really regularly.

Not to say that every single disabled person's like that, of course that's not true, of course it isn't. But I think it's about, we're human beings, we have desires, we have needs. Even if people are asexual, for a lot of people they identify being asexual, and that can mean different things to different people. But I think it's about ridding this guilt and this shame.

And one of the biggest stigmas which I'm constantly fighting against is journalists always contacting us and saying, can you talk to us about sex workers in around disability and sex? And my frustration constantly is a very a small percentage of people that I work with, that I know, use sex workers. I'm not saying there's something wrong with that. That's your choice. But most people that I know choose not to do that.

Alex Howard

Because the assumption they're making is that if you've got a disability the only way you're going to have sex is by having a sex worker, effectively.

Jennie Williams - [00:23:42]

Absolutely.

Alex Howard

There's a massive cultural assumption and misunderstanding thinking that just because someone has a disability, they aren't attractive, can't feel attractive, can't be in an intimate relationship.

One of the things that I remember of the work, particularly when you and I were spending a lot more time together, and you did a campaign around undressing disability where you had people with disabilities photographed in their underwear and really trying to embrace the idea of sex and sexiness. And I think that's also really important.

Jennie Williams

I think again, it's a really objective thing, isn't it? What is sexy? You know, some people think sexy is somebody just chilling out in their pajamas and just looking really casual and somebody else can be full on red lips and nails and high heels.

But I think the reason that we did that shoot then that was like, 10+ years ago, is because we needed something to wake people up and say, hello, it's a whole group of disabled people here. We have physical disabilities, some have sensory disabilities, some have neurodiverse, we want to show the world that we are sexual as well. And we want to start this conversation.

And it's not just about sex, it's about, like I said, it's about sex education for young people and that being inclusive. That's so important. That's a big part of the campaign. It's about women being able to get their sexual health checks. That's so important. It's such a massive journey for people to go on.

And it's not just one thing for one person. But it's about shaking the media, really more than anything else and saying, where is the representation? Where is it? Because there are millions of disabled people out here and you are not representative of that. To change it because it's boring, out of touch and it's just not right and it's not okay that it's still like this.

Alex Howard

What I'm also really enjoying in what you're saying is that not only is that group of people enjoying their sex lives, they've actually got something to teach the rest of us.

So my question for you is, if we were to have a panel of people that are living with disabilities that have vibrant, alive, active sex lives, what do they have to teach the rest of us? What can we learn from them?

Jennie Williams

I think this mental connection is a massive thing. We are, particularly dare I say, a lot of men think that sex is penetrative sex, penis in vagina sex. And that's not what sex is. It's part of sex, and that can be. Sex is more than that. It's about a mental connection, and it doesn't necessarily have to be, I'm not talking about love, but there is some kind of chemistry of, like, I really want you. I find you really attractive. But it's being able to communicate, telling somebody what you want, what they want, being able to talk.

It's about respect. It's about listening to each other. That hurts. I don't like that. I like it. Put more pressure there. Being able to have those conversations. And being able to sit back and really appreciate someone's body and not thinking, I've got to lay here really skinny. I've got to be paper thin and have amazing boobs and everything. And we, all men and women, always worry about our bodies. This is a very natural thing we do. I'm not saying to people, don't think like that. Of course,

everybody does to a point. But certainly the more and more time I'm spending having these conversations, less so. Because it's like, you know what? I just really fancy you and I want to make this work. I want to talk to you.

And having fun with it. We forget that sex should be fun as well. Sex should be about having fun and about being a bit silly and about getting things a bit wrong. And I think there's, particularly people who've got physical disabilities, it might be that you end up wetting yourself if you've got bladder pain. It might be that things go a little bit wrong where bodies make noises that they shouldn't necessarily make and the rest of it. And rather than being devastated this has happened going, that's part of it and just cracking on.

And that happens to the best of us, but we don't see it, because, again, there's a lack of representation on TV, lack of representation on porn or anything to do with that. So we've still got this image of what we think men find attractive, and we think what women find attractive, which it's just not the way, well, it is maybe a small percentage of people.

Alex Howard - [00:28:44]

But I love what you're saying about there has to be a level of lightness and humor. And I think that that's true of almost everything in life. The more serious we become about problems, the more serious those problems become.

And the tendency is that if we've got a lot of shame, the more we shame ourselves, the more serious we become. And there's something about just being free to be spontaneous, to enjoy what's happening in that moment. And that's challenging for everyone. And as you say, in many ways, it's more challenging for people that haven't had to learn to live with a disability because they haven't had some practice around it.

Jennie Williams

And I think that, it's interesting going back to you and I on a personal level, the fact that we've been able to stay friends and be able to have these conversations, it's the one thing that we always had, we were honest with each other, we spoke to each other, we respected what each other said. And that's not always the way. I've certainly been in relationships where that hasn't been the case and I'm sure you have as well.

But I think that that is just so fundamental to be able to laugh and be silly. And go, actually I don't disagree with you. And there were definitely times when we didn't do that as well. But then being able to come back round and go, more than anything else I care about you, I respect you. And if this becomes, if this is becoming something that isn't fun, or I feel pressured, or I'm being made to feel a way that doesn't make me feel good, then that isn't right. It isn't okay. We shouldn't be in that situation, whether you have a disability or not.

But what happens is a lot of people that do have disabilities find themselves in these situations more so because, one, it could be the lack of sex education. Or two, this feeling of worthlessness and feeling grateful that somebody finds me attractive.

And if there is anyone out there listening to this and they feel like that, please, please get out of that situation because that isn't true. And I feel quite emotional when I say that because it's not true. And there are people out there that will see you for you, and believe in you, and find you attractive for you.

Alex Howard

What also comes to mind as you're talking is that we often fear what we don't understand. And that's true with sex, that's true with disability, that's true of many other things in life. That when we don't understand something, we become more afraid of it. And the more afraid we become, the less likely, in a sense, we are to have open dialogue and have open conversation.

And I remember early on in you and I getting to know each other, and you may not even remember this, but we had a conversation one day where I was asking you all the questions and the things like, how long have you had hearing loss? And what does that mean? And will it always be that way? And what if you're in a house and the fire alarm goes off and you don't hear the alarm? I had all these questions and because you were comfortable with me asking the questions, the more I could ask the questions, the more I understood it.

There was just a point I was like, I can never know what it is to be in Jennie's world living with hearing loss but I understand the things that I need to understand to know how to be with her and be empathic and caring and supportive as a boyfriend because I have answers to the questions. But if we'd never had that conversation, I wouldn't have then been able to orient myself and then to be at ease.

Jennie Williams - [00:32:13]

And I think the same went back with you and me, and I think you just said read my book.

Alex Howard

I was a bit of a prat, wasn't I. I don't talk about it anymore, that happened in the past, read my book. It's a really childish way of dealing with it.

Jennie Williams

I've never read that book by the way.

Alex Howard

I don't need this very much.

Jennie Williams

So I think it's important to remember that some people are not comfortable talking about it, and that's okay. But kind of gauging it and saying, look, I just want to let you know that I want to understand. If you're not comfortable that's okay, but when you are ready, I'm here. I'm ready to receive that information. And I want to know. And if I do something that makes you feel uncomfortable, it's not right, then I want you to be able to tell me.

Because what happens is resentment can build up massively when you don't have those conversations. And you're like, and my partner and I, Craig, we've had those conversations before. At very beginning he was like, wear your new hearing aids. And at the time I didn't want to. And I got so angry, so angry with him. And I was like, or become more deaf aware, why should I become more hearing? I don't want to become more hearing. I want to be able to not wear my hearing aid. I want to be able to walk around and just sign if I want to. Why can't you sign? Why are you not? And it was a real kind of punch in the face for him, not physically, obviously.

Alex Howard

That came later.

Jennie Williams

That came later. I'd never do that, by the way.

And I think that actually he was like, no, okay, you're right. And sometimes still now when you're tired and you've got the kids in the morning and he's talking to me, and I haven't got my aids in. And then I can see him looking and I can feel the anger in me. I'm like, no, I'm deaf this morning. I can lip read. Be

better. And then he will know to correct himself, stand up, not look for my hearing aids and actually communicate better with me and not turn around. But that's a discipline.

But I think that I shouldn't get angry with him. But naturally, you do. You just do. We're humans, we get upset with each other. But by being able to communicate and say, I'm saying all this like, I've got the perfect relationship, of course they haven't. Of course, we have arguments about it. Of course I get irritated with him, and he does with me. That is life. But I think the more that you can say, if you do this, this is going to be the result. If that person chooses not to do that, then that is on them. That is not on you.

Alex Howard - [00:34:51]

Well, it's somehow, it's an act of love to enter into someone else's world that's different.

My brother in law, his wife, is from Belgium, so he speaks French. He spent a lot of effort over the last few years learning French. And they speak French a lot of the time at home because that was important to her that she moved to live in England but wanted to not lose that culture and also wanted their kids to be multilingual.

And there's something about loving someone in a way to make the effort to learn sign language as a different language, for example, or whatever it may be. And of course there's always challenges in relationships, but that is its own act of care and love.

Jennie Williams

I mean, again, Craig hasn't. I'd like to say I'm fine by that, fine with that. Sometimes it does really annoy me. But BSL is not my first language, it's my second language. It does help me communicate. My children can sign more and more now. Just turned 4 and 2. And I tell you what is very, very helpful when we go out I don't turn into one of those moms who go. I just turn my voice off and sign to them and they know I mean business. And I tell you, that's the only thing that stops them and they're like, sorry.

But yes, of course, I think it's like anything. It's about taking the step forward, whatever it is, whether it's a language or it's about someone's access needs or it's about going to, like we were talking about sexual compatibility or whatever it is. It's about taking that step forward.

And you don't have to be there but even if you're just making your way forward to each other and just showing each other you're making the effort, sometimes that is just enough in itself to go, okay, you're not me. I don't expect you to be me. One person can't be everything, can they? And one person can't be you. But to see that that person is making a bit of effort and then you get the same back then I think that's all you can ask for really.

Alex Howard

Yeah it's that recognition that relationships are you're working as a team, and the more you step towards each other, the more closeness and the more companionship I guess one ultimately feels.

Jennie Williams

Absolutely. You made me realize I need a new boyfriend now.

Alex Howard

From what I understand I think you have a great relationship, and I think a big part of it is the honesty and the openness and the being free to be yourself. And being free to be ratty in the morning because you're feeling ratty and that's also part of being in relationship.

Jennie Williams - [00:37:38]

I am sunshine and joy in the morning, Alex.

Alex Howard

That's not what I remember.

Jennie, for people that want to find out more about you and the work you're doing, what's the best way for them to do that?

Jennie Williams

Well, if you go to our website, enhancetheuk.org that's still the business side of things. So like I said we run training, we're accredited and run BSL courses, access for businesses.

If you go onto Undressing Disability you can still see it all on the same website, and that's all around the like sexual needs and sexual support.

We just had some training accredited to run in care homes to train care homes and care staff. I'm really proud of it. It's one of the first of its kind in the country. So we're just starting to roll that out. So I'm really, really proud of that.

And as I said, our sex toys will be out on the 14th February. Follow us on Instagram [@enhancetheuk](https://www.instagram.com/enhancetheuk). Follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/enhancetheuk). Follow us and you'll see all the information.

And if anyone needs any help, this is the last thing I'll say, if anyone needs any help, any support, any advice, then go on to our website. You can see the Love Lounge. We have a big array of people. We have counselors, we have OT's, we have lots of different specialists there. If we don't know the answers, we'll spend a really long time trying to find the answers.

We say on average, it takes about two weeks for us to reply to people, because so much work goes into any one question that comes in because they're normally quite complex. We are here to support people the best we can.

Alex Howard

Amazing. Jennie, thank you so much. And it's been so fun to have an opportunity to connect again, so thank you so much.

Jennie Williams

Thank you.