

Sensate Focus

Modified from “Reclaiming the Lost Art of Sensate Focus: A Clinician’s Guide” by Linda Weiner, Neil Cannon and Constance Avery-Clark

What is Sensate Focus? Sensate Focus is a series of touch exercises that become more involved as you progress... aimed at managing or eliminating performance expectations. When we are focused on performance demands, it can result in anxiety that interferes with sexual involvement and pleasure.

What is the main agenda in Sensate Focus? Sensate Focus involves touching for one’s own interest, curiosity, and exploration. This is not an exercise focused on sexual pleasure or arousal. Neither your own nor your partner’s. We want you to mindfully focus on and explore the concrete and available aspects of touch: namely temperature, pressure, and texture (TPT). This is a curiosity exercise to glean information. If you notice pleasure... that’s fine. If you notice arousal... that’s fine. But that is not the goal nor something you need to be worried about.

How do we start?

- Dedicate one hour of uninterrupted time, two or three times a week, to Sensate Focus.
- Disconnect from electronics, pets, children, or other distractions.
- Take turns touching, and alternate who initiates the touch. The more anxious partner may want to choose if they prefer initiating or receiving.
- Make sure that:
 - There is some lighting in the room
 - There is comfortable temperature
- Remove as much clothing as possible, preferably all. You can adjust as you go. If you’d prefer to start with underwear on... or light sleeping clothes... that is fine.
- Use only non-verbal communication to maintain sensory focus.
- Keep eyes opened or closed, whichever aids absorption.
- Avoid alcohol or recreational drug use.



Sex Talk with Natasha

Sensate Focus

What is the goal? We want each of you to focus entirely on your own touch experience. Intentional sexual pleasuring, orgasmic release, and/or intercourse are strongly discouraged during the first stages of Sensate Focus. Instead, each is to turn his or her attention to TPT as often as needed, focusing on: What is the temperature? Where is it cooler or warmer? Is the hair and skin texture smooth? Dry? Rough? What is harder or firmer? Where is it lighter or softer?

How to? We encourage you to avoid erogenous zones such as breasts, chest, and genitals in first stage. Remember, if arousal occurs, this is completely natural. Experience the aroused feeling without doing anything about it, and then return your focus to TPT. If orgasm occurs, you are encouraged to continue with the touching.

- Touch for your own interest and curiosity. Sensate Focus is not massage, it is not sex, and it is not intended to arouse you or your partner, although it may. If arousal occurs, just notice and refocus on TPT.
- Touch using hands and fingers only; no kissing or full body contact.
- Include all of the body in the contact, except for areas that are off limits.
- Focus on sensations of TPT. If distracted by anything else, including anxieties, refocus on TPT and then move to a new part of the body once fully focused on sensations again.
- Touch long enough to get over any initial awkwardness but not so long as to get tired or bored (if that happens, move to a new spot).
- Take turns touching and being touched in each session.
- Protect your partner from doing anything physically uncomfortable by non-verbally redirecting his or her hand away from that area for the moment, or by practicing handriding, the placement of the hand over or under the partner's to non-verbally communicate, as needed. The toucher can always return to that area a little while later.

Sensate Focus

Stage 1: Body exploration without touching the breasts and genitals

- Choose any position that is comfortable.
- Touch avoiding breasts and genitals, focusing on TPT and refocusing when attention shifts.
- For variety, you can add hypoallergenic, water soluble, lanolin-free lotion once you have mastered touching for your own interest and as long as this does not promote a demand for pleasure, relaxation, or arousal.

Stage 2: Body exploration with breast and genital touching

- Build upon the Stage 1 suggestions by assuming positions that include breast and genital contact.
- The person touching sits up against the headboard, pillows behind, with his or her legs out in front in a V, or slightly opened, shape. The partner lies face up, legs bent up and over the toucher's thighs. The breasts and genitals can be included in the touching, excluding finger insertion.
- Breasts and genitals are included as any other part of the body, and not as the main focus. The focus continues to be on TPT.

Stage 3: Mutual touching

You can add mutual touching in any position you choose. Now there are sensations of touching and being touched simultaneously, complicating the focus. You move your attention back and forth from being the receiver and the giver of touch.

Stage 4: Mutual touching with astride

The next step is for one partner to go astride the other, and engage in genital-to-genital contact. The genitals are used exactly like the hands, simply as a focal point for TPT.

Stage 5: Mutual touching and astride with insertion

During Level 1 of astride with insertion, the astride partner can slowly insert the penis or place the vagina while maintaining focus on containment sensations, and with no thrusting movement. During Level 2, movement is gradually included as long as a non-demand attitude is maintained.

These instructions can be modified as appropriate for couples who do not desire insertion and/or modified for partners interested in anal rather than vaginal insertion as part of their sexual expression.

Sensate Focus

Processing the touching sessions... Questions you can ask or consider together...

- What were the touching sessions like from my/your perspective?
- How many times did we prioritize doing these sessions?
- How did we go about deciding who would initiate and what was that like?
- In TPT terms, what were the sensations on which I/you were able to focus when we were touching?
- When you were being touched, what touch sensations did you notice, and were there any differences from when you were touching? What about me?
- What were some distractions, and what did we do to handle these?
- Did we experience arousal and, if so, what did we do? What was that like?
- Did I need to move your hand away from something uncomfortable? If so, what was that like for me and for you?
- Did we ever have intercourse when we didn't expect to?
- What did I enjoy about this exercise the most? What was most challenging about it?
- Can we take some time to thank each other for being willing to engage in these exercises together?

