

Mike more. When he would come up to hug her, she would break the hug quickly and say she was too busy. She found herself going to bed earlier than Mike and at times even acting as if she were sleeping when he came to bed. Her avoidance was because she feared that if she dared to show any interest or reaction to Mike, he would interpret it as a sexual invitation and pressure her for sex. The result, of course, was a major drop in intercourse.

Mike did not approach Carol to discuss what was wrong, and Carol did not explain why she was avoiding sex. The distance between them grew wider, and Mike started complaining bitterly about how lousy their sex life was, and how Carol really didn't seem to care much about it. The more openly critical of Carol that Mike became, the more Carol withdrew. They started to fight more often, both exchanging mean, hurtful words. They would always get over a particular battle, but Mike became increasingly obsessed and started threatening to leave. He would say that his sex drive was strong, and he did not want to spend the rest of his life being what he termed "sexually neglected and deprived." Once Mike even left for the night and threatened to get sex elsewhere if things didn't change.

Carol was afraid their relationship was over. But she still refused to have sex against her will; she couldn't stand the feeling that Mike viewed her only as a sexual object, and it totally turned her off. She realized that sex had been a problem in her first marriage, too, but she simply wasn't willing to sacrifice herself this time like she had done the first time around.

Mike started to think about how he could afford to move out on his own. Carol worried that her marriage was over.

Exercise

See Ground Rules for Talking, page 17.

Does this situation sound familiar to you and your relationship now or in the past? How is it similar? How is it different? As you discuss this with your partner, try to be aware of your values, morals, judgments, opinions, and feelings, but also try to understand your