**Stages of a Sexual Relationship** by Dr. Tammy Nelson.

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[What are the stages of a sexual relationship?](https://www.drtammynelson.com/what-are-the-stages-of-a-sexual-relationship/)

1. Longing and Attraction.

The first stages of all relationships are Longing and Attraction.  This is powerfully fuelled by hormones which make us feel live, vibrant, high. When we long for someone, we all feel attraction – we long for what we do not have.  This phase includes romantic love, desire, obsessive thinking, sexual fantasies, sneaking around, sex in unusual places or ways, and an intense erotic need for the other.

This moves to the Conquering phase, when we are excited to “get” our object of desire.  We are in bliss, we are delighted, we adore and we cherish the object of our desire, delighting in our senses, and theirs.

If we succeed in conquering, the ‘Heat’ phase begins – where the sex is hot, hot, hot….

Beware! This phase does not last. We cannot exist on this high for too long. Our bodies and minds cannot sustain this, so the hormones calm down which induces the next stage.

2. [Romantic](https://www.drtammynelson.com/the-next-sexual-stages-of-a-love-relationship/) Stage –-> Connection/Attachment

The next sexual stage of a love relationship is the Romantic Stage where we can adore our partner for all of their quirks and the parts of their personality that we might later critique.

But for now they can do no wrong, and sex is awesome and exciting for many couples.

As the romance wanes, the connection hormones begin to stir in the brain. These chemicals bring us down from the high, making us more calm. Oxytocin is released, making us want to cuddle and connect.  And vasopressin is released in males, fostering attachment.

This ‘Connection/attachment’ phase is comfortable and secure, and the sex can be nice – sometimes even wonderful, now that you have found your true love.

What happens next?  Commitment!

3. [The Conflict Begins](https://www.drtammynelson.com/the-conflict-begins/)

The moment we commit to ‘forever’ to our partner, we RELAX into the relationship, and what happens when we do?  We immediately REGRESS.

We go back to what we have always known about FOREVER – which is probably our family of origin.  All of our family issues and the dynamics of the folks who promised to love you forever now come to the surface.

We begin to “parentify” our partners, or we treat them like children (“Why can’t you pick up your socks?  How come I need to ask you for money for groceries? When will you give me what I want?”)  All of these longings for the perfect partner come from the expectation that your partner should anticipate our needs and wants, just like they did in the heat and romantic phases. We want our needs to be met by them, just like the “perfect parent” would.  It is obvious that this doesn’t always happen. And if it does, it can’t last.  So then we enter the conflict stage!

4. [Power](https://www.drtammynelson.com/erotic-curiousity/) Struggle

 Conflict leads to a power struggle.  Sex might be used now as a way to prove that you are not getting enough of what you want, or maybe it is a way to hold out on your partner until they give you what you need.  Sex is no longer spontaneous and an expression of desire, lust and feelings for your partner.  We think and worry about what’s happening. It is complicated.  Spontaneity disappears. And sex begins to lose its lush enticement.

At this point in the relationship, many couples either continue the fighting which happens from conflict and power struggle, or they avoid conflict and intimacy or go they into the “maintenance phase” of sex. Here sex may be good, or ok, but it’s not awesome.  You may know how to push each others’ pleasure buttons, but the heat is gone.

This maintenance phase can lead to three options:

1. You can fall asleep sexually and intimately and accept that this will be your relationship and sex life forever (avoid conflict).
2. You can split off all of your erotic energy outside of the relationship, which might lead to curiosity about others, an affair, or at least internet trawling.
3. This option might be better. It starts with erotic curiosity.

Rest assured that your partner is tired of being asleep too.  If they had an active fantasy life once, it is probably still there, but snoozing.  What do you think they are desiring?  What still turns them on?  Can you get curious about them?  Do you wonder about them and their desires?

5.[Make Love a Priority](https://www.drtammynelson.com/make-love-a-priority/)

Talking to your partner about their desires and learning what their inner fantasy is like is different than sharing yours. It’s being curious about their inner erotic life.  Help them spark their interest in sex again by asking them what turns them on.

In my book, “Getting the Sex You Want,” there is an exercise where you can each go through a list and check off things that might turn you on.  Communication is sharing that list with each other.

This can lead to the next stage, where the erotic energy is brought back into the relationship, just by TALKING about it.  Talking about fantasies and desires can heighten the passion and longing for your partner, even someone you have known intimately for many years.

Remember, attraction is the longing for someone.  Learn who your partner is – don’t assume you know just because you have made love in the past.  Sexual desire is fluid and changes as we develop and grow, and as relationships shift over time.

Find long term PASSION in your partnership – learn to move through the stages with purpose, dedication and intention.  DECIDE you will have a great love life, and you will.  Ignore your passion needs, and they will slide to the end of the list of priorities, and your relationship will suffer in the long run. Make love a priority today.