

SEXUAL TIMELINE EXERCISE

Make a list (word documents are often helpful as they are easy to edit) that starts with your earliest memory of anything sexual – what you saw, did, heard, said, etc. Start with your earliest memory of something sexual. This may not be something you did, but may be something you saw or heard, or something that was done to you. Include how you learned about sex.

Continue by listing every sexual experience or patterns. For sexual patterns, summarize the pattern rather than focusing on listing each instance. For example: if as a teen you regularly masturbated 2-4 times per week, then don't try to list every time; just indicate that between the ages X and Y, you masturbated 2-4 times per week. However, if it wasn't a pattern of behavior, for example, if you only masturbated 3 or 4 times during high school, then try to list each time. Try to list each sexual partner and every sexual experience, i.e., my neighbor Joe and I experimented by masturbating each other, or I discovered my mother's romance novel in her bedside table and read it nightly, followed by masturbating.

If you are male (or AMAB), list normal sexual experiences such as the first time you struggled with ED or delayed ejaculation, any struggles you had around either getting or maintaining an erection or ejaculation, and the first time you took Viagra, if applicable. If you are female (or AFAB), list normal sexual experiences such as your first orgasm, any struggles you had around orgasm, and if orgasm is a regular part of sexual experiences for you. List the beginning and end of each important intimate or sexual relationship you have been in and try to list why each one ended.

Please also list any sexual abuse, either individual instances or repeated patterns, including the name of the perpetrator. Review the definition of sexual abuse with your therapist to help identify instances and patterns that may be abusive. For patterns of abuse, try to list when it started and how and when it ended and why (if you know – if you do not know, state that). Include times you felt aroused and/or orgasmed/ejaculated when you did not give your partner permission or overtly said or indicated that you did not want to be part of and/or continue the sexual interaction.

If you have experienced betrayal, be sure to include the aspects of those experiences. If you have experienced significant betrayal, please let your therapist know and ask for the directions geared towards betrayed partners for this exercise. If you feel significantly triggered or a shame cycle, or feel very uncomfortable, it is good to stop and come back to it later. Also, please let your therapist know this next time you meet. If the trigger is overwhelming, contact your therapist for an appointment rather than waiting until the next scheduled appointment.

Include any sexual behaviors you consider problematic and use different colors for the various categories. For example, porn in green (if you consider porn problematic, if not, this may fit better in the healthy behaviors category), disconnective sexual experiences in brown, etc. If you experience a shame cycle, or feel very uncomfortable, it is good to stop and come back to it later. Also, please let your therapist know this next time you meet. If the trigger is overwhelming, contact your therapist for an appointment rather than waiting until the next scheduled appointment.

Once you've completed the list to the best of your abilities (keep in mind that additional memories may surface as you process your timeline and that's ok – don't wait until it's perfect, just do your best), create a horizontal timeline from your list. The easiest way to do this (and to be able to add to it later) is to get a 24" roll of paper, or several pieces of graph paper taped together, and some colored markers. Start by making marks in black at benchmark ages. Your benchmark ages depend on your history. You may need a longer sheet of paper depending on the number of experiences, whether those are related to abuse or sexual or romantic acting out.

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We can discuss your specific case in session and help you with the general lay out, but it will be simple math. If you are 60 put a 6" line at each lineal foot and a 3" line half-way between each of the 6" lines. The tall lines are age 10, 20, 30, etc. and the short ones are 5, 15, 25, etc. This should leave enough space for you to fill in your sexual history between the lines where appropriate. The example here will be 6' long. You can make it any length you want, just make sure the spacing between the lines is uniform.

If you can, color code the events/experiences. Pick one color for healthy/normal sexual activities/events. For example, use light blue for your first (positive) sexual experience with a willing, age-appropriate partner, first sexual experience with your current spouse, etc. Also include normal sexual experiences such as struggles with orgasms or your first time experiencing ED, etc. If you've experienced any type of sexual abuse, including early exposure to porn, sexual comments or innuendos, sexual experiences with partners more than 3 years older than you when you were under 18, sexual manipulation or assaults, etc., use a different color for those experiences. Use a new color for betrayals within past primary relationships and a different color for betrayals within your current primary relationship. If you feel significantly triggered or a shame cycle, or feel very uncomfortable, it is good to stop and come back to it later. Also, please let your therapist know this next time you meet. If the trigger is overwhelming, contact your therapist for an appointment rather than waiting until the next scheduled appointment.