

How to Talk About Different Sex Drives Without Shame — Playbook

Use this before the conversation. It's not a script to memorize. It's a field guide for when you need to know what comes next.

Before You Start

Get clear on two things before you say a word:

What you're actually asking for. Are you opening a conversation or asking for something specific? Know which one before you start. Opening a conversation sounds like: "I want to understand what's happening between us." Asking for something sounds like: "I want to figure out how to get closer again." Both are fine. They're different.

What you're afraid she'll say. Most men avoid this conversation because they're managing their own fear of what she might confirm. Name that fear to yourself first. The fear of hearing it is usually worse than hearing it.

The Sequence

Step 1: Choose the moment.

Not when she's exhausted. Not after a fight. Not ten minutes before work. Sunday morning or a weeknight when the kids are in bed. If you need to, ask ahead: "There's something I've been wanting to talk about. When's a good time in the next couple days?" That's not awkward. That's respectful.

Step 2: Set the frame.

Before you get into the content, tell her what this conversation is and isn't. It's not a complaint. It's not a scorecard. Say that out loud.

Step 3: Say one true thing.

Start with what you miss, not what you've been counting. "I miss feeling close to you" is the opening. Not "We haven't had sex in three weeks." One sentence. Then stop. Let her respond.

Step 4: Stay in the room.

When she responds, your job is to hear her before you defend your original point. Whatever she says first is probably not the real thing she's been holding. Give her time.

Step 5: Name what you want without pressure.

When it's your turn again: "What I want is to feel wanted by you again. I'm not saying it to pressure you. I just wanted you to know that's what I've been missing." Then ask what she needs: "What would help you feel more connected?"

Scripts by Situation

Opening the conversation:

"I've been wanting to say something for a while and I keep not saying it. I miss feeling close to you. Not just physically. I mean really close, like we used to be. I don't know what's changed, and I'm not blaming you. I just wanted to say that out loud instead of carrying it around."

If you're the lower-desire partner:

"I need to say something because I think my pulling back has been hurting you, and that's the last thing I want. It's not about you. I've been [exhausted / stressed / in my head] and that's got me disconnected. When I pull back, it's me managing my own stuff, not me pulling away from you. I should have said this sooner."

When she gets defensive:

"I hear you. I can see why what I said felt like a complaint. That's not how I meant it. Can we take a minute? I want to keep talking about this but not in a way that hurts both of us."

Naming what you want:

"What I want is to feel wanted by you again. That's the honest version. I'm not saying it to put pressure on you. I know wanting and being ready are different things. But I wanted you to know that's what I've been missing."

Re-entry after a bad first attempt:

"That conversation the other night didn't go the way I wanted. I think I said it wrong and I want to try again. I'm not trying to relitigate what happened. Can we try again?"

Your Style Adjustments

Connector: You've been managing her feelings instead of saying what's true for you. Say what you actually want, even if it feels risky. Vague reassurance doesn't work here.

Defender: When she says something that sounds like a counter-complaint, don't correct it. Let her finish. You can come back to your perspective after she's felt heard.

Escalator: Say less than you want to. Start with one true sentence, then stop. Let her respond before you add more. Coming in at full intensity here will close her down.

Withdrawer: Give her a warning before you say the hard thing. "I've been thinking about something I want to share." Stay physically present even if you want to retreat.

Her Pattern Adjustments

If she pushes harder when she's feeling disconnected: Lower your volume deliberately. "I hear you. Can we slow down for a second?" Her pressure usually softens when she feels you're not retreating.

If she's gone quiet and stopped initiating: Open with a question, not a declaration. "I've been thinking about us. Can I share something?" Keep your voice low. Don't make her manage your

emotions on top of her own.

If she tends to pull back and needs space: Have this conversation side-by-side, not face-to-face. On a walk, in the car. Give her a way to exit without it ending the conversation. Don't read her silence as rejection.

If she's the one who's been reaching out while you've pulled back: Name what's actually been going on for you. Let her know your distance is about you, not her. That one correction can shift months of accumulated hurt.

If It Goes Sideways

Sometimes you do everything right and it still falls apart. That's not failure. That's a hard conversation being hard.

Give it 24 to 48 hours. Then come back briefly: "That didn't go the way I wanted. I want to try again." Don't rehash. Just reopen the door.

If she said something that hurt you, name it the next day, calmly. If you said something that hurt her, apologize specifically. Not "I'm sorry you felt that way." Say what you actually said wrong, and what you meant instead.

If the conversation revealed something bigger than the original topic, say so: "I think we might need some help with this. Can we consider talking to someone together?"

Success Check

You said something true without framing it as a complaint or a demand. The conversation happened, even imperfectly. That's the measure.