

# 7. Sexuality



## Objectives

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Define sexuality.
- Describe how to be sexually healthy.
- Explain how to set limits for sexual activity.



## Background notes

Sexuality can be complicated to understand. Sexuality includes our thoughts and feelings about sex, feeling attractive, being in love, religious and cultural views on sexual activity, feelings about a changing body during adolescence, sexual dreams, crushes, hugging, kissing, touching, how we define what is male or female, how we love, and being physically close in other ways. Just like there are many parts that make up our personality, there are many parts that make up sexuality. Our culture, traditional beliefs, and gender roles play an important part in defining what we consider normal sexual feelings and behaviour for men and women.

### What is sex?

Sex is a word used to describe whether a person is male or female, but sex is also used to talk about sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is when a penis goes into the vagina. Other sexual activities are oral sex, when a person touches their partner's genitals with their mouth, and anal sex, when a penis goes into the anus. All of these sexual activities can put people at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Sexual intercourse puts a girl at risk for pregnancy. Sex is both emotional and physical. In addition to physical risks, there are emotional risks. Sex is attached to many emotions, and after sex people can feel disappointed.

Sex should be between two people who respect and care for each other. Sex is an emotional act. It should feel good to both people. Sex should not be used as a reward or to get something from someone. Sex should be agreed on by both people. If one person says no or stop, then it should stop. No one should be forced to have sex.

### Being sexually healthy

There are things we can do to be sexually healthy. We can learn as much as possible about sex and reproduction. Most importantly, we can take the time to think about choices related to sexual activity. One of our choices is to say no to sex. When we decide to have sexual intercourse, we can remain faithful to one partner, as well as protect ourselves from pregnancy and infections.

Most people feel shy or even embarrassed about some aspects of sexuality and may not want to ask questions or talk about changes in their bodies. It is important to know that these feelings

are completely normal. Many young people also feel guilty, ashamed, or bad about their sexuality. If you feel guilty feelings, ask yourself if what you are feeling guilty about is something that is harmful (or could be) to yourself or others. If it is not, then let go of the guilty feelings.

Sometimes it is hard to remain sexually healthy. We are not taught in school or at home what this means. Most young people get their information from friends, older brothers or sisters, music, and magazines, which can be incorrect and confusing. An important part of healthy sexuality is being able to tell the difference between sexual behaviours that are healthy and those that are harmful. Before acting on sexual feelings, it can help to think about what could happen if you do something.

We can ask ourselves:

- Will I or anyone else be put at risk for unwanted pregnancy, HIV, or other sexually transmitted infections (STI)?
- Will acting on my sexual feelings cause any other problems, such as misunderstandings or miscommunication in our relationship?
- Will it make me or my partner feel uncomfortable?
- Will anyone's feelings get hurt?

Being sexually healthy means taking the time to think about these things before acting on sexual feelings. Being sexually healthy also includes our emotional health. Sex is attached to many emotions. Sometimes you might want to have sex to feel closer, but you can end up feeling disappointed.

## **Setting limits**

Some people think sex is a powerful and uncontrollable force that just happens, like lightening, but having sex is a decision. When people have sex it is not nature overcoming them. It is people making a decision. We have control over our bodies. People make many decisions about sex: When? With whom? Why? Where? How often? With a condom? Without?

Sex is a big decision. It is important to make sure it is your own decision. Ignore those other people who say, "Everybody is having sex." "Everybody" is not having sex. In fact most adolescents have not had sex.

When deciding whether or not to have sex, it is important to think about if you are ready to use a condom correctly every time you have sex, if you are willing to go for HIV counselling and testing, if you know how to prevent pregnancy, and more. Most adolescents are not ready to handle all these responsibilities. If you are not prepared to deal with the consequences of having sex, then you should not have sex.

It is important to remember that we are the ones responsible for the decisions we make, especially about sex and sexual intercourse. It is up to us to protect our own bodies and make choices that help us to stay healthy.

## **Deciding to have sex**

Deciding when it is the right time for you to have sex is one of the most important decisions you will make. Each person must use his or her own judgment and decide when it is the right time and the right person. Knowing when it is the right time is something that only you and your partner can decide.

Many personal and moral questions are involved. Are you both committed to each other and willing to do what is best for the other? Are you both ready to take responsibility for any consequences of having sex, including emotional consequences? How does this decision correspond to the values you each have or were raised with?

If you are not sure, it means you are not ready. Many people look back and regret the decision to have sex early. Very few regret having waited.

It is important to remember that sex involves many emotions for both partners as well as several health risks, like HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy. If you do decide you are both ready to have sex, use a reliable form of birth control as well as condoms to protect against infections. You will be safest if the male uses a condom each and every time, and the female uses a second reliable method of birth control.



## Session guide

1. Facilitate a discussion by asking group members the following questions:
  - What is the difference between sex and sexuality?
  - What is the difference between feelings and behaviours? Do our feelings influence our behaviours?
  - Can feelings of sexuality lead to sexual behaviours? Do they have to?
  - What does it mean to set limits on sexual activity? How can we do this?
  - What should someone think about before having sex?
2. After discussing all of the questions, share the information from the Background Notes section.



## Main points

- Sexuality includes thoughts and feelings about sex, feeling attractive, being in love, feelings about puberty, sexual dreams, kissing, touching, how we love, and being physically close in other ways.
- To be sexually healthy we should learn as much as possible about reproduction and sex and think about our own choices about sexual activity.



## Activity 1: Setting sexual limits

1. Ask for two volunteers to act out the roles of Robert and Agnes.

**Robert:** Agnes, we have known each other a long time. You know I have always liked you. It would be so nice to have sex with you.

**Agnes:** Robert, I know myself and I am not ready to have sex.

**Robert:** What do you mean? Now is a good time to try it. I will even take you out for a treat after.

**Agnes:** This may be a good time for you, but it is not the right time for me. I want to wait.

**Robert:** Ok, that's fine, if that is what you want. But you don't know what you are missing.

2. After the role play ask the group: What else do you think Agnes could have said to Robert?

Some examples could be:

- I will not trade my body for a treat!
- I do not want to become pregnant.
- I am not even in love with you.
- I don't want to get HIV, or other STIs.

3. Ask the group: Have you heard of boys or men in your community acting like Robert? Can you tell us what happened?

## Activity 2: Setting sexual limits

1. Explain to your group that you will read a situation to them and they will turn to the person sitting next to them to decide what advice they would give to the characters in the situation. We will discuss two different situations.

### Situation 1

Your friend Margaret has a boyfriend named Daniel. Margaret tells you that Daniel is pressuring her to have sex. Daniel says that he loves Margaret and that sex is a natural thing to do when two people love each other. Daniel says that Margaret has to have sex with him or he will get a new girlfriend who will. Margaret does not feel ready for sex, but she likes Daniel and does not want to lose him.

2. Explain to the group: You and your partner have 2 minutes to talk about what advice you would give Margaret.
3. Ask the group to come together and ask for 3-4 volunteers to share the advice they would give Margaret.
4. After discussing the different options, read situation 2.

## Situation 2

Your friend George has a girlfriend named Susan. George tells you that Susan is telling him that she wants to have sex. Susan says that all of her friends are having sex and she does not want to be the only one who hasn't. George does not feel ready to have sex.

5. Explain to the group: You and your partner have 2 minutes to talk about what advice you would give George.
6. Ask the group to come together and ask for 3-4 volunteers to share the advice they would give George.
7. After discussing the different options, ask the group if there is any difference between the advice given to Margaret and George. Is there any reason why it might be harder for George to want to delay having sex?

## 8. Liking yourself



### Objectives

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- List things they like about themselves.
- Describe ways to feel better about themselves when others put them down.



### Background notes

How we feel about ourselves can influence the kinds of decisions we make. Adolescence is a time when we have to make many decisions and it is important we make decisions that are best for us and our futures. When we feel good about ourselves, we make decisions that help us to have a happy, healthy, and productive life. You should be proud of your abilities and the things that you are good at.

It is normal to have things about ourselves that we are not happy with or would like to change. It is important to remember that we have many good qualities that we like about ourselves and that others like about us. When you are feeling down about something about yourself, try to think about things that you like and are proud of.

Imagine that we are born with an empty treasure chest. As people love us, say nice things about us, appreciate us, play with us, and learn with us, we build up our treasure. As people say bad or mean things about us, shout at us, and put us down, we lose our treasure. As the put-downs build up, the treasure chest can lock and keep us from feeling good about ourselves. To keep the treasure chest open, it is important for us to think about all of the things that we like about ourselves and feel good about.



### Session guide

1. Facilitate a discussion by asking group members the following questions:
  - What do you think is your greatest personal achievement to date?
  - What do you like most about yourself?
  - What are two things about you that your friends most admire?
  - What are the three things you are good at?
  - What is one thing you would like to improve about yourself?
  - If you died today, what would you most like to be remembered for?
2. After discussing all of the questions, share the information from the Background Notes section.



## Main points

- It is important for us to think about all of the things that we like about ourselves and things that make us feel good about ourselves.
- It is normal to have things that you would like to change about yourself. When you are feeling bad about these things, think about ways you can change them or other things that you are happy about.



## Activity

Ask each group member to sit on their own and write 10 sentences about themselves. The first sentence should start, "I am" and then continue with sentences that describe who they are. The sentences should focus on things they like about themselves and things they are good at. Tell them that they are writing this for themselves and we will not share them with others. When everyone has finished, ask them how it felt to think about things that they were good at and like about themselves.