

The PLISSIT Model of Sex Therapy

American psychologist Jack Annon (1929-2005) developed a simple model illustrating the fact that most people with sexual problems do not need an intensive course of therapy. He used the acronym PLISSIT for four basic forms of sex therapy: Permission, Limited Information, Specific Suggestions, and Intensive Therapy (Jack Annon, "Behavioral Treatment of Sexual Problems", 2 vols., Harper & Row - Medical Department, 1976)

Permission

P stands for Permission, since many sexual problems are caused by anxiety, guilt feelings, or inhibitions. It follows that a therapist who, using his professional authority, simply "gives permission" to do what the patient is already doing, can alleviate much unnecessary suffering. (Example: Guilt feelings and anxiety because of masturbation)

Limited **I**nformation

The next step of therapeutic intervention is called LI or Limited Information. Often it is enough to give patients correct anatomical and physiological information to restore their sexual functioning. It is not at all uncommon that patients have erroneous notions about the functioning of their own body and thus fall victim to unrealistic expectations. In such cases little more than factual information and education is necessary.

Specific **S**uggestions

The next step - SS, Specific Suggestions, requires practical hints or exercises tailored to the individual case. Many of the exercises of mutual pleasuring recommended by Masters and Johnson belong in this category.

Intensive **T**herapy

Only the last step - IT or Intensive Therapy, requires a long-term intervention addressing complex underlying causes. Annon is convinced, however, that these cases are relatively rare.

The whole PLISSIT model represents a graduated system of therapeutic sieves, in which the easy cases are caught and eliminated first, while the more difficult cases sink to the bottom in steadily diminishing numbers. Thus, Annon's pragmatic and practical model is a useful reminder for all therapists and their clients that not every sexual problem requires the whole therapeutic arsenal.