

Sex and healthy relationships

Our short guide to all the important stuff you should know!

Developing relationships and having sex is an important and very normal part of adolescence and early adulthood but some things can affect how good these relationships and sexual experiences are.

Unsure about any of this?

Talk to a trusted adult, carer or GP – they have lots of resources to help you get the answers you need to start a healthy sex life.

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Thinking about having sex?

Sex is a normal part of life. If you think you're ready to engage in sexual activities, it's good to ask yourself questions like:

- > is this something I want?
- > do I know how to keep myself safe?
- > do I know the risks of unsafe sex?
- > am I aware of how to avoid STIs?
- > do I want/need contraception to avoid an unintended pregnancy?
- > am I aware of consent and what this means in the state that I live in?
- > do I feel safe?



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Consent

Consent is your agreement to participate in sexual activity. Consent is ongoing. This means you and your partner should be regularly checking in on each other. Just because one person consents to one thing, doesn't automatically mean they consent to the next thing. Everyone has the right to change their mind at any stage.

This is really important!

Engaging in sexual activity with a person who can't - or won't - consent is illegal and can result in criminal charges, fines or criminal convictions. Sexual convictions can sometimes prevent you from working certain jobs, travelling and more.

Consent is really important to make sure all activities are safe, fun and exciting for everyone involved.

An individual is **not** able to give consent if they are:

- > under the legal age of consent
- > asleep or unconscious
- > intoxicated
- > lied to about the nature of the act or who the person is
- > manipulated or physically pressured into consenting
- > don't have the capacity to consent (age, mental/physical impairment).

Do you know the age of consent?

- > In NSW, ACT, NT, QLD, VIC & WA = **16 years old**
- > In SA and TAS = **17 years old**

Tips on non-verbal consent: Communication is not always verbal. Someone's body language or facial expression is also a means of communicating and often reflects how they feel about the situation.

Some body language to look out for if you think the person you are with is uncomfortable:

- > maintaining distance
- > making their body language closed off
- > stiff muscles, inability to relax
- > negative reaction to touch (flinching or brushing off).

Be aware and if you notice anything, talk to your partner. Make sure you're both on the same page.



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Is this right? Normal concerns and worries when it comes to sex

Common sexual concerns

Sometimes sex doesn't go how you think it should or how you want it to. It's important to remember that what you see in porn or online doesn't represent sex in real life! There are a few common concerns you may have noticed or experienced that might be stopping you from experiencing the sex you want. And remember, you can always talk to a trusted adult or medical professional if you're concerned about what you've noticed.

Check out the following lists for a few common concerns and what might be causing them.

Arousal: *your body's physical response to sexual activity or sexual thoughts. Can cause genital lubrication and swelling.*

Arousal can be affected by many things, including:

- > sexual pain
- > anticipation/misconception that sex is painful
- > past traumatic experiences with sex
- > low self-esteem, negative body image
- > lifestyle choices, e.g. excessive drinking, porn habits.

If you're unsure, ask!

Just remember that what you see online may not necessarily be what's wanted in real life. Rough sex can have its place but it's vital that you speak with your partner/s and look for other clues that show if they're into it or not. If you're unsure, ask!

Libido: *your sex drive or desire to take part in sex or sexual activities.*

Libido can be affected by many things, including:

- > hormones
- > medications
- > lifestyle: fatigue, stress, lack of exercise
- > mental health concerns, e.g. depression, anxiety, PTSD
- > medical conditions.

Orgasm: *intensely pleasurable feeling during the climax of a sexual experience.*

Reasons why you may not orgasm can include:

- > sometimes it just doesn't happen!
- > inexperience
- > low libido or arousal
- > inability to orgasm due to medical reasons or medication
- > psychological: anxiety/overthinking, trauma from past relationships.

Sexual Discomfort: *persistent or recurring pain in the genitals that occurs before, during or after sex.*

Sexual discomfort can arise due to:

- > size of the erect penis
- > infections, e.g. UTIs, thrush
- > STIs
- > environment, e.g. being in a busy space such as a party
- > lack of arousal, foreplay or insufficient lubrication
- > psychological: stress, depression, negative body image, trauma
- > medical concerns, e.g. endometriosis, vaginismus.



For further information on sex and healthy relationships, visit Play Safe at playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au

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Healthy/Unhealthy relationships

Relationships look different to everyone but a healthy relationship is one where both people are connected, respected and safe.

Use this handy guide to check if your relationship is a healthy one or not.

Healthy Relationships

- ✓ Mutual respect: respect for each other's feelings, values and boundaries
- ✓ Mutual trust: trust in each other's character, abilities and truth
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Good communication: speaking honestly and openly with each other
- ✓ Independence: ability to be independent without guilt or frustration
- ✓ Healthy sexual relationship: both partners engage in sexual activity they feel comfortable with and neither feels pressured or coerced

Unhealthy Relationships

- ✗ Disrespect: disrespect for each other's feelings, values and boundaries
- ✗ Control: one person takes control of decisions (financial, emotional, behavioural)
- ✗ Hostility
- ✗ Dishonesty: keeping information from the other
- ✗ Dependence: thinking you 'can't live without' the other person
- ✗ Threats of physical, sexual or emotional violence
- ✗ Physical, sexual or emotional violence

A positive and healthy sex life can be dependent on the following things:

- ✓ Communication about the expectations of sex, relationships and boundaries
- ✓ Past experiences with sex and relationships
- ✓ Safety, contraception to reduce the likelihood of unintended pregnancy and STIs
- ✓ Mutual pleasure
- ✓ Emotional and physical support

