Sexual Problems

- Sexuality is dealt with on a separate page.
- Sexual Health and Contraception is dealt with on a separate page.

No one would expect a child to speak fluently without having to learn and practice. Most people would be surprised if the Halls of Residence only gave one choice of breakfast or if all students were expected to dress the same. Ordinary people expect to have good days and bad days when it comes to working or performing a sport. However, when it comes to sex we have a tendency to completely forget that we are all human and all different, and we expect to have instant expertise, total conformity and complete predictability.

A relationship therapist once noted down what helped his clients resolve their sexual difficulties. He found the largest number of clients were helped by being given permission - to talk about sex, to express their feelings and to be as they were. Limited information helped the second group of clients - information about the range of human sexual response and about how certain problems came and went. Specific suggestions about different approaches, positions or techniques were the third most useful therapeutic tool. For the final group of clients whose problems were not helped by these techniques, he offered intensive therapy. He referred to the approach as PLISSIT for short and it has become the basis for much sexual therapy. Use it to help you solve your own sexual difficulties.

Permission

Give yourself permission to think about sex, to fantasise about it and to talk about it and to accept that it is perfectly alright for you to have your own likes and dislikes. Sadly many people have grown up with the idea that it is wrong to have sexual feelings and desires. Most people find their sexuality is enhanced when they stop making rules about what they and their partners ought to like and begin to consider what they actually do enjoy. We have to keep our sexual activities within the bounds of what is safe and what does not threaten the freedom of others. However that does not mean we have to strait-jacket our thinking. The books recommended below are intended to be permission giving as is confidential discussion of concerns in counselling.

Limited Information

Ignorance perpetuates many sexual difficulties. Most people can expect to experience a loss of sexual desire when they are stressed. The simultaneous orgasm invariably depicted by film-makers and novelists is not the experience of the majority of couples. Most peoples' sexual appetite and preference change as they grow older. Lack of knowledge about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases can lead to great unhappiness when events occur which might have been avoided. There is a lot of information available about sex - in some ways there is so much that it has maybe become devalued. The books recommended below contain much useful information and are a good place to start. So are the leaflets in the Student Union Welfare Office. Otherwise come and talk to one of the counsellors.

Specific Suggestions
Many distressing sexual problems such as pain on intercourse, inability to achieve orgasm or erectile problems can be greatly helped by simple changes in sexual routine or position. Books, medical advice, conversations with friends or counselling may all help you find these suggestions; alternatively you may wish to speak to a sex therapist.

**Intensive Therapy**

The very thought of sex therapy raises most people's anxiety level pretty high! However this anxiety is misplaced as sex therapy is not the invasive or exposing form of treatment the tabloids may like to imply it is. Don't let these fears stop you finding the help you need. The largest provider of sex therapy and trainer of sex therapists in the country is Relate (ring 01788 573241 and ask for your local Centre's number). Therapy is provided in complete confidentiality and all the work is done fully clothed! Counselling is offered to couples irrespective of their sexuality, and some therapies are available to individual clients as well. Problems are normally resolved by means of discussion, the giving of appropriate information about human sexual functioning and by simple behavioural tasks which are completed by clients in the privacy of their own home between sessions. The therapy has a very high success rate, although it does require a commitment to following the treatment programme.

Although inhibition and ignorance is a major cause of sexual problems, some people find themselves trapped in a different way. They have become used to unusual sexual behaviour which can begin to leave them feeling dissatisfied and possibly socially isolated. A similar programme to the one above can still be greatly beneficial.

**Suggested Reading**

*Woman's Experience of Sex* - Sheila Kitzinger - Penguin

*The Mirror Within* - Anne Dickson - Quartet

Both of these books deal with sexuality from the woman's point of view. Both are comprehensively readable, open-minded and thought-provoking. Sheila Kitzinger's is slightly more up-front and focussed.

*Men and Sex* - Bernard Zilbergeld – Fontana - a comprehensive and witty book that exposes many modern sexual myths very well