



Healing Unwanted Sexual Fantasies

by Wendy Maltz M.S.W.

SEXUAL FANTASIES ARE UNIVERSAL

Like dreaming, sexual fantasizing is a natural and normal part of being human. Approximately 95 percent of men and women report having sexual fantasies. Sexual fantasies occur during daydreaming, masturbation and sexual activity with a partner. For most people, sexual fantasizing is a healthy aspect of being sexually alive. Fantasies reduce anxiety, while increasing sexual interest and enjoyment. They can function in many positive ways, such as by stimulating sex drive, improving self-esteem and enhancing intimacy with a partner. People report that their most satisfying sexual fantasies are arousing, fun and within their conscious control.

WHEN FANTASIES ARE DISTURBING

Many people are bothered by fantasies that intrude on sexual experiences like unwanted guests at a party. These fantasies are upsetting because they do not feel optional and within one's control. They often contain erotic thoughts and images that are disturbing to the person having the fantasy. For example, a person may be upset by a fantasy that involves hurtful sexual activities or sex with a person they dislike or don't want to be attracted to. Unwanted sexual fantasies are also disturbing in that people may become dependent on them for arousal and sexual release. Being stuck with a troubling fantasy is

definitely not fun. These unwelcome and unwanted erotic thoughts are the nightmares of sexual fantasies.

If left untreated, unwanted sexual fantasies can cause many problems. They can lower self-esteem, lead to risky sexual behavior, cause sexual functioning problems and harm intimacy with a partner.

WHERE FANTASIES COME FROM AND WHAT THEY MEAN

Unwanted sexual fantasies often result from upsetting relationships and disturbing sexual experiences one had in the past. Some may be the result of exposure to pornography. Similar to nightmares, unwanted sexual fantasies often represent unconscious attempts to resolve feelings that resulted from experiences of human aggression, betrayal, abandonment, and exploitation. They temporarily help people escape from emotions that inhibit sexual functioning, such as fear, anger, shame and powerlessness.

Not surprisingly, a large number of people who were sexually victimized in the past report being troubled by unwanted sexual fantasies. One research study found that females who have been molested tend to have more fantasies of being forced or dominated, than their non-abused peers. And the more extreme and violent the abuse, the more likely a survivor of sexual abuse will have sexual fantasies of being forced in sex or forcing someone else in sex.

HOW TO GET RID OF UNWANTED SEXUAL FANTASIES

A number of effective techniques now exist for helping men and women get rid of sexual fantasies they find disturbing. They include:

Analyzing the fantasy. This strategy involves looking closely at the contents of an unwanted sexual fantasy from many angles until a person finds what core confusion or unresolved emotional issue it represents. Specific techniques may include writing out the fantasy in detail, drawing or diagramming the fantasy, and exploring the characters, plot, themes, and relationships it contains.

Reducing the need for the fantasy. This strategy involves identifying and practicing those things that make a person less susceptible to a fantasy's intrusion. One way to accomplish this is to reduce stress by setting aside more time for sexual experiences. Another is to remove the pressure to climax in a sexual encounter and focus instead on sensual pleasuring and emotional closeness. Increasing sexual stimulation through other means such as deep breathing, erotic movement and non-pressured foreplay can also help.

Disrupting the function. In this strategy a person seriously interferes with the ability of the unwanted sexual fantasy to arouse. Usually this involves stopping sexual activity whenever the fantasy is present and only resuming activity when one feels relaxed and able to be present in sex without it. Rendered ineffectual, the fantasy eventually becomes extinct.

Transforming the fantasy. This strategy involves bending the contents of the fantasy to reflect healthy dynamics in sexual relating. Details in the fantasy change over time. You slowly replace negative elements with more positive ones. Bondage with ropes becomes bondage with big spaghetti noodles. Sex between a minor and an older adult becomes sex between two adults of differing ages, and so forth. The key to transforming an unwanted sexual fantasy is to maintain erotic sensory elements while shifting towards the healthier conditions for sexuality, such as consent, caring and safety.

Healing unwanted sexual fantasies allows a person to free their sexuality from burdensome emotional conflicts related to the past. When sexual fantasies are fun and optional people are able to enjoy them in new ways - ways that enhance self-esteem, intimacy and sensual pleasure.

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