

WHOLE-HEARTED: HEALING SEXUALITY AFTER BETRAYAL OR ABUSE

Laney Knowlton, LMFT, CSAT, CCPS-C

NorthStar
Relational
Consultants

Knowlton
Counseling

Healthy Sexuality Is...

- Connection to yourself and your body
- The ability to share that connection within your relationship in ways that allow each person to connect to themselves and to each other when sharing is relationally safe
- An individual and relational process that looks different for each person and couple



Each person's
body belongs to
that person

(Emily Nagoski, 2020)

YOU ARE NORMAL

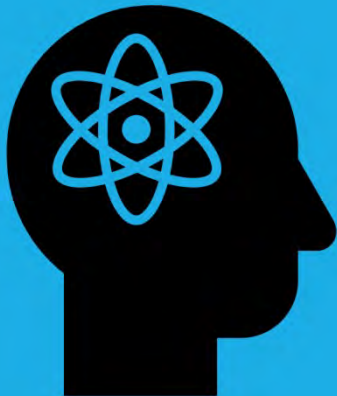
“Whatever you’re experiencing in your sexuality . . . is the result of your sexual response mechanism functioning appropriately . . . in an inappropriate world.” (Emily Nagoski, 2015, p. 9)



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DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUALITY

Arousal Template



- Your understanding of what sexuality is
- Your beliefs about what is important about sex
- The things that are sexually attractive or arousing to you
- “The experiences you carry with you that explain what you’re aroused by” (Ken Adams, Personal Communication, 2020)

Accelerator and Brakes

(Janssen & Bancroft, 2007)

Accelerator –
thoughts, feelings,
sensory information
that sends you
messages to “turn on”

Brake – thoughts,
feelings, sensory
information that sends
you messages to “turn
off”

What is Sexual Abuse?

Abuse is “a power dynamic in which a more powerful person (*child or adult*) forces themselves upon a less powerful person”

(Darkness to Light – d2l.org, 2021)

Sexual abuse is when that power dynamic includes sexual components

Sexual Abuse Includes (but is not limited to):

- Touching you or making you touch yourself or someone else without your consent (note – children do not have the ability to give consent to adults or individuals who are significantly older than they are)
- Making you watch sexual acts
- Making you listen to or read sexual comments (aimed at you or others)
- Exposing you to sexual material without your consent (note – exposing children to sexually explicit material is abuse)
- Breaching privacy boundaries with or without your knowledge (i.e., watching, photographing, or filming you without your permission, sharing sexual photos of you as a minor or without your permission)
- NOTE – not all child abuse comes from adults or even older children – children can abuse other children

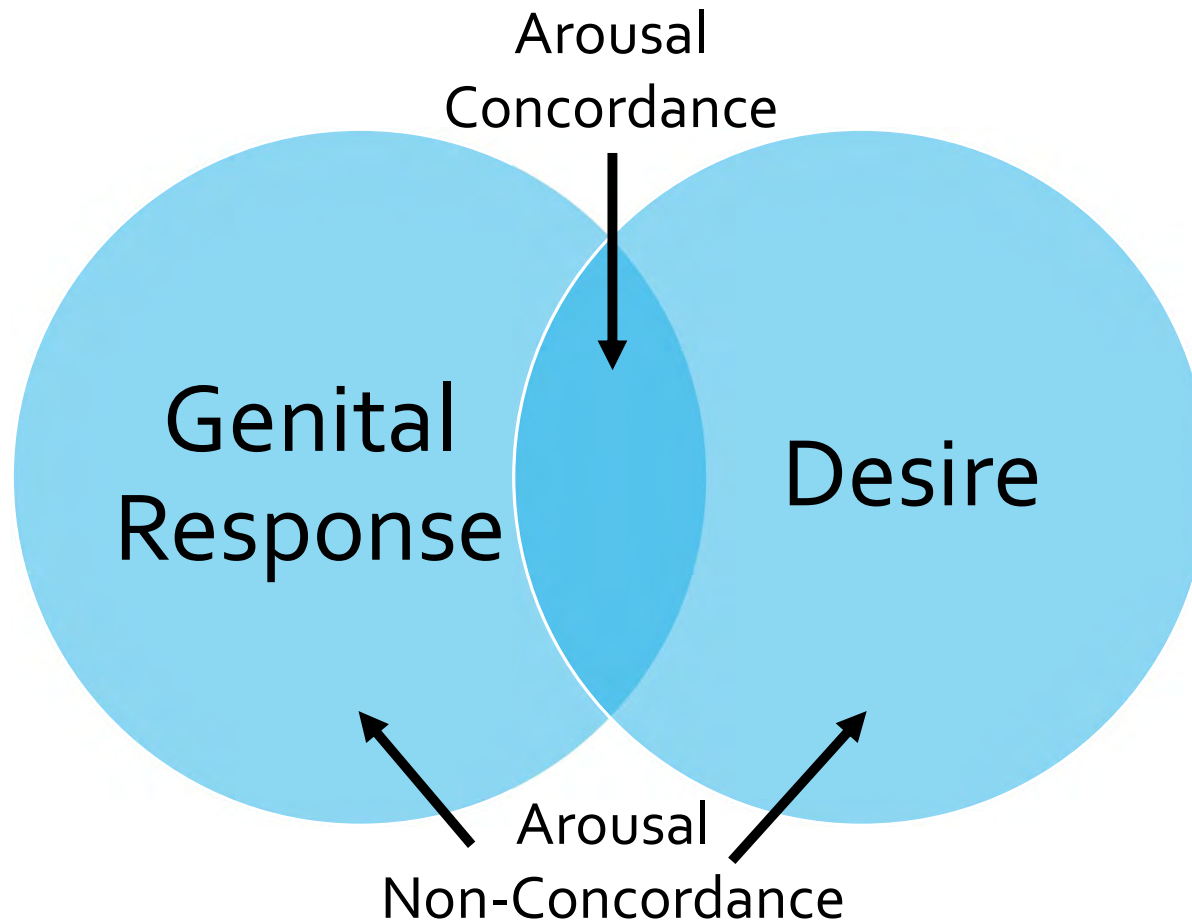
Sexual Abuse in Relationships Includes (but is not limited to):

- Manipulation to participate in sexual activities
- Using threats to force participation in sexual activity
- Not honoring or allowing boundaries, sexually or physically
- Groping or touching without permission
- Refusal to stop sexual interactions (rape)
- Forced sexual interactions (up to and including rape)
- Breaching boundaries with or without the other person's knowledge (i.e., filming sexual interactions without permission, sharing sexual photos with others without permission)

Effect of Abuse on Sexuality

- Connects shame to sexual responses – victims of sexual abuse often “carry” the shame of their abusers (Pia Mellody)
- Shame and guilt over our own physical and emotional responses to our abuse
- Early exposure to sex – our brain can’t make sense of the physical and emotional sensations
- Teaches us that emotional vulnerability is not safe
- Teaches us that the only way to “connect” or feel loved is sex – that we will never be valued or loved as ourselves
- Teaches us that sex is the only thing about us that others want and the only way to get attention – the only way we know how to maintain any type of connection with others
- Teaches us that sex is about control rather than connection (being controlled or controlling others)

Arousal Non-Concordance



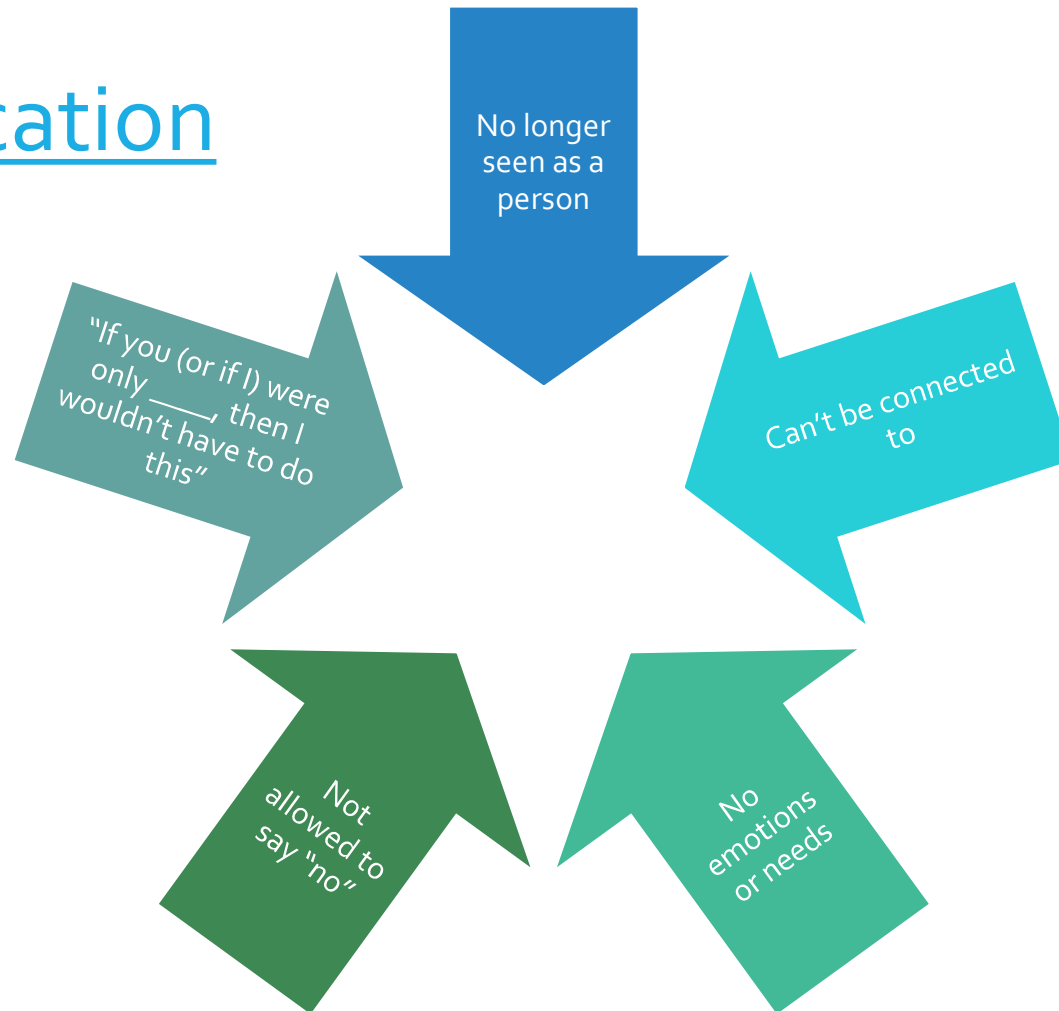
(Emily Nagoski, 2020)

Struggles with Shame around Sexual Needs



- Objectification of self and/or others stemming from family-of-origin and/or society
- Family-of-origin messages (you're not worthy of connection, your needs don't matter, the wife exists to meet the husband's needs, sex is evil and disgusting)
- Shame over physical or emotional responses to abuse

Objectification



What is Betrayal?

“Violation of a person's trust or confidence”

(Merriam-Webster, 2021)

What is Betrayal Trauma?

Betrayal Trauma is “a unique form of trauma that occurs within relationships and which is caused by your partner or significant other. You trusted in them. They broke that trust and created the trauma as a result.”

Relational Betrayal can include six areas:

- Emotionally – Your thoughts, emotions, and heart
- Spiritually – Your soul and spirit
- Socially – Your public image and relationships
- Physically – Your body and self-image
- Sexually – Your beauty and femininity/masculinity
- Financially – Your stability and well-being

(Doug Weiss, 2021, PartnerBetrayalTrauma.org)



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Effect of Betrayal on Sexuality

- Gaslighting makes betrayed partners question our own sexual reality (whether we know about the betrayal or not) – we are taught that our view of sexuality is wrong and what we need, like, or want is wrong
- We are ignored, mocked, or rejected when our sexual needs or desires are expressed – we are taught that we will never be loved or valued for ourselves and will never be good enough
- We are blamed for the betrayal - social pressure often state that betrayal is caused by partners not meeting the other person's needs

Foundational Steps to Healing Sexuality

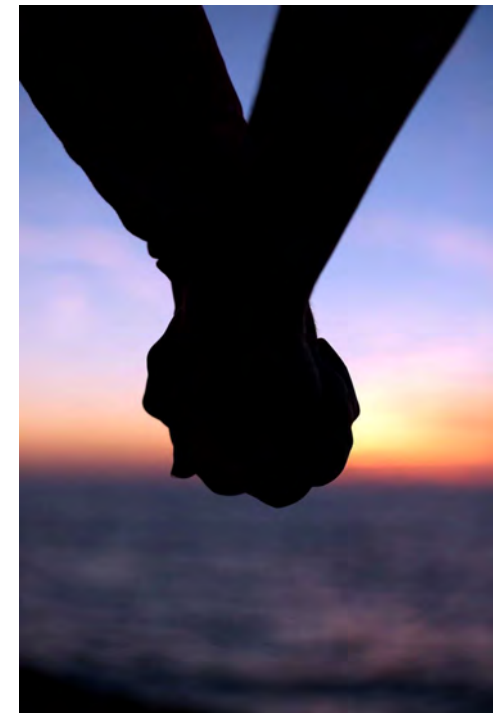
1. Emotional Safety



2. Trust



3. Connection



Sex is an Important Need

Sex is an important way to meet our needs – the need to be chosen, wanted, desired, and enough

Sex becomes problematic when it is...

- Misunderstood (i.e. incongruent behaviors are seen as meeting sexual needs)
- Overused (seen as the answer to everything)
- Misused (cost to self or others doesn't matter)



Steps to Healing Sexuality

01

Claiming
the Trauma

02

Healing the
Trauma

03

Redefining
Language

04

Self-
Image/Body
Issues

05

Self-
Exploration

Claiming (Acknowledging and Understanding) the Trauma

- Abuse in childhood, adolescence, and primary relationship (all three or any combination)
- Gaslighting
- Manipulation
- Objectification by other and self
- Sexual abuse and/or harassment
- Domino effect
- Punishment for boundaries



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Healing the Trauma

Work with a therapist...

- Trauma Treatment - EMDR, Somatic Experiencing, Brainspotting, Post-Induction Therapy, Psychodrama
- Parts Work (IFS)
- Sexual Trauma Impact Letter
- Sexual Trauma Timeline
- Sexual Trauma Egg



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Redefining Language

Identify

Identify triggers

Replace

Set boundaries around replacing easily avoidable words (sexual terms, explicit words, triggering language)

Redefine

Redefine words that allow connection to self (break down misperceptions of sexuality – i.e. sex, sexual, sensual, arousal, fantasy, desire, need, want, attraction, passion)

Self-Image/Body Issues

Confidence and Joy (Emily Nagoski, 2018)

- Confidence – Knowing what's true
- Joy – Loving what's true

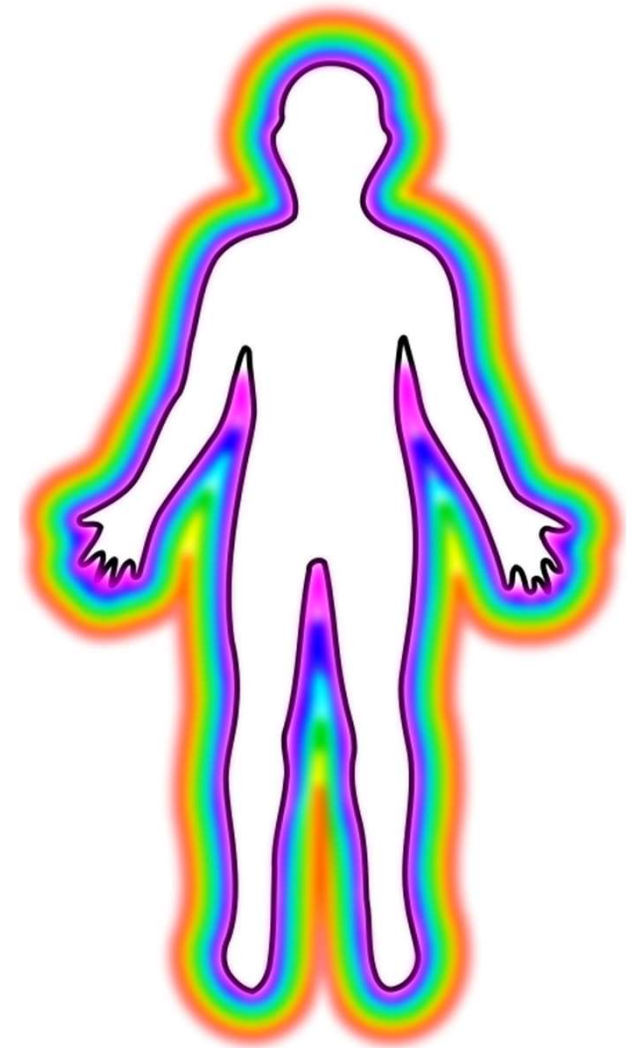
Accept yourself and your body as enough
Learn to love yourself – you are beautiful

Resources for Self-Image/Body Issues

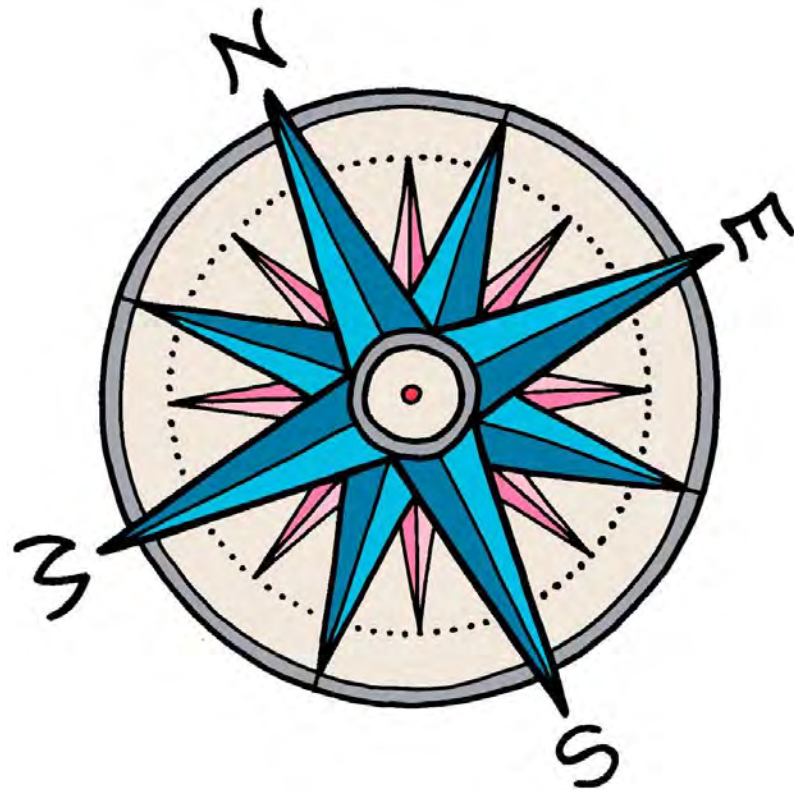
- [Self-Compassion](#) by Kristen Neff
- [I Thought It Was Just Me \(but it isn't\)](#) by Brene Brown
- [Body Respect: What Conventional Health Books Get Wrong, Leave Out, and Just Plain Fail to Understand About Weight](#) by Linda Bacon and Lucy Aphamor
- [Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance](#) by Rosie Molinary

Specifically related to sexuality

- [Come as You Are](#) by Emily Nagoski



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Self-Exploration

- Self-Exploration DOES NOT MEAN FORCED MASTURBATION
- Taking the steps to get to know your body
- Figure out what is safe for you – boundaries are essential
- Connect to yourself – what feels good to you emotionally and physically

Review of Emotional Safety

**YOU CAN ALWAYS SAY NO AT ANY POINT
OF THE PROCESS**

Your emotions
and needs are
valid

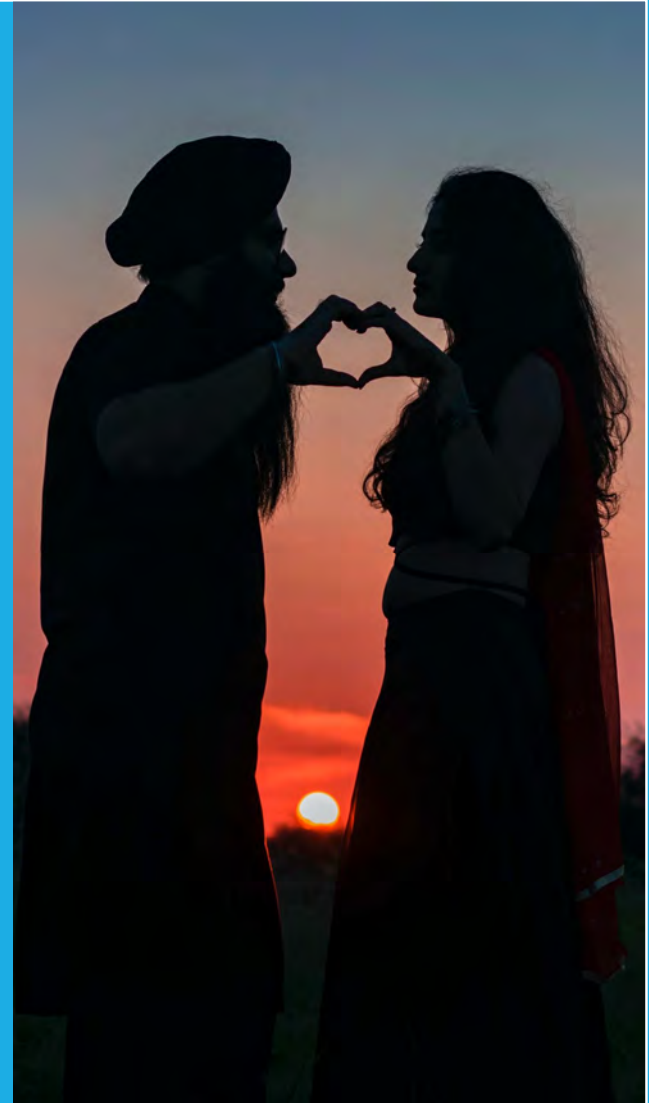
You have the
right to have
boundaries and
enforce them

Set up Plan B's to
ensure safety

It's About the Process

The primary goal is not to have sex, but to develop and deepen the process of connecting:

- Believe and enforce that you have control over your own body/ emotional safety and honor that right for the other person
- Develop and express empathy and understanding of each other's experiences
- Explore your own experience and needs in the context of the relationship dynamics
 - Communicate (verbalize) needs throughout the experience
 - Respond to the other person's requests in ways that honor you both and honor both your needs and their needs





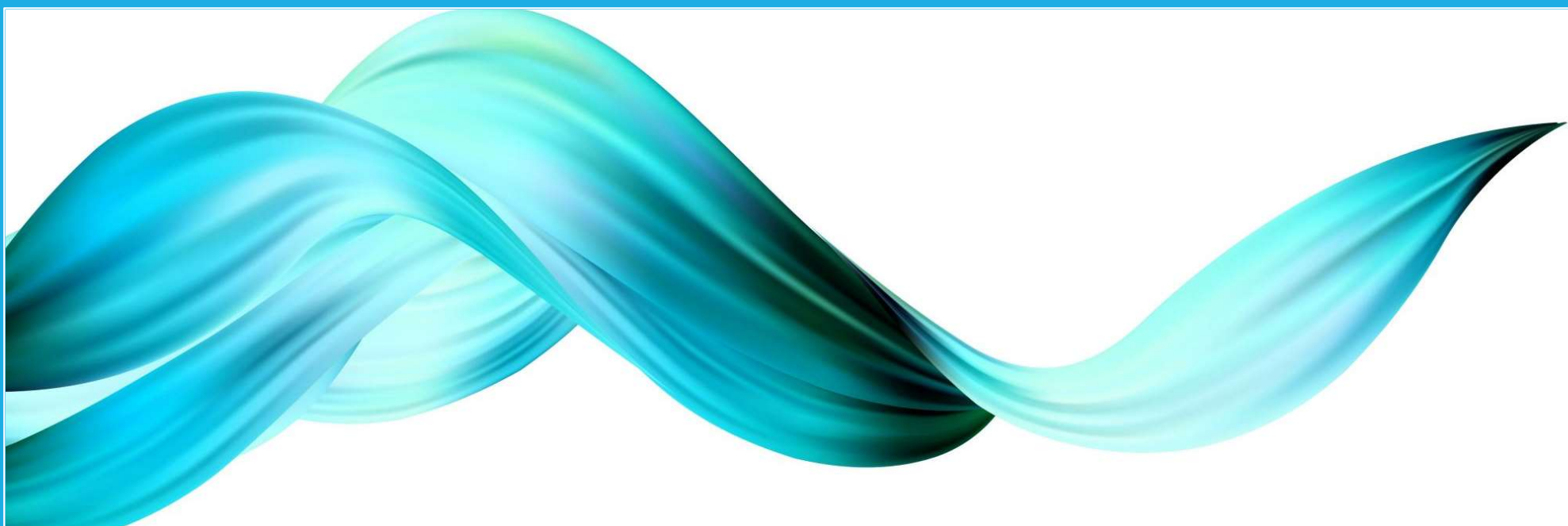
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Laney Knowlton, LMFT, CSAT, CCPS-C

Knowlton
Counseling

www.NorthStarRC.com

682-216-6523 (call or text)
Laney@KnowltonCounseling.com

www.KnowltonCounseling.com