

Doing it f'in right

Healthy teen sexuality



How in control are you with your life? Being a teen these days it's hard to feel in control over so much of your life. So many people telling you what to do, where you need to be, what you should look like, and what you should or shouldn't do because they reckon you're not old enough yet to think for yourself, because you don't know enough and that you can't be trusted. And sometimes it feels like you have absolutely no control over your body too, how you sound, how you smell, how you look, how parts act or react, etc.

It's difficult at times to work out who or what to trust. Can we trust a company that sells stuff to us to really want what's best for us, or are they just another group trying to control what we think or feel in order to make money off us? Can we trust our caregivers like parents or teachers to give us advice that is really good for us, or just so we don't cause trouble for them? Do our friends really want us to try something because it's good for us or just to make them feel better about how they want to be? Is the advice they are giving us based on lots of evidence or just a few unusual cases or because they don't know any better?

This paper is inspired by the straight-edge punk movement to **encourage people to regain as much control over their lives as possible** by developing yourself further, enjoying fun and togetherness, and questioning the 'accepted beliefs and ways' of modern society. Not about what you've done, but where you want to be.

Straight edge isn't about forcing anyone to do anything or make them believe anything, but encouraging people to not follow lifestyle behaviours promoted by society that resulted in making people more dependent or susceptible to being controlled by others, clouded their thinking and distracted them from realising and taking action against the wrong bad aspects of modern living. They noticed that drugs, alcohol, promiscuous sex, and poor eating habits dulled the senses, reduced people's self-respect and promoted apathy against changes necessary to make lives better for all. It also challenges the notion that teens have sex on their mind constantly.¹

Taking control over these for yourself is about you having a better life not about being controlled by others.

Bad sex?

Sex, that is any behaviour that ends in orgasm or ejaculation, can feel amazingly good. It can, but doesn't always, have to involve other people. Whether alone, or with others, sex can and should feel good before, during and after. You might have already experienced that it isn't always like that though. It is possible for you to only enjoy part of it or not at all, that is for you to not always feel good before, during and after a sex act.

And even though there is so much information available about sex, the reality is that there continues to be lots of wrong ideas due to a high level of dishonesty. Males² are regularly dishonest with their peers on issues like whether it is about if and how much they have 'done it' with another person, what they actually felt about it before, during and after, and how it continues to affect them from here on. Whereas women who thought their answers about their sexual experiences might be seen by others tended to give answers that were more socially acceptable than did women who were led to believe they were connected to a working lie detector.³ And then there's the whole issue of shame about talking honestly about their own dissatisfaction with their genitals, a body part they have no control over.

⁴ These suggest that you should have some healthy scepticism to any personal opinions offered in the arena of sex.

The constant torrent of articles in magazines, internet and other media sources on how to have great sex means there are a lot of people having unsatisfactory sexual experiences.

It's been common knowledge for a while that women fake orgasms (at least 60% of women admitted to faking it at least once), but men are also doing it too (25%)⁵ for different reasons. Whereas women do it out of fear of intimacy, insecure about their own sexual functioning and just wanting it to get over with, men do it in order to end awkward sexual encounters. In many autobiographies, blogs and now increasing in movies we can find more confessions or accounts of unsatisfactory sexual experiences.

Over a third of Australian year 10-12 females and one fifth of males reported having unwanted sexual experiences⁶, and with almost 50% feeling slightly 'worried' or more worried after their sexual encounters. There was also an increase in feeling 'used' (under 5 in a hundred to over 8 in a hundred after 6 years) after the sexual encounter. And this is all to do with consensual sexual relationships. This doesn't take into account other sexual experiences that fall into the category of rape or sexual assault, where both genders, especially males are highly ashamed to report, as they misinterpret their involuntary erections in stressful situations to mean they wanted the experience. Any early sexual experience that involved any amount of discomfort should be a topic of conversation with someone credible and approachable in the professional health area, to ensure any unhealthy aspect of that relationship or encounter isn't still colouring how you approach sex or your sexuality, even if you feel like you've put it behind you. This is just to ensure you will approach and enjoy sex positively in your present and future. All our early sexual experiences has some impact on our later lives, shaping what sexually arouses us and our expectations.

People say everything's ok if no one gets hurt, but everyone hurts when relationships end.

On top of all this is the additional emotional fallout from relationship breakups. Any relationship break up can be accompanied by a fair amount of grief due to loss of hopes and dreams as well as a hit to one's own self-worth for both sexes. Relationships with sexual experiences that break up result in greater levels of depression than those that don't⁷, with their long term impact only admitted in private, if at all.

Potentially indicating that the safe sex message or practice isn't still getting through Australia has some of the world's highest teenage pregnancy and abortion rates⁸. It probably wouldn't take much imagination to guess how both girls and guys involved in those situations felt.

Contrary to the stereotype that it is the confident early-developed high achiever that engages early sexually, research indicates that children who are sexually active earlier are more likely to be unhappy with their school and home lives⁹. They are also more likely to start earlier and consume alcohol to excess, potentially as a coping mechanism for insecurities and frustrations. Students who continue with further education at least 6 months after finishing high school tend to have less sexual encounters, less different sexual partners and practice more safer sex methods¹⁰ than those that don't complete high school.

Anecdotally most teen sex comedies focus on a teen male (or males) who already has a huge range of insecurities initially wanting sexual intercourse with little regard for the feelings or emotional state of any potential partners. Somehow putting one body part into an object that happens to be another human being is supposed to gain him respect. This quest has more to do with how they actually see themselves and want others to see them, rather than wanting to engage in something mutually desirable and satisfying with a partner.

This is in contrast to what both sexually active Australian teen girls and boys are wanting to make their sex lives better, that is, an emotional connection with their partner: 91% of girls and 72% of boys say this is somewhat to very important in sex.¹¹ This indicates that the emotional maturity of both partners and the strength of the relationship is important for their overall satisfaction not just for the sex act itself but how each partner is before, during and after.

Even taking all these factors into consideration, there is a prevailing attitude that we can only learn from our mistakes, that we need to get over the bad experiences in order to find the good, and that nothing has a lasting impact. However there's enough personal stories, and examples in all forms of media, that early sexual experiences does have lasting emotional and relational impacts (and sometimes even physical impacts) to dismiss this perspective as naive, and an excuse for poor decision making. Better educated people make better choices about their sexual attitudes and actions, and tend to delay it for a time they are more emotionally equipped well to handle relationships and sex, not rush in like someone taking over the controls of a passenger plane who's only prior flying experience is watching action films.

Sexual attractions

We are sexual beings, but our identities are not defined by our sexual desires, just like other desires and cravings we have do not define our identities. What we find sexually attractive are often shaped by our needs (especially unmet needs) as we develop leading up to and through puberty.

Biologically in adolescence we will find many things that stimulate us to think and feel sexual thoughts. Many get embarrassed by some of these triggers (as some might seem highly inappropriate or unusual) and wonder how normal they are. For males the dreams that accompany nocturnal ejaculations of semen ('wet dreams'), and the other triggers of sexual feelings for both genders need to be seen as your body's way of adjusting to new mechanisms that are just starting to be functional in you and should not be the focus of too much alarm. And yes, because of biology sometimes your urges are just going to be more stronger.

We can also influence what sexually excites and attracts us by what we choose to think about or expose ourselves to through the sexual experience leading to ejaculation or climax, whatever way our genitals are stimulated. Psychology says the more we expose ourselves to the same stimuli or trigger while we are experiencing pleasure such as masturbation, the more we will associate that stimuli with pleasure. Like all areas of your life, don't encourage certain desires to grow by thinking too much about it or acting on them if that's not what you want.

But don't freak out too much about your sexual fantasies as they are not always a great indicator of what you will enjoy in real life, especially in adolescence when all sorts of ideas and potential partners can be involved. Although there's a big difference between the amount of detail and nature of activity in general between girls and boys, a common fantasy for both sexes involve multiple partners. However most girls commonly reported jealousy, loss of control and regret with any real-life multiple partner sexual activities.¹¹ If you are concerned about whether particular recurring themes are problematic, seek professional health advice, otherwise just try not to feed those thoughts. Some of what turns you on during adolescence is fluid and does change.

Society likes to label and stereotype people, but the reality is that all people, especially all teenagers, are not the same. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or straight doesn't give us a clear description of everything about a person in a category as do the labels geek, freak, jock, metalhead, or even emo. Older generations tend to obsess about these labels wanting to separate people into who is like them and victimise those who are not. Young people are discovering more and more that when they forget about labels, there is more they have in common than not. That the same fears, insecurities and hopes and yearnings tend to be the same regardless of who you are attracted to. Using labels, although initially comforting and appears to provide us with a ready-made sense of identity and help us bond with our 'in' group, can end up dividing and isolating us from the respective 'out' group. What is more important is accepting people where they are at, not judging and supporting each other to make appropriate choices in behaviours. We are all of the same species and we should look out for one another.

Being comfortable being single

We will all be single for some time in our lives, even when we are in relationships.

The state of being single is something that we need to celebrate and enjoy. However there is a lot of pressure from society for us to be in a relationship, often leaving us with the impression that if we are not, there's something wrong with us. Teens that chose not to have sex reported more feelings of negative consequences as they got older, eg feeling left out or having their partners angry at them, even though those that were sexually experienced were more likely to report positive consequences for not engaging in sexual activity, eg felt responsible or friends being proud.¹² Being single can be a good opportunity to develop healthy self-control skills outside of being involved with others sexually.

Sexually arousing media and Pornography

So much media today has an impact on arousing us sexually, from printed or tv ads, music videos, and other content in TV, movies, book, etc. Most teens (75% of girls and 88% of boys) believe these media forms encouraged them to have sex and to think about it.¹¹ Students who listened to over 14 hours a week of song lyrics containing depictions of degrading sex tended to be twice as likely to have sexual intercourse.¹³

And this is before we get into the category of media that is classified as pornography. Initially pornography was defined as any material for you that gets you sexually aroused, though these days we tend to think of anything that depicts a **sexually explicit pose or activity**. It can range from professionally produced videos to self-taken provocative photos sent through a mobile. Almost seen as a 'natural' part of a male teen's life these days (90% boys & 70% girls 13-14 years old accessed sexually explicit material at least once)¹⁴ and being self-reported by boys as viewed as early as the age of six¹¹, it not only turns on most teens (58% of girls and 87% of boys) but is reported as a source of ideas of how to have sex (70% of girls and 90% of boys). This can be an issue as porn is rarely realistic of how people relate, look, perform or respond sexually and creates and reinforces unhealthy unrealistic expectations¹⁵.

"...the earlier men use porn, the more likely they are to have trouble developing close, intimate relationships with real women. Some of these men prefer porn to sex with an actual human being. They are bewildered, even angry, when real women don't want or enjoy porn sex."¹⁶

Porn encourages you to focus on the wrong aspects of other people and yourself, and often makes it hard to respect yourself or others, sabotaging one's self-worth. It can and often will colour how you view others around you and your expectations of them and distort what is involved in a healthy committed and satisfying relationships, potentially leading to a string of broken relationships and poor relationships habits. It promotes the myth that women should be concerned about attracting and sexually gratifying others.¹⁷ Repeated exposure can even negatively effect sexual performance, desensitising individuals so they find it difficult to be aroused by real life sex¹⁸, but needing more extreme forms of porn to feel sexual excitement¹⁹. Additionally youth seeking atypical sexual interests are more likely to encounter later negative issues in relationships²⁰.

Sexting and sexual videos

Sending, receiving and passing on sexual material, particularly from your peers, or even creating your own material can all seem a bit of fun and private. The only issue is that you can't always trust anyone who receives it to not pass it on. If you make your own stuff for yourself, make sure it's safe and can't be accessed by others (eg don't leave it on your phone). There are lots of stories of partners who become ex's who then, as a way of getting revenge or dealing with the hurt of a breakup, text or email or post stuff online to others. Once something is on the internet or on someone else's phone, it is pretty hard to get back, even if the original sender regrets it later. Once on the 'net, it can stay there forever, and anyone can then see it years later. If you get someone's else stuff, be respectful with it. Not to mention you could be convicted with distributing child porn if you pass it on.

Masturbation

Masturbation, that is touching your own genitals for sexual pleasure is a normal, healthy expression of sexuality and practised by practically all teenagers with males engaging in it more frequently (42% teen boys say they do it at least five times a week vs 15% for teen girls)¹¹. Even though about half the people who masturbate feel ashamed or embarrassed about it, there are a range of health benefits from engaging in it, such as it reduces stress, helps you fall asleep and gives you a mental pick-up.²¹ Due to our biology, our sexual drive will be heightened at particular times and appear to need some sort of release. It can also help you become more familiar with your own sexual responses, that is what gives you the most pleasure so you can better communicate your wants and needs to your sexual partner. Don't worry so much about how much is too much, unless you feel it seems to be linked to an obsessive compulsive disorder where you can't seem to stop when you want to. Despite what porn and other media portray, the satisfactory length of sex is something you work out with your partner, though the tendency is for it to longer in duration for the female than what is considered ok for the male.²² Practice masturbating where you last longer than five minutes before orgasm, otherwise you will train your body to treat sex more as a sprint rather than a long distance duration event. Keep in mind what was said about pornography, and try not to use porn with your masturbation, otherwise you will be training your mind to associate sex with the unrealistic fantasy images and high intensity of porn.

Relationship skills

Being mature enough for relationships isn't age dependent. There are certainly a lot of adults we see or read in news reports showing a distinct lack of ability to deal with relationships. Develop your relationship and confidence skills with everyone. Your self-worth isn't about what you have or haven't done, but should be more about the person you are. Keep learning and discovering about yourself and others. When you're not sizing each person up as a potential sexual partner, you are more free to engage with them with confidence and freedom. Get to know people. Learn how to be creative and enjoy spending time with others, to negotiate with them about all sorts of things, to deal with conflict, and to encourage others when they aren't feeling well or confident. Then when you have a good strong emotional connection with someone and you feel your relationship is at the stage where you both are comfortable to engage in sexual activities, you both will be in control and confident about negotiating what you both would like to explore and how you want it.

Too many people engage in risky behaviour in order to gain confidence, but if you don't feel confident in yourself it never lasts.

Many teens (not to mention adults!) report using alcohol as a way of feeling more confident, to 'fit in' and not 'stick out' from others, to stop 'thoughts', to 'escape' from how they normally feel for that particular occasion, or to prove to others they are 'ok' rather than reporting that they actually enjoy the taste.²³ For these, alcohol is not so much about gaining control, but losing it. Too many drink alcohol because they think they need it to have fun or feel ok about themselves and can't imagine feeling like that without it. Sex can be often be used in the same way. It's valuable for you to think about why you do things, and to find ways of enjoying and being proud of yourself without artificial chemical help.

Being more in control

The starting point of this was about helping you think about what helps you to be in more control of your life, and to live a life that respects and enjoys others around you. Obviously you can choose to ignore all of this, that's your choice. Hopefully though you can see how some of the 'common' views of sex and sexuality and expected behaviours end up stuffing more things up than helping us enjoy each other. This is about helping you really enjoy sex so that everyone involved feels good about it before, during and after. Again, it's not about what you have already done, it's about what you're going to do from here on.

Sure there will be times you will feel more horny than others, sometimes because of your biology, sometimes because of stuff you've been exposed to, sometimes because you're bored, feeling down, lonely, stressed, hassled by others or engaging in unhealthy coping strategies like drinking alcohol to excess²⁴. It's up to you, but you don't always have to pursue sex at those times. It may be helpful to just connect more with other people at those times and enjoy their company without resorting to being sexual.

It can be useful to decide for yourself sooner than later what your standard is and your response will be to offers (such as offers to service you sexually) or pressures you to perform sexual acts (claiming it would strengthen your relationship or your social standing). It might just be a response like: "Thanks but no thanks. Now is just not the right time. I want to respect myself, you or others more than that." That's why during training sportsmen find it useful to practice their responses to all sorts of situations, because when the pressure is on, it can be hard to think on your feet.

At the end of the day, don't just do what you think others think you should. It's up to you who you want to be and what you want in your life.

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Youth Discussion launching pad questions

This paper and questions are aimed primarily at Year 9 students, however there is some benefit with introducing this at an earlier age as young people are being exposed to these issues much earlier and would benefit from forming healthy attitudes and behaviours regarding sex earlier as good habits. Some of these questions lead into the sections covered by the paper, others are just for discussion.

What is your ideal image of a relationship partner for you? What do you think is their ideal image of their preferred partner?

How important is it for you to come across as physically attractive to others?

How important is it for you to come across as sexually knowledgeable to others?

What sexuality do you identify with (eg homosexuality, bisexuality, transgendered, hetero, not sure, other)?

What do you think of people who identify with an alternative sexuality than you and why? How easy do you think it is for them to be with others who don't identify their sexuality as they do?

How well do you cope with seeing yourself as single (without having a partner)?

How easy is it to talk to your parents/guardians about sex stuff? What stuff have they talked to you about?

How easy is it to talk about what you think and feel about sex with your mates?

When was the first time you saw porn, what happened and how did it make you feel?

How easy is it for you to get porn now? How much do you see?

How realistic do you think porn portrays what people want out of sex and of sex itself?

Can porn be good for people? Why or why not?

Is having sexual fantasies of others ok or not?

When are the times you are most likely to think about sex?

How much control do you think you have over what sexually excites you? If so, how?

How comfortable do you feel having someone check up regularly on the sexual side of your life - not just your behaviours, but what thoughts and feelings you have as well?

How much dating experience should some one have?

How far is too far with sex (what are acceptable or not serious sexual behaviours)?

What is safe sex? How safe is safe?

How do you judge when it is the right time for sex stuff to happen in a relationship? Age or other criteria?

How would you react if someone attractive offered you sex? Or someone unattractive?

What do you think helps make sex good? What do you think helps make it bad?

How important do you think an emotional connection is for sex to be good? Does it matter?

For long term relationships, would you like someone inexperienced or very experienced sexually?

Do you think people should be married before having sex? Why or why not?

If you want to be married, would you like to marry a virgin or someone very experienced sexually?

Does marriage solve people's sexual issues and need for sex? Why or why not?

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