

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX

BUT DIDN'T ASK A SEX COACH LIKE JANE STECKBECK BY RICK LEVIN



Popular culture is flooded with the mating call of sex, and yet very few people speak openly and directly and maturely about how sex is going for them. And when they do, it tends to be either in tones of hushed, hiccupping embarrassment or with the sort of reptilian bravado that compels our Pussy-Grabber in Chief.

Jane Steckbeck likes to talk about sex, much in the same way we might talk about work. Makes sense: Talking about sex is her job. As a certified sex coach in Eugene, Steckbeck is in the business of helping individuals and couples get past all manner of obstacles that block us from intimacy.

“As an intimacy/sex coach,” she explains, “I help people to become more confident and comfortable in their sexuality so that they can experience deeper passion, pleasure and, ultimately, intimacy.”

For Steckbeck, many of the obstacles to sexual intimacy originate in the mind, in the form of pre-conceived notions that pathologize biological processes (eg. “erectile dysfunction”) or turn them into a source of shame and inadequacy.

“The greatest barrier is that people think there’s something wrong with them, that things around sex should be easy,” she says. “So when issues come up, I’m seeing that both couples and individuals tend to retreat instead of seeking help. Coaching can be a very good format for otherwise healthy people to use.”

Openness and communication are at the heart of Steckbeck’s practice, with greater awareness and intimacy as the goal. When she takes on a new client or couple, she goes through a series of steps, gathering information by way of assessments that lead to a collaborative coaching plan.

“A coach is going to use info about the past to help a client gain awareness about what might be going on,” she says, adding that, when things like past trauma present themselves, she will refer certain patients to a therapist.

A short list of the issues Steckbeck might address includes declining desire (either individually or in a relationship), an inability to obtain orgasm, “erectile unpredictability” (as opposed to “impotence,” a term she doesn’t like), learning how to self-pleasure and reconnecting in long-term relationships that seem to have lost the spark, to name but a few.

At the bottom of many of these impediments to intimacy is a fear and shame that keeps them in the realm of secrets. “There’s so much relief when someone can hear that what their experiencing is normal,” Steckbeck says, noting that getting people to talk about their concerns is a big step toward a better sex life.

“When we communicate we also dispel the things we fear,” she continues. “It frees us up to be more explorative, to be more adventuresome. If we have the safety, we really can let ourselves go, and that’s the bliss part of sex.”

Sometimes, she says, the best way to fire up a relationship that’s lost a spark is to reassert the simple things — to take the focus off the performance itself and get people touching and talking in a way that isn’t always geared for the big payoff.

Also, people need to be willing to change and try new things, especially as they and their bodies go through the inevitable changes of life. “If you don’t try new things, you’re going to flatline,” Steckbeck warns. For couples, “if they stop connecting sexually, they stop touching, and then intimacy gets extremely compromised.”

In the end, greater knowledge and awareness leads to empowerment — taking charge of one’s own sexuality. Ironically, such empowerment can arrive when we make open ourselves up to the vulnerability at the heart of sex.

“I think vulnerability is our strength,” she says. “When we can get past the fear and let ourselves be open to it, that’s when we can establish those connections.”

That connection, Steckbeck points out, is at core of our sexual desire. “Sex, it can be intense joy,” she says, “creativity, fun, laughter, wholeness, vitality, just the spark of what makes us human in our life.”

Certified sex coach Jane Steckbeck, J.D. works with individuals and couples in relationships as well as hosting several workshops, including an upcoming workshop on sexual empowerment for women starting March 14; for further information or to sign up, visit janesteckbeck.com, email janesteckbeck@gmail.com or call 541-525-5886.