

Getting Sex Help In Small Towns

For too long, couples away from cities have suffered sexually from lack of good treatment or sound advice. Now the times are changing.

By John Townley

Dear Jack,

Please help me, but please don't let my husband find out about it. I'm terrified about sex, and I just don't know what to do. You see, when I was a little girl at seven I was raped. Then, as I grew older, sex was forced on me such as giving blow jobs and other terrible things. Now I'm thirty and married to a fine husband but can't do oral sex with him when he's in the mood for it.

Can you give me some advice on how to get over these fears? I love sex only when my husband makes love to me but I cannot touch him because of the things that happened when I was a child. My husband says I am frigid and cold and my marriage is falling apart.

Mrs. S.H.

I write a sex advice column for a national weekly tabloid. This letter arrived not long ago. Inside the flap of the envelope was scrawled the single desperate word: "Help!"

After years of marriage and struggle with sex problems that were tearing her apart and ruining her marriage, why hadn't this woman sought help? Why hadn't she and her husband gone to one of the many sex counselling and therapy clinics that dot North America to try to work things out instead of sending an anonymous letter to a newspaper columnist?

Why? Because the nearest sex clinic was a good five hundred miles away from the couple's home in the far reaches of Northwestern Canada. Sex problems may be easy to take care of when you live down the block from a major big-city therapy center, but it's not

so easy when you live in a modern-day frontier town in the sprawling Canadian wilderness.

Mrs. S.H.'s problems are shared by millions of other men and women who have been born and raised in the country away from the hassled, uptight pressures of New York, or Los Angeles city dwellers. Her seemingly ideal life among the glistening lakes and clear blue skies of the Northwest where down-to-earth values are the order of the day might be the envy of many an urban commuter, but it's got its disadvantages, too. Particularly where sex is concerned.

First of all, the solid, traditional country lifestyles that built America also carry with them some good old-fashioned sex hang-ups and superstitions that can really do a number on your sex life—like believing masturbation can make you insane or that enjoying sex is a sin. And when you're several hundred miles from the nearest reliable source of sex information, it can mean sexual tragedy.

Of course, in a pinch you can always consult your family doctor. But the chances are, that could just make matters worse. A good bedside manner is no substitute for real facts, and the fact is that general practitioners receive very little training in handling sex problems and until very recently received no training at all. Your local M.D. can do a good job of fixing a broken leg, but don't ask him to fix a broken marriage. And too often a well-intentioned country doctor's advice may simply add to a problem. I know of many instances where men with sex problems were simply told, "It's all in your head." Hardly helpful advice. Or worse,

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where women who had problems enjoying sex, as in Mrs. S.H.'s case, were simply told that women weren't expected to enjoy it.

But probably the worst difficulty of a traditional upbringing is that people are taught that sex is something you just don't talk about. That means if you have a problem, there's no way you can let anybody know—which means that some very small and easily taken care of sex difficulty can turn into real show-stoppers in the bedroom.

For instance, a man once wrote me that he had a terrible problem that he couldn't tell anybody about and wanted to know how to handle it. His sex organ was too small—only eight inches long! His girlfriend had told him he just wasn't built big enough for her. If he had only been able to talk about it and seek information on the subject, he would have long ago learned that he was better endowed than most men and that the problem was with his girlfriend, not his equipment. Instead, he had allowed her to practically reduce him to a state of impotence.

And that's another problem that becomes a major bugaboo when help isn't sought or isn't available nearby: impotence. The sound of the word itself is enough to make some men run for cover—particularly middle-aged and older men for whom occasional problems are natural and should be handled easily. Instead the old-style notion that you have to perform at all costs combined with a lack of competent professional help often leads to a serious breakdown. And where real help is not easily available, men often turn to quack mail-order remedies that are not only useless, but often actually harmful.

If all this makes you want to sell off the old homestead and head for the nearest big city, just hold your horses. Not everybody is having problems, and many that are manage to work it out in some very creative and original ways. The original pioneer spirit of Yankee ingenuity is alive and well in a lot of bedrooms in

the far-flung corners of America. For instance, an Ontario man once wrote me of his and his wife's solution to the problem of painful intercourse:

"What saved our twenty-year marriage," he related, "was oral sex. Our first year after we got married, she would always have great pain when we had intercourse, so I said no more intercourse. We talked it over together and she asked me if I would go down on her—anything to keep us together. So we bought deodorant douche and after a douche, she washed herself with scented soap and we bought some perfumed powder to rub on her body. When we did it I would gently massage her belly with my fingers and we liked it so much it went on for nineteen years. She asked me what effect it had on me and I told her it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. I told her that I actually had the feeling that I was inside of her and she said she felt that way, too—and when two people are like that they become one. That's what oral sex did for us."

By working together to conquer their problem with mutual love and respect, this couple brought themselves closer together and built a happy marriage. Had they been easily able to get medical treatment for the difficulty, they might never have had to rise to the occasion that caused their love to pass the test of adversity. What the experts weren't around to do for them, they did for themselves in a different way and perhaps were better off for it.

Some people may even be coming out way ahead of the game. Recently, psychologists and sex therapists have been taking a second look at the taboo on incest and some of them are taking a different view of that long-condemned sexual practice. In many cases where the partners are mutually willing, they say, incest may actually not be harmful. Down in the Ozarks, they passed that milestone long ago. One reader recently wrote me:

"My brother and I gave our daughters

sex as soon as they were teenagers and kept it up until they each married in their early twenties. Both our wives fully agreed to it. We are very proud of the results as they were so settled and mature in the difficult teen period which causes most girls to go bad and chase hither and yon."

Another reader, whose husband had died in the war, recounts finding her 13-year-old son eagerly masturbating. Erroneously believing it might destroy his mind, she seduced him on the spot. If it was done for the wrong reasons, it turned out to be the right thing anyway, as they had a long and loving relationship right up until he left home in his twenties. Both got what they wanted out of the relationship, and neither was harmed.

Because they have no one to turn to but themselves, people in small towns, remote islands, or other isolated situations frequently come up with creative and original solutions to sexual needs and problems—often better solutions than a professional sex counselor might come up with because they are unique and special to their own surroundings.

But there are some problems that can only be solved by professional attention, and in these cases it's a real disadvantage to live in an out-of-the-way place. The most common of these problems are those two too-scary words: impotence and frigidity. Both are charged with fearful implications suggesting they are more dire than they really are. They are simply common sexual dysfunction, which usually can be taken care of by one of many modern methods of sex therapy. They tend to be self-perpetuating, however, and they get worse if help is not sought—usually the longer you wait, the worse it gets.

Therefore, anyone having a sex problem that doesn't respond to self-help should seek professional attention immediately, even if it means the time and expense of going a few hundred miles to the nearest sex clinic. If your sex life isn't worth a little extra trouble to keep it in shape, what is?

And these days, the fact is you probably don't necessarily have to travel all the way to New York or Los Angeles or some other metropolis to find skilled, competent sex therapy. There are thousands of trained sex counsellors scattered all over North America, some of them in the most unlikely places. You just have to know where they are.

In order to help you find out, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counsellors, and Therapists has published an official register of all therapists approved by the association. There are thousands of them, so there's likely to be one fairly close by. You can get a copy of the register by sending \$3 to: AASECT, 5010 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Suite 304, Washington, D.C. 20016.

Or if you have specific questions you want answered, you can even call them on the phone at (202) 686-2523. Or, if you're closer to New York City, you can call the sex information hotline at (212) 929-2300, where they'll be able to field almost any question you come up with.

The other main source of sexual difficulties inside and outside of big urban areas is simply lack of adequate, accurate information about sex. There's just an awful lot of important knowledge about the subject that nobody gets told at home or learns in school.

But ignorance is no excuse anywhere anymore. A good sex manual like Alex Comfort's best-seller, *The Joy of Sex*, will give you enough info and suggestions to last you a lifetime. Sex is one of life's most wonderful pursuits, but you can't do it flying blind.

Although sophisticated city slickers used to be one up on country folk where sex was concerned, the tables have been turned. These days no one anywhere has to let sex problems get the upper hand or go without competent treatment. Help and information are as near as your telephone or your mailbox.

Your sex life can be as satisfying as any jet-set city swinger—and you'll still be breathing that cool, clean country air. □

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February 1979 / \$1.25

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