A WORKSHEET FOR COUPLES

INTIMACY MENU: YES / MAYBE / NO

A starting place for the wide territory between hand-holding and sex. Fill it out separately, then compare. The point is to widen the range, not to checklist your way through it.

CONTEXT MATTERS — EMILY NAGOSKI'S DUAL-CONTROL MODEL

Sexual response works through **accelerators** (things that turn you on) and **brakes** (things that turn you off). The same activity can be a yes in one context and a no in another. Most desire problems are not about missing accelerators. They are about brakes that have not been released — stress, resentment, exhaustion, body image, performance pressure, distraction. This worksheet works best after the brakes that have been on lately get addressed first. More on the dual-control model in our glossary.

THE "YES, AND" PRACTICE

Instead of an immediate "no" or "not tonight," start by naming what part of a suggestion you could say yes to, or what would make a yes possible. **Sounds like:** "Yes, and I'd want to start with [something gentler] first." Or "Yes, and I'd want it later when I'm more settled." **For responsive desire:** "Yes, and I might need 20 minutes of low-pressure touch before I know if my body comes online. Let's start and see." Skip the practice when the answer is genuinely no.

SETTING THE STAGE

Building accelerators, releasing brakes, and the anticipation through the day.

☐Y ☐M ☐N Hot yoga, partner workout, dance class, or shared physical activity
☐Y ☐M ☐N Walking, hiking, or running together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Going on an actual date — new venue, dressing up, breaking routine
☐Y ☐M ☐N Cooking together with intention
☐Y ☐M ☐N Hotel or away-from-home stay together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Skinny dipping or shared nudity outside of sex
☐Y ☐M ☐N Couples workshop, retreat, or class together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sleeping naked together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sex playlist you make together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Time apart that builds anticipation
☐Y ☐M ☐N Addressing resentment or stress first (brakes off before accelerators on)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sleeping enough that you have capacity for it
☐Y ☐M ☐N Setting the scene before — fresh sheets, candles, music ready
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sexy text during the day
☐Y ☐M ☐N Voice memo, flirtatious or appreciative
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sending a photo (with mutual consent)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Leaving a written note
☐Y ☐M ☐N Putting on lingerie or specific clothing ahead of time
☐Y ☐M ☐N Telling your partner what you've been thinking about
☐Y ☐M ☐N Initiating with a specific suggestion rather than an open question

COMMUNICATION & IDENTITY

The foundation everything else rests on. Language, consent signals, safety, and your hard limits. For items with a give/receive distinction below (manual, oral, massage, anal), mark each direction separately if your answer differs.

☐Y ☐M ☐N Preferred words for your body and genitals (note your own)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Words you do NOT want used for your body or gender
☐Y ☐M ☐N How you signal you want to slow down or stop (verbal, gesture, code word)
☐Y ☐M ☐N How you signal you want more, or want to continue
☐Y ☐M ☐N How you like to be checked in with mid-session ("is this good?" vs silent attunement)
☐Y ☐M ☐N What makes you feel safe and respected during intimacy (note your own)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Hard limits — what's always a no for you (note your own)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Trauma triggers your partner should know about (share what feels right)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Public displays of affection — hand-holding, kissing, leaning in
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sober vs altered states preference (alcohol, cannabis, etc.)

QUIET CLOSENESS

Low effort, low or no clothing-off. The everyday connection layer.

☐Y ☐M ☐N Long hug, 20+ seconds
☐Y ☐M ☐N Holding hands while talking
☐Y ☐M ☐N Cuddling fully clothed
☐Y ☐M ☐N Head and scalp scratching
☐Y ☐M ☐N Foot or hand massage (non-sexual)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sensual massage — giving and/or receiving
☐Y ☐M ☐N Specific words of affection (saying "I love you," nicknames, your own)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Eye gazing, one to two minutes
☐Y ☐M ☐N Spooning while falling asleep
☐Y ☐M ☐N Slow dancing in the kitchen
☐Y ☐M ☐N Co-regulation breathing together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Bath or jacuzzi together, companionably
☐Y ☐M ☐N Reading in bed separately, with physical contact
☐Y ☐M ☐N Falling asleep on the couch together watching something

MEDIUM-ENERGY

The bridge most couples are missing between hand-holding and sex.

☐Y ☐M ☐N Slow kissing, multiple minutes, no goal
☐Y ☐M ☐N Body massage, with or without oil, clothes optional
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sensate focus — non-goal touch, taking turns
☐Y ☐M ☐N Making out on the couch
☐Y ☐M ☐N Mutual undressing, slowly
☐Y ☐M ☐N Slowly undressing your partner (you do the undressing)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Slow strip tease for your partner
☐Y ☐M ☐N Wrestling or playful physical horseplay
☐Y ☐M ☐N Tickling, playful
☐Y ☐M ☐N Watching something erotic together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Listening to audio erotica together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Reading erotica aloud to each other
☐Y ☐M ☐N Dancing close, full-body contact
☐Y ☐M ☐N Non-genital touching anywhere else
☐Y ☐M ☐N Outercourse — clothed or partially clothed contact
☐Y ☐M ☐N Body worship — slow appreciation with words and touch
☐Y ☐M ☐N Showering or bathing together with intentional touch
☐Y ☐M ☐N Watching each other in a mirror
☐Y ☐M ☐N Mutual breathing while in close contact

HIGHER-ENERGY

Genital, fully sexual.

☐Y ☐M ☐N Manual stimulation, giving or receiving
☐Y ☐M ☐N Oral, giving or receiving
☐Y ☐M ☐N 69 — simultaneous mutual oral
☐Y ☐M ☐N Intercourse
☐Y ☐M ☐N Mutual masturbation (each self-pleasures with the other present)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Trying a new position
☐Y ☐M ☐N Quickies
☐Y ☐M ☐N Longer session over an evening
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sex at a non-default time (morning, midday, away from home)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Anal play, giving or receiving (with consent and preparation)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Hickies or marking the skin (consent-based)
☐Y ☐M ☐N Edging — delaying climax intentionally
☐Y ☐M ☐N A session focused entirely on one partner's pleasure
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sex in a non-bedroom location at home
☐Y ☐M ☐N Outdoor sex in a private spot
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sex during your period or your partner's period

AFTERCARE

The 10 to 60 minutes after. Strongly associated with relational satisfaction.

☐Y ☐M ☐N Cuddling for 10 to 30 minutes
☐Y ☐M ☐N Water and a snack together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Compliments and gratitude expressed out loud
☐Y ☐M ☐N Debrief — "what did you love about that?"
☐Y ☐M ☐N Showering together, easily, no agenda
☐Y ☐M ☐N Slow re-entering the day, no rush back to phones
☐Y ☐M ☐N Deep breaths together while still touching
☐Y ☐M ☐N Changing the sheets together
☐Y ☐M ☐N Sleeping next to each other afterward
☐Y ☐M ☐N Specific verbal reassurance ("you were wonderful")
☐Y ☐M ☐N Doing nothing together, just being present
☐Y ☐M ☐N Reflecting together on what was best about it

How to use this worksheet. Fill it out separately, compare on a calm evening. Where you both wrote yes is your core menu. Honor every no. **This list isn't all-inclusive*, and yeses shift over time** — revisit after big life changes (surgery, postpartum, new medication, illness, a new chapter together).

- Is there a maybe that could become a yes with a change in setting, timing, or what comes before it?
- What's one item you'd like to try in the next month?

***Not every yes shows up here.** Heavier kink, more specific acts, group or non-monogamy configurations, and identity questions need a real conversation — not a checkbox. Write your own in the margins, and bring anything that matters to therapy.

Want to go deeper? Our companion handout, Intimacy Menu Add-Ons, covers mood, toys, role play, and light power dynamics. Many items work for couples who don't identify as kinky. At mymentalclimb.com/resources.

If desire differences have become a recurring source of hurt, book a free 15-minute consult at mymentalclimb.com or call (925) 414-0192. Couples and sex therapy across California.

Draws on Dr. Emily Nagoski's dual-control model of sexual response (accelerators and brakes). My Mental Climb is not affiliated with Dr. Nagoski.

Educational only, not therapy.