



Starting conversations about sex and intimacy with your partner

- Dr Daly** Some of the key issues that women might have said about talking about sex, what comes to mind?
- Dr O'Malley** It was from my research, it was really, really, evident that one of the most important features of maintaining sexual intimacy with their partner was good communication within the couple. And that was evident early on, what I would say that is, couples who demonstrated good communication adapted to changes within their intimate relationship more...with, with greater ease.
And, I suppose, to try and really narrow it down because I didn't really talk to women about 'how did you talk to your partner?', but it, it came out of the conversations.
So, I can very clearly remember talking to one lady who said, 'you know we don't really have to talk about it, we just know, I know from him, and he knows from me. We might be really tired, might be under pressure from work, so I just know, now is not the time, or else, we're having a long weekend and everybody's in good form, and we know maybe that is the time.
The other thing that couples, women said, was really important was, that they were given an opportunity to talk. Maybe, away from home or away from the house or away from the baby.
- Dr Daly** Okay, that's interesting isn't it?
- Dr O'Malley** Yeah,
- Dr Daly** And what, was the, their, thinking behind that, Deirdre?
- Dr O'Malley** I suppose, it makes sense, away from the house, they weren't thinking about baby care, they weren't thinking about laundry, they weren't thinking about naps, they weren't thinking about household stuff.
So, it gave them an opportunity to connect with their partner, where they felt they had time to actually talk about, maybe feeling guilty, about not being interested in sex like they used to be.
- Dr Daly** Okay, that's an interesting one and it's one that a lot of people might think about, actually physically removing yourself from the home/ work associations.
- Dr O'Malley** Yes
- Dr Daly** So, you free up your mind almost
- Dr O'Malley** Exactly! So, you had space in your head to talk about sex and intimacy with your partner. Another thing that women talked about was kind of, relaxing in their partners company, and that might involve having a beer or two or a glass of wine, where they could enjoy each other's company, and again it was, kind of, it was removing themselves from baby, household, childcare. Where they could relax into each other's company and talk about, again, 'this isn't right for me' or 'I'm not happy with that', or 'should we be doing it more often?', or 'what do you think?'
- Dr Daly** What you're describing there, or what I guess you're describing there, is your talking about the couple going back to being a couple and not being a mother or a father. The other thing you mentioned there was you know, should we be having...the conversation is about sex, it's not



necessarily about intimacy, so, it seems to me you've described people, couples, women talking about intimacy as being difference from sex.

Dr O'Malley Yes, and that definitely came out in the research, and I would have asked that, you know, did they see intimacy and sexual activities as sort of, different things? And women talked about taking the time to sit beside their partner on the same couch and make sure they slept in the same bed or having a cuddle or a hug or a kiss. But, it was actually the sexual intercourse, sexual activity, that was potentially the issue for some women, as in, they didn't have the same level of sexual desire or interest in sexual intercourse. And for some women, they felt guilty about that.

Dr Daly Okay

Dr O'Malley But for women, who talked to their partner about that, they resolved those feelings of guilt, or apprehension or anxiety, in a much easier way or a much freer way, does that make sense?

Dr Daly It does, because what you're saying, is it's out there in the open.

Dr O'Malley Yeah,

Dr Daly It's not within me, I'm not carrying this burden of guilt or silence. In terms of you've talked about, I mean, that women, having the need to have this good conversation, good communication, openness. What, what could help a couple or a woman, get to that level of helping her partner?

Dr O'Malley Other couples talked about, now how did they bring it up? I remember talking to another lady and she said, 'yeah, sometimes we are just sitting at the kitchen table and I'd just say, you know, I'm not really happy with this, and he's say he's not really happy with this, so we both decided, okay, so this isn't great but, you know what, maybe in a few months it'll be better'.

Dr Daly Okay

Dr O'Malley So a very kind of emm...

Dr Daly Matter of fact!

Dr O'Malley Yes, very matter of fact.

Dr Daly So, what you're describing there, to me, or what I hear you saying is; it's not about the woman, it's not about the man, it's about the *us*.

Dr O'Malley Yes, yeah.

Dr Daly Is that something...

Dr O'Malley Yeah, and you know it's a pity I didn't get a chance to talk to the partners because some women I interviewed, said you know 'I can't speak for such and such, but I can only assume that they are just as tired as I am. Or, you know they have the addition of having to go to work in the



morning, I might be able to get back to bed for a half hour. So, it would be you know, really useful to get the perspective of the partner as well, and I couldn't do that in the interview, but women can do that at home in their house. 'How do you feel about this? I know I'm not interested because I'm so tired, but how do you feel? Do you feel the same way? So, that would be an interesting conversation.

Dr Daly So, the mere fact that you have a conversation, you've put it out there, it's nearly. Let's get rid of the guilt, it doesn't necessarily have to have solved the problem, but it brings it out into the open, and leaves it ready for a solution.

Dr O'Malley Ready for a solution, and what I really strongly believe is that women were able to adapt and couples were able to adapt to the changes. So, there were changes to the intimate and sexual relationship, and some people found it hard to adapt to those changes, and it was clear to me that couples who talked, women who talked to their partner, found it easier to adapt to those changes and accept them.

Now, on the other hand, and I know this conversation isn't, you know, about bad communication, but I did speak to women who found themselves unable to talk to their partner about sex, but this wasn't a new feature of their relationship. So, they would have described to me that they didn't talk about sex before they got pregnant.

Dr Daly Ever within the relationship?

Dr O'Malley Exactly, no, they didn't, you know. This woman talked about not really getting sexual satisfaction from her partner. She enjoyed sexual activity, but not to the extent where she would have had an orgasm and really, really get into the sexual experience. And she never talked to her partner about that before she got pregnant and she didn't talk about it afterwards.

Dr Daly So, she, that's the nature of their relationship, it's not the fact that they have, developed or that there is a new problem about sex or something.

Dr O'Malley No, it was something that was a feature of their relationship beforehand.

Dr Daly And it might very well work for them

Dr O'Malley Yeah, the issue is, if they are not happy with it, if they're struggling.

Dr Daly Exactly, that's the time, I suppose, that couple need to, or one of them needs to start a conversation with someone.

Dr O'Malley It might be useful even for them to talk to somebody else, a third party, who might be able to help them ...

Dr Daly Start the conversation

Dr O'Malley Start the conversation or even just maybe someone with the skills to bring up the sort of topic of sexual intercourse.



- Dr Daly** From listening to you, Dee I hear there's a difference, couples have developed an ease of talking about it, a matter of a factness, an ease, this is one feature of our relationship, and then there's others on the far side of the continuum who don't talk.
- Dr O'Malley** Yeah, and maybe it's how they communicate in the relationship with other issues as well you know? Yeah, I don't have the answer to that, but what I'm most definitely, 100 percent sure of is, women who talked to their partner about how they felt, adapted to the changes in their intimate relationship with greater ease. And it wasn't necessarily just talking about sex, it could have been talking about tiredness, extreme tiredness, about being frustrated by the time their partner came home at the end of the day, or about the worry over the baby drinking enough, eating enough, pooing enough, weeing enough, those types of things.
- Dr Daly** The whole busyness of motherhood and family life.
- Dr O'Malley** Yeah, and that would be what would be in their minds, more so than maybe the intimacy. Would be able to talk about those things with their partner. It was just as important, or quite as important as being able to talk about sex.