

intimate moment. It's helpful to be curious about our own approach to sex and whether there's a familiar pattern to what's going on in this current relationship. For example, do we see sex as 'dirty' and are uncomfortable about desire or do we see sex as a 'right' within a relationship? We all absorb messages about sex and may play these out in relationships without taking time to reflect on or questions them.

There's a common misconception that mismatched libidos are the death knell of a relationship – is this true?

Mismatched libido doesn't signal the death knell for the relationships, but the way couples deal with it can. If a couple become locked in to a pressure-guilt pattern and all the perceptions that come with that, they both can become very distressed and sometimes hopeless. It can be difficult for a couple to find their way back from the tension, anxiety and awkwardness surrounding intimacy. On the other hand, if they notice differences in libido early on, start discussing it and navigate this in a different way, I believe many couples can survive this issue and thrive beyond it.

What should you do if you're the partner who has a higher sex drive?

If you are the partner who has a higher sex drive and your

partner often turns down your invitations, try not to take it personally. Consider the reasons why your partner may not be interested. Try to think about why they may seem so defensive, it's likely they're feeling anxious and under pressure and may be trying to figure it out too. Pay close attention to non-sexual intimacy. Spending more time together and small acts of thoughtfulness can go a very long way towards your partner feeling closer to you and wanting to engage in sexual intimacy. Be affectionate and warm in your physical touch without the expectation of sex. Remember the pursuer-distancer dynamic and try backing off for a little while. If you step out of your pursuing role, your partner may feel less pressure and step in to be more intimate.

What should you do if you're the partner who has a lower sex drive?

If you are the partner who has a lower need for sex, take some time to reflect on this. Has something changed? Do you have niggling annoyances that get in the way of closeness and how can you start to talk about these? So often this is the number one thing that gets in the way of sexual intimacy – reduced sexual desire can often be a signal that all is not right in the relationship dynamic. Has

something changed for you? Perhaps you are more tired and stressed or you're experiencing hormonal changes. Does it feel possible to say yes to other types of physical intimacy? Engaging in cuddling, foot rubs or massages are all other ways to be intimate and help us feel more open to something more sexual. Think about sexual compatibility – it may be that you and your partner are compatible in many other ways but if there's an ocean between your sexual appetites and you can't seem to traverse it together no matter what you've tried, it may be time to consider whether the relationship is right for you.

How important is communication?

Communication is key. It's really difficult because we're not taught how to talk about sex and most people don't know where to start. We get entrenched in our own feelings of rejection or guilt and tend not to articulate it. As difficult as it is, try to create a space together where you can both start to express how you feel, being as gentle and honest as you can. If it's too difficult see professional support to help you navigate this.

Do you have any other advice for people struggling with mismatched libidos?

Take the emphasis off sex. If we remove sex as the ultimate goal and focus on other ways to be physically close it can really take the pressure off and allow intimacy to develop again. Cuddling, massages, baths together can all feel like special, intimate activities. Consider closely your time together – is there enough and what do you do with that time? Some couples have so little time together that it's a struggle to feel close let alone sexual. Other couples spend so much time in each others' company that there is no space for erotic energy. Watching a box set together every night does not particularly promote communication or closeness. Take time to create a little more space where you connect and engage with each other in a balanced, meaningful and, ideally, fun way. **WW**

Teresa Bergin is a sex and relationship therapist based in Dublin. For more information log on to www.sextherapy.ie

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