

It is common to experience challenging emotions such as shame when we talk explicitly about sex. Shame may be a foundational issue that puts us at risk for coercive sex. People who use coercive tactics rely on our shame, fear and our silence. Identifying our internalized messages/beliefs can help us to defend ourselves.

- Identify your emotions.
- What are the messages/beliefs about sex that we learned from parents, the media, school, peers, and religion or from our cultural heritage?
  - Examples: The myth of blue balls can create a sense of obligation. The myth that people are supposed to get drunk so that they can relax enough to do sexy things.
  - Quotes from the podcast, The Heart. “How can I make him happy without compromising too much?” “A woman is supposed to want male attention; therefore, ‘Don’t hurt his feelings.’” There might be a fear of rejection instead of shame. It could be a combination of feelings.
- Are the messages/beliefs about sex valid? And do they make you feel good about yourself? Why or why not?

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Write a personal affirmation to create resiliency. Use the present tense.  
It could be broad based. “I deserve to be treated with respect and loving kindness.”  
It could be an affirmation that is specific to my experience of shame and/or fear.  
For example: I feel afraid that if I am not ready for sex, my partner will lose interest in our relationship. My affirmation might be, “It’s ok not to be ready for sex. A supportive partner will validate that it is ok.” Or “My feelings are valid; and I pay attention to my hesitancy for a reason. I am worth waiting for.” Or “This relationship is stronger and more loving when I set limits and my partner respects my boundaries.”

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