

Sexual Health

When we talk about sexual health, you may solely think of STIs, but it encompasses much more.

Sexual health is a state of physical emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality.



HARMFUL

Sexual behaviors that could harm others.

Harmful examples are in red.



UNHEALTHY

Sexual behaviors that are not necessarily harmful but do not foster positive approaches to safe and pleasurable sexual interactions.

Unhealthy examples are in yellow.



HEALTHY

Sexual behaviors that involve a positive and respectful approach to safe and pleasurable sexual interactions.

Healthy examples are in green.



CONSENT

Consent is the mutual agreement to engage in sexual activities. It is freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastically given and specific. Each element is essential to ethical sexual interactions.

Consent requires setting your own personal boundaries and respecting other's personal boundaries.

What does lack of consent look like? NONCONSENSUAL

(one of more conditions met):

- Not legally age appropriate
- A partner is unconscious, asleep or has limited mental awareness due to alcohol/drug use
- A partner violates another's sexual boundaries using coercion or manipulation (e.g. explicit or implicit threats, intimidation, guilt tripping, or other forms of pressure)

What does consent look like? CONSENSUAL *(all conditions met):*

- Legally age appropriate
- Conscious, and aware
- Mutual agreement
- Absence of force, coercion or manipulation

Best case scenario?
ENTHUSIASTICALLY CONSENSUAL
(all conditions in CONSENSUAL met with mutual enthusiasm)

COMMUNICATION

Communication is the key to having healthy relationships. Consent does not exist without *open and direct communication*.

Things to reflect on and to communicate for healthy relationships and Interactions:

- Do you know and respect each other's sexual values?
- Do you know each other's sexual health status?
- What STI prevention and birth control methods do you prefer?
- What are your relationship boundaries, status, expectations and intentions?
- How have prior experiences (positive or negative) impacted your perspectives on sexual interactions?
- What are your sexual desires, preferences and boundaries?
- What is pleasurable for you and for them (and what is not) during sexual interactions?

One or more partners do *not* **communicate** about, **understand** or **acknowledge** the other's emotional needs and desires

Partners do *not* communicate **openly** and **in-depth** about important aspects of themselves and their relations

Partners are **mutually informed** and communicate **openly** on an **on-going** basis.

EQUITY

Equity in sexual relationships means that each person's interests and desires are respected and met to a reasonable degree. There is an equal balance to give-and-take.

An imbalance of power can lead to unhealthy and even harmful relationships. This can lead to entitled behavior over considerate behavior.

Equity can look different in each relationship. The common factor is valuing mutual respect over control and cultivating the freedom to express yourself and to grow with one another within the relationship.

Sexual relationship contains **unequal power dynamics**.

Partners buy in to **rigid gender roles and stereotypes**.

For example:

- Women or feminine individuals **must be** submissive
- Men or masculine individuals should be dominant
- Men **naturally deserve** sexual access to women's bodies
- Men can be sexually experienced but women must be "pure"

Sexual relationships are equitable.

RESPECT

Respect is treating others with dignity and consideration. This is key to healthy sexual relationships. It shows you value someone's personhood.

When you know someone's desires or boundaries, how will you behave with them? With respect or entitlement?

Sexual interactions are **characterized by a lack of respect**. One partner is primarily interested in how they can exploit or benefit from the other person through manipulation, coercion or force.

Sexual interactions **may be criminal or non-criminal** (i.e. behavior may be harmful/abusive **and** legal.)

Sexual interactions involve a **repetitive, cyclical pattern of physical abuse and/or emotional abuse**.

One partner is **more interested** in what they can get from the other person than they are interested in **being considerate and respectful** of the other's feelings, concerns, values and choices.

Partners **respect each other's implied or stated boundaries** around sexual activity.

Partners are **considerate** of **each other's feelings, concerns, values and choices**.

PLEASURE

Sexual pleasure is physical and/or psychological enjoyment from erotic experiences. This can be experienced with others or alone.

Pleasure is diverse as people are. There is not a set "right way" to experience pleasure, as long as it is not gained from violating another's boundaries and well-being.

Pleasure is sometimes hard to talk about. It is sometimes thought of embarrassing, or even shameful, to vocalize desire. Pleasure is an important part of healthy sexuality, and if no one is being harmed, there isn't anything to be ashamed of.

Take the time to learn about your own pleasure, as it helps to determine your boundaries.

One or more partners do *not* **communicate** about, **understand** or **acknowledge** the other's emotional needs and desires.

Partners *may or may not* **find pleasure in** sexual interactions with one another.

Partners are **find pleasure in** sexual interactions with one another, **care about each other's enjoyment** during sexual interactions, and **support each other in discovering** what is pleasurable for them.