

# **Intimacy & Dementia: How Close Can We Get?**



## **BrainXchange Webinar Series – Part 1**

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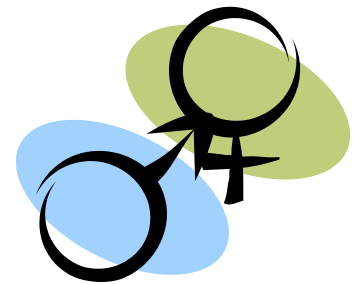
# OBJECTIVES

- To consider myths and realities related to sexuality and aging
- To identify our own barriers, values and beliefs
- To increase our comfort level when managing this sensitive issue



# MYTHS & REALITIES

- Sex is only for the young
- It's not physiologically possible
  
- Institutionalization = the end of sexual freedom



# MY BIASES

- Each of us has our own values and beliefs that will influence reactions to situations
- Every one of us is entitled to our opinion
- At some point, discussions of intimacy will likely make most of us uncomfortable
- It is important to talk about it!

## What does intimacy mean to you?



# THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Sexuality includes the need for closeness, warmth and tenderness
- “If physical intimacy has been an important part of self-image and coping, it remains so”

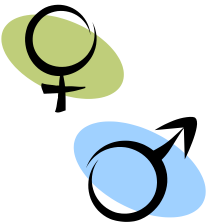
*Dmytro Rewilak, Ph.D., C.Psych.*

# SEXUAL HEALTH

• **“Sexual health is the integration of the somatic, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being, in ways that are positively enriching and that enhance personality, communication and love.”**

**WHO Technical Report Series 572; Geneva, 1975**





“Sexuality is an important aspect of seniors’ lives”

## WHAT IS SEXUALITY?



“Sexuality is more than physical act – encompasses all of who we are”





“The things that stop you having sex with age are exactly the same as those that stop you riding a bicycle... (bad health, thinking it looks silly, or no bicycle).”

*Dr. Alex Comfort*  
*The Joy of Sex - 1972*

# SAYING vs DOING

- What we *could* be doing...
- But are we doing it?

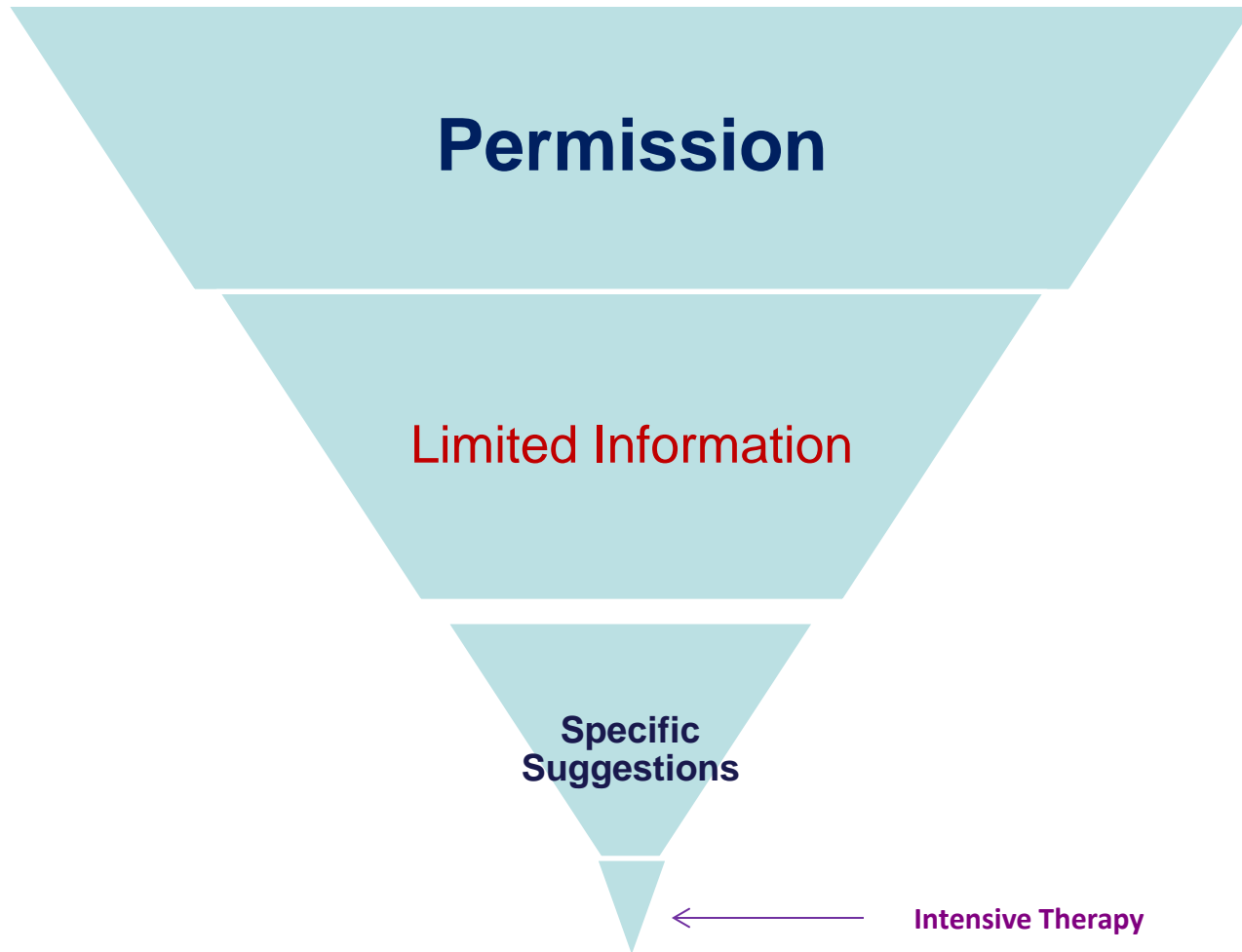


# APPROACH TO INTERVENTION

- **PLISSIT Model:**
  - **P**ermission
  - **L**imited **I**nformation
  - **S**pecific **S**uggestions
  - **I**ntensive **T**herapy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBleG8SU0NI&t=25s>

# P. L. I. S. S. I. T. MODEL



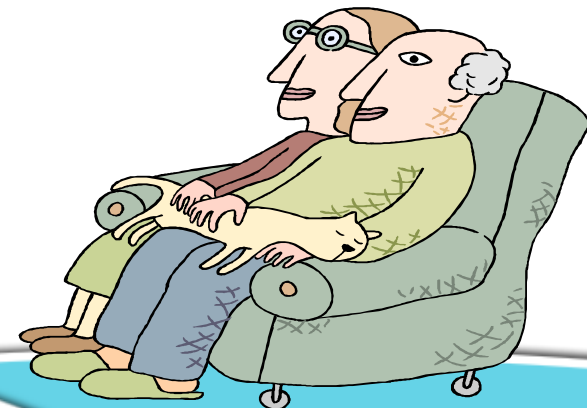
# HOW TO GET STARTED...

**There may be different ways to open the conversation:**

- **What changes in physical intimacy have you experienced, as you have grown older?**
- **What goals do you have for your intimate relationship? (if he/she is still in a relationship)**

# UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES

- LTC = Environmental issues
  - What about gender issues?
  - What about cognitive issues?
- WHAT ELSE?
  - On an individual basis – physical, mental psychological & social barriers

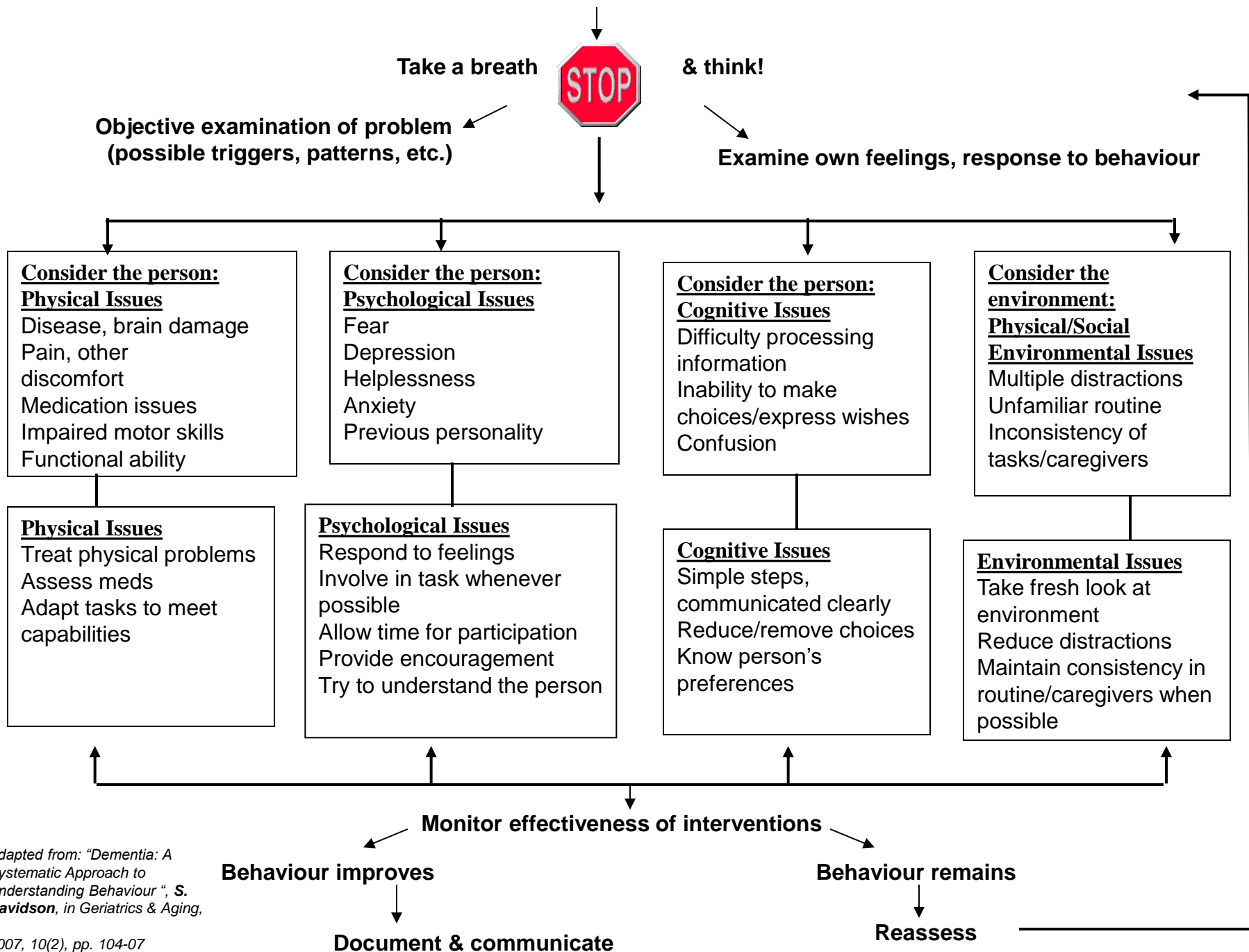


# STRATEGIES FOR OURSELVES

- **Examine our own issues**
- **Involve the family (whenever possible) but as a partner in the discussion, not for 'approval'**
- **Examine the behaviour**



# Responsive Behaviour



Adapted from: "Dementia: A Systematic Approach to Understanding Behaviour", S. Davidson, in *Geriatrics & Aging*,



# SEXUALLY 'INAPPROPRIATE' BEHAVIOUR

- Physical
  - Is there a source of physical discomfort?
- Psychological
  - Does this reflect the person's previous personality?
- Cognitive
  - Is there a loss of inhibition?
- Environmental
  - Are we inadvertently reinforcing this behaviour?

# SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

## Challenges

1. Physical – discomfort
2. Psychological - previous personality
3. Cognitive – loss of inhibitions
4. Environmental - inconsistency of caregiver approach

## Strategies

1. Treat physical problems
2. Try to understand the person
3. Simple steps, communicated clearly. Non-judgmental, non-punitive
4. Maintain consistency in routine/caregivers when possible

# IS THERE A RISK?

- What is the degree of risk?
- Can we balance the risk against the benefit of alternatives?
- Have we considered the influence of values and beliefs of everyone involved?

# FOR THE ORGANIZATION

- **Is there a policy?**
- **How are staff educated/supported?**
- **What else do we need?**



# REMEMBER...

**Staff may benefit from an opportunity to share their own feelings, but do they feel it is a safe environment to do so?**

**We need to ask ourselves:**

“Who is this a problem for?”

“Where is this behaviour coming from?”

“Are clients’ needs limited by someone else’s beliefs or values?”

# DISCUSSION

- **Questions?**
- **Comments?**



# FOR NEXT TIME

- **Strategies & examples**
- **Questions**
- **Discussion**

