

LAURA HOW

COUNSELLING & GUIDANCE



1 DAY INTENSIVE

Thank you for attending your 1-Day Couples Intensive with Laura. This handout is your companion going forward. It's designed to remind you of the insights you gained, the agreements you made, and the practical steps you committed to. Keep it close.

SARAH & MICHAEL

1 JANUARY 2026

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This is your roadmap for the next 90 days. I've distilled everything from your intensive session into this practical guide.

Read it together when you're both calm and have space to sit with it. Then keep it somewhere you'll see it regularly.

What's inside:

- Your story in brief
- The 90-day agreement
- Your commitments
- Personal notes for each of you
- Weekly check-ins
- Resources and support
- What happens next

If you feel stuck or something comes up that needs support, please just get in touch.

YOUR STORY IN BRIEF

THE 15-YEAR PATTERN

You met at university 18 years ago. The early years were electric — you couldn't keep your hands off each other. You felt desired, wanted, and alive together. Physical intimacy was easy and frequent.

But even then: Sarah, you sometimes felt pressure to match Michael's higher drive. Michael, you sometimes felt rejected when Sarah wasn't in the mood.

After marriage and children:

- Michael pursued sexual connection → Sarah withdrew
- Sarah pursued emotional connection → Michael withdrew into work
- Neither of you made intimacy a priority for 15 years
- Children, careers, exhaustion all came first
- Sex became infrequent, then rare, then non-existent
- You became co-parents, not lovers

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THE CRISIS POINT

Last 3 years: Sex became completely absent. Michael stopped initiating after repeated rejection. Sarah felt relieved at first, then guilty, then worried.

What brought you here: Michael said "I can't live like this anymore" six weeks ago. Not in anger, but in resignation. Sarah panicked, realizing how close to the edge you were.

Current state:

- No physical intimacy (including kissing, touching) for 18 months
- Michael feels rejected, unattractive, and invisible
- Sarah feels broken, pressured, and guilty
- Both feel lonely despite living together
- You sleep in the same bed but don't touch
- You're excellent co-parents but disconnected partners

IMPACT ON YOU BOTH

Michael: Questioned his desirability, considered affairs, feels ashamed of his "neediness," stopped trying completely.

Sarah: Body image issues after three children, exhaustion from part-time work and primary parenting, sex feels like "another job," disconnected from own sexuality.

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WHAT YOU BOTH ACKNOWLEDGED

You agreed:

- The intimacy died gradually and you both let it happen
- You see the pursue-withdraw pattern you've been stuck in
- Neither of you is deliberately withholding or rejecting
- You both want to try despite feeling hopeless
- The 90-day timeframe feels achievable
- You still love each other and want to save this

Sarah: You've lost touch with your own sexuality and need to rebuild that for yourself first.

Michael: You need to stop making this about being "owed" sex and start rebuilding emotional connection.

Both: You don't know if the sexual connection can be restored, and that's okay for now.

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THE 90-DAY AGREEMENT

3 JAN 2026 TO 3 APRIL 2026

REVIEW SESSION: FRIDAY IN APRIL

THE QUESTION YOU'RE ANSWERING

Can you both rebuild intimacy without demanding immediate sexual reconnection, while staying open to where that might lead?

MICHAEL'S COMMITMENTS

1. Stop Keeping Score

- No tracking days since last intimacy
- No hints, jokes, or comments about sex
- No making Sarah feel guilty for saying no
- When you feel rejected: take space, don't punish

2. Rebuild Emotional Connection First

- Ask about Sarah's day and actually listen
- Share your own feelings without making it about sex
- Be physically affectionate without expectation (hugs, hand-holding)
- Show interest in her as a person, not just a potential sexual partner

3. Do Your Therapy Work

- Continue weekly individual therapy
- Focus: Why rejection feels so devastating, your self-worth outside sexual validation
- Weekly couples therapy
- Read assigned books

4. Take Pressure Off Completely

- Sex is off the table as a goal for 90 days
- Focus: rebuilding trust, safety, and connection
- Let Sarah lead the pace of physical intimacy
- No asking "when" or "if" about sex

Your question: Can you value connection for its own sake without guarantee of sexual payoff?

SARAH'S COMMITMENTS

1. Reclaim Your Sexuality

- Continue weekly individual therapy
- Explore: What do YOU want sexually? What turns you on?
- Work through body image issues with therapist
- Consider sensate focus exercises (for yourself, not for Michael)

2. Stop Avoiding

- Don't automatically say no when Michael initiates affection
- Communicate what you need: "Not sex, but I'd love to cuddle"
- Practice saying yes to small physical touches
- Notice when you're open vs. when you're genuinely not

3. Do Your Therapy Work

- Weekly individual therapy
- Weekly couples therapy
- Read assigned books
- Discuss barriers to intimacy with therapist

4. Stay Open To Possibility

- Allow non-sexual physical affection at your pace
- Explore what makes you feel sexy/confident
- Work toward seeing your role in the disconnection
- Consider: What would it take to feel desire again?

Your question: Can you rebuild your relationship with your own body without pressure to perform?

SHARED COMMITMENTS

1. Tuesday Evening Check-In (30 minutes)

- Review schedules for the week
- Michael: "What would help you feel less exhausted this week?"
- Plan one date night (no expectation of sex)
- Quick gratitude: share one thing appreciated last week

2. No Processing Outside Therapy

- Heavy discussions stay in therapy sessions
- Exception: practical logistics (schedules, kids)
- If conflict arises: "Can we table this for therapy?"

3. Daily Appreciation

- Mental note: what did my partner do today that I appreciate?
- Optional: share it out loud

4. Read Together

Required:

- 'Come As You Are' by Emily Nagoski (both)
- 'Mating in Captivity' by Esther Perel (both)

Recommended:

- 'The Sex-Starved Marriage' by Michele Weiner-Davis
- 'Sheet Music' by Kevin Leman

A NOTE FOR MICHAEL

You've been keeping score, whether you realize it or not. Days since last touch. Months since last sex. Every "no" feels like a rejection of you as a man, not just a "no" to sex in that moment.

But Sarah isn't rejecting you. She's disconnected from her own sexuality entirely. That didn't happen because of you — it happened because of 15 years of exhaustion, body changes, and putting everyone else first.

The fastest way back to intimacy isn't through pressure or negotiation. It's through making Sarah feel safe, valued, and desired as a person — not as a means to your sexual satisfaction.

When you hug without expectation, when you ask about her day without agenda, when you compliment without follow-up — that's when she starts to soften. But it has to be genuine.

You cannot negotiate desire. You can only create the conditions where it might return. These 90 days aren't about whether you'll "get sex back." They're about whether you can value emotional intimacy enough to rebuild trust. If you do that work genuinely, sexual intimacy has a chance. If you keep score, it won't.

The other work: Why does sexual rejection devastate you so completely? That's about more than just wanting sex. Explore that in therapy. Your self-worth cannot depend on sexual validation.

You're not wrong for wanting physical intimacy. But the way you've been pursuing it has pushed Sarah further away. Try a different approach.

A NOTE FOR SARAH

You've been avoiding this conversation for years. Every time Michael initiated, you felt pressure mounting. So you withdrew. Then felt guilty. Then avoided more. The cycle feeds itself.

But here's what you need to hear: Your sexuality isn't broken. It's dormant. There's a difference.

You described sex as feeling like "another job" — something you do for Michael, not for yourself. That's the core issue. If sex is only ever about meeting his needs, of course you don't want it.

The question isn't "How do I want sex more often?" The question is "What would it take for me to feel desire for myself?"

That might mean exploring: What actually turns you on? What makes you feel powerful and alive in your body? What would sex need to look like for you to genuinely want it? This work is for you, not for Michael. If you reclaim your sexuality and discover you genuinely want sexual connection — that's a gift to yourself first, your marriage second.

Two patterns to notice: You manage expectations to protect yourself. Every time you say "Don't expect me to suddenly want sex" or "I can't be like we were at 25," Michael hears: "This will never change."

What if instead: "I don't know what's possible. But I'm willing to explore."

You also default to "no" because yes feels dangerous. What if you said yes to small things? A hug. Holding hands. Kissing without it leading anywhere. Practice saying yes when it feels safe.

These 90 days will show you whether reconnecting is possible.

YOUR WEEKLY CHECK-IN

EVERY TUESDAY EVENING (30 MINS)

This is a structure to reduce anxiety and conflict, not a place to solve big problems.

1. Schedule Alignment

- What's on each calendar this week?
- When can we have our date night? (Specific day/time)
- What support do you need with kids/work?

2. Practical Support

- Sarah: "Here's what would help me feel less overwhelmed this week..."
- Michael: "I can do X, Y, Z. Which is most helpful?"
- Agree on specific division of labour

3. Connection Planning

- When's our date night? (specific day/time)
- What sounds good? (walk/dinner/movie/activity)
- Keep it simple and achievable
- No expectation of sex afterward

4. Quick Gratitude

- Each say ONE thing you appreciated about the other last week

What NOT to Discuss

- Sexual frequency
- Past rejections
- Long-term future
- "Are we going to make it?"
- Deep processing

Save those for therapy.

READING & RESOURCES

REQUIRED READING

For Both:

'Healing from Infidelity' by Michele Weiner-Davis

Start: This week

'The Sex-Starved Marriage' by Michele Weiner-Davis

Start: After Healing from Infidelity

For Sarah Specifically:

'Come As You Are' by Emily Nagoski

For exploring sexuality as a project, not duty

For Michael Specifically:

'The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work' by John Gottman

Focus: The Four Horsemen (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling)

RECOMMENDED READING

'Sheet Music' by Kevin Leman

'Hold Me Tight' by Sue Johnson (attachment and intimacy)

LOOKING AHEAD

YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Weekly Couples Therapy:

- For next 90 days minimum
- Confine processing to these sessions
- Build rhythm and safety

Individual Therapy:

- Michael: Weekly (continue)
- Sarah: Weekly (continue)
- Focus on your individual work

90-Day Review:

- Friday in June (book this week)
- 1-Day Intensive (assessment & looking forward)
- Bring honest assessment of progress
- Decide: continue, extend, or end

WHEN TO CONTACT LAURA

Email Between Sessions If:

- A major decision needs making
- Things are significantly deteriorating

Reach Out If:

- You need additional support between sessions
- Something has shifted significantly

Email: laura@laurahow.com Phone: +44 1934 900539

AFFAIR PROOFING MARRIAGE

FROM MICHELLE WEINER-DAVIS: 'HEALING FROM INFIDELITY'

1. Make sure your marriage is the #1 priority

Make your marriage a top priority. Don't ever take it for granted.

2. Spend quality time together

Regular, protected time together is essential for maintaining emotional connection.

3. Choose your battle wisely

Let go of small, chronic conflicts so they don't erode goodwill and closeness.

4. Talk about what's in your heart

Speak honestly about your feelings and needs.

5. Focus on the positive

Notice and openly express appreciation for what your partner does.

6. Keep sex and passion alive

Treat sexual connection as a central part of marriage, not an optional extra.

7. Make yourself happy

Take responsibility for your own wellbeing and bring your best self to the marriage.

8. Hang out with marriage-friendly people

Surround yourselves with people who respect commitment and support marriage.

9. Commit to life-long learning

Keep learning and improving your relationship skills as your marriage and life evolves.

10. Don't forget to date each other

Keep dating your partner to protect romance, friendship, and a sense of being chosen.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Michael, I saw your vulnerability when you said "I just want to feel wanted again." That honesty — not anger, not demands — that's what will rebuild connection. The man who can say that is the man Sarah fell in love with.

Sarah, I saw your courage when you said "I want to want sex again." That's not the same as wanting it now, but it's everything. The woman who can admit that is capable of real transformation.

And both of you committed to 90 days of trying despite feeling hopeless. That takes real courage.

This is complex. Sarah is disconnected from her sexuality. Michael is wounded by years of rejection. But you have 18 years of history, genuine love, shared values around family, excellent co-parenting, and crucially — willingness to try. You have a chance, and these 90 days will reveal if that chance is real.

Your Next Steps:

This week: Book your 90-day review session for Friday in June. Schedule several weekly couples therapy sessions in advance. Start reading 'Come As You Are' together. Michael, take on specific household tasks to reduce Sarah's load. Sarah, talk to your therapist about exploring your sexuality for yourself. Every Tuesday evening, do your 30-minute check-in: schedules, support, connection planning, gratitude. Every week: attend couples therapy, continue individual therapy, and create at least one positive interaction together.

Trust the process, do the work, and be honest with yourselves and each other. And know I'm here to support you for as long as you need.