

Couples Therapy: I want to explore kink in my sex life – my partner of eight years does not

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Couples Therapy

This week, our reader wants to explore their sexuality after attending a kink workshop but their partner isn't on board. Cate Mackenzie, a couples counsellor, weighs in



Couples should explore while having some negotiated boundaries (Photo: Frederic Cirou/Photo Alto/Getty)

By [i Team](#)

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Each week [i](#) asks experts to answer readers' questions about [love](#), [sex](#) and [relationships](#)

I have been with my partner for eight years and after the first couple of years, [our sex life](#) became pretty much non-existent. There has been trauma and mental health issues on both sides and for a long time this [lack of sex](#) was OK with me. I love my partner very much and they love me.

In the summer I went to a kink workshop – with their blessing. It's been something I've wondered about and something that I heard was healing if you had a history of abuse. I loved it. I felt like a whole new world opened up to me.

I want to explore more and I want my partner to do it with me but they don't want to. I feel stuck. What should I do?

Couples counsellor and psychosexual therapist Cate Mackenzie says

First of all, well done you on taking the risk of exploring new areas of your sexuality and finding ways to heal old wounds. This takes great courage and I'm so glad to hear you got so much from it. I also hear the pain and confusion that comes from the fact that your partner may not want to join you in this exploration.

You have just had a very intense experience that they have not shared. Your partner may not want to speak about it now but if you go gently, kindly and give them plenty of time then maybe you can open up a dialogue about what this means for both of you and the fears that you both have. The important thing is not to rush or put any pressure on each other.

There are so many versions of kink and it might be that your partner and you are imagining very different things with that word.

A kink could be something that someone gets a kick out of – so that could be that your partner brings you a daily cup of tea or it could be that watching your person undress or dance arouses you. But equally some people would love to be tied up and dominated.

Sometimes we can bring kinky ideas back to our partners in a very gentle and playful way. If over time they are open you could, for example, make an arrangement that for an hour you will do anything they want or if they wanted you could play dominant or submissive in a fun way with consent.

Light ways to explore this could be you being naked and wearing a pinny and cleaning the house while they tell you off or give you compliments, giving little smacks and strokes if you like that. Or you can do pet play where you pretend to be their cat and get stroked. Also you could build a fun kit of sensation toys and give your partner a sensation session with gentle or not so gentle touch with for example a paddle, a pinwheel, a velvet whip, firm touch, feather light touch, etc. I am not suggesting you bombard them with these ideas, just that they are things you might suggest if they are open.

If it's an area they don't want to go near, how would it be for both of you for you to explore without them? You might want to think about what you might want or what your agreements together might be. Couples have agreements that can vary – for example, it's ok to explore in workshops or it's ok to have play partners so long as it's not romantic. Or it's ok to play

with someone as long as there is no intimate touch or kissing. Different people configure relationships in different ways. We all need different input and one person cannot provide all we need.

Anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy talks about “alloparenting” which is the idea that humans are meant to bring children up in community not in couples and I think the same applies for couples – we need community too.

So what I am asking is can you continue to explore and have some negotiated boundaries for your relationship so you both respect each other’s needs, while meeting your own. If it seems like they are not open to you exploring anything at all, then this is a bigger discussion.

The most important thing is that you are kind to each other in these conversations. You don’t have to rush anything. If we take things slowly it can be amazing what unfolds.

As told to Marianne Power