

Let's Talk About Sex

10 a.m. • Thursday, June 15

Dr. LuAnn Klindworth and Dr. Bruce McBeath

Sexuality and Emotional Intimacy in Our Older Years: We face the challenge of finding, sustaining, and deepening emotional and sexual intimacy amidst the experience of frailty, vulnerability, and significant loss.

Let's take these delicate and complex older life concerns out of the shadows and look at them with the care and attention they deserve. Please join clinical psychologists Dr. LuAnn Klindworth and Dr. Bruce McBeath in exploring this important topic.

Sex and Intimacy After 60?

Only our youth oriented culture could raise any question here. As though vitality and aliveness, the very stuff of sexuality, had a shelf life with a mid-life expiration date!

From a cultural perspective, we *focus little on the sexual lives or the underlying need for intimacy of older people*; not like the salacious gossip adorning celebrity lives, or the worried tones carried by parents regarding adolescent experimentation. With we elderly, sex is more likely in the shadows, yet stubbornly and awkwardly always on the scene.

Note, for instance, how the stirrings of oldster romance has shaken up nursing care culture. Those elderly couple pairings spring up with embarrassing regularity, sometimes publicly displayed outside the privacy of a closed door.

Note, too, how the term "shacking up" -- the now antiquated cultural label for people who choose a live-in relationship -- is today equally applied to committed older couples who eschew formal marriage but retain relational fidelity. *The taste of romance and some form of sexual union is as real* for them as it is for their adult children who are perhaps now also cohabitating.

Clearly, our need for physical and emotional intimacy doesn't disappear with passing years. Yet in older life, these forms are manifested in ways as individual and nuanced as are each one of us older people. Some struggles associated with sexuality at older ages reflect being stuck in an adoles-

cent time warp, attempting to separate sexual expression from our growing underlying human need for emotional intimacy. Forgetting that sexuality is the gateway to intimacy creates problems whenever emotional intimacy takes a back seat to physical expression, adding frustration and disappointment into their experience of aging.

Humans of any age are poorly shaped for isolated living. We require human touch, warmth and nurturing care to continue to thrive, even into the oldest of ages. *Physical challenges* associated with aging and the loss of life partners confront us and *threaten the possibility of on-going intimacy* in our lives. Such profound losses test our willingness to seek out new sources of emotional intimacy so necessary to thriving beyond merely living.



There is also freedom with age. We benefit from releasing any social pressures specifying a "right way" to develop intimacy, whether in time-worn marriages or in the uncharted waters of new relationships. Healthy aging includes a hard-won capacity for intimacy and emotional depth. These lie beyond the boundaries of any purely physical sexuality.

Bruce McBeath, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist

Advocacy Services

Randi Callahan, licensed Social Worker with Three Rivers Community Action, can assist those 60 and older and their families with information, referrals, and resources to keep independent. Have a question? Call Randi at 507-732-8512.

