



Institute for
Relational Intimacy

The Desire Dilemma:

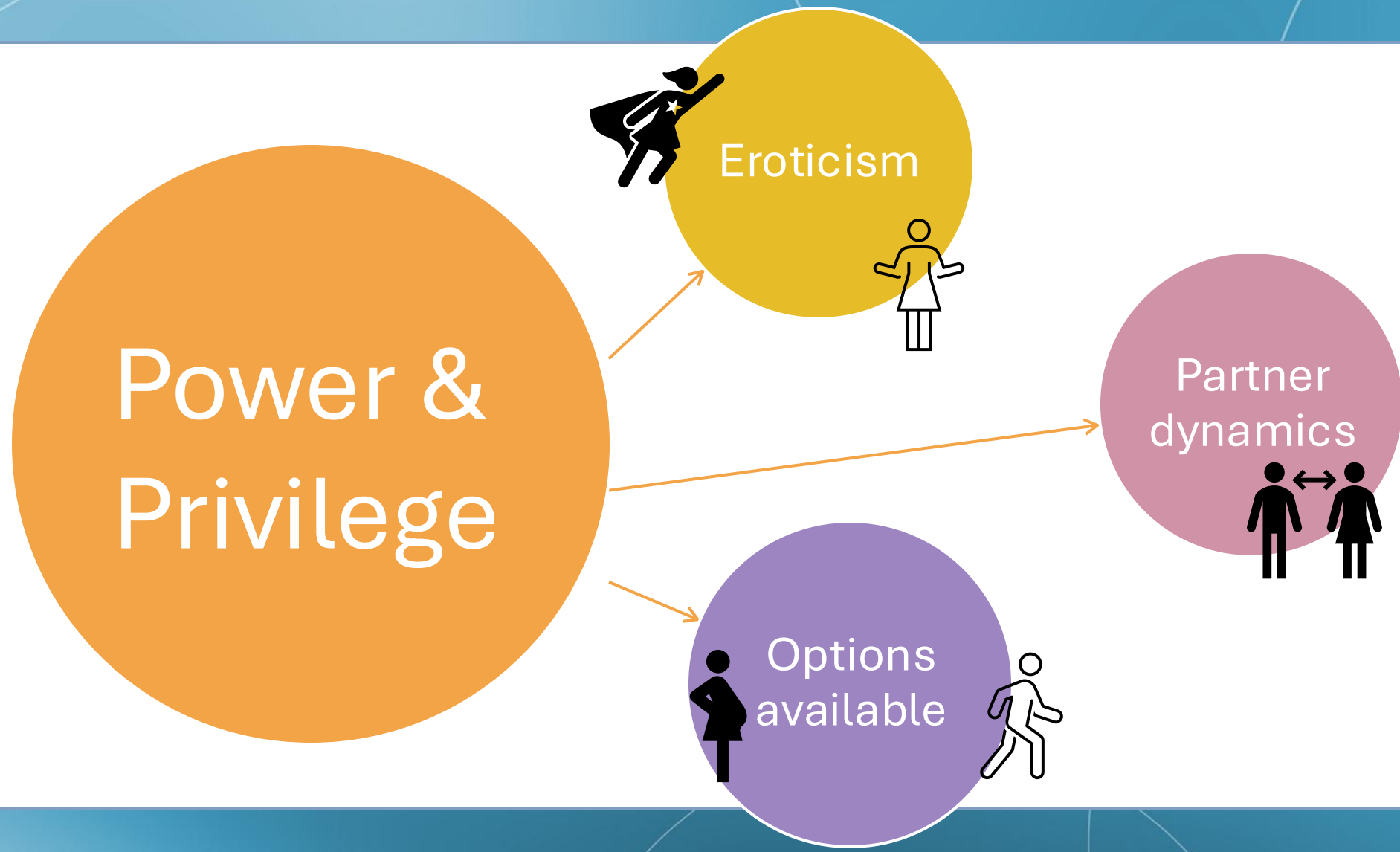
POWERFUL TOOLS FOR ADDRESSING DESIRE DISCREPANCY IN COUPLES THERAPY

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The Couples Conference
Workshop
May 3, 2025

What to expect

- How I think about desire discrepancy
- Desire myths
- Lower Desire Partner (LDP) roleplay
- Higher Desire Partner (HDP) roleplay
- Questions and case applications



First sessions

- Join with each partner
- Where are they stuck?
- Give them some relief
- Take specific stands
- Goals for both partners

Goals

Aspirational desire

Meaningfully different

Rooted in personal agency

What could I DO differently that
would make things GO differently?



What RELIABLY blocks desire for sex?



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Brief Assessment: How To Video



Brief Assessment: Will Lily Pick Andrew or Sarah?

Is there anything about sex or sexuality you think you might want to discuss in therapy?

Would you give me a brief snapshot of what that looks like for you?

Would it be ok with you if I asked a few quite specific questions that will help me understand more about that?

W illingness	When your partner is interested in a sexual interaction, do you feel willing?	Rule out coercion, violence, pressure, consent violations
L ibido	Are you interested in sex? Do you think about sex? Experience desire?	ASAP abstain from the painful activity, treat the pain. Refer to MD, and then vulvar pain specialist, pelvic floor PT, urologist, sexual medicine MD
P ain	Does any kind of sexual touch feel uncomfortable or painful?	
A rousal	Do you experience body signs of arousal? Flushing, increased heart rate, hardness? wetness?	Use lubricant, address hormonal issues, and refer erectile dysfunction to MD, cardiologist, etc. Rule out vascular issues
O rgasm	Are you able to reach orgasm when you want to? With or without partner?	
S atisfaction	At the end of the interaction, do you feel satisfied? Would you do it again?	

Sex Pain

“Is there any kind of sexual touch that feels physically uncomfortable or painful?”

- Ask directly – each partner, all genders, especially LDP
- Make a medical referral
- Sex pain is usually treatable!



Blockers

Pressure
for Self

Consent!

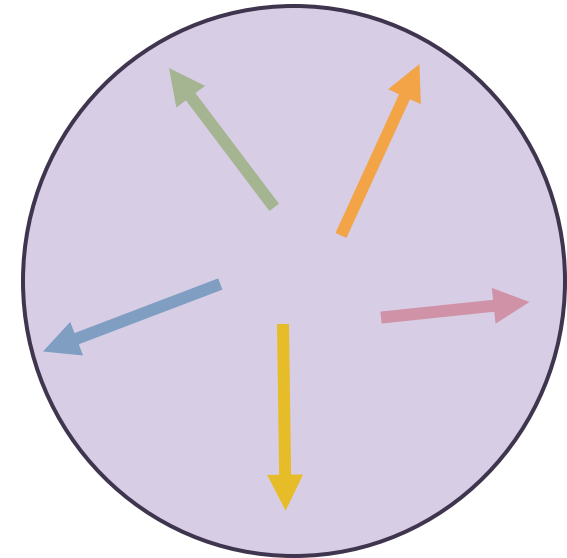


the LDP
coming from HDP



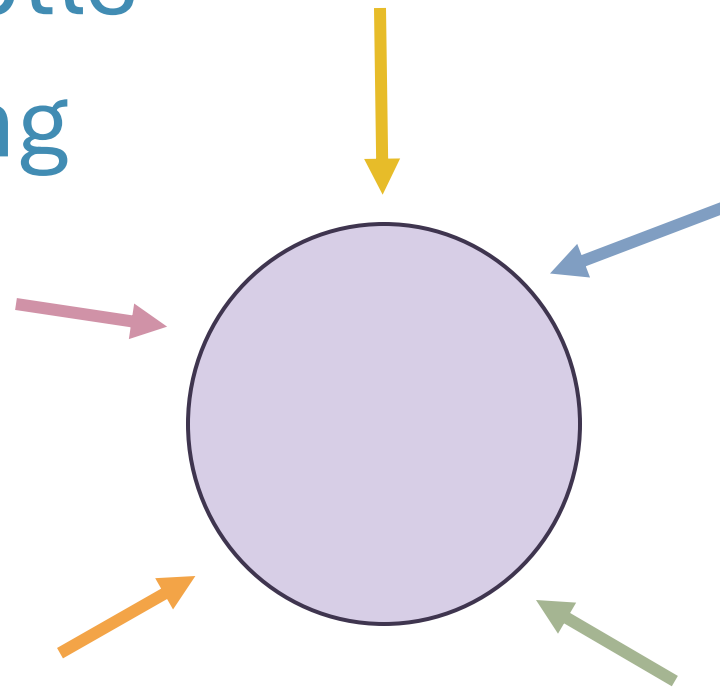
Internal Pressure for Sex

- Belief system
- Discomfort with partner's distress
- Desire to fix the distress

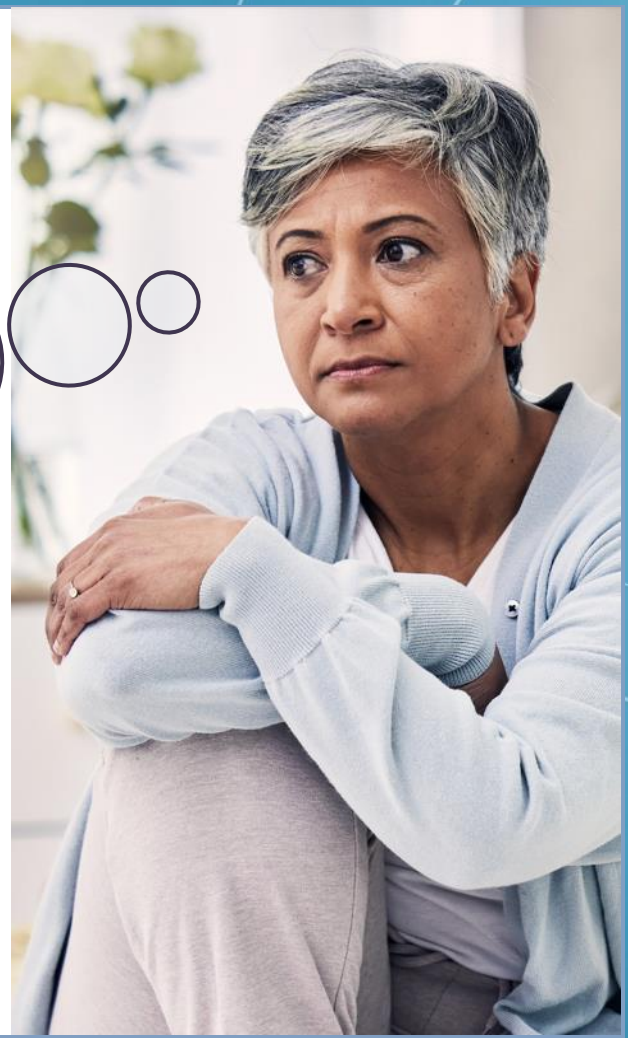
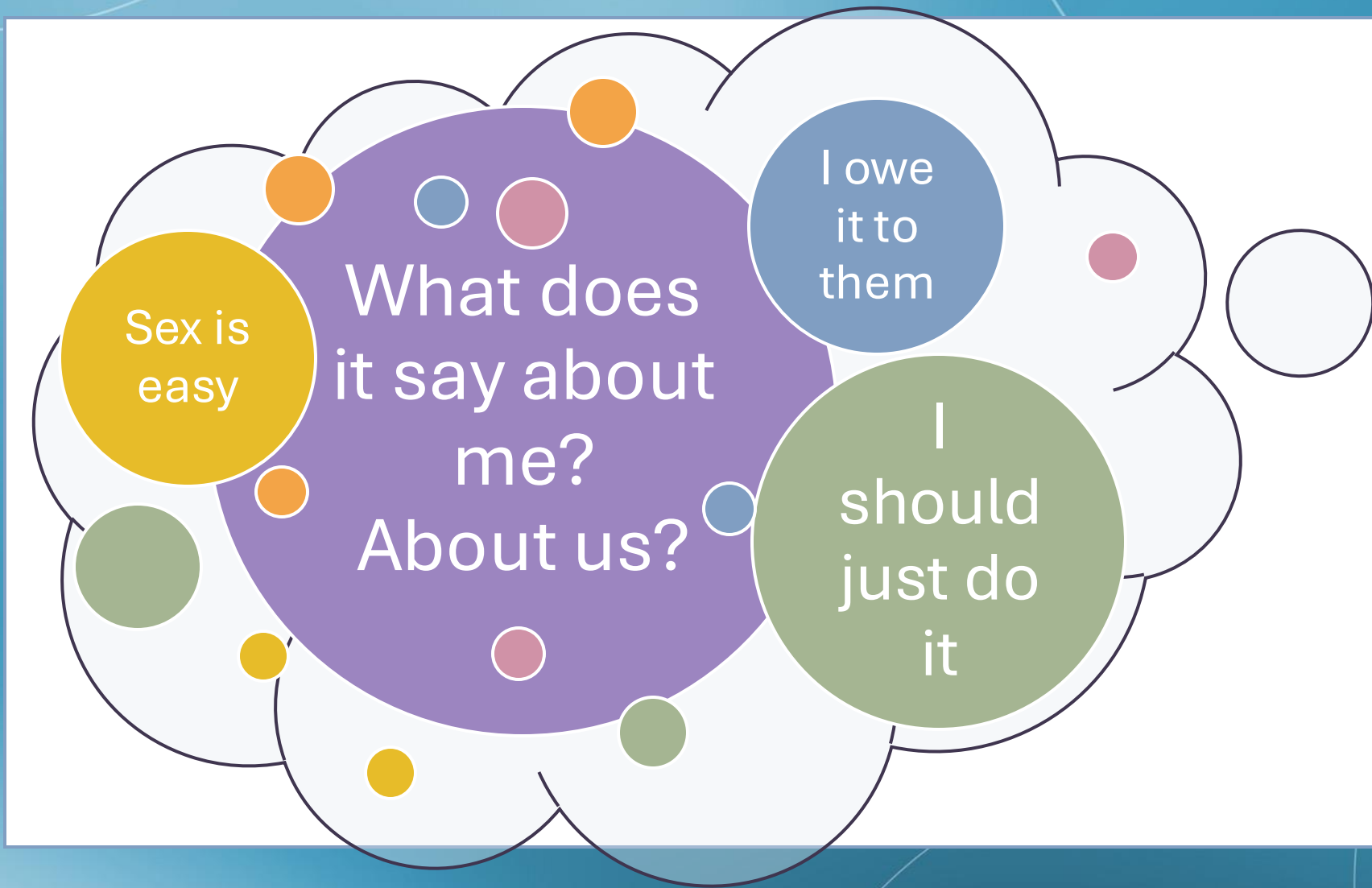


External Pressure for Sex

- Overt or subtle
- Broadcasting distress



“If I honor your right to say no, where does that leave me??”



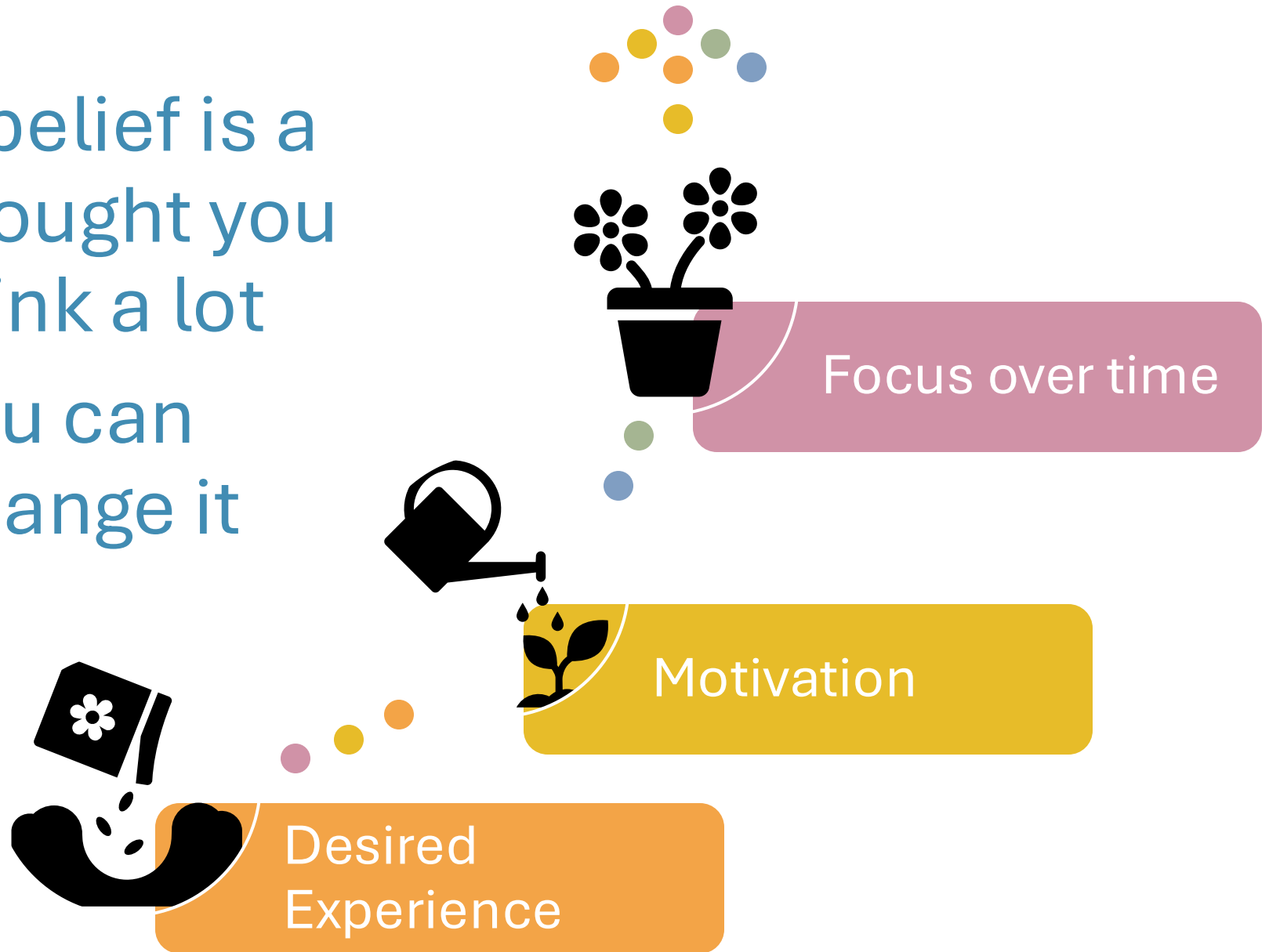
Unpacking beliefs

- Where did you learn that?
- How does it serve you?
- What would you prefer to believe?



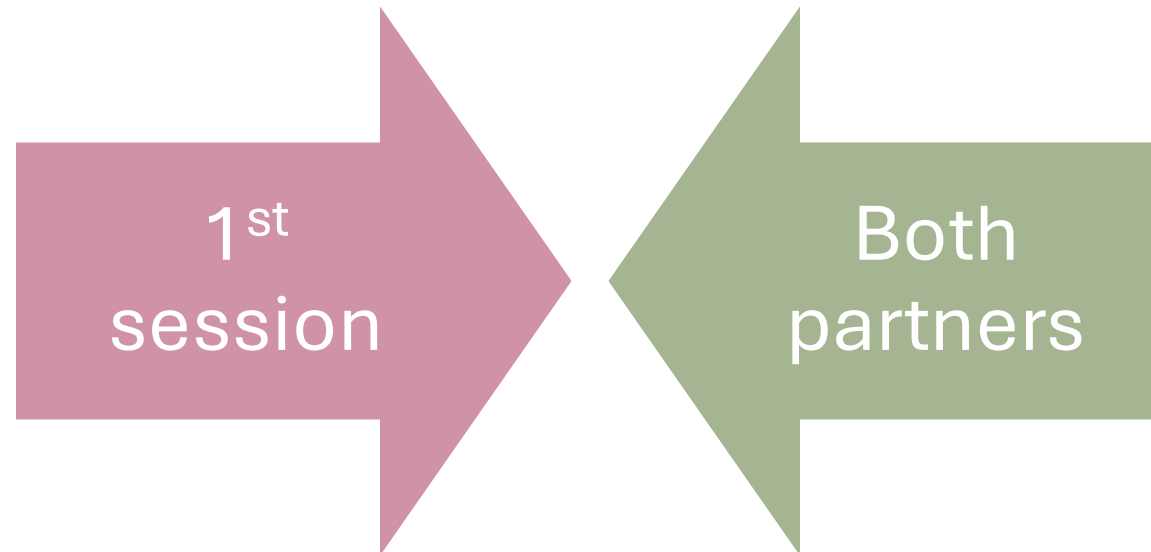
Unpacking beliefs

- A belief is a thought you think a lot
- You can change it



3 Critical Interventions

1. Rule out sex pain
2. Address pressure for sex
3. Get goals in place



LDP: Address pressure for sex



Goal basics

- Related to the pressuring dynamic
- Within one's sphere of influence
- Specific
- Juicy



Goal basics

- What do you want to **experience** that's different from what you're experiencing now?
- Why is it **important** to you?
- What **difference** will it make in your life?
- What could you **do differently** that would be a step towards that?



Experiment

- Start exploring
- 80% confidence you can do it
- Success regardless of whether it achieves the outcome you hope for
- Assess and learn from the experiment
- Craft next experiment



What does the LDP want to experience?



Towards Sex

- More pleasure
- Wants to want sex
- Sex without pain
- Sex without pressure

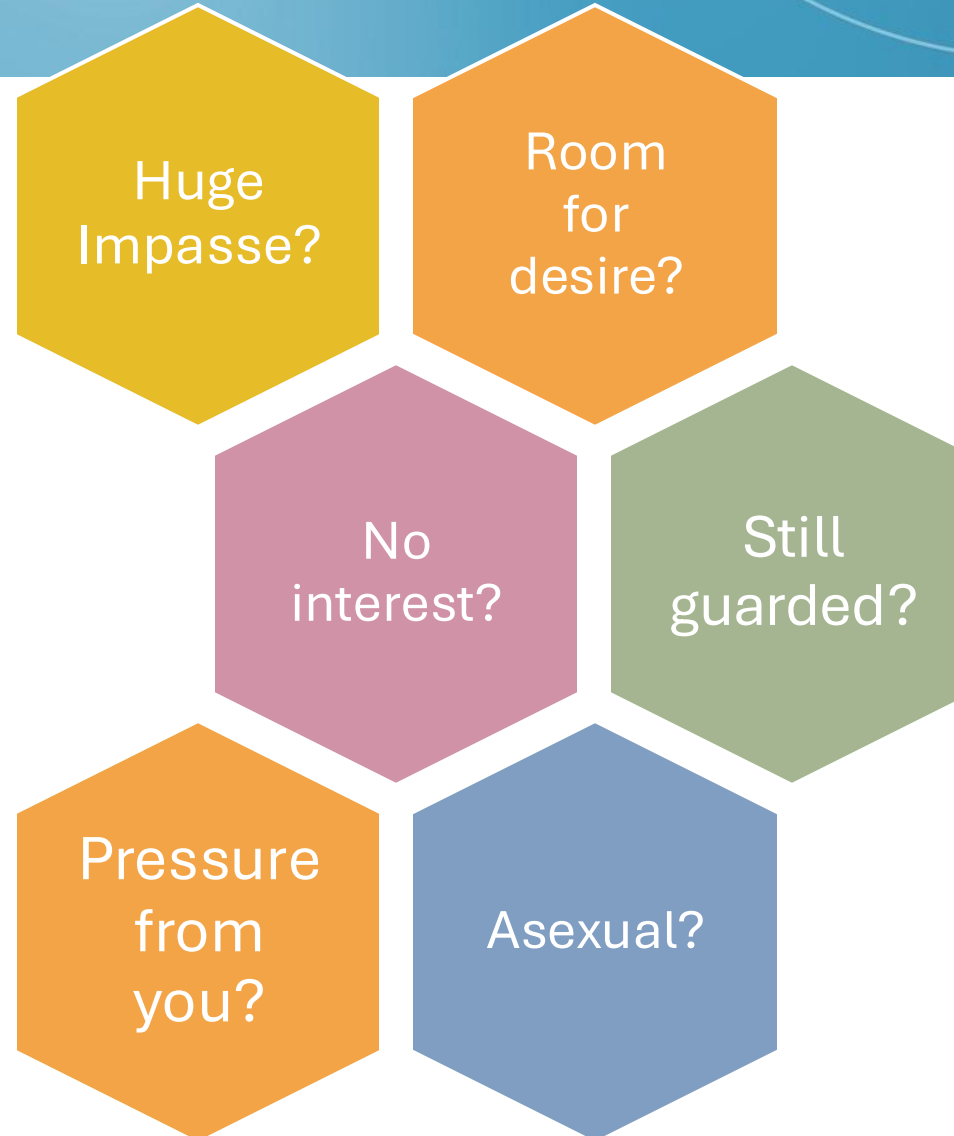


Away from Sex

- Less sex
- No sex
- Not even thinking about sex

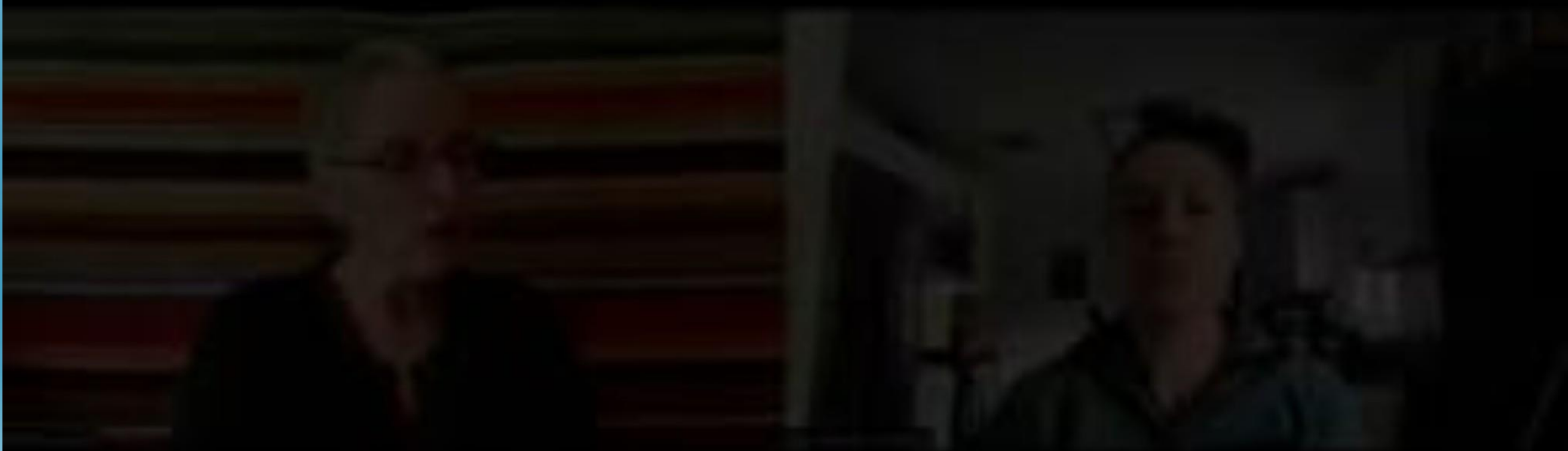


Pitfall: Miss the moment



HDP: Check in

- Breathe
- Settle in
- Listen
- Then we'll focus on you



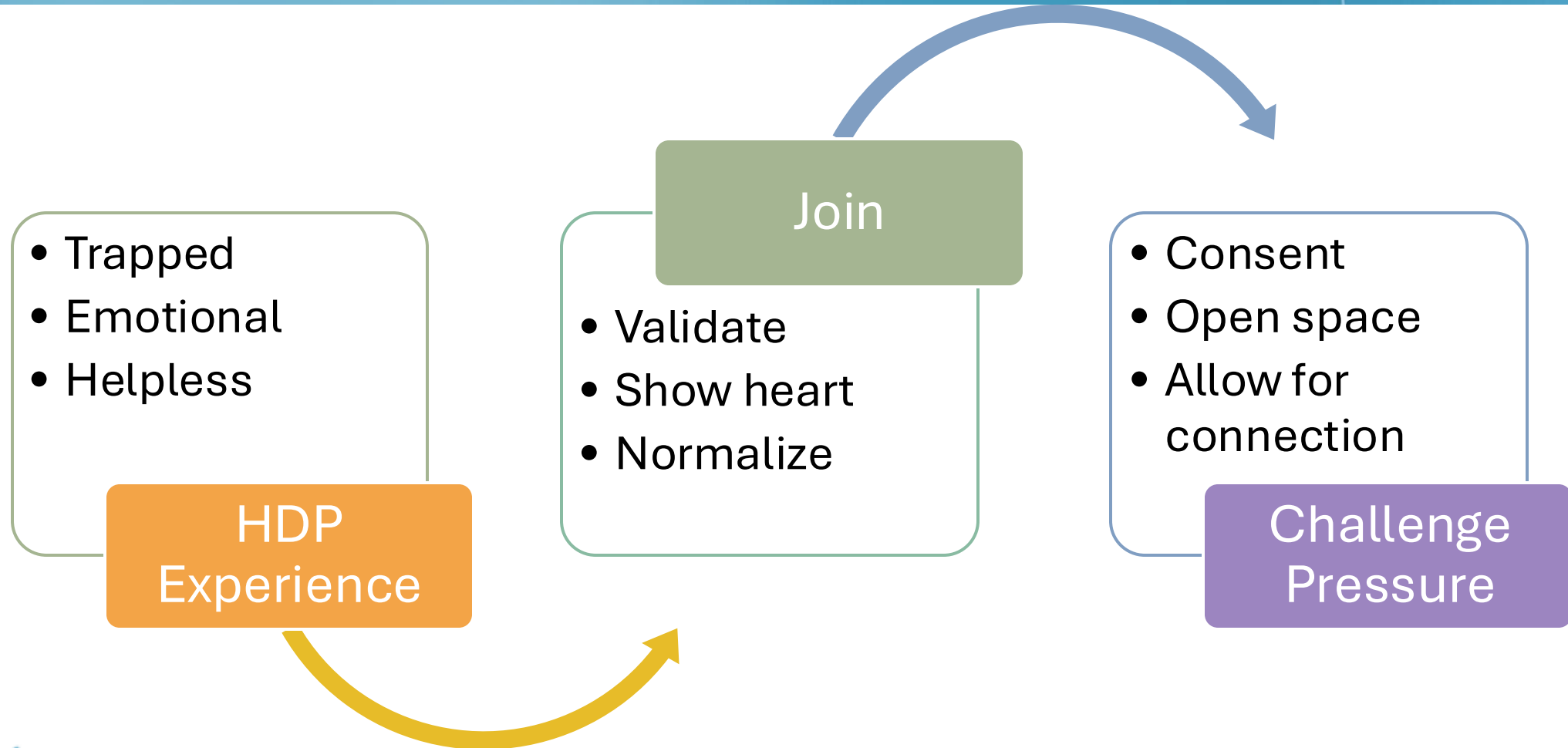
So around, your concerns about desire,

What did you see?



So what **was** that like for you as a client?

HDP: Joining & Address Pressure



HDP: Goal Setting

- Must remove pressure for sex
 - Consent! Consent! Consent!
 - Pressure kills desire
 - Creates room to experience something different
- If the LDP isn't ready for sex, would you prefer no contact or some contact?
- Space for HDP's experience
- What would you like to experience:
 - Emotionally?
 - Relationally?



How did that land for you?

What did you see?



What was that experience like for **you**?

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