INTIMACY MAP FOR CLIENTS

(For couples to complete together or individually, then discuss in their next session)

1. What Does "Intimacy" Mean to Us Now?

Use this space to describe what intimacy feels like in your relationship at this stage of life. It may include emotional closeness, comfort, laughter, shared time, touch, or simply being understood - *Write freely or use short phrases:*

.....

.....

.....

2. Exploring Different Forms of Intimacy

Tick ✓ what feels present in your relationship now, ☆ what you'd like to nurture more, and give examples.

Type of Intimacy	Examples / Prompts	✓	Our Notes or Examples
Emotional	Sharing feelings, comfort, empathy		
Physical (non-sexual)	Hugs, hand-holding, cuddling		
Sexual	Desire, touch, playfulness, pleasure		
Intellectual	Conversations, curiosity, shared ideas		
Recreational	Fun, hobbies, laughter, adventure		
Spiritual / Meaningful	Shared beliefs, purpose, gratitude		
Practical / Teamwork	Acts of care, reliability, support		

3. Comfort & Connection Zones

Draw or write in the boxes below. Be honest — these may change from week to week.

💚 Always Comfortable	💛 Sometimes Comfortable	❤️ Not Comfortable Right Now

4. The Small Things That Keep Us Close

List the gestures, habits, or words that help you feel connected.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. Creating Our New Intimacy Map

Imagine a map of your relationship. What "places" do you want to visit more often — emotional safety, laughter, affection, curiosity, teamwork?

Use this space to draw symbols, words, or connections.

Our map of connection:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Reflection Prompts for Next Session

What surprised me about my partner's answers? /
Which types of intimacy do we want to strengthen? /
How can we show affection or care differently now? /
What will we try between now and our next session?

THERAPIST FACILITATION GUIDE FOR THE INTIMACY MAP

Purpose

To help couples reconnect and redefine intimacy during transitional periods (e.g., perimenopause, menopause, illness, or post-crisis).
The goal is to broaden their understanding of closeness beyond sexual activity and foster shared empathy and curiosity.

When to Use

When one or both partners report loss of connection, affection, or sexual changes

When physical symptoms or confidence issues affect intimacy

When arguments or avoidance stem from misinterpreted distance ("You don't want me anymore")

As homework or in-session activity once emotional safety is established

Session Introduction (Therapist Script Example)

"Many couples notice that intimacy starts to feel different over time — especially during life transitions like menopause.
This isn't a sign of failure, but an invitation to rediscover what closeness means now.
This Intimacy Map helps you both explore the different ways you already connect, what feels comfortable, and what you might like to rebuild together."

Facilitation Steps

Step 1 – Frame the Concept

Clarify that intimacy includes emotional, physical, intellectual, and everyday closeness.

Normalise how hormones, sleep, or self-image changes can affect desire or touch tolerance.

Emphasise: *This is not a test — it's a conversation tool.*

Step 2 – Explore Individually

Invite partners to complete the worksheet separately for 10–15 minutes.

Encourage honesty without trying to please or guess each other's answers.

Step 3 – Share & Reflect

Guide them to share findings gently:

"What felt similar or different?"

"Were there any surprises or things you hadn't said aloud?"

"How can you support each other's comfort zones?"

Step 4 – Map Together

Use the "Creating Our New Intimacy Map" section to brainstorm shared rituals or gestures that could re-ignite connection (e.g., weekly walk, bedtime chat, shared playlist, mindful touch).

Step 5 – Integration

Assign one small, low-pressure experiment:

"Between now and next session, try one gesture from your 'Comfort Zone' list — no expectations, just notice what happens."

Therapist Tips

Language: Avoid clinical terms; use words like *warmth*, *closeness*, *togetherness*.

Tone: Keep sessions exploratory, not goal-driven.

Safety: If there is trauma, pain, or medical issues impacting sexual intimacy, refer or integrate somatic/body-based therapy cautiously.

Diversity: Acknowledge that intimacy looks different for LGBTQ+ couples, neurodiverse partnerships, or couples in non-monogamous structures.

Follow-Up Reflection (Next Session)

Invite discussion:

What changed when you paid more attention to small moments of connection?

Did any "off-limits" areas start to feel safer?

What patterns do you both want to protect as new habits?

Encourage couples to **redraw the map** in future sessions — making it a living document that evolves with them.

COMMUNICATION RESET TASK

A practical exercise for rebuilding understanding and empathy

Why This Task Matters

When life changes — emotionally, hormonally, or relationally — couples often slip into patterns of *reacting instead of responding*. This task helps you both pause, re-learn how to *listen without defence*, and *speak with clarity and care*. The aim is not to agree on everything — it's to *understand each other again.*

Preparation – Setting the Scene

Before you begin:
Choose a calm time (not in the middle of conflict).
Sit facing each other with no distractions (phones away, TV off).
Agree to take turns speaking and listening.
Use gentle tone and body language.
Remember: *this is about connection, not correction.*
You might start by saying:
"Let's do our communication reset — just 10 minutes to listen and understand each other better."

Step One – Sharing & Listening

Each partner takes turns answering these prompts.
The other partner *only listens* — no interrupting, fixing, or defending.
When one finishes, swap roles.

Speaker Prompt	Listener's Role
"Right now, what I need you to understand is…"	Maintain eye contact, nod, and listen fully.
"Lately I've been feeling…"	Reflect back: "So you've been feeling…"
"I think I might need…"	Summarise what you've heard without adding opinion.
"Something that's been hard for me is…"	Offer empathy: "That sounds really difficult."
"One thing that would help me feel more connected is…"	Thank your partner for sharing.

You can jot down what stands out to you here:

.....

.....

Step Two – Reflecting Back Together

After both partners have spoken:
Discuss:
What did I learn about my partner that I didn't know or had forgotten?
What surprised me?
What small thing can I do differently this week to support better connection?
Our shared notes:

.....

.....

Step Three – Shared Language Reset

Choose or create new phrases that feel safe, kind, and clear when tensions rise.

Instead of saying…	Try saying…
"You never listen."	"Can I share something, and could you just listen for a minute?"
"You don't care."	"I feel unseen right now — can we talk about it later when we're calm?"
"You're always angry."	"You seem upset — can you tell me what's going on underneath that?"
"You're being ridiculous."	"I want to understand your point of view, even if I don't agree."
"Forget it."	"I need a pause, but I do want to come back to this."

Step Four – Connection Ritual

End the conversation with something simple that brings warmth back into the room:

- A hug, hand-hold, or smile.
- Saying "Thank you for listening."
- A shared cup of tea, short walk, or a few quiet breaths together.

The goal is to associate honest conversation with *safety and reconnection*, not fear or fatigue.

Reflection for the Next Session

Bring this worksheet back to therapy and reflect on:
What felt easier than expected?
What made listening harder?
Did we notice any patterns (e.g. defensiveness, assumption, tone)?
How might we make communication resets part of our routine?

Menopause Psychoeducation Sheet

ReKINDLE Relationship Counselling

1. What Is Menopause?

Menopause is a **natural life stage**, not an illness. It marks the time when menstruation stops, typically between ages 45–55, though symptoms may begin earlier in *perimenopause* — the transitional phase leading up to menopause.

Average UK age: 51 **Perimenopause:** can last 4–8 years

Postmenopause: the years after the final period (12 months without menstruation)

Hormonal changes — especially fluctuating **oestrogen**, **progesterone**, and **testosterone** — influence mood, energy, sleep, libido, and cognition. These shifts can impact **both partners**, as they often affect emotional regulation, desire, and communication.

Area	Possible Changes
Physical	Hot flushes, night sweats, disrupted sleep, fatigue, joint pain, headaches, vaginal dryness, weight changes
Emotional	Mood swings, irritability, anxiety, low confidence, tearfulness, frustration, loss of identity
Cognitive	"Brain fog," forgetfulness, slower recall, difficulty concentrating
Sexual / Relational	Reduced libido, discomfort during sex, body image concerns, misinterpretation of distance or rejection

Note: *Not everyone experiences all of these, and the intensity varies widely.*

3. What Might Be Happening Psychologically

Hormonal changes interact with social and emotional shifts:

- **Identity transitions:** moving from fertility and child-rearing years into a new phase of self-definition. Grieving fertility or youth
- **Existential reflection:** re-evaluating life choices, purpose, and relationships.
- **Self-image changes:** altered body confidence or fear of ageing.
- **Emotional sensitivity:** mood and sleep disturbances can heighten reactivity and communication difficulties. Re-evaluating what intimacy, freedom, and satisfaction mean

It's normal for this time to bring both loss and growth — a rebalancing of identity, priorities, and needs.

4. How Menopause Can Affect Relationships

When one partner's internal world changes, the relationship must adapt too.

Possible relational impacts:

- Misreading hormonal mood changes as rejection or anger
- Reduced sexual frequency or different timing of desire
- Disconnection through shame or misunderstanding
- One partner feeling excluded or "unwanted"
- Avoidance of touch due to physical discomfort
- Shifts in independence, energy, or emotional needs

These changes are not signs of incompatibility — they are invitations to re-negotiate connection and care.

5. Helpful Communication Reminders

Healthy dialogue can transform confusion into empathy.

Try saying:

- "I'm not sure what's happening for me right now — can we just sit with it together?"
- "I notice I'm more irritable lately; it's not about you."
- "What do you need from me when I'm struggling?"
- "How can I support you when you're tired or low?"
- "Let's check in — what's helping us stay close these days?"

Avoid: blaming language ("You've changed," "You're always moody")

ReKINDLE Relationship Counselling

Shared Language for Symptoms

(How to talk about what's happening without blame or misunderstanding)

If you might usually say…	Try saying instead…	Why this helps
"You're so moody lately."	"I can see you're struggling — how can I support you right now?"	Replaces criticism with care and curiosity.
"You never want sex anymore."	"I miss our closeness — can we talk about what feels comfortable for you just now?"	Focuses on connection, not pressure.
"You've changed."	"I notice things feel different between us. How is this time affecting you?"	Invites shared reflection instead of accusation.
"You're overreacting."	"This seems really hard for you — would you like me to listen or help problem-solve?"	Validates emotional shifts and gives choice.
"You're always tired."	"It sounds like your energy's really low — what would help you rest?"	Acknowledges fatigue without judgment.
"You don't find me attractive anymore."	"I'm feeling a bit disconnected — can we find some new ways to feel close?"	Shifts from fear to solution-seeking.
"You're so forgetful!"	"We're both juggling a lot — how can we make things easier to remember together?"	Turns criticism into teamwork.
"You're never in the mood."	"What helps you relax or feel more comfortable when you're close to me?"	Normalises fluctuating desire and curiosity.
"Stop being dramatic."	"I can see this symptom is really impacting you — let's take a breather together."	Offers empathy and regulation instead of dismissal.
"It's just hormones."	"Hormones are playing a part, but your feelings are still real — I want to understand them."	Respects emotional reality while naming biology.
"You used to be fun."	"I miss how we used to laugh — what could we do that feels good for both of us now?"	Looks forward instead of criticising the past.
"You're shutting me out."	"I'd love to stay close even when things feel heavy — what helps you feel safe to talk?"	Prioritises connection and safety.
"It's like living with a stranger."	"We're both changing — maybe this is a chance to get to know each other again."	Reframes change as opportunity, not loss.
"You're not yourself."	"I know this phase is intense — what parts of you feel most like *you* right now?"	Encourages self-connection and empathy.
"You just need to calm down."	"Let's pause together — would it help to take a walk or breathe for a moment?"	Models co-regulation instead of control.

Reflection Prompts (for couples or individuals)

What new understanding do I have about this stage of life?

What could I try differently this week to show care or curiosity?

What assumptions have I been making about my partner's behaviour?

How might we support each other emotionally and practically?

Menopause & Our Relationship: A Shared Understanding
A reflective handout for couples navigating change together

1. Understanding What's Happening
The menopause and perimenopause can bring physical, emotional, and relational changes. It's a *natural* transition — not an illness — but the effects can feel unpredictable for both partners.
Common physical and emotional symptoms may include:
Hot flushes or night sweats
Sleep disturbance or fatigue
Changes in libido
Mood swings or irritability
Low confidence or body image worries
Forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating
Feelings of loss, grief, or anxiety
Physical discomfort during intimacy
Reflection:

Which of these changes have we noticed — in ourselves, or between us?

.....

.....

.....

2. Normalising Relationship Changes
When one partner experiences hormonal and emotional changes, both people feel the effects. It's easy for miscommunication, hurt, or withdrawal to creep in — especially when neither person fully understands what's happening.
It's common for couples to experience:
Misinterpreting mood shifts as rejection
Changes in closeness or affection
Increased arguments or irritability
Shifts in identity or priorities
Different needs for space or reassurance
Remember:
These changes are *nobody's fault*. They are part of a shared adjustment to a new life stage — one that can deepen understanding and compassion if explored openly.
Reflection:

What patterns or misunderstandings have we noticed recently?

.....

.....

.....

3. Communication Tips for Connection
During menopause, communication often needs to become more intentional and gentle.
Try these:
Use "I feel…" rather than "You always…"
Ask before giving advice or solutions
Talk about what support looks like today — it may change tomorrow
Create space for both voices — both experiences matter
Keep a sense of humour and kindness where possible
Example prompts for discussion:
"What do you wish I understood better right now?"
"How can we make space for patience when things feel tense?"
"What helps you feel close to me when I'm struggling?"

Our shared notes or new phrases to try:

.....

.....

.....

4. Shared Responsibility & Support
Menopause is *not just a women's issue* — it's a relationship phase that invites shared understanding.
Ways to support each other:
Learn together — read, watch, or attend appointments as a team
Adjust routines for better rest, nutrition, or exercise
Express appreciation often — not just empathy for symptoms
Revisit intimacy — explore closeness without pressure or goal
Use humour and warmth to defuse moments of frustration
Reflection for each partner:
One thing I need from you right now: .....
One thing I can offer to support you: .....
5. Looking Ahead Together
Menopause can mark the *beginning* of a new phase — a chance to redefine connection, intimacy, and purpose together.
It can also open conversations about identity, self-care, and shared growth.
Shared vision prompt:

"What kind of relationship do we want to build as we move through this next chapter?"

.....

.....

.....