

# Sensate Focus Programme

## Stage 1

### **“Sensate Focus” without genital contact – touching your partner for your own pleasure.**

This stage of the programme emphasises the importance of keeping safe within limits.

### **A formal agreement must be made between you to ban all attempts at intercourse or genital contact until you feel comfortable with these early stages of the programme.**

This ban is essential if performance anxiety is to be reduced. It removes any particular goal, reduces the pressure on you to succeed, allows you to experience new feelings and lets physical contact become an end in itself.

You should aim for three sessions a week, each session being in two parts. Partner A (the male **or** female) initiates the sessions when he or she wants by saying to Partner B, “I would like to touch or caress you” (or words to that effect). Partner B can accept the offer or decline as he or she wishes. If B accepts the invitation then the assumption is made that B will later in the same session want to caress A. On the next occasion it should be Partner B who initiates.

### **Important points to remember:**

1. If you are doing the caressing – assert yourself. Touch your partner where you want to touch (anywhere on the body except the genital area and breasts) in a way that is nice for you and for as long as you wish. Experiment and touch parts of the body you have not touched before. Touching may include kissing.
2. If you are being caressed – relax. Protect yourself if you do not like what is being done to you (the easiest way to do this is to move your partner’s hand elsewhere). You will need to recognise if you and when you are “spectatoring” – which means watching your body being touched rather than participating fully by feeling the sensations that you are experiencing. Do not worry if this happens as first: you must learn to realise when you are doing it and learn ways to get out of it. There are two things to do (a) concentrate on relaxing your whole body and concentrate in addition on the sensations produced by your partner and (b) stop caressing for a short time until you feel sufficiently relaxed and ready to start again.
3. It is nice to touch and feel close to your partner.
4. It is nice to be touched.
5. Aim for three sessions a week, taking it in turns to initiate the sessions with the initiator caressing first.
6. You may push yourself into starting a session, feeling little motivation or drive to begin with. There is a common experience partly because of the artificiality of the situation, partly because people feel a little embarrassed and awkward at first, perhaps because of longstanding resistance to body contact from previous experiences that have gone wrong. It is important to see this stage as a stepping-stone towards a spontaneous sexual relationship.

7. Some people find this stage pleasantly relaxing, others find it arousing. It does not matter which, but it is important for you to recognise what you are feeling.
8. If after a session you find yourself very aroused and unable to settle, it is quite permissible to relieve your tension by masturbating – but you should do it yourself at this stage, it should not be done by your partner. If you are quite clear about these limits you may well find that this relief of tension is not necessary.

## Stage 2

### **“Sensate Focus” without genital contact – touching for your own and your partner’s pleasure.**

This stage is similar to Stage 1. Each session has two parts with one person starting to caress first in a way that is pleasing for him or her, in the second part his or her partner then caresses, but in addition you indicate to each other what you like the other to do.

If you are being caressed you must aim to:

1. Relax.
2. Protect yourself – if you do not like what is being done, move your partner’s hand elsewhere.
3. Praise and encourage the things you like – either in words or with grunts or by putting your partner’s hand back for more (do not take over complete control though, this is your partner’s responsibility). If something could be even nicer, put your hand on your partner’s to demonstrate how you would like it (harder, softer, faster, slower, more to the left, etc.) then leave it to your partner. In this way the person caressing still maintains complete control but the person being caressed is beginning to give some feedback as to what is especially nice for him or her.

But remember, it is up to the person caressing to choose what he or she does.

Remember to discuss with each other how you felt after each session – “self-assert” and self-protect”.

Remember it is nice to see your partner enjoying being touched by you.

## Stage 3

### **“Sensate Focus” with genital contact.**

Exactly the same basic principles apply for this stage of the programme:

1. **A ban on intercourse persists** but now genital contact with hands and/or mouth is permitted.
2. Each session is in two parts as before: A caressing B, then B caressing A.
3. As before, alternate partners initiating the session, the initiator touches in the way he or she wants to touch with the partner protecting himself or herself from hurt and guiding the hand to show what is particularly pleasurable. When genital contact occurs, subtle changes in pressure, speed or direction can have profound effects on sensation received, so it is even more important to be able to communicate what is best for you and remember it will not be the same for each session. Your body sensitivity can vary from day to day.
4. Do not concentrate solely on the genital regions, spend as much time as before on general body caressing and kissing as well.

5. The use of body lotions, or a lubrication of your choice, can enhance the pleasure to the caresser and the caressed, especially when touching genital areas.
6. The only goal is to be able to relax and enjoy what is happening. Check for “spectatoring” and learn ways of getting back to being fully relaxed and involved.
7. The partner being caressed may or may not become aroused and may or may not ejaculate or reach a climax. The response will vary from session to session and this is normal. Do not aim for climax or orgasm but if it does occur it does not matter and need not mean the end of a session.
8. If premature ejaculation is a problem, you will be given additional suggestions on how to deal with this.

#### Stage 4

##### **“Sensate Focus” with genital contact and simultaneous caressing.**

As caressing and genital contact becomes easier for both of you, you should now move on to simultaneous caressing so that both of you are giving and receiving physical pleasure at the same time – remember all the principles you have learnt.

In particular, remember:

- Sex is a natural response if you let it happen.
- Be on guard for “spectatoring”.
- Communicate to your partner when he or she is doing something particularly nice for you.
- Protect yourself against things you do not like.

#### Stage 5

##### **Vaginal containment**

Once Sensate Focus with genital contact is going well and the male partner is getting reasonably firm erections (and if applicable has begun to establish some control over ejaculations) you are ready to reenter this stage of the programme.

As before, this stage is designed to allow freedom to experience sensations of physical contact with each other without anxiety, i.e. failure to achieve a particular goal.

After a period of mutual caressing involving the genital area, when you (the woman) feel that you are ready and when you feel your partner has a reasonable erection, you invite the penis into your vagina.

The easiest position is the “female superior”. In this position the man lies flat on his back. The woman kneels over him with her knees either side of his body, more or less at the level of his nipples. In this position she is well placed for lowering her bottom to guide and insert his penis into her vagina. This means that the woman keeps full control over what is happening. The aim of this stage is to re-acquaint yourself with the body sensation of a penis in a vagina. The woman should tighten and relax her vaginal muscles on the penis, which she may or may not be able to feel once it is inside the vagina. The penis itself is receiving little direct stimulation from static position and the man may well feel his erection is lost.

If you wish, you can then resume genital caressing and perhaps repeat the process over again. Remember that you are both to concentrate on the sensations you are feeling from your genital region and relax and not to start any thrusting movements.

Initially you should only allow vaginal containment for a brief period (say 15 seconds). The period can be gradually lengthened in each session.

## Stage 6

### Vaginal containment with movement

It is important to re-emphasise at this stage that you use the principles concerning your physical contact with each other as you used right at the start. You should be touching and be being touched in a way that is pleasant for both of you and with no particular performance in mind other than of giving and receiving pleasure.

As before, start with mutual caressing involving both non-genital and genital areas in a way that feels good for both of you and although the man may well have an erection fairly quickly, it is important that both of you should feel aroused and receptive before vaginal entry takes place.

After a period of vaginal containment, you may try some limited thrusting movements to see how this affects your sensations. Only do this briefly to start with, but if you are both enjoying the feelings this produces, allow the movement to continue.

By this stage it is essential that either of you can say “stop” at any time. In this way you avoid the feelings that once vaginal intercourse has started you have to go on regardless. You are setting the limits for yourselves now. Practice this by saying “stop”. Remember that even if you are enjoying lovemaking, your partner may want to stop and needs to be able to without fear that you will get angry. This is what a secure, safe, sexual relationship is about – and when you feel really safe you will usually want to carry on.

The movements of intercourse feel different in different positions you can try and it is important to experiment to find ways that suit you both. You may find one position nice for one of you and another position better for the other.

Your responsiveness will vary from session to session and month to month. This is normal for both sexes. Many women find they respond better at a particular time of the month. Many women enjoy clitoral stimulation in addition to the thrusting of the penis and find that they reach a climax most comfortably and pleasurably in this manner.

This is normal and not a sign that they are not fully aroused. Many women can also have a highly satisfactory and highly aroused sexual experience without a climax. It is an important rule to remember that provided physical contact is enjoyable, the orgasm is not necessary. It is also a myth that a joint climax is the ideal. Most people find it very pleasurable to enjoy the experience of their partner's climax, separate from their own, whilst on occasions they may enjoy coming together. These are all variations on the theme of making love and what you enjoy will depend on your feelings and state of mind at the time. The only goal is to enjoy yourselves – together.

**Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust**

**Sexual Health Service**

**Tel: 0300 303 1948**

SHD @Bournemouth  
66-68 Palmerston Road  
Boscombe  
Bournemouth  
BH1 4HT

SHD @Weymouth  
Weymouth Community Hospital  
3 Melcombe Avenue  
Weymouth  
DT4 7TD

The information in this leaflet is available in additional languages and alternative formats. Please contact the Trust for further details.

© Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust. All rights reserved. Not to be reproduced in whole or in part without the permission of the copyright owner.

Produced: Feb-21  
Version: L014\v1\Feb-21

Review Date: Feb-24

Website: <https://sexualhealthdorset.org/>

**Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust**

Sentinel House  
4-6 Nuffield Road  
Poole  
BH17 0RB  
Tel: 01202 277000