Here is the transcript for:

Sexual Empowerment 14 Day Journey with AVAIYA Teacher, Sofia Ashley

Brielle Starr [00:00:00]:
Hello, Avaya family. I'm Brielle Starr, online education coordinator for Avaiya. Thank you so much for joining us. Our fellow teacher, Sophia Ashley, is with us today to talk about how if you want to change your sex life, you should become BFFs with your vagina. Welcome to Avaiya, Sophia.

Sofia Ashley [00:00:17]:
Thanks so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

Brielle Starr [00:00:20]:
I'm so excited to have you here today. I love the title of this conversation. I can't wait to get more into it. But just right off the bat, why do you think that talking about sex and vaginas is so important?

Sofia Ashley [00:00:33]:
Because the world doesn't want us to. There's so much taboo and shame around this topic that is so, so deeply rooted in the systems that harm. And because of that, it shuts us down from this hugely important part of ourself. And a really big part of the beginning of my journey was reading a book by Naomi Wolf called vagina, a new biography, which I highly recommend. And it really was about how and in my tantra training, we learned that, like, your vagina is your second heart. It's such, defining part of you, in good and bad ways. Right? We decide who people are based on the genital anatomy that they are born with, which has, a positive experience for some people and a negative experience for others. But it's the seat of so much power.

Sofia Ashley [00:01:27]:
It's the seat of so much possibility, and it really is emblematic of our connection to our right to joy and rest and pleasure in all its forms, not just sexual.

Brielle Starr [00:01:40]:
Beautifully said. I love your passion for this, and I can tell we're gonna have such a great conversation today. So then kind of in regards to our relationship with our own vagina, how does that relationship affect our sexuality?



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Sofia Ashley [00:01:55]:

So when I started my own journey, and, I mean, it's shifted because I've shifted as a human being, I was in my twenties. I was having okay sex, but was, like, on the long lost holy grail search for the amazing souls, you know, soul amplifying orgasm. And I also was in the doctor's office constantly for vaginal pain during intercourse, even though I didn't have a yeast infection, didn't have PV. You know, I there was no symptoms or reason that I should be experiencing pain. So I was at this place where I literally felt like I was at war with my vagina. I was resentful of her. I would get mad at her when we were having sex. I was like, why isn't this working? Why aren't you cooperating? Why doesn't this feel good? And we were not in good place.

Sofia Ashley [00:02:44]:
Right? So it wasn't until the light bulb went off for me that I realized that, like, maybe the problem was the relationship that I had with my vagina, and maybe the problem was that I was not listening to her, not honoring what she needed, not honoring her nose, and forcing her to do things that she didn't wanna do, and maybe that was the problem. Right? Like, maybe I was the problem, or the relationship I had with my body was the problem. And that's a situation that many, many, many vagina owners find themselves in largely because it's very challenging to have a relationship with your vagina. Like, if you think about penis owners, their penis is, like, on the outside of their body. When they have an erection and they're aroused, it is obvious. They can touch it. They can play with it. It's this very tactile thing.

Sofia Ashley [00:03:36]:
And I always used to joke, like, you need an army of mirrors and lights and contortionist gymnastic abilities to actually look at and connect with your own vagina. And you're still only looking at your vulva, the outside part. Like, there's so much of your clitoris and your internal anatomy that you can just not really connect with on that way. So many, many women or vagina owners have, at best, kind of a neutral relationship, like an agnostic relationship with their vagina, and many, many others because of the very likely trauma almost every single vagina owner has been through, whether it's just being catcalled or whether it's full on sexualized assault, it can be a

really negative relationship. And that totally hampers our ability to hear what our vagina needs, which is the same as what we need. Because I in short, good sex is about knowing what your body wants and being able to communicate that to another person. And if you are disconnected from the part of your body that needs to share its desires, you are not gonna be having the level of sex that you want.

Brielle Starr [00:04:50]:
Mhmm. Yeah. Thank you so much for explaining a little bit of your backstory with that as well because I think that shows just how many women, even if they're in a better place now, have experienced a lot of issues around sexuality and sex, in the relationship, and it's so easy to disconnect from your vagina and not really wanna think of it almost as even a part of yourself. And so I was wondering, how does that relationship with the vagina change after having kids?

Sofia Ashley [00:05:16]:
Yeah. So, I mean, after we have babies, you know, if you already had a not really existing relationship, it can change pretty dramatically for good or bad. I've actually heard of some people, feeling more sexual responsiveness and having an easier time or godmothersipping after baby, which is amazing. But we kinda go through 4 different levels of change. And this is after baby, but, also, this would be after any major life change. So through perimenopause, after menopause, maybe you had an accident that harmed your body, after an assault. There's kind of 4 realms in which change can happen, and they all sort of dance together, and they help us to sort of map out what's shifted for us so that we can kinda create a new roadmap to our pleasure. So those four pieces are your physical body, which includes both, like, your muscles and your pelvic floor and, like, those kinds of things, and also, like, the brain chemistry that's happening or your hormone balance.

Sofia Ashley [00:06:23]:
There's the emotional side, there's the spiritual side, and there's the cultural side. And that's kinda how I like to break this all down. And so really briefly, I mean, there are so many examples in each category, and one step

people can do is to just try to think about what has changed for me in my sex life in each of these categories post baby. So physically, you just birthed a baby. You had a baby in your body for 9 months putting pressure on your pelvic floor. Maybe you had a c section, maybe you tore, maybe you had an episiotomy. Many, many things happened in that region of your body that could make it more sensitive, differently sensitive, that could mean there's scar tissue or pain or, difference numbness or irritation that needs to get worked through that's new. And then on a hormonal level, you've got especially if you're breastfeeding, you have a whole range of different hormones happening in your body, which change, the way you orgasm and your likelihood to kind of desire and interact with sex.

Sofia Ashley [00:07:27]:
And, in particular, what happens is, whoever's breastfeeding is getting so much oxytocin load from breastfeeding that their their intimacy cup almost feels full. Right? Like, you spend all day it's not sexual, but you spend all day huddling with somebody and, getting all this oxytocin and dopamine from breastfeeding. And so you don't need those hormones. You're not your body is not seeking them, and they're the exact same sort of hormones you get from intimacy and connection with your partner. So those are some of the things that can be happening physically. Right? Emotionally, it runs the gamut, and obviously connects a little bit with that hormonal piece. So everything from you might be experiencing postpartum depression and rage, big, big feelings that you're working through, gender scripts might change in your relationship, and this overlaps a little bit with the cultural. So when I mean when I say gender scripts, I mean, like, expectations of what a man or a woman or each kind of partner does in a relationship.

Sofia Ashley [00:08:32]:
And sometimes we have a certain pattern or relationship, and then we have a baby. And it's almost like these, sort of underground societal expectations kick in, and there's shifts in how we see each other and how we're interacting, which can sometimes lead to resentment or frustration or other emotional blocks in our relationship. Obviously, we've got body changes and how we're feeling about those body changes. Your libido can be

affected. So just like less desire potentially or more desire or feeling pressure from your partner, which is gonna affect your desire. So all of those sort of like emotional relational dynamics can play a huge role in whether we wanna have sex, whether we can get into our body during sex and out of our busy anxious brain, and whether we can have good sex. Spiritual has a lot more to do about sort of religious background and the scripts that you might have learned from that. And so maybe there's a different script for married or not married people.

Sofia Ashley [00:09:44]:
You know, we know a lot of religious, messaging around sexuality is, like, fairly negative. Not all of it. I actually see a fair amount of, like, heavily Christian spaces where there's, like, actually a lot of, like, Christian sex after kids books, which is super cool to see. But it's important to remember that messaging that you got specifically from your spiritual background can again impact. If you're feeling a lot of shame and embarrassment about being a sexual creature and a mother, that's gonna hamper your ability to feel sexual in a way that it didn't when you weren't a mother. Right? Mhmm. And then culturally, I think more of those, like, sex expectations. So people are worried about the fact that maybe they're not having sex enough.



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Sofia Ashley [00:10:32]:
Right? Like everyone else is having sex every day or twice a day, and we're having sex once a month. That's where those gender scripts play in. That's where the sexual models we have in our brain, like, we just think sex is spontaneous and natural, and that everyone's born an amazing lover, and there's no requirement to, like, learn any skills. So a lot of the taboos and shame we have around sex and the lack of confidence that we have within sex as a result of that also plays a factor. So, I mean, that's that can sound a little bit overwhelming, but it's all connected. And the main piece is that everyone's gonna be affected differently in each one of those realms. Right? So some people may not have a lot of physical changes, and that might not be a part of their post baby dynamic, but maybe their relationship has changed drastically and they're caregiving a lot, and they don't wanna share their time. They don't wanna caregive someone else.

Sofia Ashley [00:11:34]:
Or, there's this new being. There's this third person that has entered your relationship, and, like, sharing can be hard. So it's mostly important to know which dynamics have most affected you because that gives you the starting point for your road map back to or towards better sex.

Brielle Starr [00:11:57]:
Mhmm. Yeah. Thank you so much for describing all the different factors and elements that can play a role in your relationship and sex after children. And I think it's amazing that you are doing the work you do because there clearly are a lot of issues that might come up that a lot of women probably do want resolved, but maybe couldn't find difficulty finding the right people to help them. And so then what could we do to

Sofia Ashley [00:12:22]:
strengthen our relationship with our vagina? So it's the everyone's least favorite answer, which is masturbating. Although I'd say there's a couple lightweights we can do this. Right? So, one of my favorites is actually just to even go through the exercise of thinking about your vagina as a person you have been in a relationship with and to, like, map out the history of that relationship. When have you been really close? Have you ever been really close? When did you first get to meet each other? What are some of the highs and lows of the things you've experienced together? Where are you now in that relationship? And that that can be a pretty tender exercise depending on what you live together, so I always kind of encourage people to take it slow, but it's a totally different lens to kinda go, okay. I'm gonna, like, personify my vagina. Maybe I'm even gonna name her as a bit of, a way to get creative and out of my own body, and just to think about that relationship and maybe to mourn some pieces of that relationship and then maybe to commit to trying to do better in that relationship, like owning where maybe you've caused harm or hurt to your own body. Right? So that's one step that doesn't involve, you know, getting naked or touching your own body. Tantra has a lot of wonderful tools within it, really around energy work.

Sofia Ashley [00:13:54]:
So one of the simplest things that people can do to just start connecting energetically with that part of their body, and doing a little bit of energetic healing even is to, sit in some kind of meditative position, maybe put your hand, like, over clothes, naked, whatever feels good, on your vulva to just connect with it. You can imagine a red ball of light, which is all about the fire element, which is the healing element for the sacral space, there. And you can even maybe just try to have a little dialogue with her, like, what do you need right now? Or, one of my other favorite techniques is to write a letter to your vagina. Right? Thanking her for all the wonderful things you've been through, apologizing if you need to apologize, or committing to her in some different way. So those are kinda some fun, playful, somatic, and, like, expressive art kind of techniques that you can use to just kind of take a more playful way of reconnecting with her. And then really, I mean, I remember when I heard this advice in my teens. Right? People would be like, you need to touch yourself and get to know your body, and I'd be like, yeah. Yeah.

Sofia Ashley [00:15:09]:
And we have such a taboo around young women masturbating or touching themselves. I mean, culturally, it's, like, so normal to make jokes about teenage boys and their bodies, but, like, teenager girls masturbating? Like, so reclaiming that in and of itself is quite radical. Right? It's quite against a lot of cultural taboos and quite profound because of it. And, yeah, it just means spending time together. It can mean things like, there's a wonderful website called OMG Yes, which is all about, different women who oh, sorry. Got a little text there. OMG Yes. It's all about different women showing different ways that they pleasure their body, different techniques that they use to orgasm, and it's so sex positive.

Sofia Ashley [00:16:05]:
It's so fantastic. There's, like, videos, and you learn all about it. But the the main thing is to, like, spend time with your body and figure out what she likes and how she gets turned on and what feels yummy to her.

Brielle Starr [00:16:18]:
Beautifully said. Thank you so much for, yeah, sharing some of those really fun techniques and also still bringing up that, yeah, it is good to explore yourself, and it's definitely not something that is very societally talked about at all or even shamed like you mentioned. So I think, yeah, it could be really empowering to take the time to actually do that for yourself. And so what do you think that most people get wrong about libido and desire?

Sofia Ashley [00:16:46]:
That's the the $1,000,000 question. Right? 2 what's the 2 of the biggest things or the biggest thing? And I learned this reading, come as you are by Emily Nagoski, is this we have this myth of spontaneous desire. So we have this myth that we're all walking around, turned on, just ready to have sex at any time. And that is true for some people, but actually for most of the population, it is not true. Most of us have what's called responsive desire, which means we need to have some kind of input. Maybe we see an image that turns us on. Maybe our partner wears a certain outfit that, just makes us, you know, revs our engines. Maybe our partner kisses our neck or, like, touches our back in a way that, like, our body responds to an input.

Sofia Ashley [00:17:45]:
And so so many of us are walking around, especially when we're struggling with libido post kids, going like, I don't want it. I don't want it. I don't want it because we're expecting to just, a, like, respond immediately or to just wake up and want it or go to bed and want it. And I I basically say, like, the biggest thing people need to know is you need to create a party that your libido wants to show up to. And that party is not you exhausted after a 4 hour bedtime battle at 11 PM after a long day of work. Like, there is nothing about that party that my libido wants to go to. Maybe yours says, that's cool. That is not a party my libido wants to go to.

Sofia Ashley [00:18:35]:
And so understanding what your specific libido likes and what your specific libido doesn't like allows you to, with intention, create the environment, the

context, the space in which your libido can go, yeah. I think I'm into this. Yeah. I think I feel safe. Yeah. I think this could be good.

Brielle Starr [00:18:55]:
Lovely. Yeah. Thank you for explaining that to us a little bit. And so then other than just libido, what are some other hurdles that people may have when it comes to rekindling their sex life?

Sofia Ashley [00:19:07]:
So the 2 biggest ones that I see in particular after baby would be time. So if you have kids that do not sleep well, your prime hours where you may have normally had sex are usually spent taking care of somebody else, or you're just trying to get what precious little sleep you can. And the other is kind of privacy. So I joke that it's almost like boy going back to high school where you can't go home and have sex in your bedroom because you don't want your parents to hear you. And so if if your kids are not sleeping or you're trying to have sex in a non evening dimension, people have a lot of worry about their kids hearing them or walking in on them. And that, like, privacy component is it's very real, for sure. Other ones would be actually contraception, which is deceptively important. So a lot of women, will I mean, breastfeeding is not birth control.

Sofia Ashley [00:20:14]:
And so you're if you're not planning on having baby after baby, or you're wanting a little bit of space, being worried that you're gonna get pregnant is a huge damper. And so if you're not using contraception that you feel good about, then or you're not yet if you're not using any, then that's like this worry, this brain gremlin, I call them, that can be playing in the back of your mind. And then I think probably the 4th biggest one would really be relationship dynamics. So if you're bickering a lot, if, you know, you're both tired and grumpy and at your rope, there's sort of that caregiving dimension, right, of, like, you're just giving, giving, giving a lot, and that could be just mom or it could be both parents. And so sex can be another act of giving, unless it's not, or it can be perceived as another act of giving. And sometimes people just don't feel like they have it in the tank to give

more. And so part of it's about changing mindset, and part of it's about making it a more, juicy experience even if sex is not at play and we're just gonna get sexy. As I I call it, make it sexy fun time.

Sofia Ashley [00:21:28]:
But, yeah, if there's resentment at play, frustration at play, or communication happening, obviously, those are gonna be hurdles. And, yeah, I mean, there's other dynamics, but I can leave it at that for now. Yeah. I think

Brielle Starr [00:21:41]:
that those are could be very prevalent in a lot of people's lives, and I totally see how that would make you kinda be in your head too much to even really want to experience something, sexual. So then on the

Sofia Ashley [00:21:52]:
other side of that,

Brielle Starr [00:21:53]:
what are the top three things people can do to get things going in the bedroom? Yeah.

Sofia Ashley [00:22:00]:
So I think the first piece is and it it's hard because, like, even this is a hard one for people is to try to start to create some dialogue around it. And that might mean starting with some self reflection. So like I talked about, reflecting on each of those 4 quadrants and reflecting on what's changed for you, and maybe your partner doing the same self reflection, and having some tools and frameworks for thinking about your sex life and having a conversation about your sex life. And the biggest piece there is taking off one of those cultural expectations that we're both supposed to be good at this, right, and to acknowledge even if your sex life was phenomenal before you had kids, the road map you used to use has changed, and your partner can't drive blind to get you to an orgasm or an amazing one. They need a new map, and you have to give them that map. Right? Because they have

certain things used to feel good, like, for a lot of folks, breast and nipple play may have been a fun positive part of their sexual experience post baby or pre baby, and then as soon as they start breastfeeding, their boobs are, like, a no go zone. And so if your partner doesn't know that that's off the table, how could they possibly know unless you try and then you realize that you don't like it and then you communicate it. Right? So taking the pressure off of any communication being like feedback or judgment on your partner's sexual ability, and instead being like, this is not about how good you are at sex or not, this is about me telling you what's happening in my body and my brain and what I need.

Sofia Ashley [00:23:43]:
Because actually, the mark of a good lover is someone who asks you what's going on in your body and your brain and then listens. Right? We're not all magical mind readers. So communication, just being honest about, like I mean, honestly, it was a huge turn on my partner and I. Like, I'm two and a half years postpartum with my second. I am not having sex frequently, people. Like, I do not have a lot of desire. I am using all of my own tools. And we had to have a conversation the other night to just be like, yeah.

Sofia Ashley [00:24:12]:
It's not frequent. And when it does happen, it's not that great for either of us. And I know you can feel that, and I know I can feel like that, and we haven't been talking about it. And just the act of talking about it, like getting brave because it was scary, even though I have a super supportive relationship, turned us both on, and we had great sex right after. Like, it was so cool. So communication is, like, number 1, and that self assessment piece. The second one is kind of this mixture of, like, rip off the Band Aid and just do it anyways, but in the right way. And so I talk about this idea of having naked, sexy fun time or sexploration dates.

Sofia Ashley [00:25:00]:
And so, again, it's this idea that you need this new road map. Right? So nobody comes to 5 be is born a 5 star chef. Like, you have to learn how to do it. And even a 5 star chef, the first time they cook a new cake, maybe with

ingredients they haven't used before, maybe they're doing some gluten free thing, like dairy free vegan thing that they've never done before, they likely don't expect the cake to be perfect on the first go. Right? Let's say they're making a wedding cake. Like, they don't make this cake for the first time the day before the wedding. They're gonna try the recipe first and give themselves lots of room to fail and learn and observe. And so we have to approach our sex dates.

Sofia Ashley [00:25:42]:
When we make the decision that things are not working, we wanna change them. We wanna set up some sex dates, but we wanna set them up as a place to fail and learn. So it's not about having mind blowing orgasms. It's not about having the best sex ever. It is about experimenting and even making, like, physical notes about what worked or didn't, and totally letting go of, any expectation to, like, perform in a certain way. Right? And so I have a whole playbook on how to do that. And it just helps you to like sometimes you just have to start, especially if you have if you're in the boat of, like, you haven't had sex in, like, 6 months or a year, you just have to start. But I think the other thing I wanna say, and I'm mindful of time is, like, you want to be creating positive feedback loops.

Sofia Ashley [00:26:35]:
So every time you have sex or you're intimate with your partner and you do things you don't wanna do and you kinda push yourself past your no, and it's not really that fun, your body goes, that wasn't great or that was shitty. I don't really wanna do that again. And so the next time you try your body, maybe not your brain, but your body's remembering last time, and it's going, wasn't that great last time? I'm not really interested in doing this again. Whereas if we focus on having a positive experience, which maybe it means we just get naked and massage each other for a little bit and we leave it at that because it ended as a positive experience, then my body's gonna go, ah, last time we got naked, it's all fun and safe, and I had a good time. And so I'm gonna be more willing and open and receptive to trying again. So communication is huge and having these, like, naked sexy fun time dates where we are exploring together, rebuilding the map together,

communicating a lot together, and just trying to create that positive feedback loop is what's gonna help us kick start back on the road. And, of course, there's lots more dimensions, especially if we've got lots of trauma to heal, especially if we've got, like, pretty entrenched relationship dynamics. There are other pieces that might need support, but those are 2 of the biggest things that, are gonna help people to get back on the path to where they wanna be.

Brielle Starr [00:27:59]:
Yeah. For sure. Those were amazing. I I think that those were both so important, especially even if you have aren't even rekindling. You're just trying to get to a place of having a good sex life and you don't even really know what that's like. I think those are such amazing suggestions, the communication, as well as I love that you used the term sexploration. That was lovely. I had not heard that.

Brielle Starr [00:28:21]:
And then are there any final insights you'd like to share before we wrap up, Sofia?

Sofia Ashley [00:28:26]:
Oh, I'm sure I had one while I was rehearsing. I think the biggest thing that I wanna say is, like, so many people that I talk to when I ask them what they have done to address this or deal with it, the most common answer I get is ignore it. Maybe they've Googled something, and maybe they've tried counseling, but most of them are just ignoring it. And so my sort of call to action to you, my encouragement to you is that this will not get better by you ignoring it. You pleasure, sorry, is medicine for your body. So orgasmic pleasure is medicine for your body. Connection with your partner is medicine for your body. It is the antidote to the stress and overwhelm that we have in our lives.

Sofia Ashley [00:29:22]:
And you have a right and, you deserve, you need this in your life. It's so easy to downplay how important it is because we have so many shame and taboo

around it. I acknowledge it feels like a massive mountain to tackle, and it is some of the most raw and deep, like, personal development you can do. And, also, it can be full of fun, full of self discovery, and this is also about lighting up your own power. Right? So when I learn how to communicate my needs in the bedroom, guess what? I learned how to do that at work and with my kids. And when I learned how to set boundaries about what I like and what I don't like and what what I do and what I don't wanna do, I learned how to do that in all the other parts of my life. So this is not just an investment in better orgasms or a stronger relationship. This is an investment in, like, your whole self, and, it's entirely worth it in my view.

Brielle Starr [00:30:30]:
So beautifully said. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and insights with us today. Thanks for having me. Thank you so much for being here. And I also want to thank our Avaya students for joining us today, and we'll see you again soon. Take care.



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