

# **You, Your Life, Your Dreams: A Book for Adolescents**

**Written by  
Catharine Watson and Ellen Brazier**

**Family Care International  
Straight Talk Foundation**

## Acknowledgements

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## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

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## Foreword

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Adolescence—the period of life when you change from a child into an adult—is an exciting time, but it can also be a confusing time. You experience many physical and emotional changes during adolescence, and you may have many questions about your body, your relationships with other people and your future.

*You, Your Life, Your Dreams* was written for adolescents, aged 14 to 19, to help you cope with some of the many challenges and decisions you face as you move from childhood to adulthood. This book offers factual information about the changes that occur during this time of life, and about a range of other issues, such as: how to stay physically and emotionally healthy, how to avoid sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy, how to handle pressure to have sex, and how to avoid drug and alcohol abuse. The book also offers advice on getting along with your parents and friends, handling romantic relationships, setting goals, doing well in school and out, and coping with setbacks that you may encounter along the road to adulthood.

This book contains a lot of information, but you do not have to read it cover-to-cover or front-to-back. You can look at the **Table of Contents** and find the topics that interest you most. When you have read these sections, look back at the **Table of Contents** and find something else that you want to know about. You can also flip through the book, looking at the cartoons, illustrations and the quotes from other adolescents. Or, you can look through the book and read all the **“DID YOU KNOW”** boxes, which contain factual information.

Although this book was written primarily for unmarried adolescents, aged 14 to 19, parts of the book may be of interest to older and younger youth, as well as to married adolescents. Share this book with your friends, your brothers and sisters, and your parents. Talk to them about it, and find out what they think about the topics that are discussed.

Enjoy this book and stay safe!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Anyango." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Molly Anyango*  
*Peer Counsellor*  
*Family Planning Association of Kenya*

## A Note to Parents, Teachers and Other Adults

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Many adults think that adolescents face few of the problems and worries that confront adults. However, for many young people, adolescence is a confusing and stressful time. It is a time of questions and anxieties about the physical and emotional changes that are taking place, as well as about education, employment and relationships with parents and friends. Adolescence is a time of peer pressure, ups and downs and worries for the future.

But adolescence is also an exciting and wonderful stage of life. It is a time when young people grow emotionally and mentally, take on new challenges and new responsibilities and identify their dreams for the future. They learn to make more and more decisions for themselves—decisions that may affect their lives today, tomorrow and for years to come.

As they negotiate the challenges of adolescence, young people need factual information and skills to be able to make sound decisions and safe choices. Many parents, teachers and other adults worry that adolescents lack the maturity and judgement needed to make good decisions about issues such as relationships, sexual activity, drugs and alcohol, or planning their futures. However, research shows that young people can make safe, responsible decisions if they are armed with accurate information and a range of skills, such as decisions-making, communication and negotiation skills, and if they are guided by caring adults.

*You, Your Life, Your Dreams* examines some of the key issues that young people in Africa face as they are growing up. The contents of this book were determined in consultation with adolescents in a variety of countries. It focuses on issues that adolescents themselves identified as important: the changes of puberty, staying healthy, coping with stress and depression, getting along with parents, handling friendships and romantic relationships, healthy sexuality, pregnancy, abortion, coping with drugs and alcohol, education and employment.

There are good reasons to ensure that our youth are well-informed about these issues. At home, in the streets, in schools and through the media, young people today are increasingly exposed to a variety of challenges and risks. Young people today are at great risk for a variety of health problems, such as sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion. About 60% of all new HIV infections in Africa are occurring among young people aged 10 to 24. This means that young people are getting infected with HIV faster than any other age group.

The most at-risk adolescent is the young person who lacks correct information. He or she will rely on friends, videos and popular music as sources of information, and in so doing, will get considerable *misinformation*. Therefore, this book was written to help ensure that adolescents have access to factual information and can build the skills they need to handle peer pressure and relationships, and, most importantly, to make safe and responsible decisions.

I encourage parents, teachers and other adults to look through this book and to share it with the young people you know. Talk with them about the information and advice given. Help them stay safe as they travel the road to adulthood so that they will be able to reach their dreams.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Ananie Arkutu', with a long horizontal line extending from the left side of the signature.

Dr. A. Ananie Arkutu  
FRCOG

# Table of contents

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

## **FOREWORD**

## **A NOTE TO PARENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER ADULTS**

<b>CHAPTER 1: ADOLESCENCE: THE BIG CHANGE, THE BIG CHALLENGE</b> .....	1
What is adolescence? .....	2
The facts .....	4
Values .....	5
Life skills .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 2: YOUR CHANGING BODY</b> .....	9
The growth spurt: the start of puberty .....	9
Hormones .....	12
Your genitals or “private parts” .....	13
Body hair and skin changes .....	13
Your mind .....	14
<b>CHAPTER 3: BOYS</b> .....	17
Body shape and size .....	17
Your voice .....	18
Your private parts .....	19
Practising good hygiene .....	21
Erections .....	22
Ejaculation .....	23
Wet dreams .....	24
<b>CHAPTER 4: GIRLS</b> .....	27
Body shape and size .....	27
Your breasts .....	27
Bras .....	31
Your private parts .....	31
Practising good hygiene .....	33
Menstruation and the menstrual cycle .....	35
Keeping a calendar .....	39
Discomforts with periods .....	40
Sex and menstruation .....	41
Comfort, health and hygiene .....	41
What to use .....	42
<b>CHAPTER 5: BASIC BODY CARE</b> .....	45
Keeping clean, smelling nice .....	45
Caring for your teeth .....	46
Pimples .....	47
Hair care .....	48
Eating well .....	49
Exercise .....	51
Good rest .....	53

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

<b>CHAPTER 6: TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEART AND HEAD</b> .....	55
Self-esteem .....	55
Self-confidence .....	58
Don't worry, be happy .....	60
Coping with sadness .....	63
Getting along with other people .....	64
<b>CHAPTER 7: CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS: YOU AND YOUR PARENTS</b> .....	71
Appreciating your family .....	72
Being understanding of your parents' values and beliefs .....	72
Coping with your parents' expectations .....	74
Communicating with your parents .....	74
When you need other sources of help .....	78
<b>CHAPTER 8: FRIENDSHIPS AND FALLING IN LOVE</b> .....	81
Friendships .....	81
Finding out someone isn't a true friend .....	83
Getting along with the opposite sex .....	84
Starting a relationship with someone you like .....	85
Building a strong relationship .....	87
Love .....	88
Having crushes .....	90
Falling out of love .....	91
<b>CHAPTER 9: SEXUALITY AND SEX</b> .....	93
Healthy sexuality .....	94
Sexual feelings .....	96
Masturbation .....	96
Virginity .....	98
Sexual intercourse .....	101
Setting sexual limits .....	102
Deciding not to have sex .....	104
Taking with your partner about sex .....	104
<b>CHAPTER 10: TAKING CARE OF YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH</b> .....	109
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) .....	109
How can you know if you have an STI .....	111
Going for an STI check-up .....	112
HIV/AIDS .....	113
How can you know if you have HIV? .....	115
Living positively with HIV .....	116
Safer sex .....	118
Condoms .....	119
Other reproductive health problems .....	123

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 11: PREGNANCY AND CONTRACEPTION</b> .....	129
How does pregnancy happen?.....	129
Signs of pregnancy .....	130
Risks of pregnancy and childbirth for adolescent girls .....	131
Coping with a teenage pregnancy .....	132
Caring for yourself during pregnancy .....	134
Pregnancy and HIV .....	134
Planning for delivery .....	135
Care for yourself and the baby after delivery .....	136
Abortion .....	136
How to avoid pregnancy.....	138
Are contraceptive pills safe? .....	139
Emergency contraception .....	139
Dual protection.....	141
<b>CHAPTER 12: PRESSURED AND UNWANTED SEX</b> .....	145
Pressure from boyfriends and girlfriends.....	145
Pressure from adults .....	146
Sexual abuse.....	148
Sexual harassment .....	150
Rape .....	150
What to do if rape occurs .....	154
<b>CHAPTER 13: SUBSTANCE ABUSE</b> .....	157
Types of drugs and substances that are abused .....	157
Cigarettes and Alcohol.....	159
Addiction.....	161
Why people start taking drugs.....	163
How to handle pressure to take drugs.....	166
Keeping off drugs .....	168
<b>CHAPTER 14: REACHING YOUR DREAM</b> .....	171
Identifying your dreams.....	172
Planning careers .....	173
Setting goals.....	174
Making good decisions .....	176
Staying focused on your goals and dreams.....	178
Doing well in school.....	179
Being out of school.....	181
Dealing with setbacks .....	182
<b>GLOSSARY</b> .....	187
<b>SOURCES</b> .....	198

YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

# Adolescence: The Big Change, The Big Challenge

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## Patrick, 16, Kenya

*“What I have enjoyed about being an adolescent is taking care of the responsibilities of home in the absence of parents. And I like this because I think I have grown and can control myself and the young ones.”*

---

## Naana, 17, Ghana

*“There are many things about being an adolescent that I don’t like. I remember when I was younger I had more freedom than I have now. There are so many rules and regulations.”*

Many people around the world define adolescence as the period of life between 10 to 19 years of age. If you are between 10 and 19 years old, you are an adolescent.

Congratulations! You are a special person!

Of course, you have always been special and always will be. But for now you are extra special. You are going through a lot of changes and trying out new things—from new looks and new identities to new experiences, like going out with friends, holding hands and kissing.



**Your parents may find your adolescence  
a bit nerve-racking**

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Your new looks and identities may make your parents, aunties and uncles very nervous because they don't want you to get hurt, and they don't want you to make a big mistake, such as getting yourself (or a girlfriend) pregnant while you are still in school. Most of all, they are nervous because they know that these years will have a big impact on the person you are going to become and the kind of life you are going to lead.

### **WHAT IS ADOLESCENCE?**

Adolescence is the time when you change and grow physically and mentally from a child into an adult. During adolescence a lot of things start happening:

- Your body will change—in ways that you like and some that you don't.
- You will start to have sexual feelings, and you may not always know what you should do about these feelings.
- You will start to think independently and want to make decisions for yourself.
- Your feelings about your family and your relationship with your parents may change—in good ways and bad. Your parents may give you more responsibilities, which is a nice sign that they trust and rely on you. But they might also start being very strict—keeping you from your friends and trying to make decisions for you about your schooling or your future. They might also seem less affectionate towards you than before, and you may miss the easy, loving relationships you had as a child.
- Your friends—and what they think—may matter to you much more than they used to.
- Your emotions may be much more complicated than they used to be, and sometimes you yourself may not understand exactly what you are feeling or why.
- You may really want to feel loved and to feel close to someone.
- You may face difficult decisions, and there may be times when you don't always know whom to turn to for advice.

Adolescence is a special time for everyone, everywhere—from Tanzania to Togo. But it's also a challenging time. This is a time of big change, and big changes take time. You'll face a lot of decisions as you go through adolescence, and some of the choices you make will stay with you for the rest of your life.

There's a lot that you can do to get through adolescence safely. You can make sure you understand your body and the changes that are taking place. You can also make sure that you understand yourself and what you want out of life. Take time to think about your future and to plan for it. Adulthood is a big responsibility, so you must prepare for it well during your adolescence.

You don't have to go through adolescence alone. You are surrounded by people who deal with serious problems on a daily basis. You have a large extended family—aunties, uncles and

many cousins—to whom you can turn for advice. In addition, you are part of a rich culture, and you have rich traditions to draw on as you go through adolescence.

Adolescence has always been complicated everywhere, but today young people face problems their parents and grandparents may never have dreamed of—problems like:

- Pressure to have sex.
- Drugs in schools and the community.
- Parents who are too busy or shy to talk with their children about the changes they are going through.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.
- Being orphaned because of AIDS or accidents.
- Wars and political instability.

To cope with all these things and to get through adolescence safely, you need to be strong, creative, resourceful and hopeful. Try to learn from the people around you who are strong and calm in the face of hard times. Take a page out of their book and try to cope with the challenges facing you with a positive attitude.

### ADOLESCENTS FEEL AS THOUGH NOTHING BAD WILL HAPPEN TO THEM

It is a characteristic of adolescents in every country in the world—from Botswana to Brazil, from Kenya to Korea, from Ivory Coast to India—to think bad things cannot happen to them. “It won’t happen to me,” they tell themselves. They sometimes feel too confident and too safe.

Are you like this? Do you feel you can take risks and nothing bad will happen to you? For example, you and your girlfriend might know about contraceptives. But you think that as long as you don’t have sex very often, you and your girlfriend will be safe from an unwanted pregnancy.



**Many adolescents take risks because they think that bad things will not happen to them...**

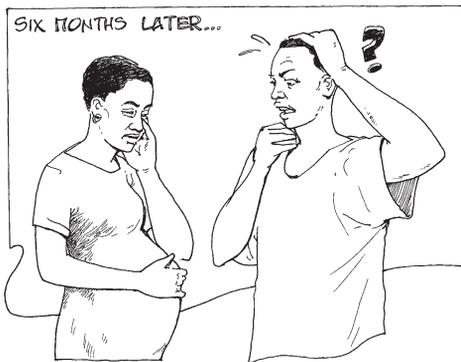
Or you might know a lot about HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. You might know that it can be transmitted through unprotected sex, but you don’t think your boyfriend could possibly be infected. You don’t think HIV infection could happen to you or the kind of people you know.

Does this sound like you? If so, here are some things you should keep in mind:

**Pregnancy can happen the first time you have unprotected sex.** In fact, every time a couple has unprotected sex, there is a 1 in 12 chance of pregnancy. This means that if you have

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

unprotected sex once a month, you (or your girlfriend) would probably be faced with an unwanted pregnancy within one year.



**...but pregnancy can happen even if you only have sex one time. It can happen the first time.**

**Keep in mind too that HIV infection does happen to adolescents.** In fact, it happens to adolescents more than to anyone else! Adolescents are getting infected with HIV faster than any other age group in Africa: 60% of all new HIV infections are among young people.

Don't let one of those pregnant adolescents or new HIV cases be you. Read this book carefully to find out how you can make good choices to stay safe and healthy. Please share this book with your friends so they too can learn how to make smart and healthy choices.

To go through adolescence safely, you need at least three things:

- The facts of life.
- Values—you need to know what you believe is right so that you can make decisions that you can live with.
- *Life skills* so you can use the facts you know and remain true to your values.

### THE FACTS

What do we mean by “The Facts”? What are the “Facts of Life”?

The facts are all the essential pieces of information—the things you have to know in order to cope with everyday life and make good decisions.

Knowing the facts means knowing how to take good care of yourself—physically and emotionally—by eating well, by taking good care of your body and by taking good care of your heart and head. Knowing the facts also means knowing how pregnancy happens, how HIV/AIDS and other STIs are spread, and how you can best avoid them. It means knowing what drugs and alcohol can do to your body and your brain, and how they can ruin your life. It means knowing how best to cope with difficult situations and problems so that you can still achieve your dreams.

Most importantly, knowing the facts means knowing the difference between reality and myths. It is very important to have the facts when you're trying to look at your options, make important choices and decide what you should do.

You need facts to stay safe. This book is full of facts. It will give you facts about:

- The changes going on in your body (Chapters 2, 3 and 4).
- Taking care of your physical and emotional health (Chapters 5 and 6).
- Relationships with other people—parents, friends, boyfriends and girlfriends (Chapters 7 and 8).
- Sexuality, sex and taking care of your sexual health (Chapters 9 and 10).
- Pregnancy and contraception (Chapter 11).
- Pressured and unwanted sex (Chapter 12).
- Drugs and alcohol (Chapter 13).
- Planning your future and reaching your dreams (Chapter 14).

## **VALUES**

The word value has several meanings. One meaning refers to how much something is worth—what it costs in Cedi, Kwacha, Naira, Shillings, Dollars or any other currency to buy that object.

But the word value can also refer to the things you believe in and the things you think are important in life. Some good values are:

- honesty
- openness
- tolerance
- kindness
- charity
- forgiveness

These are just a few values, but you may hold many more, such as working hard in school, helping your parents at home, being loyal to your friends, being active in your community or being active in your church, mosque or temple.

Values help guide how you act, and they help shape the decisions you make. They help you make choices that are good for you and good for others. For example, someone who values kindness and tolerance would stand up for a disabled classmate or neighbour whom other people were treating unkindly. Someone who values honesty would choose to return the money if a shopkeeper gave her or him too much change.

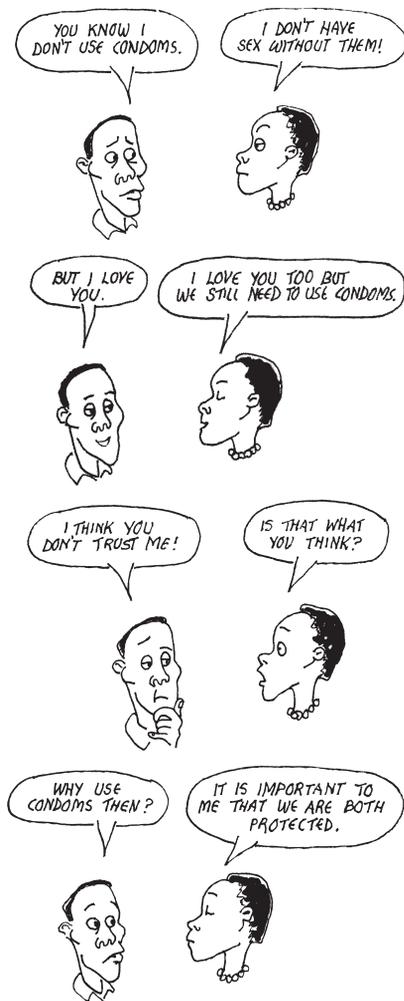
What are your values? What is important to you? What do you believe in? As you read this book, think about your own values. Knowing what you value will help you make smart and

healthy choices and stay safe while you go through all the normal ups and downs of adolescence. Knowing what you value will help you remain true to yourself even when someone is pressuring you to do something you think is wrong. When you're faced with several alternatives, knowing your own values will help you make the right choice—a choice you can live with.

## LIFE SKILLS

You also need life skills to stay safe. In fact “life skills” can be life saving skills like being able to:

- **Talk out your feelings.** Your feelings are important, but other people may not understand how you feel unless you tell them. Learn how to let others know what you think and want by being direct and by using statements that start with “I”—“I wish,” “I would like,” “I need,” “I don’t like...” Practise using “I” statements until you feel comfortable saying them.
- **Argue your point.** You have good reasons for feeling the way you do, and it’s important to learn how to communicate those reasons without putting down other people or making them feel bad—without being unkind, aggressive or overly critical.
- **Know what you think and stand by it no matter what other people say.** Everyone has beliefs about right and wrong, good and bad. These beliefs are called principles. Sometimes, you may know exactly what your principles are. But at other times, things aren’t as clear, and you may have to spend some time carefully thinking through what is right for you and why. If you are clear about what you think is right—why you do or do not want to do something—you’ll be able to stand up for what you believe in. And ultimately, standing up for your beliefs will earn you respect.
- **Make good decisions under pressure.** As you become an adult, you start having to make more decisions for yourself. Sometimes, other people may be urging you to do one thing, and you might feel tempted to just go along. But making good decisions means carefully weighing all your choices and thinking about the consequences of each one. It can be hard to do this if someone is rushing you or putting pressure on you to decide quickly. One important part of making good decisions is being clear about your principles and your overall goals in life. Another important part of decision-making is giving yourself the time you need. Remember, you can always tell someone: “I need to think about this. Let me get back to you.”

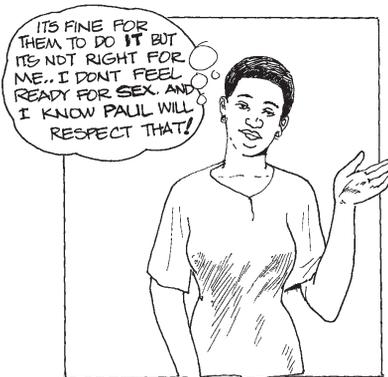


Standing up for yourself is a life skill

These life skills also have names like “assertiveness,” “creative thinking,” “problem solving,” “decision-making” and “self-awareness.” Life skills are very important. In fact, life skills are just as important as knowing the facts because the facts won’t protect you unless you have life skills too. For example, you may know that unprotected sex can lead to pregnancy, and STIs including HIV/AIDS, and you may have decided that you don’t want to have sex yet, but you don’t know how to be assertive with your boyfriend and argue your point.

You need life skills to use the facts you know—to stand up for what you want and what you believe in, especially when people you care about, and whose respect you want, think differently.

How are your life skills? Can you stand up for what you believe is right even if your friends think otherwise? Are you strong enough to argue for your health or even for your life? Start practising as you read this book!



**Making good decisions under pressure and standing up for what you believe in are life skills**

# Your Changing Body

Between the ages of 10 and 16 years of age, most girls and boys enter puberty. Puberty is the time when you change physically, emotionally and mentally from a child into a young adult.

## THE GROWTH SPURT: THE START OF PUBERTY

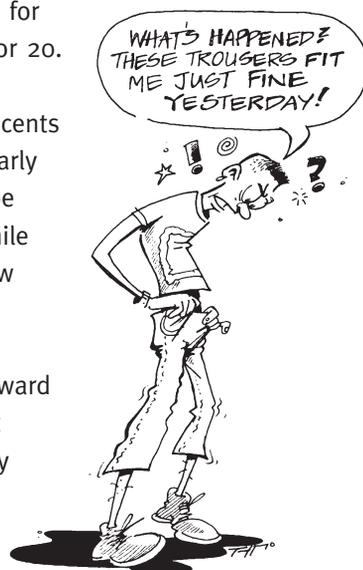
Up to the age of 9 or 10, there is little difference between boys and girls. They have different sexual organs, but they both have flat chests and similarly sized muscles.

The big physical differences between girls and boys start becoming obvious during puberty. On average, girls start experiencing physical changes around the ages of 10 or 11, when they suddenly start growing faster. This period of fast growth is called a “**growth spurt.**” For girls, the growth spurt usually lasts about three years. During these years girls are often taller and bigger than boys of the same age.

Boys start their growth spurt a little later than girls do—on average around the age of 12 or 13. For boys, the growth spurt usually lasts longer than it does for girls. In fact, some boys keep growing until they reach age 19 or 20.

But remember: these ages are only **average** ages. Some adolescents start their growth spurt earlier and others start later. Starting early or starting late doesn’t have much effect on how tall you will be or how fast you will grow. Some early starters grow quickly, while others grow slowly. The same is true of late starters: some grow quickly, others slowly.

During the period of fast growth, boys and girls often feel awkward and clumsy. This is because different parts of the body grow at different times and at different rates. The first parts of the body to grow are usually the hands and feet, followed by the arms, legs, hips and chest. Adolescents who suddenly grow very fast often find themselves tripping and falling. It feels strange to suddenly be several centimetres taller!



The “growth spurt”

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Some boys and girls grow so rapidly in puberty that their skin can't keep up with their fast-growing bones. Sometimes when this happens, they develop "stretch marks," light or darkish lines on their skin. These marks may fade or get less noticeable as a person gets older, but they may never disappear completely.

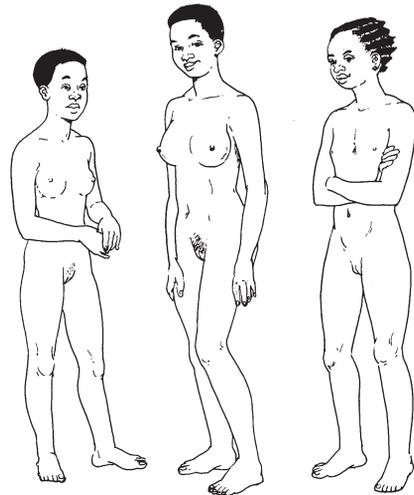
Even if it seems like you are growing very fast, puberty is actually a gradual process. It will take some time before you are physically and emotionally an adult. In the meantime, here are some things to keep in mind:

### EVERYBODY IS DIFFERENT

Each person enters puberty at a different time and with a different speed. Your breasts may be slower to grow than those of your friend, but you start to menstruate earlier. Or you may experience everything much later. She gets breasts and starts to menstruate when she's 12. You get breasts and start to menstruate at 15.

Or, if you are a boy, you might have a friend whose voice was deep by the time he was 13. He might have pubic hair and big muscles already, whereas you have not grown a centimetre!

Remember, everyone is different, and whenever these changes happen to you is the right time for you.

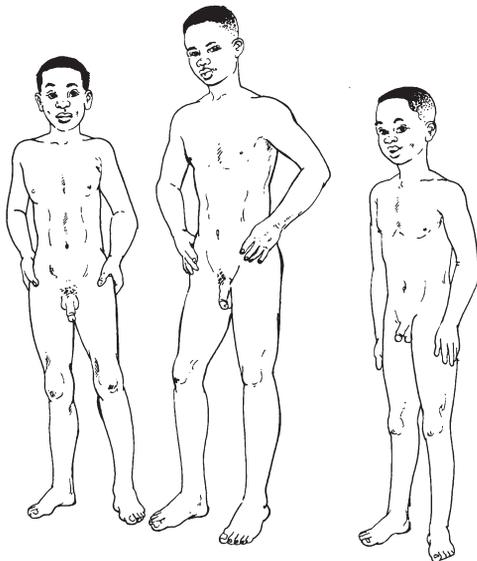


**All of these girls are 13 years old, but they are developing at different speeds.**

### EVERYBODY IS SPECIAL

In terms of your health, it does not matter if you are developing faster or more slowly than your peers. Your body will change when it is ready, and there is nothing you can do about the timing. Some girls and boys who are perfectly healthy do not develop until much later than their peers. Other girls and boys develop much earlier than their peers, and they are perfectly normal and healthy too.

But, of course, it *can* be very hard to be different. It can be hard to be the first girl in the class with breasts or the last boy to have his voice change. You may be teased. You may feel very different than your peers.



**These boys are also 13 years old, and they too are developing at different rates**

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**Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*“I began noticing changes in my body when I was eleven years old. I started developing breasts, having hairs in my armpits and genitals. I felt very bad because I had these changes very early, and I felt very different from my peers.”*

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**Sherry, 19, Ghana**

*“I was in class 6. I don’t know if my friends were developing late or I was developing early, but I felt bad when I began to develop breasts. I had heard my mom talk about how, during their days they used a tapoli (small wooden tool for crushing pepper) to try to break down the lump in the breast, so I tried it—maybe about three times. It was quite a funny idea, and of course it didn’t work at all. But now, those who were teasing me have much bigger breasts than I do.”*

Try to remember that these things will not matter in the long run. By the time you are 20, it will not make any difference to you—or to anyone else—whether your voice started to change when you were 13 or 17. It will not matter if your periods started when you were 11 or when you were 16.

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**Sherry, 19, Ghana**

*“Just let nature take its course. Even if you don’t like it, there’s nothing you can do about it. Just accept who you are.”*

Although you may not be able to change your body, there are things about yourself that you **can** change:

1. You can make sure that you are a nice person. You can make sure that you work hard at whatever you do (in school, at work and around the house). You can work on your personality, your sense of humour and your character. Focus on **who** you are and **who** you want to be—not what you look like.
2. Try your best to ignore the teasing. Try to laugh it off, and don’t let the teasers see that they are upsetting you. Eventually, they will get tired of teasing you.
3. **Never** let your desires for your peers’ approval and respect lead you into doing things that are not good for you. Don’t let your need to fit in with your peers push you into doing things that you know are not right—like teasing other people, taking drugs or taking risks that may hurt you or your future.
4. Educate yourself with correct information. Make sure you know where to go to get the information you need and the answers to your questions as you go through adolescence.

Also, keep this in mind: people of your age often know more **myths** (false information) than they do facts—especially when it comes to explaining puberty and sex. Your friends may tell you things that are not true, so you need to know where to go to get the facts. For example, you may be told that your breasts or penis will grow if you have sex. Or you may be teased that your breasts are big because you are having sex already. Similarly, you might hear that pimples are a sign that you should have sex.

But none of these things are true! They are all myths. Myths like these can be dangerous, mostly because they add to your worries. They make you think you can do things to change something that you just cannot control.

## HORMONES

What controls these changes in your body? What makes you develop faster or slower? What makes you develop at all?

Your body constantly produces **hormones**, which are like special chemical messengers that tell your body how and when to change and to grow. Your growth spurt is caused by a growth hormone, which is released by the brain in increasing amounts.

In addition to the growth hormone, sex hormones also start to be released during puberty. For girls, the sex hormones are produced in the ovaries, and for boys, they are produced in the testicles. These sex hormones cause the differences between the shape of men's and women's bodies. When girls enter puberty, their hips begin to grow, and the hips usually grow more quickly than their shoulders. Girls' hips become wider and rounder, and their waists seem smaller and narrower in comparison. The breasts also begin growing.

For boys, these sex hormones cause their shoulders to broaden and their arms and legs to become thicker and more muscular. Boys' breasts do not change as dramatically as girls' breasts do at puberty, but they do change. Some boys experience some swelling of their breasts during puberty, but this usually goes away with time.

Hormones also affect your emotions. Many adolescents feel very intense emotions. One minute they may feel happy and excited, but the next minute, they feel like crying. They may feel great about themselves one day and bad the next.



Adolescence can be a time of very strong emotions

These changes in your emotions are called “mood swings,” and most adolescents experience them from time to time. During puberty, the production of hormones suddenly increases, which is what makes many adolescents feel a wide range of strong emotions. Later in life the production of hormones will decrease again, and you will feel more in control of your emotions.

Keep in mind that all the physical, emotional and mental changes of puberty are caused by the hormones your own body is producing. There’s nothing you can do to speed up or to slow down the production of these hormones. Just try to remember that you are unique, and you are also perfectly normal.

### **YOUR GENITALS OR “PRIVATE PARTS”**

In addition to causing changes in girls’ and boys’ body shapes and emotions, hormones make the genitals grow. Genitals is the scientific word for private parts—those areas of your body that you keep covered with your underwear or knickers.

Before you became an adolescent, your genitals were mostly just the place from where you relieved yourself. During adolescence, however, the genitals get bigger. For girls, skin and tissue in the genitals becomes softer and fatty. For boys, the penis starts to lengthen and thicken during puberty. The testicles also grow, and they start to make sperm, which are the male’s reproductive cells.

The genitals also start producing new fluids during puberty. Boys start producing semen, a mucus-like fluid in which sperm swim. Semen comes out of the penis when a boy ejaculates. Girls also produce fluids—menstrual blood and vaginal fluid (read Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 for more on boys and girls).

### **BODY HAIR AND SKIN CHANGES**

Your skin and body hair change during puberty as well. For most adolescents, their skin becomes more oily. The simple skin of childhood is gone. This can lead to pimples, which are common problems for adolescents (read Chapter 5 for information on good care of your skin).

Another sign of puberty is hair in new places on the body. Both boys and girls may notice the growth of a little more hair on their legs and arms. In addition, boys grow hair on their private parts, face, chest, and in their armpits. Girls also grow hair on their private parts and in their armpits.

The hair in the private parts is called pubic hair. Some people have lots of pubic hair. Others only have a little. Pubic hair helps to keep the genital area clean, which is very important because the skin in the genital area is delicate and easily irritated. The pubic hair helps to hold sweat and other secretions away from the sensitive skin in the genitals.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Some adolescents are not very happy about their new body hair—especially pubic hair—at first.

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**Balay, 16, Kenya**

*“I was shocked! I did not know that one could grow hair in the pubic area. I thought I was sick and asked my mum who assured me that it is normal.”*

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**Diana, 17, Zambia**

*“When it grew, I just told myself that I had to live with it.”*

---

**Douglas, 12, Zimbabwe**

*“Growing pubic hair was not pleasant. It made me look ugly.”*

Some adolescents are teased about their pubic hair or lack of it.

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**Bernard, 17, Kenya**

*“My friends laughed at me because I had not grown pubic hair.”*

Just remember, pubic hair is natural and has a job to do. So whether you have a little or a lot, don't worry too much about it.

Hair in your armpits also comes during puberty, although often it is in late puberty. Many girls do not grow underarm hair until after their breasts have started growing and after their menstrual periods have started. For boys, underarm hair usually starts appearing about a year or so after the pubic hair has started growing. Like pubic hair, underarm hair has a job. During puberty, you start to sweat more, and the hair helps to keep the sweat away from your skin.

For boys, facial hair is usually the last new body hair to appear. Hair starts growing on the corners of a boy's upper lips. Sideburns may start to grow at the same time. The hair above the upper lip (moustache) continues to grow, and then hair grows on the upper part of the cheek and just below the middle of the lower lip. Finally, it grows on the chin. Hair doesn't usually start growing on the chin until a boy's genitals are fully developed. For most boys, facial hair starts growing between the ages of 14 and 18, but it may start earlier or later.

### **YOUR MIND**

While there are many obvious changes to the body during puberty, the mind (brain) is also changing in less visible ways.

During adolescence, the mental abilities increase a great deal, along with the capacity for critical and independent thinking. As a result of these changes, you start developing your own identity. You begin seeing yourself as a unique individual. You want to think for yourself and make your own decisions. Often, for the first time, you see things differently than your parents

## CHAPTER 2 | YOUR CHANGING BODY

do. You may feel like questioning your parents' beliefs and reasons. You may want to experience life first-hand, rather than simply rely on what others tell you. You may want to try new things for yourself, and, at times, to take risks.

All these mental changes are exciting signs that you are becoming an adult. But they don't mean that you are already an adult. Even though your mental abilities are increasing a great deal, there's still plenty that you don't know. In fact, you will never know everything, so it's important to know where or whom to go to for the information you need. There will be times when it's worth drawing on the experience and knowledge of an older person. So, ask questions. Don't assume you have all the answers. Learn everything you can.

## Chapter 2

# Your Changing Body

Puberty, which usually begins between the ages of 10 and 16, is the gradual process of changing from a child to an adult. Each person starts to change at a different time. Some people develop more quickly and others develop more slowly. Everyone is different, and there is nothing you can do to control the timing of these changes.

What should you expect as you change from a girl to a woman or a boy to a man?

- The growth spurt: your hands, feet, arms, legs, hips and chest will become larger. Your body will produce hormones, which are special chemical messengers that tell the body how to grow and change.
- Your genitals, or private parts, will get bigger and begin producing fluids.
- Your skin may become more oily.
- You will begin to have pubic hair and a little more hair in your armpits, on your legs and arms, and, if you are a boy, on your face.
- You may experience a wide range of strong emotions.
- Your mental capacities will increase.

Regardless of how rapidly or slowly you change—or when you start to change—try to remember that these changes are perfectly normal. Getting used to your new body can take some time, so be patient and don't worry too much.

# Boys

In Chapter 2, you read about some of the changes that boys experience during puberty. This chapter will give you more information about these changes.

## **BODY SHAPE AND SIZE**

Most boys start their “growth spurt” between the ages of 12 and 13 years. Of course some boys start a bit earlier, and some boys start later. During the growth spurt, your body will start getting much taller and bigger.

One of the first parts of your body to grow may be your feet. In fact, the bones in your feet often grow much faster than the other parts of the body, so your feet may reach full size long before the rest of you does. If you feel as though you are suddenly clumsy, it may be because your feet are much larger than they were a short while ago. Be patient, it may take the rest of your body time to catch up!

Some bones in your body will grow more than others, and this causes your body shape to change. For example, your shoulders will grow a lot, whereas your hips may only grow a little. Your hips may seem very narrow in comparison to your broad shoulders. Your legs and arms will probably grow more than your backbone, so your legs may seem long compared to your chest or the trunk of your body. As a result, your shape will be very different from that of a little boy.

Your muscles also get bigger, especially in your legs and arms, and as these muscles develop, you will get stronger. Your chest will also get bigger as muscles and some fat accumulate there. Many boys also notice that their nipples and breasts change during puberty. The nipples may get a little bit bigger and the rings around the nipples may get larger and darker in colour.

Some boys find that their breasts swell and are painful. A few boys have a lot of swelling, which makes them very worried that they are going to grow big breasts—like a woman. Don't worry. This is perfectly normal. The swelling and tenderness are caused by all the hormones in your body. It may take a year or even a year and a half, but the swelling will go down when your body stops producing so many hormones.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Through all these changes, be patient with yourself! Your body is just fine, and you are perfectly normal. Even if you are not growing as fast as your friends, don't worry. You **will** grow! It is just a matter of time. **When** you start growing and how much you grow is determined mostly by the characteristics you inherit from your parents. Even if you start growing very late, you might still end up taller than many boys who began their growth spurt earlier.

### YOUR VOICE

Your voice will be another sure sign that you are going through puberty. The voice starts changing after your growth spurt has begun—usually around the age of 14 or 15.

Boys' voices become lower and deeper during puberty because of a hormone called **testosterone**. This hormone causes the voice box (larynx) to grow larger. As your vocal cords get thicker and longer, your voice gets lower and deeper.

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#### Precious, 15-year-old boy, Ghana

*"The first thing I noticed was the breaking of my voice, broad chest and shoulders. I was happy about it because I saw that now I am an adolescent."*

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#### Panaito from Kenya.

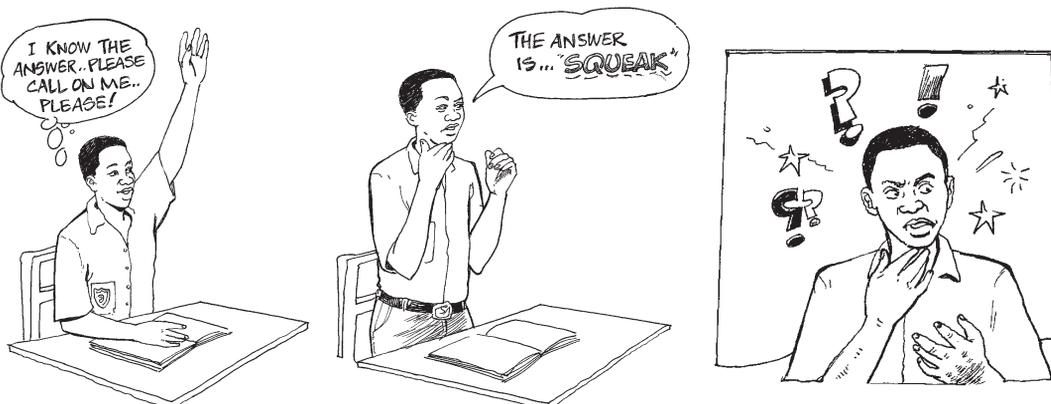
*"I experienced the change in my voice just after I had experienced wet dreams."*

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#### Aloysious, 19, Uganda

*"When my voice changed at 15, I realised that I was experiencing growth in my life. I grew very rapidly and was so happy."*

The first sign that your voice is changing is often a sudden squeak or cracking of the voice when you are talking. Some boys find it embarrassing when their voice cracks, especially because it is so unpredictable. Their voice will be normal one minute, but the next minute it is high and squeaky. Other boys do not notice very much when their voice begins changing. Even if your voice cracks a lot, don't let it worry you. Like other changes during puberty, it is perfectly normal.



Voice changes can happen at embarrassing moments

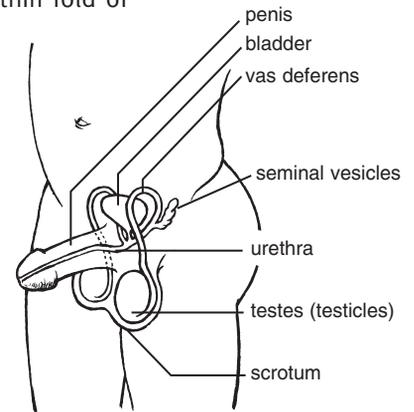
## YOUR PRIVATE PARTS

The penis is made of muscles that surround a narrow tube, called the **urethra**. Urine and semen pass through the urethra. The penis has a body and head. The “body” or “shaft” is the tube-like part of the penis. The “head” is the tip of the penis. It is called the glans. It is the most sensitive and delicate part of the penis.

When you are born, the head of the penis is covered by a small, thin fold of skin. This skin is called the foreskin. In many parts of Africa, this skin is removed in an operation called circumcision (see page 20 for more on circumcision).

The size of the penis varies from male to male. It has no relation to body size. In most cases, the larger a penis is when soft, the less it increases in size when it is erect. If it is small when soft, it may increase relatively more in size when it becomes erect.

A lot of adolescent boys (and even some grown men) spend a lot of time thinking—and worrying—about their penis. Is it too small? Why does it curve that way? Is there something wrong with it?



Male reproductive anatomy

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### Aloysious, 19, Uganda

*“At certain times we would pull out our penises and compare who had the biggest.”*

If you have ever wondered whether your penis is the right size, just remember that sexual performance does not depend on penis size. The size of the penis actually has little effect on a woman’s enjoyment of sexual intercourse. In fact, for most women and men, enjoyment of sex is mostly determined by their feelings about each other. It’s the relationship that counts—not the size of the penis.

Hanging below the penis is the **scrotum**. The scrotum is like a bag or sac of skin that holds the **testes** or **testicles** where sperm are made from puberty to old age. The skin of the scrotum is a bit hairy and oily. It tends to collect dirt, which may start to smell bad if it is not washed regularly.

During childhood, your scrotum is drawn up close to your body. But, as you go through puberty, the scrotum begins to get looser and to hang down, although when you are cold or frightened or feeling sexual, your scrotum may again get tighter and draw up close to your body. The scrotum hangs down because the testicles need to be kept at a temperature lower than your body temperature in order to make sperm.

### DO YOU KNOW about circumcision?

Circumcision is an operation where the fold of skin around the top of the penis is cut. This fold of skin is called the foreskin. It covers the glans of the penis, but it can be pulled down the shaft.

According to some African cultures, as well as some religions, such as Islam and Judaism, circumcision is usually done when babies are just a few days old. In other African cultures, circumcision is done when a boy is an adolescent, and the procedure is considered a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. There are also cultures in Africa that do not traditionally practise circumcision at all.

There's nothing wrong with being circumcised, and there is nothing wrong with not being circumcised. Circumcision is a cultural and religious rite, and if the people from your home don't do it, that is just fine.

Does circumcision make a difference to sexual feeling? This is very hard to know since each male experiences sex in his own way. What is sure is that both circumcised and uncircumcised males can enjoy sex and can make their partners happy.

While circumcision is mainly a religious and cultural practice, some people believe that circumcision has some health benefits—mainly because circumcision makes it easier to keep the penis clean. But there can be other health reasons for circumcision too. On some boys and men, the foreskin is too tight or attached to the head of the penis and cannot be fully rolled down the shaft. This can cause swelling and pain, and circumcision is often the best solution. Some people think that circumcision protects against HIV/AIDS and other STIs, but **even if you have been circumcised, you are at risk of HIV/AIDS and STIs. You should always practise safer sex.**

So what does all this mean for you? If your culture doesn't circumcise boys, should you get circumcised so that it's easier to keep your penis clean? The answer is No. Just practise good hygiene, and remember to clean under the foreskin carefully. That's usually all you need to do. However, boys who cannot roll back the foreskin and who feel pain when they get an erection should talk to a health worker.

Increasingly, circumcision is being done in health facilities, but in some places it is done by traditional “surgeons” as part of a traditional ceremony. Wherever it is done, a clean, sterilised instrument should be used each and every time a circumcision is performed. It is very dangerous if the same knife is used on many boys because if any one of the boys is infected with HIV, the knife can spread the infection to the other boys.

If you undergo a traditional circumcision ceremony, make sure it has been modernised to prevent the spread of HIV and other blood-borne illnesses. Never bow to cultural traditions that expose you to HIV. They can be changed to be safe. For example, in Mbale, Uganda, people took the following steps to make sure that circumcision is safe:

- each circumcision candidate is instructed to have his own knife.
- the knife must be boiled before use.
- the surgeons must wash their hands carefully between each candidate.

**DID YOU KNOW that there are many myths about the penis?**

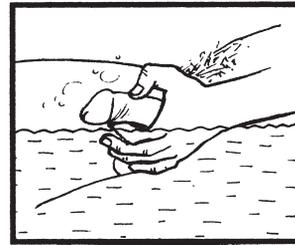
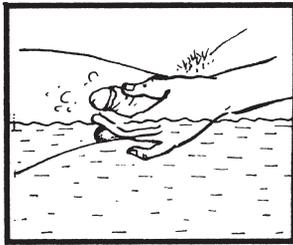
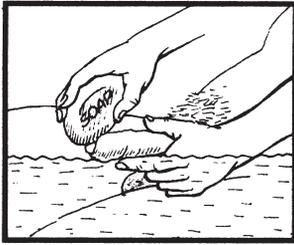
There is a lot of false information about the penis:

1. *If you do not exercise the penis through sex, it will stop functioning and decrease in size. **This is false!*** Sex is not “exercise” for the penis. Your penis doesn’t need exercise. It will work just fine without any sex at all. Sexual abstinence or “waiting” can never hurt your penis.
2. *A penis increases in size the more you have sex. **False again!*** Your penis size is determined by the traits you inherit from your parents—not anything you do with it.
3. *A small penis cannot satisfy a woman. **False!*** The size of the penis has little effect on women’s enjoyment of sexual intercourse. This is because the main centre of sexual sensation for a woman is the clitoris and the area around the opening of the vagina. The vagina itself does not have many nerves so it doesn’t feel very much.
4. *Boys with small penises cannot use condoms. **Not true!*** Condoms are made to fit tightly, so everyone can use them.
5. *You need to have sex whenever you get an erection. **False!*** This is definitely not true, which is a good thing for you. Otherwise, what would you do if you got an erection in class? If you don’t have sex, the erection will just go down on its own. You can’t possibly injure yourself by not having sex when you get an erection.
6. *Boys with big thumbs have big penises. **False!*** Many people say things like this (or they say it about boys with big noses, big feet, ears, etc.), but it is not true. There is no relation between your penis size and any other part of your body. There is no way you can know anything about a boy’s penis just by looking at him.
7. *Accumulated sperm causes backache, madness, headache, impotence and acne. **False!*** Even though your testicles produce millions of sperm, it is impossible for too much sperm to build up and cause problems. In addition, sperm cannot move around to different parts of your body.
8. *Wet dreams are a sign that you need to have sex. **False!*** Wet dreams are just one way that your body gets rid of sperm and semen. It is not a sign that you need to have sex. Your body can regulate itself just fine without your having to take any risks.

**PRACTISING GOOD HYGIENE**

Whether you are circumcised or not, it is important to wash and clean the penis every day—just as you do every other part of your body. You should also wash the scrotum, between the scrotum and the thighs, and in between the buttocks.

If you are not circumcised, you need to roll back the foreskin and gently clean this area. You may notice that there are tiny bumps at the base of the glans. These bumps are glands that produce a whitish creamy substance called smegma. Smegma helps the foreskin slide back smoothly over the glans. However, if smegma accumulates beneath the foreskin, it can cause bad smells or an infection. It is very important to keep the under-the-foreskin area very clean at all times.



If you are not circumcised, roll back the foreskin and wash gently beneath it.

## ERECTIONS

Normally the penis is soft and hangs down. During an erection, more blood flows into the penis than usual and less blood flows out. This makes the penis become larger and harder, and it stands out from the body. An erect penis usually curves upwards slightly, and it may curve to one side.

When your penis is erect, you will find that you can not urinate easily because a muscle closes the bladder off. You will have to wait until the erection goes down before you can relieve yourself.

An erection can happen when the penis is touched or caressed, or when you are excited by a sexual thought or by the sight of someone you find attractive. Erections can also be caused by anxiety and stress. It is also very common for boys to wake up with an erection in the morning. While you are asleep at night, your penis will probably become erect and then go down about 5 to 7 times. This is completely normal and healthy.

Erections occur in males of all ages, including babies and old men. Sometimes boys worry that they are having too many erections. They are disturbed by very frequent erections in class, on the bus or when they are walking. Sometimes there seems to be an obvious reason for the erection. Maybe you are sitting next to someone you find attractive. At other times, however, erections may come for no reason at all.

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### **Nfune, 13, from Zambia**

*“Erections are rather uncontrollable and frequent. Sometimes they show that you are sexually excited. I hate it when it occurs in school and in public!”*

Please do not worry. You are merely normal, healthy and full of hormones. It can be embarrassing if you get an erection in class or in public place, but most of the time you are probably the only person who is aware of it.

Sometimes boys think that they must have sex to control these erections. This is not true! It is only a myth that some boys pass around as an excuse for having sex. Having erections is not a sign that you need to have sex.

## EJACULATION

When you reach puberty, you may start noticing a different fluid coming out of the penis—one that is milky in colour and is sticky. It is thick, not watery like urine.

The mucus-like fluid comes out of the penis when a man ejaculates or “comes.” Ejaculation is the climax of sexual excitement, when a man has an erection. Keep in mind that you don’t have to ejaculate every time you have an erection. If you just wait, the erection will go down on its own without causing any harm to you.

The mucus-like fluid is made up of two things. About 10% of the fluid are millions of **sperm**, which are the male reproductive cells. Sperm are so small that you cannot see them unless you have a microscope. If you could see them, you would see that each sperm has a round body or head, and a long thin tail.



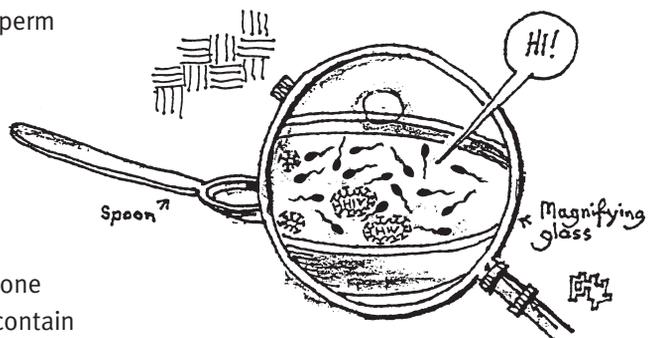
A sperm

The other 90% of ejaculate is a milky liquid called **semen** or **seminal fluid**. Semen allows the sperm to swim, and it provides nourishment for the sperm and keeps them alive. But semen is not food for girls! That’s just another myth!

The sperm are made in the **testicles** (see illustration, page 19). Semen—the white milky fluid—is made in the **seminal vesicles**. These are two glands behind the bladder. When a man ejaculates, sperm mix with semen from the seminal vesicles, and this fluid passes through tubes called the **vas deferens**, into the **urethra**, and comes out of the opening at the tip of the penis.

It may seem that a lot of this sticky fluid comes out of the penis during ejaculation. But, in fact, it is only about a teaspoonful. Do not under-estimate the power of this teaspoonful of semen, however. It contains about 500 million sperm! Each one of those sperm could make a girl pregnant. When you think about the 500 million sperm in one ejaculation, you will see how easy it is to make a girl pregnant.

If the boy or man is infected with HIV, one teaspoon of semen will probably also contain hundreds of thousands of the virus that causes AIDS.



A small teaspoon of semen contains millions of sperm and can contain HIV if the boy is infected

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Many boys worry that a condom will not be able to hold all these 500 million sperm. But those sperm are very, very small, and therefore, a condom can hold them all—provided it is put on correctly (see Chapter 10 for more on condoms).

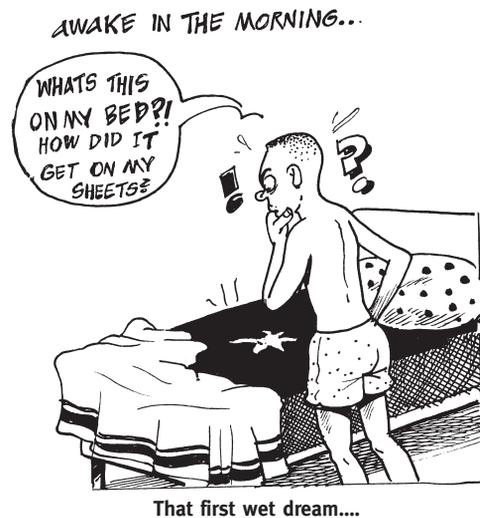
Some boys worry that if they ejaculate too often, they will reduce the amount of semen in their body. They worry that they may run out of semen and won't have enough when they need it. This can never happen. A man will make sperm and semen from the start of puberty until his dying day.

Also, remember that there is no way that too much sperm and semen can accumulate or build pressure in your body. Your body is a perfectly-tuned machine. Your body has ways to get rid of excess sperm and semen: one of them is wet dreams.

### WET DREAMS

Boys sometimes release semen or “ejaculate” while they are asleep. This is called a wet dream. For many boys, the first wet dream is the first time semen comes out of their body. They will probably wake up and find a damp patch in the bed or on their clothes.

If you do not know about wet dreams, this can be confusing and worrisome. You might think that you have wet your bed or that you are bleeding or sick. But you will see that the fluid is milky white, not like blood or urine.



Wet dreams only happen when you are asleep. If you nap during the day, you could possibly have a wet dream, but most boys have wet dreams at night when they are asleep. Many boys who wake up to find that they have ejaculated recall that they were dreaming about something sexual. But you can have a wet dream even if you have not been having a sexy dream.

Most boys find wet dreams embarrassing. It's okay to feel embarrassed, but remember that wet dreams are very common during adolescence. Not every adolescent boy has wet dreams, but most do.

A boy cannot stop himself from having wet dreams. They are natural and normal. They are the way that your body makes room for new sperm from the testicles. Having wet dreams does not mean that you should have sex.

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**Adam, 13, Uganda**

*“I don’t think having wet dreams means I should be having sex. It is just growth. I only feel shy because I have to change my bed sheets every other day.”*

For some boys, starting to have wet dreams is a big experience—something they feel happy about.

---

**Panaito from Kenya**

*“When I got my first wet dream, I felt that I had attained sexual maturity. I was happy to be among those who had already experienced it. But if I had not been informed, I would have even tried to see a doctor. Thank God I knew what it was.”*

---

**Adam, 13 of Uganda**

*“When I had my first wet dream, I told my big brother who assured me that it is part of growth.”*

Other boys aren’t quite so happy when they first start having wet dreams, and this is perfectly normal too.

---

**Nfune, 13, from Zambia**

*“I find them disgusting.”*

Some boys have unkind “friends” who tease them about their wet dreams. But it is wrong to tease or laugh at someone because they have wet dreams. Wet dreams are normal.

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**Bernard, 17, of Nairobi, Kenya**

*“I was in Standard 8. I had not expected to start ejaculating so early. I confided in my friend. Instead of explaining why it had happened, he laughed at me. I felt embarrassed. I did not want anybody to know, but he told others, and some of them said that I was masturbating. I went to another friend who was older and he told me wet dreams were normal.”*

You shouldn’t be worried about wet dreams, since they are perfectly normal. The more you inform yourself about your body, the more comfortable you will be with all the changes you’re going through. In addition, being well informed will enable you to help younger boys understand what is happening to them as they go through adolescence.

There is plenty more good information in this book for you boys, so don’t stop reading here.

## Chapter 3

# Boys

During puberty, a boy can expect many changes to occur in his body. These changes are gradual and occur at different ages for different boys. Here are some of the changes you can expect:

- Your body will grow, especially the bones in your shoulders, arms, legs and feet. Also, your muscles will develop and you will grow stronger.
- Your voice will change and then deepen as your vocal chords get thicker and longer.
- Your penis will grow, and your scrotum will begin to hang down.
- You will have erections more frequently.
- You may have wet dreams (you may ejaculate in your sleep) at night.

As you undergo these changes, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Every penis is the right size.
- There is nothing wrong with being circumcised, and there is nothing wrong with not being circumcised.
- Wash and clean your penis every day, always rolling back and washing under the foreskin if you are not circumcised.
- You do not need to have sex when you have an erection.
- Wet dreams are normal, common and nothing to worry about! They are not a sign that you should have sex.

Whenever these changes occur in your body is the right time. You are unique, and you are completely normal!

# Girls

Chapter 2 gave some information about the changes that girls experience during puberty. This chapter will give you more information, so keep reading.

## BODY SHAPE AND SIZE

Most girls start growing quickly around the ages of 10 to 11 years old—but there are always girls who start growing when they are younger or older than this. The feet are often the first part of the body to grow a lot. You may still be quite short, but find that your feet are suddenly very big! Don't worry, the rest of your body will catch up to those big feet. Your body is just growing at its own rate.

Other bones will also start growing—each at their own speed. Your arms and legs may start growing quickly while your backbone grows more slowly.

Another change you may notice is that your hips start growing. The hipbones become larger, and soft, fatty tissue grows on the hips, thighs and buttocks. As your hips become wider, your waist will look narrow in comparison, and your body will have a rounder, more womanly shape.

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### Catheryn, 15, Ghana

*“I was 10 years old when I first began to see changes in my body. People told me without these changes I wouldn't be a woman so I was very happy. I was entering into womanhood and had to take proper care of myself.”*

## YOUR BREASTS

Some girls begin to develop breasts at age 8 or 9, but other girls do not start until much later. The development of the breasts is caused by a hormone called **oestrogen**. Oestrogen causes the tissues in the breasts to grow so that some day, when you have a baby, you will be able to produce and store milk.

Before your breasts start to form, your nipples will probably get larger and stand out more than they used to. Another change you may notice is that the ring of skin around the nipple—

the **areola**—gets darker in colour and larger. You also may see tiny lumps in the areola. These lumps are little glands, which are normal. When a woman has a baby, these glands produce a substance that helps protect the nipple when the baby is breast-feeding.

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**Magreth, 18, Tanzania**

*“When my breasts started to grow, I felt OK. Though sometimes it was a bit painful.”*

As the nipples and areola get larger and darker, the breasts grow larger and fuller. As these changes start happening, you may notice that your breasts feel sore. It can be painful if they are bumped or hit. This is normal, and it is no cause for alarm. The breast is a very sensitive part of the body. The nipple is especially sensitive. When it is stimulated by different sensations, such as touches or even the cold, the nipple becomes harder and erect.

Some girls’ breasts grow slowly. For others the growth is very quick. On average, it takes about 4 years for the breasts to develop fully, but some girls’ breasts develop fully in less than a year, while other girls’ breasts can take as long as 6 years to develop. So if your breasts are taking a long time to develop, be patient. It will happen.

---

**Deborah, 15, Uganda**

*“I developed breasts recently, but I’m worried at the rate they are enlarging. I don’t mind having breasts, but I hope they do not grow extraordinarily big. At first I was wondering why they had delayed to come, but now I’m scared about the size.”*

Breasts come in all shapes and sizes. The size and shape of your breasts are determined by the genetic traits that you inherit from your parents. The size is also determined by the amount of fatty tissue in the breasts. There is nothing you can do about what your breasts look like. No amount of exercise can increase your breast size. Exercise works by building up muscles, and there are no muscles in the breasts. Just remember: all breast sizes—big and small—are good for feeding babies.

You also should know that breasts grow unevenly. One breast may become a bit bigger than the other breast. In fact, no one has two breasts that are exactly the same size, but usually this difference is not very noticeable. The shape of the nipple also varies a lot. Some women’s nipples turn inwards. Instead of pointing out, they sink into the areola.



**Whether your breasts are large or small,  
they are the right size for you.**

Breasts have different meanings in different cultures. In some cultures, it is fine for women to go bare breasted. In other cultures, doing this would be considered very shocking and indecent. In most places, however, growing breasts is a big event in a girl's life. It is a sign of growing up. Most girls come to like their breasts.

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**Prossy, 13, Uganda**

*"I like my breasts. I used to admire my elder sisters who already had breasts. I used to fold my stockings and put them inside my dress."*

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**Barlay, 16, Kenya**

*"I used to admire girls in bodysuits. I was happy when they came, so I could also wear a bodysuit."*

---

**Cathy, 17, Uganda**

*"I developed breasts in Standard 1. I felt like I was the oldest girl in the class. It took me time to accept the changes that were happening to my body. But I liked the rounding of my hips. My friends kept on telling me that they were so tempting and this made me so proud."*

---

**Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*"I was very happy because I started to look like my mum. When I was not having breasts, I used to wear my mother's bra and put my socks in them to look like my mum."*

Some girls feel embarrassed when their breasts begin to grow. This is normal too. Many girls who are embarrassed about their breasts feel that way because none of their friends have begun to develop breasts yet.

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**Irene, 16, Uganda**

*"When my breasts started growing, I used to wear very tight T-shirts, my little sister's T-shirts. I wanted to flatten myself."*

---

**Angela, 17, Kenya**

*"I was conscious and always wore a baggy sweater when they started appearing. I used to feel uneasy as I was in a mixed school and didn't know what the boys would say."*

Some girls lose their upright posture and sink in their chests, because they feel embarrassed about their growing breasts. This is a pity because everyone should like their body, and they shouldn't care what other people say. Whether your breasts are big or small, pointed or round, they are nice the way they are.

**Rita, 16, Uganda**

*“I like my breasts because they make me feel like a real woman. Big girls without breasts are always teased that they aren’t different from men.”*

It would be great if people did not tease others about their breasts. People who tease are just immature. Try your best to ignore them.

**DID YOU KNOW that there are many myths about breasts?**

People say a lot of things about breasts that are not true. Here are some:

1. *Girls with pointed breasts are sexy. **This is false!*** Sexiness is in your mind, not in a piece of your anatomy.
2. *Putting butter on the nipples or letting insects bite the nipples, makes the breasts grow faster. **Not true!*** It is hormones that make the breasts grow—nothing else will make any difference.
3. *Girls with dark skin around their nipples have already had sex. **False!*** Like the colour of your skin, the colour of the ring around the nipples (the areola) is determined by the genetic traits you inherit from your parents.
4. *Breasts grow big when girls let boys touch them. **Not true!*** The size of the breasts is genetically determined. Nothing you do will make them bigger or smaller.
5. *Girls with breasts that have drooped have already had sex, or they had an abortion or a baby. **False again!*** Breasts droop because of gravity. If you have big breasts they are more likely to droop because of the weight.
6. *Wearing a bra makes breasts droop. **False!*** Bras actually help prevent drooping because they support the breasts and prevent the skin and breast tissue from stretching and losing their elasticity.
7. *Girls with big breasts will have a lot of milk for their babies. **False!*** Milk production does not depend on breast size. Even the smallest breasts can produce enough milk to satisfy a baby.

**TAKING CARE OF YOUR BREASTS**

Breasts are very sensitive, so there are a few things you should know about taking care of them. You should never pluck the hairs around your nipples, as this can cause an infection. It is normal to have these hairs. A few girls have a little discharge coming from the nipples. This is normal, but if the discharge seems to have blood in it or is brownish in colour, you should see a doctor because this could be an infection.

Taking care of your breasts also includes making sure no one touches them against your will. Boys and men usually find women's breasts very attractive. But no one should touch you unless you want them to.

For some people, the breasts are very sensitive to touch. Touching can be sexually exciting, and this might lead you to go farther than you really want to go.

## BRAS

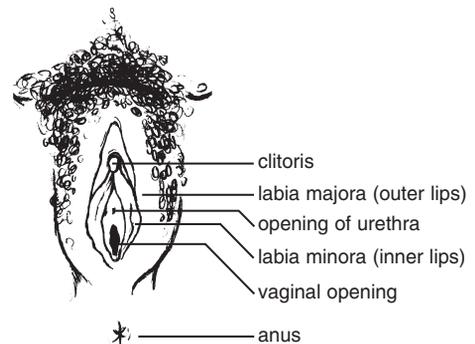
If you have small breasts or very firm ones, you may not need a bra. But if your breasts are large, you may feel more comfortable wearing a bra that provides some support so the breasts don't move or bounce when you walk, run, dance or play. Some adolescent girls feel embarrassed about their breasts, so wearing a bra makes them feel less self-conscious.

Many women figure out their bra size simply by trying on different sizes to see which one is most comfortable. This works just fine. Other people take measurements to figure out the right bra size. To take your measurements, you need to know your **chest size** and your **cup size**. Measure around your chest, just under your breast, to get the chest size. Then measure around the fullest part of your breasts to get your cup size. If the chest and cup measurements are the same you need cup A. If your breast measurement is 2.5 cm more than your chest size, you need cup B. And if your breast measurement is 5 cm more than your chest measurement, you need cup C.

## YOUR PRIVATE PARTS

The vagina is the biggest of the three holes in the genital area. The other holes are the **urethra** (in front of the vagina) and the **anus** (in back of the vagina). The vagina itself is a short tube about 7 cm deep and 3 - 4 cm wide. It is made up of soft folds of skin.

The adult vagina is very strong, extremely stretchy and very muscular. During childbirth, the vagina has to stretch to many times its normal size to allow a baby to leave the mother's body. But a young girl's vagina is thin and cannot stretch very much. This is one reason why childbirth is so dangerous for adolescent girls. The vagina of an adolescent girl can tear or burst during childbirth. This causes very serious problems (read Chapter 11).



**Female genitalia**

At puberty, the walls of the vagina begin to produce a fluid or discharge. This fluid is thicker and stickier than saliva, and it has a purpose: to keep the vagina clean and to maintain the proper environment in which "good" bacteria that prevent infections can grow. Many women notice more vaginal discharge at different times of the month and when they are feeling sexually excited. This is normal.

**DO YOU KNOW the facts about the vagina?**

There are many myths about the vagina:

1. *The vagina is the dirtiest part of your body. **False!*** The mouth is the dirtiest part of your body. Vaginal fluids and menstrual blood are actually clean. But once they leave the body, bacteria can breed in them and make them smell.
2. *The vagina is not closed at the end. It is just a big hole. **False again!*** The vagina is closed by the cervix. Condoms or tampons will not travel up into the body.
3. *It is obscene to touch the vagina. **Not true!*** The vagina is just like any other part of your body. Touching it is just like touching your ear. But your vagina is a very private part, so you should only touch it when you are all alone.
4. *The vagina is only for the pleasure of men. **False!*** The vagina is part of a woman's body. It is hers and hers alone! Don't let anyone touch it if it makes you feel uncomfortable.

The area around the opening of the vagina is called the **vulva**. The opening of the vagina is normally closed, and it is protected by the **labia majora** and the **labia minora**, which are the outer and inner "lips." These lips are two folds of skin. There are many small glands in the labia, so you may notice that you perspire and have some white secretions here.

In front of the urethra, where the inner lips (the labia minora) join, is the **clitoris**. The clitoris is a small bump of flesh about the size of a small pea. The clitoris is filled with nerve endings, and it is the most sensitive part of the genitals. It is very sensitive to touch.

Deep inside you, at the end of the vagina is the **cervix**. The cervix closes the end of the vagina. There is only a very small opening in the cervix, and this opening leads to the uterus (womb). The opening is so narrow that only menstrual blood can come down and only sperm cells can swim up. Some people fear that during sexual intercourse a condom could come off the penis and go up into the uterus. This is impossible because the opening of the cervix is much too small. The cervix only opens during childbirth so that the baby can come down from the uterus, into the vagina and out of the body.

The surface of the cervix is very delicate, especially in young girls and young women. The cervix can get damaged or infected by bacteria and viruses that may enter the body during sexual intercourse. This could lead to cancer of the cervix. Girls who have sex early, or who have many sexual partners, or who have HIV, are more at risk for cancer of the cervix than girls who have a more careful sex life. Delaying sex and using condoms can protect your cervix (read Chapter 10 for more on sexual health).

**PRACTISING GOOD HYGIENE**

The vulva and anus should be washed regularly and kept dry. It's a good idea to avoid sharing towels with other family members or your friends as these can pass on infections from one person to another. After bathing, wear clean cotton panties. In very hot weather, nylon panties should be avoided as they hold in moisture and heat, which causes the growth of bacteria. If you cannot find cotton panties, wear ones that have a cotton lining.

After you pass urine or defaecate, you should always clean yourself by cleaning from the front of your private parts backwards towards the anus. Whether you use toilet tissue, paper, water, grass or leaves to clean yourself, make sure you avoid wiping forwards. If you wipe forwards, you risk pulling germs from the anus to the vagina and urethra. This can give you an infection.

You should never try to wash inside the vagina unless a doctor instructs you to do so. Unfortunately some girls and women try to wash inside the vagina with harsh soaps. Some women also spray the area with deodorants or perfumes. None of this is necessary, and it can even be harmful because harsh soaps, perfumes and vaginal deodorants can change the normal fluids inside the vagina and can irritate the skin inside the vagina.

In some countries, like Zimbabwe and Zambia, women put herbs, pieces of cloth and other objects into the vagina to "clean" it or to tighten it. This is not a healthy practice because the skin inside the vagina is very delicate. Inserting foreign objects can cause small cuts, abrasions, and sores, which could become infected and could also put you at greater risk of HIV infection.

In general, it is best to never place anything in your vagina, except tampons and medicines prescribed by a doctor. Just make sure that you follow instructions closely.

It's good to pay close attention to your normal discharge and how it changes during your monthly cycle so that you can recognise any unusual signs or changes. If you pay attention closely, you will notice that the discharge is not always the same. Sometimes it may be clear while at other times it may be a bit whitish like egg white. When you are ovulating, it may be more slippery and clear. A female's vaginal fluids also change when she is sexually aroused.

If the discharge becomes heavier or thicker, changes colour to yellow, green or brown, or causes itching in the private parts, then you may have an infection. Bad-smelling discharge, and pain or bleeding in the vagina when you are not in your menstrual period, are also signs of infection. If you experience any of these changes, you will need to see a doctor.

If you don't engage in unprotected sex and if you practise good hygiene, you are unlikely to experience these problems. When taken care of properly, the vagina is a perfectly-balanced, self-regulating environment. All you need to do is gently wash the genital area daily with clean water or clean water and bath soap. Separate the outer lips to clean away secretions that collect there.

**DO YOU KNOW about female circumcision?**

In some cultures, the clitoris and/or other parts of the female genitalia are cut or removed altogether through a practice called **female circumcision** or **genital cutting**. The operation varies in different countries. It ranges from cuts around the clitoris to the removal of the clitoris and the labia (the inner and outer lips). Cutting away the clitoris and the labia and stitching/narrowing the vagina opening is called infibulation and is the most extreme form of this practice.

**When is it carried out?** The age at which female circumcision is carried out varies from country to country. It is done during infancy, childhood, adolescence, at marriage or during a woman's first pregnancy.

**Why is it done?** Various cultural and traditional customs and beliefs support female circumcision, but neither the Bible nor the Koran support the practice. In some societies people believe that circumcision will preserve girls' virginity and prevent women from being loose (promiscuous). In addition, some people believe that female circumcision increases the sexual pleasure of husbands, and the practice is believed to increase girls' chances for marriage and to enhance their fertility.

**How it is done?** The procedure is usually done by older women or by traditional birth attendants who use special knives, scissors, pieces of glass, razor blades or crude tools to perform the operation. The operation is often performed in unclean conditions and poor light. Usually no painkillers (anaesthetics) or medicines to prevent infection (antiseptics) are used.

**What are the consequences?** Female circumcision can cause serious health and psychological (emotional) problems:

- **Severe bleeding (Haemorrhage)** The cutting of the genitals can cause severe bleeding. This may result in death or in severe anaemia (weak blood).
- **Infection:** Infection can result from the use of unclean instruments or tools during the operation, and it can be caused by traditional medicines used for healing the wound. The infection may spread to the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries causing constant pain and infertility. Infection can also cause death.
- **Shock:** Extreme weakness or loss of consciousness can result from severe bleeding, pain or infection.
- **Urine retention:** After being cut, females may hold their urine for hours or days because of pain or fear of passing urine on the wound. Even after the wound has healed, for an infibulated woman, the hole may be too small to pass urine.
- **Difficulties during menstruation:** If the opening of the vagina is too small for menstrual blood to flow out properly, the blood may collect in the vagina and uterus. This can result in infection and in the uterus becoming swollen with menstrual blood.

**DO YOU KNOW about female circumcision? (continued)**

- **Difficulties during sexual intercourse and childbirth.** Girls who have been circumcised may find sex painful. They also may have problems during childbirth if the opening of vagina is too narrow for the baby to pass through (see Chapter 11).
- **Psychological and social effects:** Female circumcision may leave a lasting mark on the life and mind of the woman. She may lose trust and confidence in her parents or guardians. She also may suffer from feelings of incompleteness, anxiety, depression and the inability to enjoy sexual relations.

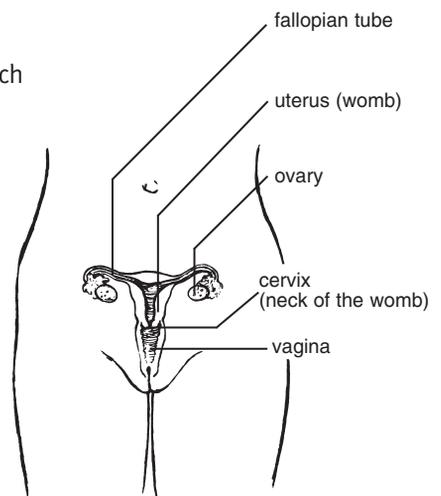
Because of the serious health risks involved and because female circumcision is not a medically necessary procedure, many people now call it **female genital mutilation (FGM)**. It is considered a violation of women and girls' rights to physical and mental health and their rights to liberty, security and bodily integrity (the wholeness or completeness of their body). If you or a girl you know is facing pressure to be circumcised, talk to a local authority or a health worker to see if they can talk to the parents and relatives about the serious health consequences of the procedure.

**MENSTRUATION AND THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE**

Most girls begin having menstrual periods (also called monthly periods) between the ages of 10 and 16. Menarche (the beginning of menstruation) is a sign that big changes have taken place deep inside a young woman's body. It is also a sign that she could become pregnant if she has sexual intercourse with a male.

During puberty, hormones cause the **ovaries**, two egg-shaped organs, to mature and to start releasing an egg (or ovum) each month. Every female is born with thousands of eggs in her ovaries. The eggs are so small that you can not see them without a microscope.

As the ovaries mature, the **uterus** also matures, and a soft lining begins to form in the uterus each month. This is how the uterus prepares itself to receive a fertilised egg. If there is no fertilised egg, the lining of the uterus will break down and will pass through the **cervix** and out of the **vagina**. This is **menstruation** or a **menstrual period**. Because the lining is made of blood vessels, it is called **menstrual blood**.



The female reproductive organs

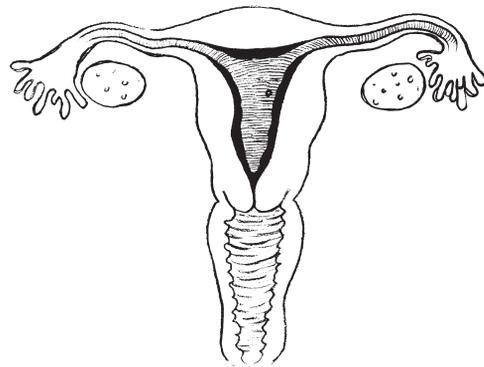
Girls who have started menstruating have “monthly cycles.” For the first few years, most girls’ menstrual cycles are very irregular. They don’t know when they will get their periods. There

seems to be no pattern to it, and they sometimes will go several months without getting their periods at all. This is normal, and after a few years the menstrual cycle will become more regular. Some women never have a regular cycle, and this is normal too.

Even when it is regular, the length of the menstrual cycle varies for different women and girls. For some, the cycle is as short as 21 or (even fewer) days. For others, it is as long as 35 days. The average cycle is 28 days. Let's look at the 28-day menstrual cycle of the average woman:

On Day 1 she starts to bleed. For the next 5 to 7 days her body will be shedding the lining from the walls of her uterus. At the same time, her body has seen that there is going to be no pregnancy that month, and it knows that it needs to start to prepare another egg. One egg starts ripening in one of her ovaries. Soon afterwards, the uterus starts to build up another lining.

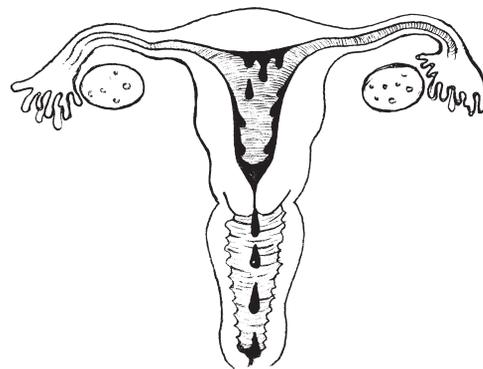
Halfway through the cycle—sometime around Day 14 or 2 weeks after she started bleeding—the egg is released from the ovary, and it starts to float down the fallopian tube. This is the **fertile period**, when the woman's chances of becoming pregnant are highest. The egg spends a few days inside the fallopian tube, and if it meets a male's sperm there, it can become fertilised and the woman could become pregnant (see Chapter 11 for more on pregnancy).



Lining of the uterus ready to receive an egg

If the egg doesn't become fertilised, it goes into the uterus, down through the cervix and vagina, and passes out of her body. This will be around Day 20.

About a week later, when her body realises that there has been no fertilised egg, the lining of the uterus will again come out as menstrual bleeding, and the cycle begins all over again.



Menstruation: shedding of the uterus lining

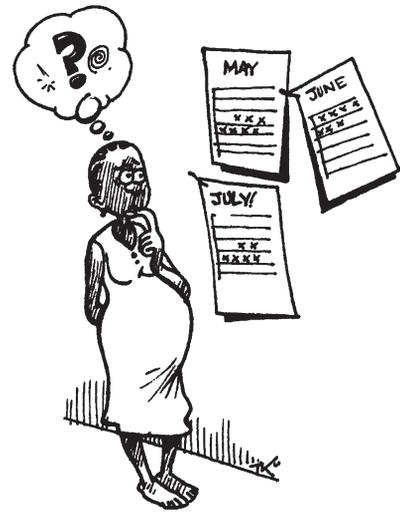
That is how the menstrual cycle works. Many women assume that their fertile period is right in the middle of their cycle, but this is only true for women with a 28-day cycle. For women with shorter or longer cycles, the fertile period will not be in the middle of the cycle. This is because **ovulation** (the release of an egg) occurs about 14 days **before** the next menstrual bleeding begins. This means that a woman who has a 21-day cycle probably ovulates around Day 7, whereas a woman with a 35-day cycle probably ovulates around Day 21.

The menstrual cycle is especially irregular during adolescence, and it can be affected by stress, sorrow, travel and other changes in a girl's life. Therefore, it is very difficult to know when the fertile period will occur. Many girls become pregnant by mistake because they have sex during what they think should be their “safe days”—the days when they think that their risks of pregnancy are low.

Most girls and boys have heard of “safe days.” However, there are no “safe days” from pregnancy for adolescents. This is because the menstrual cycle is so irregular during adolescence. And even if your periods have been regular, they can suddenly become irregular.

In addition, there are no “safe days” against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can get those infections every day of the month.

Waiting for the “safe days” is not a good way to prevent pregnancy or to protect yourself against STIs. If you are a sexually active adolescent, never count on “safe days” for protection. There are much better ways to protect yourself (read Chapters 10 and 11 for more on safer sex and contraception).



There are no “safe days” for adolescents

## THE FIRST MENSTRUATION

Starting to menstruate is a very big event in a girl's life. Many girls can remember the exact day they started.

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### Ruvimbo, 13, Zimbabwe

*“I remember it was on June 10. I woke up and found my clothes with blood. I went and told my mother. She gave me cotton and told me how to use it. She also explained to me that if there is no cotton I could use old material.”*

Menstruation means that your body is developing and working in a new way. It also means you can become pregnant if you have sex. But menstruation does not mean that your body is ready for sex or for having a baby. The vagina is still small and immature until a young woman reaches the age of 18 to 20. In addition, the hips or pelvic bones may be too small for normal delivery.

Menstruation is a sign of health, but many girls are very shocked and unhappy when they first menstruate—usually because they did not know what it was, and they thought that something was wrong.

**Diana, 17, Zambia**

*"It came to me as a shock since I had never had any knowledge about it. Then my mother explained to me why I had to go through it."*

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**Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*"I didn't know what it was. I was very upset and felt shy both with my parents and my peers. I even prayed and asked God to make that thing go away. I later realised it was part of life."*

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**Stabisile, 19, Zimbabwe**

*"I was unsure of what was going on. I had no information on how to deal with it. Menstruation made me miserable."*

Girls who know what to expect and girls whose mothers and older sisters talk to them about menstruation often find it easier to accept this change. They feel better able to handle it.

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**Sandra, 13, Uganda**

*"I have not yet begun menstruation, but even if it comes I already know why it is there and I know how to manage it."*

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**Demitrida, 13, Tanzania**

*"I have not started my menstrual period yet. When I do I will tell my guardian teacher. I will also tell my mother so that she can help me with cotton or pieces of cloth."*

You will know that you have started to menstruate when a little blood comes out of your vagina. The blood does not pour like water from a tap. It dribbles slowly. Usually by the time you notice a feeling of unusual wetness, your panties have absorbed any blood that has come out, but the rest of your clothes will be fine.

But sometimes there is more blood, or it comes more suddenly. Or, it might take you a longer time to notice what is happening. Cathy, 17, from Uganda bled through her panties on to her clothes:

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**Cathy, 17, Uganda**

*"It happened in class with all my classmates around. I stood up to go to the toilet. Then I realised I had stained my dress. Oh, it was such a terrible experience. I was so embarrassed. My friends helped me, but I spent the whole week at home."*

If this happens to you, stay cool. It's not your fault. You didn't know it was going to start! It takes everyone a while to figure out how to deal with menstrual periods.

**DO YOU KNOW the facts about menstruation?**

Everyone has many questions about menstruation. Here are some common questions and the answers:

1. *How much blood will I lose each month?* Over the whole monthly menstrual period, the average female only loses about 60-70 ml of blood. Measure 70 ml in science class. You'll see that it is not very much! However, this is just an average. Some females lose even less—just a few tablespoons worth of blood a month. Others lose up to a cupful.
2. *If I keep track on a calendar, can I know which days are my safe days when I won't get pregnant?* No, you cannot. Adolescent girls tend to have irregular periods so they cannot predict their safe days. In addition, there are no safe days against infection with HIV and other STIs. You can get infected with STIs any day. Do not consider safe days a good way to protect yourself!
3. *Can I menstruate twice in one month?* Yes, look at page 40. Susan menstruated twice in April.
4. *Can I have sex during menstruation?* This is not a good idea, especially if it is unprotected sex (sex without a condom). If you have HIV, the HIV will be in your menstrual blood so your partner could easily be infected. But you are at risk too. If you have sex at this time with a male who has HIV or another STI, you are more likely to get infected than at any other time of the month.
5. *Does sex cure menstrual cramps?* No, sexual intercourse will not cure menstrual cramps. This is just a myth that young people pass around.

**KEEPING A CALENDAR**

For most girls, it takes some time to get used to menstruation. If you are feeling unhappy about menstruation, your feelings are perfectly normal. Try to remember that menstruation is a sign of maturity and health. You should also know that it will not last forever. Most women stop having their periods when they are in their late 40s and their 50s. This is called menopause.

Many girls find it helpful to keep a diary of when they bleed each month. Even if they are irregular, this helps them have some idea of when they might menstruate so that they can prepare for it. You can buy a small calendar and mark with an X the day you start to bleed. By counting the days between the X's, you will soon see how long your cycle is and how regular (or irregular) it is.



**Keep track of your periods using a calendar**

Susan, aged 19, has a regular 28-day cycle. In April, she started to bleed on April 1st. So her next period started on April 29. In May she started menstruating on May 27. In June she menstruated on June 23. In July she started menstruating on July 20. In August she started on the 16th.

Did you notice that her period started on a different day each month—even though she has a perfectly regular cycle?

Remember, the calendar method is a good way to help you prepare for your periods. But it's **not** a good way to know when your “safe days” will be. If you are sexually active, you should find a better way to protect yourself against pregnancy *and* against STIs, including HIV/AIDS (see Chapter 11).

### **DISCOMFORTS WITH PERIODS**

Many girls have swelling and extra tenderness in their breasts just before their monthly period starts or when they ovulate. This is not very comfortable, but it is normal. The soreness is caused by hormones, which make the breast tissue hold more water than normal. Wearing a well-fitting bra will help you feel more comfortable, and eating less salty food will help reduce the amount of water that your body is storing.

Periods can affect one's mood too. Before their period starts each month, some girls feel tearful or depressed. Sometimes girls feel bad tempered because their breasts feel sore or their body feels a bit swollen or bloated. This moodiness is sometimes called “premenstrual tension,” and it is a common problem. Try not to let it bother you too much.

Many girls experience a bit of abdominal pain or cramps during their period. These cramps happen because the muscles of the uterus are contracting while the lining is being shed. These cramps are normal and can be managed. If the pain is strong, lie down and try to completely relax your body by breathing in deeply and slowly. You can also gently massage the abdomen and back. Alternatively, a hot water bottle placed on the abdomen and lower stomach will give relief. If this does not work, try a painkiller from a pharmacy, kiosk or shop.

Exercise can also help—even though this may not be your first instinct. You might feel like lying down, but taking a brisk walk or going for a run actually helps some girls deal with their cramps. If you can get tampons, you can even try swimming. Having your period shouldn't prevent you from doing things you enjoy.

Menstrual cramps and pains are usually a feature of early adolescence, and, by the time you are 18 or so, they probably won't bother you as much. But some girls have extraordinarily painful periods. These girls usually are the same ones who have very heavy periods.

Girls with very heavy periods usually end up using many pads in one day and night and yet they still stain their sheets or clothes. They often miss school because they are bleeding too much or are in too much pain. Imagine missing school every month. Imagine the impact that has on your studies!

There is a solution for severe menstrual problems, so you should not suffer unnecessarily. If you have truly terrible period pains or bleed very heavily—and if you are missing school because of your periods—you should see a health worker. Some health workers will prescribe contraceptive pills to relieve heavy, painful periods. The pills make the menstrual periods more regular, and they also reduce the amount of blood lost each month. If you need to consult a health worker about your periods, ask about contraceptive pills. You can take these pills if you are a virgin and are not having sex. The pills contain very low doses of the hormones that naturally occur in your body. They are safe for adolescents.

If your doctor does not want to prescribe the pills for you, ask what else you can do to reduce the discomfort you are going through every month. You should not miss school because of a problem that can be easily solved.

You may also need to see a health worker if you start bleeding or spotting between periods or if your period lasts more than 8 days.

### **SEX AND MENSTRUATION**

There is absolutely no truth to the rumour that sex cures menstrual pains. In fact, sex during menstruation can increase the risks of getting STIs, including HIV. Menstrual blood is a rich environment in which bacteria and viruses can grow very quickly.

If a menstruating female has sex with a male who has an STI, she is more likely to get infected than during other times of her monthly cycle. In addition, she is likely to get a more serious infection when she is menstruating. This is because the opening of the cervix is wider than usual so that the menstrual blood can flow out. The STI germs can travel up into the uterus and fallopian tubes and can cause an infection high up in the female reproductive organs. This can result in infertility.

For the male, having sex with a menstruating female is also risky. If she is infected with HIV, her menstrual blood will be rich in HIV viruses.

### **COMFORT, HEALTH AND HYGIENE**

In some cultures, menstruating females are seen as dirty—but actually menstrual blood is clean. Once menstrual blood leaves the body, however, bacteria can grow in it, causing it to smell, which is why good hygiene is especially important during menstruation. During menstruation, wash yourself at least once a day to keep clean. Do not use deodorants or perfumes on your genitals as they can cause irritation.

Here are some tips for making your periods easier and more comfortable:

- Always be prepared—keep track of when your periods are due so you aren't caught by surprise.
- Avoid eating too much salt. Salt causes your body to retain extra water, especially around

the time of your periods. This can add to your feeling of heaviness, the swelling of your abdomen and legs, tension and depression.

- Drink plenty of water or fruit juice.
- Eat foods that are rich in iron like small whole fish, liver, beans, meat, and lots of green vegetables. This will help you to replace the iron lost in bleeding.

## WHAT TO USE

Throughout history, women and girls have always menstruated and coped with it even when there were none of the sanitary products that you can buy in stores and kiosks today. So even if you do not have the money to buy pads or tampons, you can deal with your periods just fine.

One of the most common and cheapest materials is clean rags. You can cut them to fit your panty area, sewing several layers of cotton rag on top of each other. Make sure that they are clean. Wash them thoroughly and hang them in a private but sunny place to dry. The sun is a very good disinfectant and kills germs.

Toilet tissue is also inexpensive. You can buy about five rolls of toilet tissue for the cost of one pack of pads. You will need to make a thick long wad of toilet tissue. Sometimes toilet tissue is too rough, however, and it can cause irritation and soreness to your skin.

Pads are also good. They are designed to fit neatly between your body and your panties. They have strips of tape that keep them attached to your panties, and your panties help to hold the pads close to the opening of the vagina. Pads have a plastic lining to minimise leakages. If you use pads, you need to throw them down a pit latrine or burn them after use. Do not flush them down the toilet, as they will cause blockage.

Some women use tampons, which are small, hard cotton objects that are pushed up into the vagina during menstruation. The cotton softens as it absorbs all the blood that comes into the vagina from the uterus. Attached to the tampon is a little soft cotton thread, which hangs out of the vagina. You pull this thread to remove the tampon.

One nice thing about tampons is that you cannot feel them at all, so you can forget all about the fact that you have your period. But tampons also require extra care. Always wash your hands before and after inserting a tampon. You



**If you prepare yourself, your period won't be a big inconvenience.**

also need to change it frequently, because it could cause infection if left in your vagina. Never leave a tampon in for more than 8 hours. Don't use tampons at night because you may sleep more than 8 hours.

What ever you use—rags, toilet tissue, pads or tampons—change it frequently to avoid staining and bad smells. When menstrual blood gets in contact with air, it develops a stale odour. If your panties or clothes get stained with blood, soak them in cool, mildly salty water. Hot water will cause the blood to set and remain as a permanent stain.

Your menstrual period is part of you. If you prepare for it, you will find that it isn't such a big hassle. You can be active and still have fun during your periods, and they shouldn't cause you to miss school or work.

## Chapter 4

# Girls

During puberty, a girl can expect many changes to occur in her body. Here are some of the changes you can expect:

- Your body will grow, especially the bones in your hips, arms, legs and feet. You will develop a rounder, more womanly shape.
- Your breasts will develop and your nipples will become larger and darker.
- Your genitals will mature, and the walls of your vagina will begin to produce a fluid or discharge.
- You will begin to menstruate each month as the lining of the uterus is shed.

Whenever these changes occur in your body is the right time. As you undergo these changes, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- There are a variety of breast shapes and sizes, all of which are attractive and are good for feeding babies.
- Wash and clean your genitals—but not inside the vagina—every day. Wear cotton panties.
- It's a good idea to pay attention to your normal vaginal discharge so that you can notice any changes that might be a sign of a vaginal infection.
- Because an adolescent girl's menstrual cycle can be very irregular during the first several years, there are no "safe days" against getting pregnant, and there are never any safe days against HIV and other STIs.
- Although cramps, swelling and mood swings are normal, your menstrual cycle does not have to be uncomfortable. Exercises and low-salt diets can help some of these problems. If you have terrible pains or bleed very heavily, see a health worker.

# Basic Body Care

This chapter is about how to take care of your overall health. This may not seem as important as some other things in this book, but it is! Knowing how to stay healthy is very important. In fact, many health problems can be avoided altogether if you eat well, take exercise, practise good hygiene and feel good about yourself.

It is your responsibility to take care of these things on a daily basis, and to look and feel as good as possible. Your body has to last you your lifetime. It is the only one you will ever have, so take care of it!

## KEEPING CLEAN, SMELLING NICE

Everybody wants to look nice, but feeling attractive can seem especially important during adolescence because of all the big changes you experience. Not only does the body change shape during puberty, but it starts producing new smells, new fluids and new worries for many young people. Practising good hygiene can be a very good way to feel more comfortable with your body and all these changes.



**Bathe at least once a day to stay fresh and clean.**

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**Sandra, 13, Uganda**

*“Always bathe, wash and iron to appear smart!”*

Good hygiene is especially important during adolescence because your skin begins producing more fluids than it did when you were a child, and some of these fluids can cause unpleasant smells if you do not bathe.

The main fluid you may notice is sweat. Sweat, which is mostly water, is produced by glands in the skin. The sweat glands become much more active when you reach puberty, so many

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

adolescents notice that they sweat a lot. They also notice that their sweat takes on a different smell and taste than the simple watery sweat of a child who has been running in the sun.

Your armpits have many sweat glands, but you also have many sweat glands in your hands, feet and even your genitals, so you may notice that you are perspiring more in these places too. The smell of your perspiration will change during puberty, but these changes in body odour are natural and healthy. They are signs of growing up.

Although some people worry about the smell of their sweat, and especially their underarm perspiration, bathing once or twice a day, and wearing clean clothing should be enough to keep you fresh and clean. If you perspire a lot and it bothers you, wear cotton underwear and loose cotton clothes. Cotton is more absorbent than synthetic materials, and it allows air to flow through the cloth, which helps keep you cooler. Some people buy roll-on or spray deodorants to prevent underarm odour, but these products can be costly. Bathing and wearing clean clothes usually works fine.

Like sweat, other bodily fluids—menstrual blood, vaginal fluids, semen and smegma (the white lubricating substance under the foreskin of the penis)—are basically clean. But once these fluids leave the body, bacteria can grow in them, causing bad smells or sometimes infection. Therefore, it is important to clean the genital area—around the vagina and the penis—daily. Boys who are not circumcised need to pull back the foreskin and gently clean away the smegma (see Chapter 3).

Girls need to clean in between the inner and outer lips of the vulva, but they do not need to clean inside the vagina with soaps because the vagina cleans and protects itself with its own vaginal discharge. Good hygiene is especially important during your menstrual periods (see Chapter 4).

For washing the genitals, ordinary bathing soap is fine. You should not use strong antiseptic soaps or deodorants in the genital area because they can cause irritation. In addition, strong soaps can kill good bacteria that usually live in places like the vagina and that help protect against certain infections. After washing, always dry yourself and put on clean panties.

If you have dry skin, putting some vaseline, mineral oil, cocoa butter or other lotion on your hands, arms and legs will help. Lotions put on just after bathing help to keep moisture in your skin.

Wash your hands frequently. Always wash your hands after using the toilet and before eating or preparing food. Keep your nails clean by keeping them short.

### **CARING FOR YOUR TEETH**

Your mouth is another place where bacteria live, so taking care of your teeth is another important part of practising good hygiene. The bacteria in your mouth can eat holes into the teeth.

These holes are called cavities, and they can be very painful. Decayed teeth can cause infections that affect other parts of your body.

Brushing your teeth at least twice a day—or after meals and before you sleep—can help kill bacteria that feed on the food particles in your mouth and cause tooth decay and gum disease. Keeping your teeth clean can also help to ensure nice breath.

You should clean the surface of every tooth—both in the front and the back of your mouth. You should also try to clean between your teeth. Toothbrushes and toothpaste are best, but if you don't have toothpaste, even clean water will work fine. You can also clean your teeth with a little salt and water, which will help prevent gum and mouth infections.

You should avoid eating a lot of sweet foods and sodas. Besides having little nutritional value, they cause tooth decay. It is also important to avoid sharing toothbrushes because this can spread illnesses.

## PIMPLES

During puberty, the oil glands in your skin become more active, and they start producing an oily substance called **sebum**. You have these oil glands throughout your skin, all over your body. They are especially numerous on your face, neck, shoulders, upper chest and back.

Sebum is a good substance because it helps keep your skin soft, elastic, and young-looking. However, during adolescence, your oil glands can produce too much sebum, and the excess sebum can block the pores (small openings) in your skin. This can cause problems, like pimples.

The oiliness of your skin and how much excess sebum you produce during puberty determine how vulnerable you are to these skin problems. Having some pimples is normal and very common. In fact, at least 8 out of 10 teenagers have pimples sometime during adolescence. Pimples are most common between the ages of 14 and 17, but they also happen to older and younger boys and girls.

Some teenagers have a lot of pimples—a problem called **acne**. Acne tends to run in families. If your parents or older brothers and sisters had acne, you may be more likely to develop it. For a few people, acne continues to be a problem even after their teens.

Stress may be a factor in getting pimples. Many teenagers find that they get a lot of pimples just before an important event like a big date, a match or exams, or anything they are very nervous or excited about. Some girls notice that they get more pimples just before their menstrual periods.

There are many myths about pimples, and some people say wrong things such as: “Pimples are a sign that a girl or boy is longing for sexual encounters.” This is not true! Sex does not cure pimples!

## WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT PIMPLES?

Pimples are a normal part of adolescence, and unfortunately, there is no way to avoid them altogether. Nor are there any miracle cures for acne. However, there are a few things you can do to take care of your skin that may help.

Keeping your skin clean is very important, especially if you live in hot, dusty or humid places. You can use a bathing soap and warm water to gently wash areas where your skin is oily—your face, neck, shoulders, back, and upper chest. Washing these places at least once a day will help remove the oil from the surface of the skin and keep your pores clean and open.

But do not wash your skin too much or use strong, harsh soaps because they can irritate your skin and make pimples worse. **Never** use strong laundry soaps, detergents or bleach, as these will damage your skin. You should also try to make sure that any oils that you put in your hair do not get on your face because these oils and hair tonics can also block the pores in your skin. Lastly, be careful about using face creams and skin lighteners. Even though the packaging may promise to give you clear, beautiful skin, some creams may actually make things worse. In addition, many skin lighteners contain substances that are very unhealthy.

Although it may be tempting at times, it is not a good idea to squeeze pimples or pick at them. If you do this, the pus can spread the infection to other pores. You can also get permanent scars.

Pimples are a nuisance. They can be painful and sore, and they can be embarrassing at times. But, they are a normal part of adolescence. A lot of teenagers feel as though they are the only person with bad skin problems, but that is mainly because they don't notice that their peers have them too. Your pimples are much more noticeable to you than they are to anyone else. You may think that everyone is staring at them, seeing only bad skin and not you. But this is not true. Other people have many other things to think about and what they really notice is who you are—not what your skin looks like.

So, take courage and don't let a few pimples depress you! You will not have them forever.



**Even if you think your pimples are very bad, other people probably don't even notice them.**

## HAIR CARE

We have hair all over our body, but especially on our heads, as well as in our armpits and around the genitals. Taking care of your hair is another part of practising good hygiene and taking good care of your body.

The hair on your head is pretty easy to care for—especially if you keep it short. Whether you keep your hair short and natural, plaited or permed, you should wash it to keep it free from dust and dirt. If you are in school, try not to share hair combs because this can spread lice or the fungal infection, ringworm. If you do share combs, make sure you carefully wash the comb with hot soapy water before and after using it.

Some people have trouble with dandruff, which is when the skin on your head is very dry. Dandruff consists of small flakes of dead skin, and some people who have a lot of dandruff use special medicated shampoos to stop the dandruff.

Simple, regular bathing is good care for the other hair on your body—the hair in your armpits and the pubic hair around the genitals. As you read in Chapter 2, these hairs serve a good purpose—they keep sweat and dirt away from your skin. In some parts of Africa, however, people remove some of these hairs. For example, some people feel the genitals look nicer without hair. Others think it is better for hygiene.

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**Magreth, 18, Tanzania**

*“When I was in standard 6, I started to grow pubic hair. My mother told me that if they grow long, I must trim them and wash very well, otherwise I will smell.”*

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**Lois, 13, Tanzania**

*“I have seen hairs in my armpits. It is not long since I saw this hair so I have not trimmed it yet.”*

If your culture discourages pubic hair, merely trim it with scissors. **Do not** take it off completely by using hair-removing creams or by shaving. Hair-removing creams will irritate and hurt the delicate skin in the pubic area. Shaving also has risks. If you shave your pubic hair, you are likely to make some very small cuts in the skin. If you have sex, these cuts are like open doors for HIV to pass through. That is dangerous. The other problem with shaved pubic hair is that, when it grows back, the hairs are so sharp that they can pierce a condom. Thirdly, the naked pubic area also tends to get little infections around the hair follicles or the base of where the hair should be growing. Trimming the hairs a little bit is safe, but be careful and don't take all the hair off.

## EATING WELL

Good nutrition is essential for good health. Eating a nutritious and balanced diet is important throughout life, but it is especially important during childhood and adolescence when your body is growing and developing very fast.

Your body needs good food to grow and to give you energy for doing well in school, playing sports and doing work. Sometimes young people don't eat a nutritious diet and they forget to stick to regular meal times. They may skip meals and snack on biscuits, chips, sweets, chocolate and soda. These foods aren't very nutritious, and your body needs a lot more to stay healthy.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Different types of food do different jobs in your body so you need to eat meals with each type of food. The basic types of food that your body needs in order to function well are:

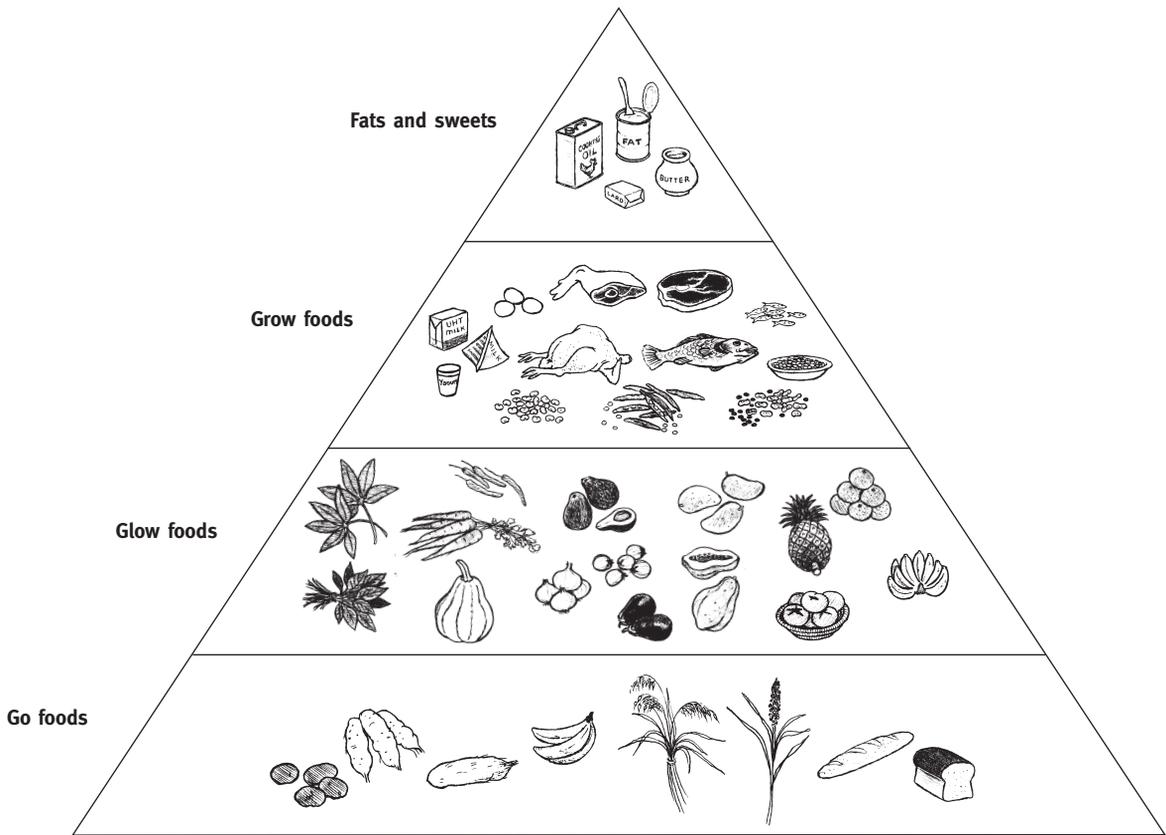
- **“Go foods” or energy-giving foods:** “Go foods” include staple foods, such as ugali (or maize meal), fufu, cassava, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, bread, rice, plantains, millet and sorghum.
- **“Glow foods” or protective foods:** “Glow foods” contain important vitamins and minerals that your body needs to function properly and to glow with health. These vitamins and minerals are found in most vegetables, such as dark leafy vegetables (spinach, pumpkin leaves, cassava leaves), tomatoes, pumpkins and carrots. Most fruits, such as pawpaw (papaya), mangoes, oranges and pineapple also contain important vitamins.
- **“Grow foods” or body-building foods:** “Grow foods” contain protein, which is called the building block of the body. Protein helps your body to grow and develop properly, especially during adolescence. It also helps the body heal and repair itself when you get hurt. “Grow foods” include: groundnuts, peas, beans, cowpeas, meat, chicken, fresh fish, dried fish and snails. Eggs, milk, yoghurt and cheese also contain proteins. Many sources of protein—meat, fish, beans and peas, along with greens and dark leafy vegetables—are good sources of Iron as well. Iron is especially important for girls and women because they need extra iron when they are menstruating and when they are pregnant.
- **Fats, oils and sweets:** Fats are a source of energy. Some fats, such as groundnut oil, palm kernel oil, coconut oil come from plants, while others, such as butter or ghee come from animals. Because there is so much energy in fat, your body only needs small amounts of it. In fact, eating too much fat can cause some health problems in the long run. Another source of energy is sugar, but sweets can be bad for your teeth.

Think about your diet and whether you are getting all the basic food types. As shown in the illustration on page 51, the “go foods” should be the foundation of your diet, and you should eat the most of these foods. “Glow foods” are also very important, so eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. “Grow foods” are very important, but you don’t need as many servings each day. Lastly, it’s best to eat only a little bit of fats, oils and sweets.

### HOW MUCH ENERGY DOES YOUR BODY NEED?

The energy you need depends on how much energy you use up. All the growth during adolescence takes up a lot of energy—in fact an adolescent needs more energy than most adults.

Energy is measured in calories. If you eat more energy or calories than your body needs during the day, the extra calories will be turned into fat and your body will store this fat for a time when it is needed. For most people this store of fat is healthy and normal. But it can be a problem if you have too much fat. Some people—especially people who eat too much food with many calories (fatty and sweet foods) and who do not exercise—get too fat.



A nutritious diet includes many different types of food, in differing amounts

In some African cities, there are more and more girls and boys who are heavier than they should be. This is partly because it is harder to take exercise in the city. It is also because a lot of fried food is eaten in the cities. Fried food can be easy and quick to prepare—it can be prepared much more quickly than traditional dishes, such as beans and stews. Even though fried food can taste good and can be prepared quickly, it is not very healthy. A diet of fried food can make people too fat, and, over the long run, it can damage the heart and blood vessels.

Try to avoid eating fatty and fried foods, as well as sugary foods and drinks.

**EXERCISE**

Everyone needs exercise: children, adolescents, adults—girls as well as boys. Exercise makes you beautiful: shiny, shapely and bright-eyed. It makes you stronger because it strengthens your heart and lungs, builds your muscles and thickens your bones. It makes you better able to resist disease by boosting your immune system.

**Nfune, 13, Zambia**

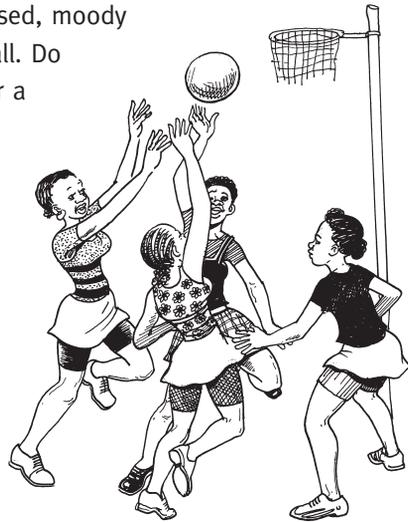
*“I stay healthy by having a balanced diet and doing a lot of exercises.”*

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Exercise has some other benefits. It improves your mood. It builds your self-confidence. It makes you feel good. If you are feeling stressed, moody or sad, go for a fast walk or play a game of pick-up football. Do some sit-ups. Play netball. Ride a bicycle. Skip rope. Go for a swim. Play volleyball or table tennis. Anything that gets your heart pounding will lift your spirits.

Exercise can also be a good way to work on some important life skills, like confidence, co-ordination and teamwork. Many people first learn these skills when they are playing sports or when they join a team.

Getting plenty of exercise doesn't mean that you have to join a sports club. Even helping with work on the farm, in the garden or around the house can be good exercise. Making yourself useful at home can at the same time improve your relationship with your parents.



**There are lots of fun ways to take exercise**

Some people are very athletic while others are not. Some people just have a special talent for football, for running fast or for swimming well, just as some people are especially good in math or in learning languages. Even if you don't think you are athletic, you should get plenty of exercise. Everyone has a body that needs using, stretching, pushing, and testing. You may find as you exercise that you enjoy it more and more. You might even turn yourself into an athlete before you know it!

If you are not used to exercising, it can be difficult at first. You may find that you get out of breath when you run. It may feel unpleasant and put you off taking exercise. So, start gradually. Find an activity you like and build up your strength so you can do more and more. The aim should be to get your heart pounding, to feel that you are breathing faster than normal, and to get warm. Try to do this for at least 20 minutes, 3 times a week.

Keep up your exercise routine and see what happens. Your skin will get brighter. Your eyes will glow. You will feel happier and calmer. You will be more confident and able to handle difficulties. And of course you will be stronger and healthier too. So keep it up! Don't let exam time stop you from exercising. It is at exam time that you need exercise most.

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**Ruvimbo, 13, Zimbabwe**

*“I ride my bicycle to keep myself busy and for health reasons. Teenagers should occupy themselves; the world has a lot to offer.”*

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**Godfrey, 19, Zimbabwe**

*“I love sports. I play basketball to keep my body fit.”*



Good posture also comes along with exercise. Poor posture leads to aches and pain in the chest and back.

**Keep up your exercise routine and you'll soon notice a difference!**

**GOOD REST**

Along with good food and plenty of exercise, you need to rest enough. Resting allows the body to store up more energy. Rest can be in the form of physical relaxation or sleeping.

Take time to relax each day by reading a book, doing something you enjoy, listening to the radio, or simply reflecting on your life. In small quantities, television can be relaxing, but don't spend too much time watching the television or videos.

Sleep is an especially important form of rest. Only when you are asleep does your heart slow down and your muscles relax. This allows your body to recover and repair itself from any stresses or injuries. You need a lot of sleep during adolescence because your body uses up a lot of energy. Most people need about 8 hours of sleep every night. Some people need less, and some people need more. If you are tired all the time, make sure that you are going to bed early enough. All the changes your body is going through are very demanding, so make sure you give it a chance to rest!

## Chapter 5

# Basic Body Care

There are a few simple and basic things you need to know about taking good care of your body.

- As you reach puberty, you will start to perspire more. Bathing will keep you clean and smelling nice.
- Clean your teeth at least twice a day to avoid tooth decay (cavities) and to have nice breath.
- If your oil glands produce too much sebum (an oily substance), you may develop pimples. Pimples are a normal part of adolescence, and there is no way to avoid them altogether. Keeping your skin clean with water and a mild bathing soap is the best solution. But do not wash your skin too much, and do not use strong laundry soaps because this will damage your skin.
- Eat a nutritious diet full of “go foods,” “glow foods” and “grow foods.” Avoid eating too many sweets and fried foods.
- Get plenty of exercise. Exercise strengthens your heart, lungs and muscles, keeps you fit and lifts your spirits.
- All the changes you are going through are very demanding, so give your body a chance to rest—around 8 hours per night.

By practising good hygiene, eating well, exercising properly and resting, you will allow your body to function at its best. You will feel good physically, which will also help you feel good emotionally.

# Taking care of your heart and head

This chapter is about your emotional health. Emotional health is a package of many things: loving yourself, feeling confident about your abilities, coping with worry, stress and sadness, and getting along with other people. Being emotionally healthy means feeling good about yourself. It also means having the inner strength to cope with life's ups and downs.

Doctors do not know why one person is emotionally healthy while another person is not. It is probably a mixture of your in-born personality and the way you were treated as a little child. Being emotionally healthy is also affected by your own attitude—are you willing to work on being emotionally healthy?

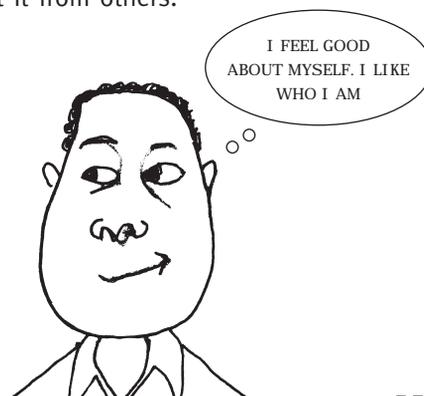
Everyone can work on being emotionally healthy. This means working on your self-esteem and self-confidence. It also means developing skills for coping with worries, stress and sadness. It also means working on your relationships with other people.

## SELF-ESTEEM

The Oxford Dictionary defines “self-esteem” as “a good opinion of one’s own character.” When you have high self-esteem, it means that you feel good about yourself. You know that you are a worthwhile person—someone worthy of love. You respect yourself. This is a very good feeling, and when you feel worthy of love and respect, you expect it from others.

Having high self-esteem does not mean that you never get upset or angry with yourself. Everyone gets frustrated with themselves at times. But someone with high self-esteem can accept his or her mistakes and move on.

High self-esteem is also different from pride or being too conceited. People with high self-esteem like themselves, but that doesn’t mean that they think that they are perfect or are better than other people.



**DO YOU KNOW what it means to be emotionally healthy?**

Emotional health can be hard to describe, but you usually know it when you see it. Take Rose, for example. She seems happy most of the time, and she appears to be able to cope with life's up and downs.

- If she gets a poor mark, she accepts it and works harder.
- When her boyfriend leaves her, she cries, but then decides that it's not the end of the world.
- At exam times, she doesn't get too stressed out. She takes exercise and talks to her best friend to handle stress.

Rose has high **self-esteem**. She isn't emotionally crushed when her boyfriend leaves her. She knows she's still a great person. She also has a lot of **self-confidence**. Yes, she did poorly on a test, but she **knows** she can do better. She doesn't have to blame the teacher. Her ways of coping with stress are good; sports and talking out problems with a trusted friend help her deal with the tension and move on.

But other people have a lot of trouble coping with life's normal ups and downs. For example, Emma, who is in the same situation deals with everything differently:

- She can't accept criticism and blames her teacher for a poor mark.
- When left by her boyfriend, she becomes depressed, spreads rumours about him, and starts flirting with other boys.
- When she feels stressed out, she starts drinking beer and smoking cigarettes.

Why does Emma have so much trouble coping with the same problems? One factor may be self-esteem. She is devastated when her boyfriend leaves her, and she copes with the pain by saying bad things about him. She tries to reassure herself that she's still desirable by rushing into the arms of another boy. Her way of coping with stress is not very effective; alcohol and cigarettes may help you forget about your problems, but they don't solve them.

Self-esteem is something deep inside you. But that does not mean that you cannot work on it or that you don't need to nurture and build it. You can work on your self-esteem on a daily basis. You can:

- Avoid constantly comparing yourself with others. Set your own goals, and don't judge yourself according to someone else's achievements. Life is a long race. Sometimes you will be ahead, sometimes behind.
- Recognise your special talents, and appreciate yourself the way you are. Make a list of the things you do well. Are you an artist, athlete, singer, storyteller or dancer? In what subjects do you excel at school?

- Think about the kind of person you are, and make a list of your best qualities. What do you like about yourself? Your generosity? Your sense of humour? Your creativity? Your ability to be a critical thinker?
- Be aware of the things you would like to improve about yourself, but don't be horribly self-critical.
- Be realistic. Set yourself achievable goals so that you can be satisfied when you accomplish them.
- Believe in yourself. Tell yourself: "I can do it!"
- Spend time with people who care for you, make you feel good about yourself and boost your self-esteem. Stay away from people who damage your self-esteem, particularly if they do it on purpose!

Of course, working on your self-esteem won't mean that you will never have ups and downs, but it will help you get through them in one piece. Self-esteem protects you. When someone treats you poorly, your sense of self-esteem shouts: "Hey, this is wrong. Don't let this person treat you like this!"

Imagine that your friends have deserted you. They are teaming up and are leaving you out. Suddenly you feel shaky and unsure of yourself. Why don't they like you any more? Did you do something wrong? Your self-esteem starts to droop like a flower. You start to feel bad about yourself.

Some people panic in such circumstances. They look for an easy way to boost their dented self-esteem and to feel liked—even if this involves doing something that they think is wrong. For example, some young people who are rejected by old friends begin hanging out with a group of kids who drink, smoke and get into trouble. They too start taking drugs or drinking alcohol in order to feel accepted.

Acceptance feels nice and it gives you a boost, but it doesn't solve your self-esteem problem, and it won't last long. You might feel better for a while, but soon a little voice inside you starts nagging: "These people are not serious. You are not being true to yourself. You are holding yourself back from doing the things you like and are good at. You don't feel very good about what you're doing..." That little voice is your conscience. It's always a good idea to listen to it.

Repairing your self-esteem will take more work than fitting in with a new crowd or numbing your unhappiness with a drink (see Chapter 12 for more on drugs and alcohol). However, it will serve you better in the long run. When you are going through a self-esteem crisis, here are a few more things you can do to get yourself through it:

- Try to put your immediate crisis into perspective. Try to remember that life is full of ups and downs and that this isn't the end of the world.

- Talk to someone you are close to about your problem and your feelings. Find a youth counsellor or someone who cares about you and who will be able to help you through this.
- Remind yourself that many people will value you for who you are. Find someone who can appreciate you—a new friend, a teacher, a sister or brother, a parent or another relative.
- Be patient. Self-esteem doesn't recover overnight, but you will feel better about yourself soon.

## SELF-CONFIDENCE

While you work on your self-esteem, you can also work on your **self-confidence**. Self-confidence is another key to emotional health. If self-esteem means feeling good and solid about your **character** and the **person** you are, self-confidence means feeling good about your **abilities**.

Self-confidence is great. People who are self-confident feel free to try new things without worrying too much about failure. They are not afraid to put themselves into new situations and among people they don't know. They are not overly worried about what other people might think about them.

Self-confidence is very attractive. Self-confident people are often well-liked because they seem to be enjoying life to its fullest, as they take on new challenges and new experiences.

Self-confidence feeds on itself. In other words, self-confidence creates greater self-confidence. This means that the more you try new things, the more self-confident you get. This is for two reasons:

1. You learn that you can succeed at many things that you never even imagined you could.
2. You learn that even if you fail to do something, it is also okay!

When you are self-confident, you may sometimes fail, but more often than not, you will succeed. This is because when you fail at something, it is often because you are tense or anxious. When you are self-confident, however, you often sail through a new task. Anxiety and self-doubt aren't making it difficult to concentrate on whatever you are trying to do.

Work on your self-confidence, and it will help you throughout your life. You can:

- Think of yourself as a competent person—someone who can achieve things.
- Give yourself challenges. Try new things and be open to new experiences. Practise saying to yourself: "I don't know how to do that, but I certainly would like to try."



**Self-confidence enables you try out new things without worrying about failure.**

**DO YOU KNOW why girls have more problems with self-esteem and self-confidence than boys?**

Sometimes girls have more problems with low self-esteem and low self-confidence than their male peers. Why is this? Are self-esteem and confidence determined by your sex—male or female?

The answer is No! Self-esteem and confidence are not determined by sex. However, a person's self-esteem and confidence can be greatly affected by how she or he is treated by other people—parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, neighbours, religious and community leaders, etc.

Unfortunately, in some cultures boys and girls are treated very differently, and this can greatly affect how they see themselves and their abilities. For example, in some families, boys may be given more opportunities for education and job training, and teachers sometimes pay more attention to boys. Girls, on the other hand, may not get the same opportunities. They may be pulled out of school. They may not be allowed to spend time playing with friends or playing sports as their brothers can. In addition, their hard work around the house and in the fields seems to go unnoticed and unappreciated. As a result, girls and women may feel less valued, and they may begin to believe that they are not worth as much as boys and men. But this is not true! All people are equal. If given the same opportunities, girls can do just as well as boys in school, jobs and anything else they want to do.

It can be very hard if you are a girl and live in an environment where you constantly feel as though you are not valued as much as a boy. Here are some things you can do to cope with this situation:

- Always remember that you are worth just as much—no matter what anybody else says. You are just as intelligent and capable as any boy.
- Work doubly hard on building your self-esteem and confidence.
- Rely on yourself for praise and satisfaction when you do something well. Don't wait for praise from other people who are unlikely to give it.
- Take every opportunity you have to learn new skills and make the most of them. Remember, every time you succeed at something you will be proving to yourself and to others that you are worth just as much as anyone else.
- Be realistic about the challenges that face you, but don't give up hope. If you live in a society where women are seriously under-valued, don't expect this to change overnight, but don't let it make you despair either.
- Talk to your parents or another caring adult. For example, if your parents are threatening to pull you out of school or to make you get married, try to find someone to talk to. Explain how important your education is to you and ask if they can help you cope with this situation.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- Have a sense of humour. Never let embarrassment or what other people think stop you from trying something.
- Look at obstacles as opportunities to experiment and learn something new. Think to yourself: “Okay, how can I deal with this problem?”
- If you fail at something, keep it in perspective. Don’t get too worried or upset about it. Think about what went wrong and what you could do differently next time. Then let it go.

### **DON’T WORRY, BE HAPPY!**

Have you heard a song with that title? It has an easy catchy tune. But how easy is it to be happy? After all, everyone has worries, and adolescents have many worries—worries about themselves, their appearance, their friends, success in school, the future, etc.

Feeling very worried can be unpleasant. First, ask yourself if the worry is really worth worrying about. Many times people worry needlessly. There are many things that are not worth worrying about, such as:

- **Things that you cannot change**, such as your looks, the colour of your skin, texture of your hair, and the size of your breasts or penis. You cannot change these things, so it’s better to accept them as they are. You are beautiful and handsome in your own way. Besides, it’s your personality that makes you attractive to others. Focus on who you are, not what you look like.
- **Worldly things that are not within your means.** You see a beautiful dress in a shop. Don’t worry about having it because you simply can’t. It would take your father’s monthly salary to buy it! In addition, if you did get that dress, you would find that in a few months you wanted another dress even more. Worldly things don’t bring happiness or an end to worries, so focus on those things that are within your means. Be contented with yourself the way you are and with what you have.
- **Not having a girlfriend or boyfriend:** Some people find a girlfriend or a boyfriend during adolescence. But many do not find that special person until much later in life. In addition, many romances between teenagers do not last very long. It can take time to find your soul mate. Be patient and don’t rush into a relationship just because you think you should have a girlfriend or boyfriend by now.
- **Pressure from your peers to do something that you don’t want to do:** Do only those things that you think are good for you. Don’t ever let the desire to impress other people cause you to do things that you don’t want to do and think are wrong.



“If only I could have that nice dress. Then I would always be happy...”

- **Being lonely:** Loneliness is something that everyone experiences at times throughout life. There will always be a few moments when you feel as though you have no one to talk to or no one who truly understands you. Usually these moments are short-lived, and everyone has them.

But of course some situations are worth worrying about. For example:



- **Your parents cannot afford your school fees, and you don't know where to turn for help.** This is a real problem, but one that many young people face. Talk to a teacher or to a counsellor at a local youth centre to see if they have any suggestions. Also, try talking to a religious leader or community leader to see if they know of anyone who can help you. Maybe you can switch to a cheaper school or get a weekend job to earn some money.
- **You and your girlfriend had unprotected sex, and now she thinks she might be pregnant.** This is a big worry. The best thing to do is to go to a clinic for a pregnancy test and for advice about what to do. Go with your girlfriend for support. If she is pregnant, don't deny that it is yours. You are equally responsible (see Chapter 11 for more on pregnancy).
- **You have heard a rumour that one of your ex-boyfriends or girlfriends has AIDS. You don't know if it is true, but should you get tested?** This is another big worry. Yes, go for counselling and a test so that you can put your mind at ease or take action as needed. Take someone with you for support (see Chapter 10 for more on HIV/AIDS).
- **An older man or a classmate has been giving you small gifts and treats, but now he wants you to have sex with him. He says you owe him for all the money he has spent on you.** Don't give into the pressure. You might end up getting pregnant by mistake and having the man or boy leave you. Stay away from him. Find the courage to talk to your parents, an auntie or some other adult about this difficult situation. Don't try to cope with it all alone.

In serious situations like these, worrying does serve a purpose. You need to think very hard about all the options you have for coping with the problem. Then you need to weigh all your options and the possible consequences of each one so you can pick the best course of action.

However, worrying about serious situations like these can add up to stress, which is when you start to feel overwhelmed by your problems and worries. When you are feeling stressed, your body will give you signals: you cannot stop thinking about the problem. Your heart may pound. You may feel short of breath. You may have stomach aches. You may have trouble sleeping at night or you may have nightmares (bad dreams at night). You may become very forgetful. If you are experiencing these signs of stress, take action:

- **Take a deep breath.** If you are feeling so stressed that you feel short of breath and light-headed, stop what you are doing, and slowly take several deep breaths, holding air in your lungs for a few seconds before you exhale.
- **Look for the source of stress.** Can you reduce it? Are you feeling stressed about something that you shouldn't worry so much about? Make a list of all the things that are making you feel stressed, and then look at it carefully. Have you taken on too much—too many responsibilities? Is there something you can take off your list?



**Don't try to cope with your worries alone.  
Talk to someone.**

- **Talk to someone.** You don't have to solve your problems alone. Other people have been through difficult times, and they may have new insights into your problem. Find someone you trust—someone who will understand your problem. This could be a parent, an aunt or uncle, an older brother or sister, a close friend, a teacher, a neighbour, a health worker, a youth counsellor, a religious leader or a community elder. These are just a few people who may be able to give you advice. They may be able to suggest a solution you had not even thought of.
- **Take some exercise.** Run, play football or netball, or take a brisk walk. Go swimming. Exercise is an excellent way to cope with stress.
- **Get enough sleep.** Try to go to bed in a good frame of mind. Avoid watching television right before bed. Try to relax all your muscles one by one as you lie in bed.
- **Eat healthy food.** Always eat breakfast, and avoid skipping meals.
- **Use prayer or meditation** as a way to calm yourself and cope with your stress. Prayers are full of wisdom about how to manage one's every day life.
- **Do something you really enjoy**—something that will help you take your mind off your worries, like spending time with a close friend, drawing, singing, gardening, cooking, listening to music, etc.

There are a few ways of coping with stress that you should avoid. These include:

- Using alcohol or drugs as a relief. This is no cure. Alcohol and drugs relax those parts of your brain that help you think clearly and control your behaviour. Drugs and alcohol can lead you to do things that you might later regret.
- Bottling up your feelings. Holding all your anxieties inside you won't help you cope with them, and it won't make your stress disappear. You will eventually feel like exploding.
- Taking out your stress on other people. Don't let your stress drive you to the point of being rude, hostile or nasty to other people. This will only make you feel worse about yourself.

These ways of coping with stress are not healthy, and they do not work. They will complicate your life even more, and they may give you something even worse to feel stressed about. Stress is something you can control, so don't let it control you!

### **COPING WITH SADNESS**

Sometimes problems can make you feel down, and no amount of trying to get a positive angle on life, to eat fruit and vegetables, to play sports, and to get enough sleep makes you feel better.

Sometimes you have every reason to feel sad. For example, if you have experienced the death of someone close to you, it can be very sad. You may miss the person terribly and feel an enormous sense of grief. If you have lost your boyfriend or girlfriend, you may feel very lonely, and you may wonder if you will ever be close to anyone again.

Losses like these are very hard, but you can get through them. After a period of grieving, you will feel ready to move on. Even though the sadness of losing someone you love will always be with you, eventually you will become happy again.

But sometimes people start to have very deep sad and negative feelings about life. They may feel as though nothing in their life has meaning. There seems to be nothing worth living for. They feel empty and extremely hopeless. They feel dull. They feel that they've lost direction.

These feelings of extreme sadness and hopelessness are called depression. Depression can be triggered by a sad event like a death, but often people who are feeling depressed have a hard time identifying one specific reason or cause. As a result, they may have trouble realising that they are depressed. They might notice a range of changes in themselves, such as:

- Feeling sad most of the time.
- Lack of energy.
- Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much (sometimes depression makes it hard for people to even get out of bed).
- Difficulty thinking clearly.
- Constant headaches and stomach problems.
- Inability to enjoy activities that were once pleasurable.
- A change in their eating habits (such as eating more sweets) or drinking habits (drinking alcohol to try to forget about problems).

Have you ever felt this way or have you ever noticed these changes in a friend? Being depressed is serious, so whether it is you or a friend who is feeling sad, take action:

- Try to identify what is making you feel sad.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- Talk to other people about your feelings and what is making you feel sad.
- Take exercise, and do things that give you pleasure and make you feel good about yourself.

In addition to these things, try to be more outgoing and to spend time with other people. Get involved in your church or mosque or a youth group. Spending time with others can help you get your mind off the things that are making you feel so sad. Helping others can also be a good way to make yourself feel better. Try helping a young child who is learning to read. Help a friend or neighbour with their chores. It sounds silly, but you might be amazed how helping someone else can make you feel a lot better about yourself and the problems you are facing.



**When you're feeling down, helping someone else with their work can make you feel better.**

If these things don't help, however, or if you are feeling so sad and hopeless that you have thoughts of suicide (killing yourself), please find someone to talk to right away—a relative, teacher, or a professional counsellor. Many pastors and religious leaders are very good counsellors, and they offer support and advice to people all the time. There are solutions to your problems, so don't try to cope all by yourself when you are feeling seriously depressed.

### **DID YOU KNOW that alcohol makes depression worse?**

Many people begin drinking more when they are feeling depressed, largely because it helps them forget about their troubles. Alcohol seems to numb the brain and to make problems less immediate.

Unfortunately, however, alcohol isn't a good way to cope with feelings of sadness and depression. In fact, alcohol falls in a category of drugs that are called "depressants" because it slows down the brain and other organs in the body. Alcohol and other depressants actually make depression worse. In addition, they simply help someone avoid coping with the problem that is making them depressed. As a result, alcohol can become a crutch when problems arise. People can become so addicted to alcohol that they cannot face life without it.

### **GETTING ALONG WITH OTHER PEOPLE**

Getting along with other people is another important part of emotional health. Good relationships with your parents and friends will help you feel good about yourself in general, and they help you cope with life's ups and downs. Getting along with other people involves many important skills, such as:

**Self-awareness:** Being self-aware means being able to recognise **what** you are feeling and **why**. Being self-aware means that when you are feeling out-of-sorts, you stop to work out what you are feeling—sadness, anger, frustration, anxiety, etc.—and then you take some time to work out what is making you feel this way. Are you anxious about your studies? Are you worried about a friendship that seems to be fading? Has someone made you feel bad about yourself?

Self-awareness is important because it helps you understand what the problem is and what has caused it. With this information you can begin working to solve the problem. If you are feeling anxious about your schoolwork, you can talk to your parents or your teacher and begin getting the help you need to feel confident again. If you are worried about a friendship, you can take steps to talk to your friend about how important the friendship is, and together you can figure out how to make it strong again. If someone is making you feel bad about yourself, you can decide to either confront them to let them know that you feel bad when they treat you a certain way. Or, if that doesn't help, you can decide to try to stay away from that person who makes you feel bad.

Lastly, self-awareness can help you recognise your own short-comings—those weaknesses you need to work on yourself. Do you have any habits or tendencies that you would like to change? Or, maybe, you have noticed that when you do poorly on an exam at school, you tend to blame someone else. “The teacher doesn't like me,” you tell yourself. Or you think: “Other students were making a lot of noise, and I couldn't focus.”



**Self awareness is the ability to recognise what you are feeling and what is making you feel this way.**

Blaming other people is an easy habit to get into, but it is a bad one because you aren't being honest with yourself, and you aren't taking responsibility for yourself. Maybe when you were a child, it was okay to blame others, especially as there are so many things that children simply cannot control. But, as you enter adulthood, you need to take responsibility for your actions. If something doesn't work out the way you want, it's up to you to try to change it! Feeling sorry for yourself and acting as though you are the victim of other people's actions won't solve anything.

**Empathy:** Empathy is like self-awareness, except that it is the ability to understand what someone else is feeling and why. Being empathetic means that you have the ability to imagine yourself in the shoes of someone else—a friend, a parent, a relative, etc. You can understand their concerns, worries, fears and needs, and you can understand how they feel. Just as self-awareness helps you know what you need, empathy can help you understand what someone else needs. For example, if a friend is feeling sad, putting yourself in his or her shoes can help you know how to help.

**Problem-solving and creative thinking:**

Finding good solutions to difficult problems requires creative thinking. Creative thinking is the ability to think of possible solutions that aren't obvious. It is the ability to brainstorm all the possible ways to handle a problem, rather than limit yourself to what you have seen other people do.

For example, imagine that you became pregnant while you were still in school. All the other girls you know who became pregnant left school and never finished their education. Creative thinking means not assuming that you must end your education simply because you've seen that happen to other girls. Maybe you can stay in school during the pregnancy. Or perhaps you can return to school after you have had the baby. Maybe there is a centre for teenage mothers where you can continue your studies or training. Creative thinking involves talking to other people (teachers, youth counsellors, parents, aunts, uncles, friends) and exploring all the options that might be open to you.

**Negotiation skills:** These skills that you need to work out a problem or a difference with someone else. For example, you may want to go out with friends, but your parents want you to stay at home. This kind of situation requires good negotiation skills. Negotiating can be very hard work, and it can be frustrating at times. You might feel ready to explode or to yell. You might become so frustrated that you want to just say "Forget it!" and walk away feeling angry and fed up. But you need to be patient and calm as you explain why you feel the way you do, and what you need. You also need to be fair, understanding and respectful of what other people feel and need.

**DO YOU KNOW** how to resolve a problem creatively and assertively?

Anne, 16, is an orphan. She lives with an aunt who wants her to work in her shop every day after school. This is a big problem for Anne. She doesn't get enough time to study. She's beginning to feel very stressed because her exams are drawing near. She is having trouble sleeping at night because she is so worried about her studies. She starts to feel upset at her aunt. She wonders if her aunt sees her simply as a source of labour and doesn't love her or care about her future.

Anne is very **self-aware**. She knows that she has a tendency to bottle up her feelings until finally she explodes in anger. Usually this does not work very well. Her aunt gets cross and says that she is being disrespectful.

So this time she decides to do things differently. Instead of **aggressively** telling her aunt: "You don't love me!" she behaves **assertively**. She says calmly to her aunt: "I feel very worried about my exams. Yet at the same time I do want to help you in the store."

Expressing herself in this way, Anne stands up for herself and for her own need for more time to study. But at the same time she is being understanding of her aunt's needs for help in the store. She shows **empathy** for her aunt, who has a lot of burdens.

Approached in such a manner, the aunt is understanding too. Together they **think creatively** to solve the problem. They find a schedule that gives Anne more time to study in the afternoons, but she still helps her aunt in the evenings when she needs it most.

It is amazing how good Anne feels. Suddenly she feels less stressed, and life seems manageable again.

Not every problem can be negotiated, however. **Sometimes, you may have to focus on an outcome that keeps you safe, even if it doesn't make the other person happy.** For example, supposing your girlfriend or boyfriend refuses to use a condom, no matter how hard you try to convince her or him. In this kind of situation, focus on keeping yourself safe. Walk away if you must.

**Assertiveness:** Assertiveness is an essential skill for getting along with others. Being assertive means standing up for yourself. To be assertive is to be straightforward and honest with yourself and with other people about what you need and want.

People who aren't assertive are often very passive and submissive. Even if they are being treated poorly, they don't stand up for themselves. People who are not assertive often lack the confidence and self-esteem to stand up for their own needs and to protect their feelings or body from being hurt.

Assertiveness is very different from being aggressive. People who are aggressive are rude and unkind. They don't care about other people's feelings. Being too aggressive isn't very good for your emotional health because, deep down, you will feel bad about being unkind.

Golden rules of assertiveness are:

- **Decide what you feel or want and say it.** Don't be afraid to be honest about your feelings. People should respect them. For example, maybe you felt uncomfortable and unhappy when your boyfriend touched your private parts. So you should tell him: "I felt unhappy when you touched my private parts. I don't want you to touch me like that anymore." Someone who truly loves you will not want to do things that makes you feel unhappy.
- **Maintain eye contact.** Eye contact (looking someone in the eye) is an important part of being assertive. It tells the other person that you are serious about what you are saying and that you are paying close attention to whether or not they are listening to you. Eye contact is not encouraged in many cultures, and in some places it may be considered rude if a young person looks an elder directly in the eye. One way to deal with this is to follow traditional customs, such as kneeling, that show respect, while still maintaining eye contact when you need to be assertive.
- **Don't make excuses.** Your own feelings are the best reasons. For example, if you don't feel ready for sex, but your girlfriend or boyfriend is pressuring you, avoid using other people as excuses. Don't say: "My mum is about to come home, and I have a stomach ache, and I'm afraid of getting pregnant, and I'm very busy with books so it's not a good time." You might confuse your friend with all these excuses. He or she might think that you want to go to another place on another day, or that you might want to use a condom. He or she might not realise that what you are really trying to say is: "I don't feel ready for sex so I do not want it now." So, say what you really feel!
- **Don't seek the other person's approval.** If you don't want to do something, say so clearly and don't ask if it is okay. For example, if someone is pushing you to take alcohol or drugs, don't say: "I'd rather not, if it's okay with you...?" Instead, say: "No thanks. I don't want

any.” Show them that you know your own mind and aren’t looking for their approval.

- **Don’t get confused by the other person’s arguments. Keep repeating what you want or do not want.** Maybe your girlfriend keeps pressuring you, and she has all these arguments for why you should have sex. “Don’t you love me?” she asks. “But my old boyfriend had sex with me,” she says. Stand your ground, and don’t give in. Tell her: “I’m not your old boyfriend. I’m me. I don’t want to have sex.”
- **Remember that you have a right to change your mind.** Perhaps you and your boyfriend talked about sex a few days ago, and you told him that you would have sex with him. But you’ve had a couple of days to think it over, and now you feel sure that the time is not right—that you aren’t ready and that the relationship isn’t ready. He says: “But you agreed that we could have sex.” Tell him: “I’ve changed my mind. I’ve decided I don’t feel ready.” If he truly loves you, he will respect your right to change your mind, and he will wait until you feel ready.



Being assertive means being clear and straightforward about what you want.

The basic life skills discussed in this chapter—self esteem, self-confidence, coping with stress and sadness, self-awareness, empathy, problem-solving, negotiation skills and assertiveness—are some of the keys to good emotional health. If you master them, you’ll be able to stay safe, and you will probably succeed at many things you try in life.

## Chapter 6

# Taking care of your heart and your head

Being emotionally healthy means that you are able to:

- **Feel good about yourself.** You like and respect yourself. You have high **self-esteem**.
- **Feel good about your abilities.** You don't worry too much about failure, and you aren't afraid to try new things. You are **self-confident**.
- **Cope with worries and stress.** You don't worry needlessly about things such as the way you look, things you cannot afford, pressure from your peers, or not having a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- **Cope with sadness.** You don't let problems and sad events overwhelm you and make you feel completely hopeless.
- **Recognise *what you are feeling* and *why*.** You are **self-aware**. When you are feeling out-of-sorts, you stop to think about what you are feeling (sadness, anxiety, anger, frustration) and what is causing you to feel this way.
- **Understand what someone else is feeling and why.** You can put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand what his or her worries, fears and needs are. This ability to understand someone else's feelings is called **empathy**.
- **Solve problems and think creatively.** When you have a problem, you can think of a variety of ways to cope with the problem. You can find good solutions that aren't immediately obvious.
- **Explain to someone else what you want and why you feel the way you do.** When you are trying to resolve a problem or a difference of opinion, you can argue for what you want, while still being respectful of the other person's feelings and needs. You can try work out a solution that is good for both of you. You have good **negotiation skills**.
- **Assert yourself.** You can stand up for what you want and what you need. You are clear and honest about your own feelings. You don't allow yourself to be pressured into something you don't want to do.

Being emotionally healthy isn't something you can achieve all by yourself. There will be times when you will need to get advice and help from others—from a parent, friend, teacher, aunt, uncle, older sibling, religious leader or youth counsellor. An important part of being emotionally healthy is being able to ask for help when you need it.

# Getting along with your parents

Some adolescents are blessed to have parents with whom they can easily get along and discuss important things. But many young people have trouble getting along with their parents during adolescence. Their relationship with their parents becomes more complicated. They start struggling and arguing about everything with their parents. They feel as though their parents are much too old-fashioned and traditional. They feel as though their parents don't trust them or have confidence in them.

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**Gifty, 14, Ghana**

*"My parents are free and they share the problems with me so I do not disagree with them. They always make me feel happy and advise me a lot. I want parents to have time for their children. Parents should talk to their children and advise them a lot because it depends a lot on your parents for your dreams to come true."*

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**Cathy, 17, Uganda**

*"My mother's strictness coincided with my body changes. She discouraged me against groups, yet it was the time when I needed them most, to share experiences."*

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**Panaito, 14, Kenya**

*"My parents sometimes prevent me from socialising with my fellow youths."*

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**Barlay, 16, Kenya**

*"Parents try to make us good but sometimes they are strict. They choose friends for us, and I do not like that."*

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**Halima, 14, Kenya**

*“My parents and I always disagree about going out without a buibui (black dress and headscarf worn by Muslim women), and now that I have finished my examinations, they don’t like me to go out all the time.”*

Whether you are at one extreme or the other, there’s a lot you can do to maintain and to improve your relationship with your parents. It can be hard work at times, but if you are serious and committed, your efforts will pay off. In addition, you’ll find getting along becomes easier and easier.

**APPRECIATING YOUR FAMILY**

Make a list of your best traits—the things about yourself that you like. Perhaps you think your sense of humour is one of your best features. Maybe you like your nice smile. Perhaps you feel good about your talent for carpentry or your quickness in mathematics.

Next, ask yourself where these traits and strengths came from. Where and from whom did you learn them? You might see some of these same traits in your parents, your aunties and uncles or other members of your family. Do you have your mother’s sense of humour? Your father’s nice smile? Who taught you all those things about carpentry?

Sometimes it’s easy to get so caught up in struggles with parents and other family members that you can’t really see how much they have given you. You have trouble seeing what you have in common because of all the differences of opinion between you. Sometimes you may even feel embarrassed by your family. Maybe your parents don’t have much money, so your family lives in a one-room house. You may feel ashamed to bring friends home.

It’s important to appreciate your family and to accept your family as it is—rich or poor. Focus on what your family has been able to give you, rather than what they couldn’t give you. Remember, your family has played a big part in shaping who you are and who you are going to be. Your family has also given you many of the values by which you will live your life.

Of course, this isn’t to say that you are exactly like your parents. There may be just as many differences between you as there are similarities. In addition, adolescence is often a time when young people want to explore the differences between them and their parents. They want to be more independent, which is perfectly normal and healthy. However, becoming more independent is not easy. In fact, it can be very hard—for you and for your family.

**BEING UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR PARENTS’ VALUES AND BELIEFS**

When you are trying out new identities, new looks, and new ways of being, your family can find it very hard. They might wonder what has possessed you. Where did you get these funny ideas? Where did their beloved son or daughter go? Who is this young person who only wants to spend time alone or out with friends?

It can be difficult for parents to recognise that you are becoming an adult who can think for himself or herself and who has his or her own opinions. They still think of you as a child. Be patient with them while they adjust to this big change in you.

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**Grace, 14, Kenya**

*“We disagree sometimes about clothing, because they say that trousers and jeans are for men. But I think wearing them is safer for me than dresses and skirts. They also do not like me plaiting rastas. They say that the style is of bad people. As for me I don’t think so, I take it as a style.”*

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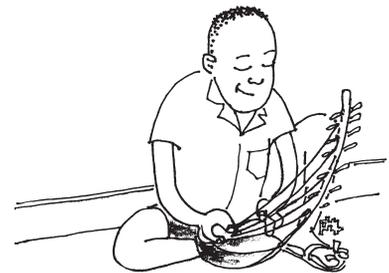
**Bernard 17, Kenya**

*“Sometimes my ideas conflict with my parents.”*

Remember that your parents grew up during a different time. Even if your parents seem too traditional, find something positive about it. Your parents are a link to your culture, and this is an important and very rich part of who you are. You can learn a lot about your culture from your parents and your elders. It would be sad to lose things like:

- Your local language or “mother tongue.”
- The history of your people.
- Traditional musical instruments, songs and stories.
- Traditional dances and cooking.

Imagine yourself without any of these things. Imagine if you did not know who your ancestors were. Who would you be? Where would you belong?



**Learn about your history and culture, traditional music, instruments and dances**

Without a sense of our culture and our history, we are lost. Our ancestors, their language, culture, and beliefs are an important part of our identity. Don’t under-value them!

Of course, modern culture has a lot that’s very good as well—things that make our lives better, like education, modern medicine, and new ideas about the roles of men and women. For example, girls today have many more opportunities for education and exciting careers than their grandmothers ever had. Old attitudes—like beliefs that women and girls should only stay at home to cook and take care of the house—are changing. Attitudes about traditional practices such as early marriage are also changing.

You are living during an exciting time. You are exposed to many ideas. You have many options in terms of how you want to live your life. You can choose the best of both worlds—the best of your traditional culture and the best of “modern” culture. You can embrace what you like and think is good, and you can reject those things that you think are bad.

As you try to make your own decisions about which traditional and modern customs you want to live by, try to be sensitive to the beliefs of your parents and elders. Talk to them to find out why they feel the way they do. Explain your own feelings and thoughts.

### **COPING WITH YOUR PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS**

Some parents expect a lot from their adolescents. They want you to lead a better life than they did, so they want you to work hard now, to do well in school, to get serious!

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**Halima, 14, Kenya**

*“Sometimes my parents put too much pressure on me. They expect me to do everything right and not to make any mistakes. They expect me to be perfect yet that cannot be possible, since we are all human beings who are liable to make mistakes all the time.”*

Parents' expectations can seem like a heavy burden. Sometimes it may seem as though they are so focused on the future they have dreamed up for you, that they aren't listening to your own ideas on the subject.

Maybe your father has his heart set on your becoming a doctor, but you are not very strong in sciences. Or perhaps your mother expects you to marry and stay in the village where you were born, but you want to go on to university and be a journalist.



**“He wants to be a teacher? I say No! He's going to be a doctor. That's what I want for my son.”**

This type of situation can be very hard. Your parents often think they know what is best for you, even when they don't. It can be hard for them to recognise that you are an independent person with your own talents, ideas and dreams. They may have a hard time recognising the differences between your dreams and the dreams they themselves have for you.

Try to be patient with them, and try to remember that they want your future to be a bright one. Keep talking to your parents. Tell them about your own goals and dreams, and why you want to pursue them. Show them how serious you are.

### **COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARENTS**

Lack of open communication is the cause of many struggles between young people and their parents. Sitting down to have an honest discussion is surprisingly hard for everyone.

**Julia, 22, Ghana**

*“When I started seeing changes in me, I found it difficult to talk to my parents about it. But as time went on I felt more relaxed and was able to talk to them. I asked them any questions I wanted to.”*

Most parents want very much to help their children go through adolescence safely, but often they don't know how. They're afraid of embarrassing you, and they're afraid of embarrassing themselves. Their own parents probably didn't talk to them about adolescence and all the changes one goes through. Thus, it's very hard for them to help you when they themselves did not get much help. Like you, they may not have much experience in this area, or any role models to draw upon.



**Show your parents that you care about pleasing them.**

How does one learn to talk openly with parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents or other family members? How do you build a relationship where they trust you? Especially if you have been arguing lately, how do you even start? Of course, there's no simple answer, but here are tips you can try:

- **Show your parents that you care about pleasing them.** Volunteer to help your parents with something they are working on—in the kitchen, around the house or in the garden. While you are working together, bring up the issue you want to discuss.

**Anthony, 15, Kenya**

*“The best way to approach your parents is when you have done some work that makes them happy and then you can go and talk to them about what you want.”*

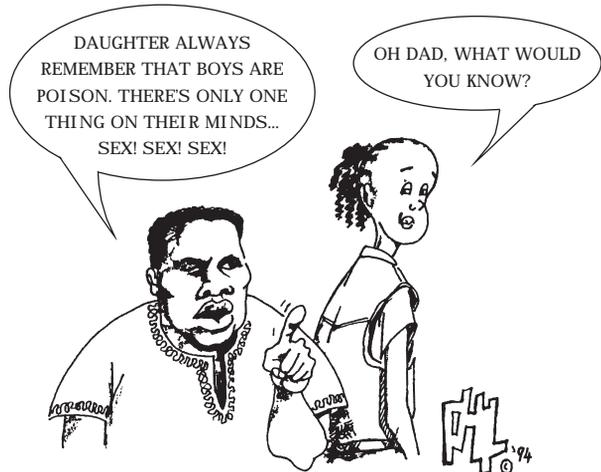
- **Choose a good time to talk.** Timing is everything! Choose a time when your parents are not too tired or busy. Maybe it is better to wait until the weekend when they are feeling more relaxed and less worried about work.
- **Start with easy topics.** Start with topics that aren't too embarrassing to you or to them and about which you don't disagree strongly. In many families, parents and their children only start talking to each when it's something serious—like when the children want to do something the parents don't like. This is a hard place to start.

You can first try talking to your parents about a friend's situation or problem, rather than your own. This can give both you and your parents a sense of each other's values and can

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

help build trust and understanding about a situation that is not too personal. But don't betray your friend's trust, and do protect his or her privacy. For example, you can talk to your parents about the friend's problem, but don't name the friend who is in this difficult situation.

- **Show your parents that you do care about their views.** Ask them what they think and why they feel a certain way. Try to understand their perspective and their concerns. Perhaps you think your parents don't want you going to discos simply because they are strict. But maybe they know something about the discos that you don't. Perhaps they have heard of girls being raped there or that people are pushing drugs there. They may have some very good reasons for feeling the way they do. Show them that you are interested in their reasons and care about what they think.



**Ask your parents what they think and why. They may have good reasons for feeling the way they do.**

- **Be respectful.** Your parents and your other older relatives care a lot about respect. So even if you feel frustrated, try not to shout or make them feel you are being disrespectful. Also, be respectful of their values. While many of your values may be similar to those of your family, some may be different. If you want to live by different values than those of your parents, that is fine, but don't criticise your parents for their beliefs—even if they seem too old-fashioned or traditional to you.
- **Earn their trust.** Show your parents that you are responsible and that they can trust you. If they tell you to be home by a certain time, make sure that you are home by then. Be open with them about what you want to do and why. Don't try to sneak off to a disco when you've told your parents that you are going to a friend's house. If you try to deceive them, they will probably find out and will feel as though you have broken their trust.

Your parents need to respect your privacy, but you should not abuse it by living a secret and risky life. Your parents also need to respect your choice of friends, but in return, you need to show them that you can choose friends well. Don't hang out with people who don't care about you and whose values fundamentally oppose those of your family.

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### **Aloysious, 19, Uganda**

*"You should do what you are told even if you dislike it, and don't give them stress by doing things that you know will hurt them dearly. By doing all these when you talk to them they will not refuse anything you tell them."*

- **Be open with your parents.** Remember, you are changing so fast that your parents may feel as though they hardly know you. It is your responsibility to make sure that they do! Talk to them about your dreams, your expectations and your needs so that they feel confident that they know you and what you want. Share your concerns and worries with them, and ask them what they would do in your situation. Let your parents meet your friends so they know whom you are going out with.



**Be open with your parents and introduce them to your friends so that they know they can trust you.**

When your parents feel as though they know you well, they will feel better able to trust you. It will help them begin to accept you as the adult you are becoming and to stop treating you as a child. It will help them feel comfortable allowing you to make more and more decisions on your own.

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**Prisca, 14, Kenya**

*“The best way to approach our parents is by telling them of our problems and asking them if they can help. If you ask them, they can’t refuse because they are loving and understanding. You can plan a day and sit together with them and share the things you want to say because they can’t refuse.”*

- **Show your parents you care about them.** Just as you want them to show you that they love you, show your parents that you care about them. Do nice things for them to show them that you love them and want to please them.

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**Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*“You should sometimes buy gifts for your parents. It really makes them happy.”*

Getting along well with your parents and coping with their strictness, their protectiveness, their big expectations and their traditional values can be hard. It will take time and patience. But it will be worth every minute and every bit of effort you put into it. It will be worth it because there will be times when your friends and peers cannot advise you as well as your parents can.

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**Gifty, 14, Ghana**

*“You should respect your parents and put shyness aside. You should tell your parents your problems because they are the best people to have answers to your troubles and problems. Talk to your parents often.”*

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**Jennifer, 17, Ghana**

*“You should help them in the house in every thing they do. In helping in all these things the love between you and your parents will be long.”*

**WHEN YOU NEED OTHER SOURCES OF HELP**

Sometimes the difference of opinion between you and your parents can be too big. You have tried talking with them yourself, but it didn't work. They aren't listening to you, and the matter is serious. For example, supposing your parents told you that they want to pull you out of school and marry you off to an older man. You have tried to explain to them how important your schooling is to you. You have told them about your dreams of becoming a teacher, but they haven't heard you.

There are many difficult situations like this, which you can't manage alone. You need to find an adult who can help you.



**If you are having trouble talking to your parents, try asking another adult for advice and help.**

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**Evans, 16, Kenya**

*“If you cannot talk to your parents to resolve a problem or argument, you should talk to a close relative, a person like your aunt or uncle who will advise you and know what is good for you.”*

Try talking to another kind and caring adult you trust—someone who understands you, like a relative, an adult brother or sister, a teacher, a family friend, the parent of a close friend, a religious leader, or a social worker. Ask someone to advise you and to help you by talking to your parents about the matter.

Even if you aren't having a serious problem with your parents, but just want advice, you may sometimes find that it is easier to talk to an aunt, uncle or another relative. There are many people who care about you and who will be happy to help you if you ask them.

## Chapter 7

# Getting along with your parents

Adolescence is a time when many young people and their parents have trouble getting along. But it doesn't always have to be this way. There's a lot you can do to improve your relationship with your parents:

- **Appreciate your family.** Accept your family as it is—rich or poor. Spend some time thinking about what your family has given you, such as your personal strengths, your values and other things you like about yourself. Don't simply focus on what they have not been able to give you.
- **Be understanding of your parents' beliefs and values.** Your parents grew up in a different time. Even if you feel that your parents are too traditional, find something positive about it. Learn from them about your history, traditional customs, music and language.
- **Remember that your parents want the best for you.** Coping with parents' expectations can be hard, especially when their dreams for you and your own dreams are not the same. Talk to your parents about your goals and why you want to pursue them. Show them you are serious and hardworking.
- **Be honest and open with your parents.** Look for good opportunities to talk to your parents. Give them a chance to get to know the adult you are becoming. Show them that you are trust-worthy and responsible.
- **Show your parents that you care about their feelings and want to please them.** Ask your parents why they feel the way they do. Try to understand their concerns. Show them that you are interested in and care about what they think.
- **Be respectful.** Even if you and your parents disagree, try not to shout at or be rude to them.
- **Be patient with your parents.** Give them time to get used to the fact that you are becoming an adult who has opinions and who can think for herself or himself.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Building a more open and close relationship with your parents takes time and hard work. Don't get frustrated or discouraged if it does not happen overnight.

Sometimes, the differences of opinion between you and your parents can be too big. Find a caring adult you trust—an aunt or uncle, older sibling, family friend, teacher, religious leader or social worker—and ask for advice. Perhaps they can help you resolve the problem with your parents.

# Friendships and love

This chapter is about friendships and love. Everyone needs good friendships, and everyone needs to feel loved.

## FRIENDSHIPS

Friends play a big role in shaping who we are. They make us laugh, and they make us feel happy. They introduce us to new things and to new ideas, broadening our horizons. They share our dreams and try to help us plan out our futures.

Our friends also answer many of our questions during adolescence, and they help us feel comfortable with all the changes we are going through. When we're in trouble, they encourage us and help us with our problems. They help reassure us about ourselves.



Friendships are important during adolescence and throughout life

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### Naana, 17, Ghana

*“Most of my friends began noticing the changes in their bodies around the same time I did so I wasn’t very worried about them. We discussed the changes, and I found out that we had the same problems.”*

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### Grace, 14, Kenya

*“My friends are good. We respect each other and love each other like brothers and sisters. They like me the way I am, and if I do anything wrong, they come openly and tell me the way I am to do it. Some think it is bad to have a friend of the opposite sex but it is good because they understand and we can seek advice from them.”*

**Gifty, 14, Ghana**

*“My friends like and respect me a lot because I am honest and I advise them about what is right for a girl to do.”*

You can be friends with people of your own sex and with people of the opposite sex as well.

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**Seif, 13, Tanzania**

*“I have three girl friends. We just sit and talk or study together. A girl friend is just an ordinary friend.”*

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**Evans, 16, Kenya**

*“My girl friend and I help each other with schoolwork and share ideas about life and how we should behave with big people.”*

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**Halima, 14, Kenya**

*“To be friends with a boy or girl is to help one another and make decisions together. Also to talk if something is wrong.”*

Boys and girls can be friends, and they can have a friendship without sex. Boys and girls can also have romantic relationships that don't involve sex. Therefore the terms “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” don't necessarily mean that the relationship is a sexual one.

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**Anthony, 15, Kenya**

*“Our friendship is not to play sex or do anything that we would regret in our future. Our friendship is to help each other as friends not anything else.”*

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**Kwame, 17, Ghana**

*“People think a girlfriend is a person who you can relate with only sexually. A girlfriend is a person whom you can seek advice from, a person you can share problems with.”*

A good, strong friendship is a wonderful thing. It makes you happy. It contributes to your emotional growth because it teaches you how to be close to someone.

Good friendships also contribute to your self-esteem. If you have a good friend, you feel good about yourself. It is nice to have someone to confide in, and it's also nice to know that someone else feels comfortable confiding in you. You can bounce ideas off a good friend without being laughed at. You can share secrets and know they will be kept. It is nice to know that your friend will like and respect you even when you disagree about something.

Through a close friendship, you can learn how to agree and disagree. You learn how to be strong enough to have your own opinions. Being able to stand up for yourself and what you

believe is right is a life skill. It's important for your future and for all your relationships with other people. In fact, friends help you build many important skills that you need to succeed in life—skills such as the abilities to:

- Communicate well and be open about your feelings and thoughts.
- Listen and understand someone else's feelings and opinions.
- Be supportive when someone is in trouble or feeling down.
- Negotiate (for example when you and a friend disagree about something, you may have to negotiate some compromise or middle ground between you).
- Co-operate, work together and share responsibility.
- Accept and respect differences of opinion, beliefs and practices (for example, you and your friend may not always agree on everything, but that's okay).

Friends start becoming especially important during adolescence because many young people feel shy talking to adults. If your parents think that spending your time with friends is a waste of your time, try to explain how important your friends are to you and why. You need friendships.

Good, strong friendships take time and effort to build. They don't happen overnight. And you don't find true friends every day.

### FINDING OUT SOMEONE ISN'T A TRUE FRIEND

There may be times when someone you thought was a friend turns out not to be a good friend. For example, when a friend reveals your secret to others, or spreads nasty rumours about you, he or she is not acting as a friend should.

This can be very painful, but it is part of life. Try talking to the person and ask her or him to stop doing whatever it is that is upsetting you. If the friend doesn't stop treating you badly, stay away from him or her. Losing a friend can be sad, but you will make other friendships—better ones.

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#### **Ayoo, 15, Uganda**

*"I lost most of my friends because they did not respect my opinions. Now I have only one true friend, but we respect each other."*

Friends can also be a source of pressure—specifically peer pressure, which is a big source of worry for parents. Peer pressure sometimes makes young people do things that are wrong, like take alcohol or drugs. Peer pressure can also make young people have sex when they don't really want to do it.

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#### **Florence, 16, Ghana**

*"I feel pressure from other girls when they put up a good appearance and also when they go out for boys. I advise myself not to show any bad attitude or do bad things."*

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

In adolescence, it is very common for groups of adolescents to become friends, and there is pressure to do certain things or be a certain way if you want to join or stay in the group. Watch out for peer pressure! It is very powerful because you want to be liked and you want to be part of the group. You want to impress your group of friends, and you want to make sure that you aren't left behind.

Always keep a clear mind, and be true to yourself. Do not take risks just because you want to keep a set of friends.

Here's one more thing to remember: There may be times during adolescence when you feel as though you don't have close friends. This can make you feel very lonely, sad and anxious about yourself. Don't worry that there is something wrong with you. Maybe you are a little more mature than the other people your age. Maybe you want something different out of a friendship than your peers. As you grow older and meet new people, you will make wonderful, strong friendships. Be patient. It will happen!



**Sometimes peers exclude you from their group. This can be very hard, and you might feel as though you would do anything to be in the group. Be true to yourself, and don't take risks to earn their respect.**

### GETTING ALONG WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX

For a lot of young people, getting along with the opposite sex is hard. They don't know how to treat each other respectfully and appropriately, and they don't know how to be themselves around the opposite sex. Here are some tips for boys:

- Don't stare or whistle at a girl because of her looks, dress or style of walking.
- Listen to what your girlfriend says, and take her "No" to mean "No." Don't try to convince yourself that she means "Maybe" or "Yes" when she says "No."
- Don't loiter near girls' toilets or block their path.
- Don't intentionally harass or scare girls at night or in lonely places.
- Don't start rumours about girls.

Girls can also have bad attitudes towards boys. Here are some tips on getting along with boys:

- Don't exploit boys for money and gifts.
- Accept that boys are also sensitive and have feelings too. Don't laugh at boys or make fun of them.
- Be straight with boys. Be clear about what you do or do not want. Say what you really think, and don't be afraid to express yourself. Be assertive! When you don't want to do something, say "No!" and stick to it.

- Don't start rumours about boys.

Girls and boys often end up in bad relationships because they don't have a good understanding of the opposite sex, and they find it hard to be friends. Boys often don't know what girls want from boys. Girls don't always know what boys want from girls either. Here are some tips:

- **Girls want love, care, trust and respect:** Girls get worried if boys do not respect them. They like boys who take time to listen to them and take them seriously.
- **Company:** Girls find that the company of boys is fun and exciting. They like boys who can support them when in trouble and with whom they can have fun and share jokes and laughter.
- **Freedom:** Girls want to be given a chance to think for themselves. They want boys who realise that girls have brains and like to use them.
- **Confident boys:** Girls admire boys who are confident and who are not afraid of girls.
- **Genuine boys:** Girls like boys who are themselves—boys who aren't always putting on a show, pretending to be somebody that they are not.

What do boys want? Most boys want the same things that girls want in a relationship:

- **Boys want love, care, trust and respect:** Most boys want to be with a girl who is caring and supportive—someone who listens, who takes them seriously and who respects them.
- **Company:** Everyone loves company. Boys, like girls, want someone with whom they can spend time, laugh, share stories, and talk about their ideas, dreams and goals.
- **Freedom:** Many boys feel a lot of pressure to act tough—to act as though they don't have emotions and feelings. They want someone with whom they can share their personal thoughts and feelings.
- **Confident girls:** Contrary to what many girls believe, boys like girls who are confident—girls who aren't afraid to express themselves freely.
- **Genuine girls:** Boys like girls who are real—girls who aren't trying to put on a show of being overly mature and sophisticated.

At the root of a good relationship is a strong friendship—not simply strong physical attraction or a sexual relationship. Neither person tries to control the other person or to pressure them into doing things. And neither person exploits or uses the other in any way.

A good and long-lasting relationship does not develop overnight. It takes time for two people to really get to know each other and to build a strong friendship.

### STARTING A RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE YOU LIKE

Adolescence is a time when you may begin feeling interested in and attracted to other people. You may see someone at your school who looks nice, and you think you'd like to be friends.

But you aren't sure how to begin. You don't know if she or he would like you or would even be interested in you. For all you know, she or he might never have noticed you!

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**Prisca, 14, Kenya**

*"The best way to approach a boy or girl is by approaching him/her in a polite way. The best way to start a friendship is by caring for your friend and helping each other in time of difficulties."*

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**Mercy, 16, Ghana**

*"The first thing to do to start a friendship is to be a friend to that person and when you get to know each other well, you can tell him or her what's on your mind or heart by opening up your feelings."*



**Adolescence is a time when you may begin to feel interested in and attracted to others.**

It's hard to approach someone new, especially when you are interested in them romantically. You may feel afraid to approach the girl or boy because you don't want to be rejected, and you don't want to have your feelings hurt. On the other hand, if you don't approach the person, you may never have any type of relationship with him or her at all.

There are two ways you can find out if someone likes you and is interested in you. You can talk to them yourself, or you can ask a friend to talk to them.

If you decide to have a friend approach the person you like, be careful to choose a good friend—someone who is completely trustworthy. You don't want to choose a friend who will end up telling other people that you like a particular person. You also don't want to choose a friend who will say too much to that person. For example, you might simply want your friend to mention your name to see if the person knows who you are and seems interested in you.

It's okay to ask a good friend to approach someone you like, but at some point, you are going to have to talk to the person yourself. This can be very hard. You might feel very shy. Your hands may feel wet with sweat. When you start speaking, you may completely forget what you meant to say. All these things are normal reactions to feeling nervous and excited.



**If you like someone, be friendly and be yourself. Go out of your way to see her or him.**

Try to relax, and remind yourself that you are an attractive, fun and intelligent person. You have nothing to lose. Just be friendly towards the person you like. Start up conversations with her or him. Find out what she or he is interested in, and go out of your way to see her or him. If the girl or boy is friendly towards you, then take the next step: tell her or him that you would like to get to know each other better. Ask if she or he can go do something with you sometime.

### **BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP**

There are many ways to get to know someone well and to develop a close friendship and good relationship. You can go for walks, go to festivals, go to the movies, or go for a drink and a snack together. You can play sports and you can get involved in community or religious activities together. You can study together. You can spend time together while you are with a group of friends.

If your goal is to get to know someone well and to develop a close, lasting relationship, doing a range of different activities together works much better than just having sex. In fact, having sex before your relationship is close and strong can ruin your relationship. Or it can make your relationship one that is only based on sex.

Remember, sex and love are two different things. Having sex does not necessarily mean that two people love each other.

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#### **Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*“When you have sex, it does not mean you are in love. The person may be using you. He may be using you just because you are attractive, but not because he loves you.”*

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#### **Harrison, 15, Ghana**

*“Sex and love are not the same thing. If you sleep with a girl it does not mean that the girl loves you.”*

Many people think that sex will keep their relationship strong, but this is not true. Sex is not a good way to try to keep a relationship, and it can sometimes ruin a relationship.

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#### **Okakah, 17, Kenya**

*“One of my close friends told me that I would lose my girl-friend if I didn’t satisfy her sexually. Surely this made me very anxious so I started to experiment with her, even though she was not in the mood. This made me even more worried. Then I asked why she’s not in the mood. She explained that making love could cause unwanted pregnancy and if this happens, we would lose our dignity from the community. At the end we realised that lovers need to have mutual respect and understanding, and they need to ignore the pressure from other youth.”*

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Okakah's friends told him that he'd lose his girlfriend if he didn't have sex. But in fact, he almost lost his girlfriend by trying to have sex with her! What his friends were telling him was not true.

Remember, two people can have a very close relationship without having sex. By talking and sharing experiences, they can learn something more important about each other—how each person views life, how they would make decisions together, what kind of partner and parent each person would make, and how each feels about the other's plans for life.

Before you have a sexual relationship with anyone, you should first be true friends. Sex without friendship will always be dangerous for your health and for your heart. You can get hurt. So for a healthy relationship and healthy sexuality—be true friends first!

### LOVE

Love is difficult to define because it involves many different feelings. Love is a big thing, and there are different kinds of love—love for your parents and friends, love for your boyfriend or girlfriend, even love for your village!

Love is a complex emotion, and people may define love differently based on their own experiences with loving relationships. Generally, however, love refers to a deep feeling of fondness, attraction, respect, caring and understanding for another person, despite his or her weaknesses or faults.

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**Godfrey, 19, Zimbabwe**

*"I can't describe it. It's wonderful to be in love."*

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**Patrick, 16, Ghana**

*"Love is the union of two people with the art of understanding each other and being faithful to each other."*

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**Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*"Love is a thing that is between two people, either a boy or a girl. Love is sharing your problem and caring for each other."*

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**Stabisile, 19, Zimbabwe**

*"Falling in love is one of the best things in the world."*

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**Jennifer, 17, Ghana**

*"Love is you and your family and friends sharing ideas together. This is what I know about love."*

Falling in love can seem like magic. You meet someone special, and everything changes. The sun seems brighter, the grass greener, and you feel like you are walking on air.

Falling in love is different than making a new friend. When you fall in love, you may feel a warm, full feeling. You may feel like smiling all the time because the thought of your loved one makes you so happy. You want to be with this person all the time, and you daydream about him or her. In some cases, you may lose your appetite or have trouble sleeping at night.




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**Sherry, 19, Ghana**

*“It is quite strange. You don’t know what comes over you. You can’t describe it. You try to get the person out of your mind but you realise it won’t go. You can be reading for exams but you notice that your mind is not following your eyes across the page.”*

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**Sarah, 16, Uganda**

*“I am 18 and there is a boy I love very much. When he is not near me, I fail to concentrate on anything. When he is with me, I tremble and cannot do anything sensible, even when he tells me to pretend he is not there. These feelings have me totally confused.”*

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**Angela, 18, Kenya**

*“It is exciting to be in love. You do not want to hurt him. You feel new as if something has been added into you. Sometimes reading becomes a problem. If he writes to you, you will read the letter for hours.”*

“First love” is one of life’s most intense experiences. Falling in love is not like anything you experienced as a child. It is something you should try to take slowly. Don’t rush into anything, and handle your heart and your loved one’s with care.

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**Diana, 17, Zambia**

*“I think falling in love should come naturally rather than what is happening with most teens who go looking for love instead of letting love find them. People should look at each other in a positive way. Love can be handled by not pushing to do things that you would regret later.”*

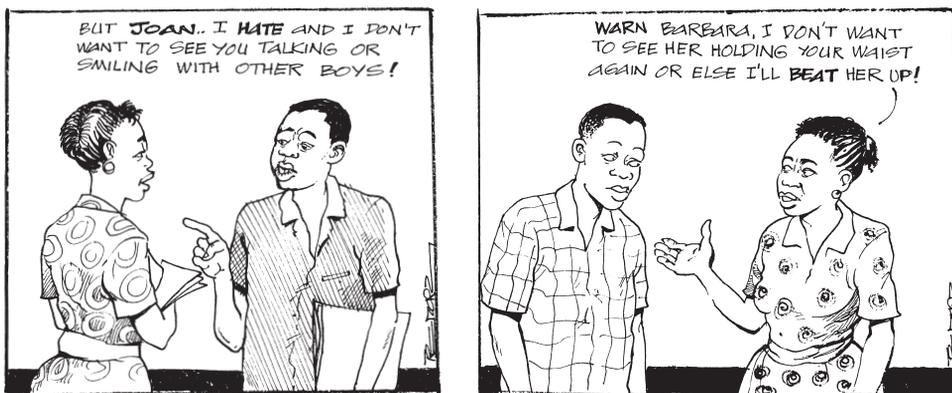
**Cathy, 17, Uganda**

*“My feelings don’t develop so suddenly. This is because I always want to know the person I’m attracted to better. I show my feelings after I am satisfied that he is not after using me but after a real relationship.”*

When you are truly in love with someone, you respect each other. You will never do anything that might hurt the other. You will never force the other person to do anything he or she does not want to do. You will want her or him to be happy. Check out your love against these points:

- Love makes you and your loved one feel good about yourselves and about each other.
- Love is honesty, caring and truthfulness.
- Love is respect and dignity.
- Love does not allow one person to take advantage of the other.
- Love does not put sex before friendship and is never a reason for unsafe sex.

True love involves a sense of responsibility and commitment to the other person. It is a feeling that seeks good things for the other person. Love is not irritable, impatient or touchy. It does not hold grudges. Some people think that jealousy is a sign of love, but it is not. Jealousy is usually a sign that a person is insecure and does not trust that you care about him or her.



**Jealousy is not a sign that someone loves you. It is usually a sign of insecurity.**

Sometimes, however, jealousy is a sign of a more serious problem. For example, jealousy is sometimes a sign that one person wants to control the other person. Many abusive relationships (men who beat their wives or men who rape their girlfriends) start out with jealous behaviour, which then gets worse.

**HAVING CRUSHES**

Sometimes, it is difficult to know if you are truly in love. Your heart pounds, and you feel breathless and dizzy at the sight of a certain boy or girl. You think it must be love. It's over-

whelming! But when you get to know that boy or girl, the wild feelings suddenly disappear, and you no longer feel attracted to that person. That was infatuation or a crush.

Crushes are perfectly healthy and normal. In fact, most adolescents have crushes. Having a crush can be exciting, fun and risk-free. Many crushes never even turn into a relationship. You might have a crush on someone and not really want to have a relationship with him or her. You might simply enjoy admiring them from afar. That's fine.

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**Naana, 17, Ghana**

*"I know that when you love someone you do what is best for the person and have that person's best interest at heart, but I have never actually been in love. I can say I have had crushes on some boys, but I have never fallen in love."*

### **FALLING OUT OF LOVE**

Love doesn't always last. Feelings of being in love can disappear as quickly as they appear, but they can also be very real and powerful.

Sometimes, as you get older, you and your friend may find that you have drifted apart. Your dreams are taking each of you down different paths. You find that your interests have changed, and you don't have much to talk about. You don't laugh together the way you used to.

It isn't good for your emotional health to stay in a relationship when you are no longer in love. This can be sad, and it can be very hard, especially if one person still feels in love, but the other no longer feels the same way.

If you decide to end a relationship, be honest about your reasons, but also be kind and considerate. Try not to hurt your friend's feelings, but at the same time, make the end final—don't leave your friend hoping or thinking that you will change your mind.

If your loved one breaks off the relationship with you, this is also very painful and difficult. It can be hard not to keep thinking that she or he will change her or his mind and come back to you. It may be hard to accept that she or he doesn't love you any more. You may feel terribly lonely and rejected.

Give yourself time to cope with the pain. Do not rush into a new relationship with someone else to make yourself feel better. Even though you might feel angry and hurt, don't blame the other person and never spread rumours or nasty stories about your ex-partner. These are not mature ways of handling your feelings.

Part of life is losing some friends and making new ones. Eventually, you will find the right person to love and to spend your life with, so be patient. In the meantime, focus on being a kind and loveable person. Liking yourself makes it easier to love others and to be loved.

## Chapter 8

# Friendships and love

Good friendships and relationships help you feel good about yourself. **Good friends help you with your problems, introduce you to new ideas and share your dreams for the future.**

Sometimes people you think are friends can pressure you to do something you don't want to do, such as having sex or taking drugs. This is called **peer pressure**. Anyone who pressures you to do something you do not want to do is not a true friend. Don't let anyone pressure you to do something that you know is wrong and risky for you.

Good friends can be people of the same sex or people of the opposite sex. **Boys and girls can be good friends without having a sexual relationship.** The words "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" do not necessarily mean that the relationship is a sexual one. Any two people can have a close and loving relationship without sex.

Getting along with the opposite sex can be hard because many boys and girls are not sure what the other wants in a relationship. Remember, most people—girls and boys—want the same thing in a relationship. They want respect, trust, honesty, understanding and caring.

If you want to approach a girl or boy you like, try to relax and be yourself. Be friendly. Go out of your way to see her or him. If the person seems to like your attentions, ask if you can go do something together.

Building a good relationship takes time and patience. **Sex is not a good way to build a close relationship.** In fact, sex can ruin a relationship. Having sex does not necessarily mean that two people love each other or that they are close. Sex without true friendship is dangerous for your health and your heart.

Falling in love is a wonderful feeling. It makes you feel good about yourself and the other person. Enjoy the feeling, and don't rush into anything. Remember, **love is about respect and caring for each other. Love is never a good reason to do anything that puts your health and future at risk.** Love can't excuse having unprotected sex.

Relationships don't always last. If you fall out of love, it isn't good to stay in the relationship. Be honest with your friend, but be kind and considerate too. Try not to hurt your friend's feelings.

If someone ends a relationship with you, you may feel very sad and alone, but do not despair. You will find the right person to love some day. Give yourself time to cope with the loss. Do not rush into a new relationship, and do not spread nasty stories about the person.

# Sexuality and sex

There is a great deal of confusion about sexuality and sex. Many people think that sexuality means sexual intercourse. People also think that you aren't a sexual being and don't have sexual feelings until you actually start having sexual intercourse.

But these beliefs are not true. Every person is a sexual being from birth until death. Being sexual can mean:

- Feeling attractive and good about your body.
- Feeling emotionally close to someone else.
- Enjoying being touched and hugged.
- Touching your own body.
- Feeling attracted to another person.
- Making up romantic stories in your head.
- Having sexy thoughts or feelings.

Adolescence is a time when you may become more aware of your sexuality—how you feel, think and behave as a male or a female, and what you want in terms of close relationships and physical affection. When you were younger, you probably did not think about these things, but during adolescence, you may become more aware of what it means to be a man or a woman. You also may start to feel attracted to other people and start noticing your own sexual feelings, desires and dreams.

## DO YOU KNOW what is “sexuality” means?

Sexuality is complex. It's much more than simply your sexual feelings or having sexual intercourse. Sexuality includes:

- Your awareness and feelings about your own body and other people's bodies;
- Your ability and need to be emotionally close to someone else;
- Your understanding of what it means to be female or male;
- Your feelings of sexual attraction to other people;
- Your physical capacity to reproduce.

Sexuality is an important, joyful and natural part of being a person. But sometimes people use their sexuality in unhealthy ways to influence, control or tease another person. This can range from flirtation and seduction to sexual harassment and abuse. Don't use your sexuality as a tool to get something or to tease or hurt someone else.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

These are exciting changes, but they can also be confusing—especially because there are so many myths about sexuality and sex. For example, some people think that having sexual feelings is a sign that they should have sexual intercourse, but this is not true. Having sexual feelings is simply part of being human. Every person has sexual feelings.

This chapter is about sexuality and how people express their sexual feelings. There's a lot you need to know in order to make good decisions about sexuality and sex.

### HEALTHY SEXUALITY

Being a sexually healthy person means that you can express your sexual feelings in ways that are not harmful to yourself or to anyone else. You don't take risks with your own feelings and health, and you don't take risks with other people's feelings and health.

As an adolescent, you can start working on being a sexually healthy person. You can make sure that you inform yourself as much as possible so that you know the difference between fact and fiction when it comes to sex. You can take time to learn about your body, your emotions, and how to be sexually safe and healthy.

Most importantly, you can take some time to think about your choices related to sexual activity. One of your choices can be "No sex" or "Not yet." You can wait before you rush yourself into sexual intercourse. You can make sure you understand the consequences of unprotected sex and how to best protect yourself.

Sometimes it can be hard to be sexually healthy. No one ever teaches you in school or at home what healthy sexuality is. And your main sources of information—peers, older brothers and sisters, videos, music, and magazines—can be confusing and misleading.



Magazines, music, novels and advertisements give confusing messages about sex.

In some videos and romance novels, sex seems to be romantic and problem-free. Sex looks like something that just happens—there’s no discussion between the two people about whether they should have sex. They never discuss whether or not they should use condoms. And even though they don’t use condoms, those people in videos and novels never seem to get into trouble with an unwanted pregnancy or with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) like HIV/AIDS.

In music, men and women sing desperately about love and sex. They never seem to worry about HIV or other problems. All they want is love. *“My mind is telling me ‘no’, but my body is telling me ‘yes’,”* goes one rap song. Another says: *“I don’t know what you’ve done to me but it’s got me to act in such a crazy way.”*

Music is beautiful, and it touches you deep inside. Videos and novels can be a great escape from your day-to-day life, but they don’t help you handle your own relationships. They don’t help you know how to talk to your girlfriend or boyfriend about whether or not to have sex. And they certainly don’t help you talk to your partner about using condoms.

Even the people you know and love can also confuse you about sex and sexuality. Most parents don’t want to talk about sex with their children, so it can be hard to learn much from them.

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**Gift, 14, Ghana**

*“Why do our parents feel shy and difficult to educate us on sex? Is it because they think we will go and practise it or what?”*

Many of your peers and friends may say that they have had sex even when they have not. You might start to think you should have sex to keep up with them. Your peers may also tell you myths such as: you need sex to cure menstrual pains or to make your penis get big and strong. But these things are not true. Having sex won’t cure menstrual pains, and it won’t make the penis bigger.

For many of you boys, your older brothers and uncles may have taken a lot of sexual risks that they regret deeply. But they still urge you to start sex to prove that you’re a man.

For many of you girls, no one has ever told you that you are beautiful before, but now boys are telling you this, and it makes you feel good about yourself. Should you flirt with them and encourage them?

It can be hard to make sense out of all the messages you get about sex. However, an important part of healthy sexuality is being able to tell the difference between sexual behaviours that are healthy and those that are harmful to yourself or others. Before you act on your sexual feelings, think about the possible consequences of your actions. Will you or anyone else be put at risk for unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS or other STIs? Will acting on your sexual feelings cause any other problems, such as misunderstandings or miscommunication in your relationship? Will it make you or your partner feel uncomfortable? Will anyone’s feelings get hurt? Being sexually healthy means taking the time to think about these things before you act on your sexual feelings.

## **SEXUAL FEELINGS**

You will know when you start to feel sexy or sexually aroused. You feel it in your body. In boys, the main sign of sexual feeling is erection of the penis. In girls, it is wetness of the vagina. This happens because extra blood from nearby blood vessels flows into the special spongy tissue inside the penis or vagina. In boys, the spongy tissue in the penis swells up, making the penis longer, harder, wider and erect. In girls, the spongy tissue swells up inside the walls of the vagina making them produce more vaginal discharge, which lubricates the area and makes it wet.

You might feel this sexual excitement just by reading a romantic novel or by thinking about a boy or girl you like. If you were actually with that boy or girl and you were touching each other, you would probably get even more excited.

What should you do about your sexual feelings? First of all, you don't need to have sex when you have sexual feelings. Sexual intercourse is only one way that people express sexual feelings. But there are plenty of other ways that people express these feelings—from talking to each other and holding hands to hugging, cuddling, kissing and touching each other.

These ways of expressing sexual feelings can be very sexy and satisfying—and they carry little risk of HIV infection (read Chapter 10 for more on HIV and other STIs). Your breathing and heartbeat may increase. Your whole body may feel very sensitive and stimulated. You can stay at this level of sexual excitement for hours. You do not have to go further. Boys, you do not need to tell girls that you have to have sex if you have an erection. It is simply not true. Your erection will go down when you stop cuddling the girl.

It is important to know that not all physical touching leads to sexual excitement. If a person is pushed unwillingly into sex, it will not feel nice. Sexual excitement only happens when people are feeling happy and relaxed (read Chapter 12 for more on sexual abuse and unwanted sexual activity).

## **MASTURBATION**

Masturbation is the act of touching one's own sexual organs—the penis, vagina, breasts or other parts of the body that are sensitive to sexual stimulation. Masturbation is another way that people sometimes express their sexual feelings.

Both men and women can relieve sexual feelings and experience sexual pleasure through masturbation. In fact, most people masturbate sometime or other during their lives, but boys tend to masturbate more frequently than girls. Some girls and boys start masturbating when they are children and continue to do so all their lives. Some start during puberty; others start when they are adults. Other people never masturbate, and some people feel that having sexual fantasies and masturbating is in conflict with their religious or moral beliefs.

In some cultures, there are many myths that are meant to discourage people from masturbating. Here are some falsehoods about masturbation:

- Masturbating makes you insane.
- Masturbating makes you grow hair on the palms of your hands, causes pimples on your face or makes you go blind.
- Masturbating makes you pale and makes you use up all your sperm.
- Masturbation makes you weak and makes it impossible for a man to father children.
- Masturbation causes you to lose your desire for the opposite sex.
- Masturbation makes you become a proud and self-centred person.

None of these myths are true. From a medical point of view, masturbation is considered a normal part of development. It is normal if you do masturbate, and it is normal if you don't. There is no scientific evidence that masturbation causes any physical or psychological harm.

Masturbation is only considered a problem when:

- It is excessive—the person cannot function or get through daily tasks without masturbating.
- It is done in public places where other people may see.

Experts in human sexuality consider masturbation one normal way for people to enjoy and express their sexuality without risking pregnancy or STIs, including HIV/AIDS. Nothing bad will happen to your body, even if you masturbate a lot. The only thing that can happen is that your genitals might get sore from rubbing them too much.

#### DO YOU KNOW what an orgasm is?

If your sexual excitement increases, you might be heading for what is called an “orgasm.”

In a boy, an orgasm is easy to identify. Muscles suddenly contract all along the penis, pushing semen out of the penis. For the girl, there are also muscle contractions inside and around her vagina, pelvis and clitoris. Sometimes a bit of fluid comes out of her vagina, but she does not ejaculate.

An orgasm is like a sneeze, a feeling of muscle tension followed by release and relaxation. For most people, it is a brief feeling that lasts about 10 seconds, but it is a good feeling that most people like to experience.

For most girls, it takes time to start having orgasms. They need to know where and how they like to be touched. And they need to be happy and relaxed.

Both boys and girls can have orgasms through masturbation. This is fine. You are alone, you are exploring your body, and the sexual fluids that come out of you are not going to impregnate or infect anyone.

If you have an orgasm when you are just touching and cuddling someone else, it is a bit more complicated. There are two of you, and sexual fluids will contain HIV and other STIs if one or both of you is infected (read Chapter 10 for more on STIs and HIV).

## FEELING ATTRACTED TO SOMEONE OF THE SAME SEX

Adolescence is a time when many people become more aware of their sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about whom a person feels sexually and romantically attracted to. Most people are attracted to people of the opposite sex (i.e., men are attracted to women, and women are attracted to men). Feelings of being attracted to the opposite sex are called heterosexual feelings.

Some people feel romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same sex—some men feel attracted to men and some women feel attracted to women. This attraction to the same sex is called homosexuality.

At some point in their lives, most people have sexual feelings, thoughts, dreams and attractions to someone of the same sex. Two close friends (either two boys or two girls) might have a crush on each other—they like being together and at times feel physically attracted to each other. Some people find these feelings confusing or upsetting, but they are normal, and many people experience such feelings at some time in their lives.

Some people remain attracted only to people of the same sex. Although some religions and cultures consider homosexuality to be wrong, abnormal and a habit that can be changed, most experts think that people's sexual orientation and feelings are not something they can control—any more than they can control the colour of their skin or the texture of their hair. In other words, homosexuality is probably not a deliberate choice that someone makes, and it cannot be changed through praying, will-power or having sex with someone of the opposite sex.

During adolescence, some people come to realise that they are homosexual. This realisation can be a difficult one. You may feel very different than everyone around you, and you may feel very alone. If you are going through something like this, try to find someone to talk to, such as a youth counsellor, a health worker, a teacher you trust, or an older family member—someone who will help answer your questions and ease your worries.

## VIRGINITY

A virgin is a person who has not had sexual intercourse. Every boy and girl is born a virgin. Virginity is good protection against HIV and other STIs. These days, more and more boys and girls are choosing to keep their virginity until marriage.

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**Ruvimbo, 13, Zimbabwe**

*"I would like to keep my virginity. I'm not going to make love to anyone even with 'protectors'. My boyfriend is cool that is why he is my man."*

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**Stabisile, 19, Zimbabwe**

*"I'm still a virgin. Maybe my strong religious beliefs play an important role in this."*

**Susan, 18, Uganda**

*“Virginity gave me a sense of pride and respect. Young girls should keep their virginity until they feel they have found the right person. Sex is something you can always postpone. Avoid situations that will compromise your principles, and you can maintain it.”*

Many people are confused about what makes a girl lose her virginity. They think that a girl’s virginity is determined by the hymen, which is a very thin piece of tissue inside the opening of the vagina. The hymen has some small holes in it, and it does not completely cover the opening because menstrual blood has to come out each month. Some girls have no hymen at all. They are either born without one or it gets stretched by sports and disappears completely.

Girls who have hymen tissue will sometimes bleed when they lose their virginity. Girls who have little or no hymen tissue may not bleed the first time they have sex. This confuses people. They say: “There was no blood, therefore she was not a virgin.” But she may have been. If she had not had sex before, she was a virgin. **Virginity is only lost through sexual intercourse.** It cannot be lost through sports, using a tampon, masturbation or any other activity. While it is true that these things could stretch or tear the hymen, this does not mean that the girl is not a virgin. People who think that the hymen is proof of virginity are mistaken.

**DO YOU KNOW the facts about virginity?**

There are many myths about virginity:

1. *I heard that a girl can lose her virginity through sports. Is this true?* No! Virginity can only be lost through sexual intercourse. Playing sports is good for girls, and it can’t possibly cause them to lose their virginity.
2. *Can some herbs restore a person’s virginity?* No herb can restore virginity. Once lost, it is lost forever.
3. *My friends say that if I remain a virgin too long, I will develop illnesses and abnormalities.* Not true! You can stay a virgin all your life without bad effects.
4. *Is it true that if a girl stays a virgin too long, her hymen will harden and she will have problems with sex?* This is nonsense! The hymen is a thin piece of tissue. It does not harden with age, and waiting to have sex will never hurt you.
5. *You can tell virgins by the look on their faces.* False! You cannot tell a virgin from their looks. It is only a virgin who knows his/her status.
6. *After you have lost your virginity, you have to continue having sex.* Not true. You can stop having sex whenever you want.
7. *I heard that you shouldn’t use a condom if you are having sex with a girl who is a virgin because it takes a lot of force to break a girl’s virginity—so much that you will break the condom. Is this true?* No! Boys and girls who are virgins can comfortably use condoms without any problem. The hymen is a very thin piece of tissue, which tears easily.

Like girls, boys can only lose their virginity by having sexual intercourse. Some people do not think it is as important for boys to be virgins as it is for girls. In addition, many of the videos you watch and the novels you read make it seem as though it's important for men to be very sexually experienced. Sometimes it seems as though to be a real man, you have to be having sex. But having sex does not make you a man, and whether you are a boy or a girl, keeping your virginity is good. It's the best protection against HIV, other STIs and unwanted pregnancy.

## LOSING YOUR VIRGINITY

Whether you are a girl or a boy, you should be the one to decide when to lose your virginity. Don't let other people decide for you or pressure you into it. You chose your time. And choose the right person. Wait until you are sure that you can always protect yourself against STIs, including HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy.

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**Adam, 13, Uganda**

*"I think the right time for sex will be when I'm 20 years old. I shall finish my studies, and maybe work. Even when the time comes I will use condoms to avoid the risks involved."*

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**Nfune, 13, Zambia**

*"I would rather wait until I'm married or until I'm financially secure because if the girl gets pregnant she would need money to support the baby."*

Sometimes your peers may pressure you to have sex.

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**Douglas, 12, Zimbabwe**

*"Some boys who are older than we are or who are blessed with big bodies laugh at us saying we are virgins."*

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**Andrew, 17, Tanzania**

*"My boyfriends laugh at me and try to encourage me to have a girlfriend. They say that how can you live without a girlfriend, you are not a man!"*

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**Mildred, 17, Uganda**

*"At times, you feel left out when your friends are talking about sex issues. You can only fit in the conversation, using what you read in novels and watched in movies. If you don't have a positive attitude about yourself you can be misled. I have chosen to keep my virginity until I get a man good enough."*

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**Lois, 13, Tanzania**

*"I talk to my friends about having sex. There are some girls and boys who say that if you refuse to have sex you look like an uneducated person."*

Many adolescents today are very clear that having sex should be their own decision, and that no one should push them into sex.

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**Patrick, 17, Uganda**

*“All my friends are having sex with their girlfriends, and I almost gave in because of pressure from friends, but I realised I wasn’t sure and felt confused. Besides I want to do things my way. I will wait.”*

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**Lois, 13, Tanzania**

*“Nobody can force me to have sex. It will be my own decision.”*

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**Milensu, 13, Zambia**

*“I would not have sex because I have to wait until marriage when I will be ready for the sex consequences. I do not expect any of my friends to put pressure on me to have sex. The decision is mine.”*

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**Andrew, 17, Tanzania**

*“If I want to have sex it will be my own will. My friends will not influence me.”*



**Stand your ground against peer pressure.  
Don't have sex simply because your  
friends think you should.**

**SEXUAL INTERCOURSE**

Sexual intercourse is what most people think of as sex. Sexual intercourse is when a male and a female put their bodies close together and the male’s erect penis goes into the female’s vagina.

Why do people have sexual intercourse? There are many reasons—some good and some bad. Here are some reasons:

- To be loving and intimate. For two people who are very close, sex can be very intimate and loving. However, some people have sex because they think it will bring love and intimacy to their relationship. They think that having sex will prove that there is love between them. But this does not usually work. Intimacy comes from talking honestly and sharing emotions. Sex doesn’t bring two people closer together if they weren’t close to start with. And having sex does not mean that two people love each other.
- To satisfy sexual feelings and the need for physical affection. Some people think that you need to have sex to satisfy sexual feelings—just as you need to drink when you feel thirsty. But sex doesn’t always work that way. In fact, sometimes having sex is **less** satisfying than

holding hands, cuddling and kissing. If the two people are not in a close relationship, having sex can be very *unsatisfying*.

- To try to keep a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Many people have sex because they're afraid of losing the relationship if they don't have sex. This is one of the worst reasons to have sex. Anyone who would leave you because you don't want to have sex does not love you (see Chapter 12 for more on this).
- For gifts. Many people have sex to get gifts, money or other favours, like getting good marks in school. This can be very complicated, for example if your sexual partner is paying your school fees. But these are the wrong reasons to have sex. They won't make you feel good about yourself. You shouldn't use your body to get something from someone else. No matter what it is—money, presents, special treatment—it's not worth it!
- To feel grown up. Many people rush to have sex because they think it will make them mature. But having sex really doesn't change anything about you inside. It won't make you mature, and it doesn't make you an adult.
- To fit in with or impress peers. Many young people feel as though everyone around them is having sex—as though they are the only ones who aren't having sex. This can be worrying, and some adolescents have sex simply because they think their friends are all doing it. But the truth is that most people don't tell the truth about sex, and many people make up stories because they want to impress other people. Many of your peers who say they're having sex really are not having sex.
- To have a baby. Sexual intercourse is the only kind of sexual activity that will give you a baby. Most people want babies at some time in their lives, but few want to have a baby during adolescence (read Chapter 11).

Sexual intercourse is how most people in the world have got HIV. If you are not ready to protect yourself and your partner by always using a condom, you are not ready for sexual intercourse.

### **SETTING SEXUAL LIMITS**

Some people think that sex is a powerful and uncontrollable force that just happens, like thunder or rain. But the truth is that sex—having sexual intercourse—is a deliberate decision. When you have sex, it is not nature overcoming you. It is you who make a decision. In fact you make many decisions about sex: When? With whom? Why? Where? How often? With a condom? Without?

Sex is a big decision. Try to make sure that it is your decision. Block out all those voices who say that “everybody” is having sex. “Everybody” is not having sex. And, anyway, you are you. You are not “everybody.”

If you are deciding whether or not to have sex, think about this: Are you ready to cope with the demands of safer sex—correct and consistent condom use, HIV counselling and testing, and more? Most adolescents aren't ready to handle all these responsibilities, so be honest with yourself. If you don't feel ready, you can say “No” and wait until you are older.

You also need to care for your partner, and he or she must care for you. Caring takes time. Friendship and closeness don't develop overnight. If you aren't true friends, you may find the sex embarrassing. This is a sure sign that this is not the right person or the right time for you.

If you and your partner are not ready for sex, stick to kissing, holding hands and hugging. Set limits and agree on them. Never do anything that you or your partner finds unpleasant or distasteful.

**DO YOU KNOW if your relationship ready for sex? Take this quiz to find out.**

Answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

1. Do my partner and I know each other well?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
2. Do we feel connected to each other and part of each other's lives?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
3. Are we both committed to the relationship?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
4. Do we trust each other?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
5. Do we communicate well?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
6. Can we talk with each other comfortably about sex?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
7. Are we thinking about having sex because we really want to—or because we feel pressure to have sex?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
8. Have we talked about what kind of contraceptive method to use?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
9. Have we discussed the need for HIV tests for both of us?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
10. Have we talked about how to protect ourselves from STIs including HIV/AIDS?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
11. Have we agreed to use condoms and other contraception every time we have sex?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
12. Will my partner respect my right to say “yes” or “no” to each sexual encounter?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
13. Will I respect my partner's right to say “yes” or “no” to each sexual encounter?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know
14. Will the setting for the sexual relationship be safe and comfortable?  
yes  no  maybe  I don't know

*If you answered “no”, “maybe” or “I don't know” to any of these questions, maybe you and your partner are not ready to have sex. It might be better to wait.*

## DECIDING NOT TO HAVE SEX

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**Andrew, 17, Tanzania**

*“My friends and I talk about sex. We also talk about the impact sex can have on us like if we make a girl pregnant, we would be in trouble, forced to marry or chased out of school.”*

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**Halima, 14, Kenya**

*“The best reasons for delaying sex are to wait for a person of the right choice and to wait until you get married.”*

Many young people choose not to have sex for some very good reasons:

- They are worried about pregnancy and STIs/HIV/AIDS, and they do not want to take risks.
- They are too young and do not feel ready.
- They don't want to disappoint their parents.
- They feel it goes against their values or their religion.
- They would rather wait and concentrate on their studies.
- They want to be sure that their boyfriend or girlfriend truly loves them.

If you are faced with the decision whether or not to have sex, remember that sex can have serious consequences like HIV and unwanted pregnancy, which could change your life forever. You need to think through this decision very carefully, keeping this in mind:

- Waiting is the best way to stay safe and to stay healthy.
- You have the right to say “No” to sex and to stick with your decision.
- If you decide to say “Yes” to sex, you must practise safer sex to avoid pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other STIs. No condom, no sex.

## TALKING WITH YOUR PARTNER ABOUT SEX

Decisions about sexual intercourse involve two people and require good communication skills. It's very important to be able to tell your partner what you do and do not want to do.

Many people feel uncomfortable and embarrassed talking about sex, but it usually gets easier with time and practice. Here are some tips:

- **Think about why you do or do not want to do something.** Know what your reasons are so that you can explain them clearly to your partner.
- **Practise beforehand.** If you aren't sure how to talk about sex with your girlfriend or boyfriend, try talking with a close, trusted friend or a youth counsellor first. Ask them how they would bring up the subject and how they would talk about it. Get ideas about how to handle the situation.
- **Choose a good time and place.** Choose a good time to talk with your boyfriend or girlfriend—a time when neither one of you is distracted by other things and a time when you both are feeling relaxed and comfortable. It's also important to choose a good place. Choose a place where you don't have to worry about other people overhearing you. At the same time, choose a place that isn't so private that you feel worried that your boyfriend or girlfriend will get the wrong idea.
- **Don't wait until you are already "in the heat of the moment" to begin discussing sex.** It is pretty difficult to have a good conversation about sex when one or both of you is feeling excited and in the mood. Make sure you talk about what kind of sexual relationship you want, long before you and your partner find yourselves in a sexy situation.
- **Be honest about your feelings and the way you feel.** Don't use other people or other factors as excuses. For example, if you don't want to have sex because you want to wait until marriage, don't tell your boyfriend that you don't want to have sex because you're afraid of getting pregnant or because you're afraid that your mother will find out. If you tell these excuses to your boyfriend, he might think that you are trying to tell him that you want him to use a condom or that you want to go to his place. To avoid misunderstandings, be honest and direct about your feelings.
- **Stand your ground and don't give in to pressure.** Even people you care about a lot can pressure you to do things you don't want to do. It can be very hard to withstand this kind of pressure because you like the person and you want him or her to be happy. Remember, however, that someone who loves you should not want to do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. If your boyfriend or girlfriend keeps pressuring you, it is either because they don't understand how you feel or because they don't care about your feelings as much as they should. Stand your ground, and make sure they understand what you want.



## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- **Pay attention to your feelings and instincts.** If at heart you don't feel that something is right for you, don't do it. Wait until you don't have any fears, worries or concerns.
- **Always allow yourself to change your mind.** Supposing you told your boyfriend that you would have sex with him, but now you are feeling as though you do not want to go through with it. This is okay. You have a right to change your mind. You have good reasons for feeling the way you do.

Even if you have had sex before, you can always decide to stop. There is no problem with stopping. You do not have to justify why you are stopping. Just remember, people have a right to change their minds.



**You always have a right to change your mind about sex.**

## Chapter 9

# Sexuality and sex

Adolescence is a time when you become more aware of yourself as a person who has sexual feelings. You become more aware of your sexuality—how you feel, think and behave as a male or a female and what you want in terms of relationships with other people.

**Being a sexually healthy person means that you can express your sexuality in ways that are not harmful to yourself or to anyone else.** It means that you do not take risks like having unprotected sex, which could result in unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.

Everyone has sexual feelings, and **you don't need to have sex when you have sexual feelings.** Sexual intercourse is only one way that people express their sexual feelings. But there are many other ways to express sexual feelings, such as talking to each other, holding hands, hugging and kissing.

A virgin is someone—a girl or a boy—who has never had sexual intercourse. **Virginity can only be lost through sexual intercourse.** Girls cannot lose their virginity through sports, using a tampon or any other activity.

**Keeping your virginity and waiting to have sex will keep you safe.** It will never hurt you to wait. Many adolescents decide not to have sex because they feel that they are too young, and they do not feel ready. You have a right to say “No” to sex.

Sexual intercourse is how most people in the world have become infected with HIV. **If you aren't ready to protect yourself and your partner by always using a condom, you are not ready for sexual intercourse.**

Talking about sex with your girlfriend or boyfriend can seem difficult and embarrassing at first, but it's important to be able to tell your friend what you do and do not want to do so that there won't be any misunderstandings. Choose a good time to talk—don't wait until you are “in the heat of the moment.” Be honest about your feelings, and don't allow yourself to be pressured into something you do not want to do.

Remember, even if you have had sex before, you can always decide to stop having sex. There is no problem with stopping. If you can't protect yourself against pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other STIs, you should stop having sex.

# Taking care of your sexual health

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**Stabisile, 19, Zimbabwe**

*“My body is special to me. I protect it from STIs, HIV and pregnancy.”*

Your body is special too. Are you protecting it? There’s a lot you should know about staying healthy and protecting yourself from reproductive health problems.

When most people think of reproductive health problems, they think about sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. These are serious problems, so it’s a good idea to know how to take good care of yourself and how to avoid risks.

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—also called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—are infections that are spread through sexual contact. Some STIs cause open sores, bumps or blisters, whereas other STIs do not have any obvious signs.

STIs are spread through contact between two people’s body fluids—semen, vaginal fluids and blood—and through contact with infected skin. STIs can be spread from a man to a woman, and from a woman to a man—and between two people of the same sex.

The worst STI you can get through sex is HIV. There is no vaccine against HIV, and there is no cure for it once you are infected. Most people die within 10 to 20 years of getting infected with HIV.



Other STIs, like syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhoea, are also very serious. They are curable and manageable, but they can still have long-term effects:

- They can make boys infertile and girls unable to have babies.
- They can help HIV to enter your body.

In brief, there are three ways to avoid STIs, including HIV:

1. Do not have sexual intercourse. Delay starting sex or stop having sex.
2. If you have sexual intercourse, always use a condom from start to finish of the sex act.
3. Go with your partner for an STI check-up, including an HIV test, before starting sex. Depending on when you last had unprotected sex, you may need more than one HIV test to be sure you are free of HIV (see page 116 for more on this). Make sure that neither of you have any infections before you start having sex and remain faithful to each other.

That sounds easy: one, two, three ways to stay safe. But there is more to think about. If you have had sex and decide to stop, you should still get a check-up. You may have an STI without realising it.

#### **DO YOU KNOW why girls are more at risk for STIs including HIV/AIDS?**

Although both men and women can get infected with STIs, women and girls can get infected more easily. There are several reasons why:

1. The man's penis goes inside the female and his sexual fluids, which may carry infection, stay inside her body. This increases her chances of getting an infection in the uterus, fallopian tubes or ovaries.
2. Girls are especially at risk for STIs because the cervix and the vagina of an adolescent girl are more delicate than those of an older woman. The vagina can tear during sexual intercourse, which also increases the risk of getting an STI.
3. Many girls and women are taught to be submissive to men. They lack the skills and confidence to persuade their partners to use condoms for protection. Married or unmarried, many adolescent girls have partners who are older than themselves. When the partner is older than the girl, it can be especially difficult for her to protect herself against STIs and pregnancy. In many societies it can be very difficult for a woman to refuse sex with her husband or to insist that he use a condom, even when she thinks that he may have other partners.
4. Women and girls are at more risk for unwanted sex (pressured sex and rape) than men and boys. In these difficult circumstances, it can be very hard to protect oneself.
5. Many cultural practices, such as dry sex and putting herbs, cloth and other objects into the vagina to "clean" or "tighten" it, actually increase women's risks of getting infected with an STI. Drying the vagina before sex makes it more likely that there will be tears and cuts during sexual intercourse.

If you and your partner use condoms all the time, that's great. But keep it up! Many people start out using condoms, but after a while they start to think: "I trust my partner. We can stop using condoms." This is not okay! Before you stop using condoms, you both need to have STI check-ups, including at least one HIV test. Even if you and your partner have check-ups and do not have any STIs, it is best to continue using condoms. What if one partner has sex with someone else? Also, you still need to avoid pregnancy.

### HOW CAN YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE AN STI?

**Many people, and especially women, who are infected with an STI have no obvious symptoms at all.** For example, there are no signs to tell you that you have HIV at first. Some other STIs don't always have obvious signs either, so everyone should think about his or her risk for STIs. If you have had unprotected sex, you could have exposed yourself to STIs.

If you get a sore or a rash on your private parts that goes away, you still need to see a health worker. There are several STIs that can have symptoms which disappear. The syphilis sore always goes away, and the sores of herpes come and go. If you ever notice any sore, rash or blister on or in your genitals, you should see a health worker. Even if the symptoms of an STI disappear, the infection will still be there, and it won't cure itself.

Whether or not you are sexually active, it is a good idea to know what your genitals look like. If you know what they look like when you are healthy, you will be able to recognise a problem more easily. Use a mirror to see your private parts better. Syphilis, for example, causes a *painless* sore, and you might not notice it unless you look.

For girls, it's good to be familiar with the appearance and smell of your normal vaginal discharge. A normal vaginal discharge:

- Is like egg white. It is clear or whitish.
- Smells neutral or healthy and not offensive.
- Is not itchy.

STIs often cause discharge to be yellow or green in colour and bad-smelling.

#### DO YOU KNOW the signs & symptoms of STIs?

Some STIs have no obvious signs, especially in women, but other STIs do have symptoms.

Signs of STIs in men include:

- A wound, sores, ulcer, rash or blisters on or around the penis.
- A discharge, like pus, from the penis.
- Pain or a burning feeling when passing urine.
- Pain during sexual intercourse.
- Pain and swelling of the testicles.
- Abnormal swelling or growths on the genitals.

Signs of STIs in women include:

- A discharge from the vagina that is thick, itchy or has a funny smell or colour.
- Pain in the lower abdomen.
- Pain or a burning feeling when passing urine.
- Pain during sexual intercourse.
- Abnormal, irregular bleeding from the vagina.
- Itching in the genital area.
- Abnormal swelling or growths in the genitals.

Some infections that are not sexually transmitted also cause an abnormal discharge (read the end of this chapter for more on this), and even a virgin could get one of these infections. If you notice anything different, see a health worker. If your partner notices anything different in his or her private parts, you should also go for a medical check-up—even if you feel perfectly fine.

### GOING FOR STI CHECK-UP

If you have had unprotected sex, you need a STI check-up, whether or not you have any symptoms.

Going for a check-up can be a bit nerve-racking. Unfortunately, some health workers can be judgmental and unsympathetic towards adolescents. They think you shouldn't be having sex and they let you know! These days, many clinics charge fees for STI services, but some clinics provide reduced cost services to adolescents so ask around, and try to find an adolescent-friendly health centre. Even if the health workers are unfriendly, stand your ground, and keep asking for what you want. It is very unlikely that they will refuse to care for you. Be assertive.

At good health facilities you will also get counselling about important decisions such as:

- Do you want to continue having sex?
- Do you want an HIV test?
- How can you talk to your partner about using condoms?
- Should you use contraception? What method is right for you?

Many clinics will give you free condoms, so start using them faithfully, and make sure that your partner also gets proper treatment.

If you find out that you have an STI:

- Your sexual partner (all your sexual partners, if you have more than one) also needs treatment. An untreated partner will infect you again. Even if you are no longer going with that boy or girl, you should still tell them to go for a check-up and treatment. If you do not tell them and they have no symptoms at all, they might not know that they have an STI until it has already done permanent damage to their reproductive organs. It might be very hard to go talk to an ex-girlfriend or an ex-boyfriend, but you need to find courage to talk to that person and to tell her or him to go for a check-up.



**Telling your partner can be difficult,  
but it's very important.**

- Finish all the medicines that the health worker gives you.
- Do not have sex until the health worker says that you and your partner are cured.
- Discuss sexual health with your partner so that you can protect yourselves.

**Never** treat yourself with medicines for an STI. You need to get the right medicine or medicines from a health worker. Using the wrong medicine will make the STI-causing organism become resistant to medicines.

**Never** share medicines with your friends. Take the whole correct dose yourself. If you only take part of the dose, this will also make the STI resistant to medicines and harder to treat.

### **HIV/AIDS**

HIV (**Human Immunodeficiency Virus**) is the virus that causes AIDS (**Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome**). AIDS is a disease in which the body's defence against diseases—its immune system—is progressively destroyed.

When HIV enters the body, it attacks the immune system, which normally protects the body from infections. Over time, a person infected with HIV becomes unable to fight off infections and even common illnesses that otherwise would not be serious. When the body can no longer fight off these illnesses, the person has AIDS. **There is no vaccine for preventing HIV infection, and there is no cure for AIDS once it has been contracted.**

It takes a long time to notice signs of the virus. As a result, a person infected with HIV might be healthy for years and might not know that he or she has the virus. During that time, he or she could spread the virus to others without knowing it.

The length of time it takes for someone to notice signs of the virus depends on how strong a person's immune system is and how tough the virus is. There are different strains of HIV, and some make people sick faster than others. On average, it takes 5 to 10 years before there are any signs of infection with HIV.

Because the virus attacks the immune system and makes the person more vulnerable to infections, the symptoms vary greatly depending on what infection or illness the person develops. However, some of the typical symptoms are:

- Swollen lymph glands
- Tuberculosis (TB)
- Severe weight loss and fatigue
- Sweating, especially at night
- Recurrent fever

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- Severe and persistent diarrhoea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Persistent cough
- Skin rashes and sores in the mouth

There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but there are some medicines that help people live with HIV for many years without becoming ill. Unfortunately, these medicines are not a solution for most people because they are extremely expensive, and in many African countries these medicines are not yet available.

Therefore, it's best to stop HIV from entering your body in the first place:

- Never decide someone is “safe” because of the way she or he looks.
- Wait as long as possible before starting sex because sex is the main way that HIV is transmitted.
- If you do have sex, always use a condom. If used correctly and consistently, condoms can protect you from HIV and other STIs.
- Always test for HIV before starting a sexual relationship, and make sure your partner goes for an HIV test as well.
- Do not share razors, needles, ear-piercing equipment or ceremonial knives.

### **HOW DOES HIV ENTER THE BODY?**

HIV is mainly spread through sexual intercourse and direct contact with body fluids. It is easier for a man to infect a woman than for a woman to infect a man. This is because the skin tissue in the vagina, around the clitoris and around the outer lips of the vagina is very delicate. This skin tissue is very vulnerable to tiny scrapes, sores and cuts—cuts and scrapes that are so small that they are not visible to the eye, but they are big enough for HIV to pass through if the delicate skin comes in contact with the semen of an HIV-infected man.

When a man has sex with an infected woman, he is also greatly at risk. His penis is exposed to vaginal fluid, which carries HIV if the woman is infected. The virus can travel up the urethra (the tube inside the penis). If he is uncircumcised, it can get onto the soft tender skin under the foreskin. The virus could pass through this delicate skin, especially if there are sores, scratches or cuts.

HIV can be spread in other ways too. These include:

- From mother to infant during pregnancy or delivery or through breast-feeding.
- Through contact with the blood of an infected person. This could be through a blood transfusion, a cut with a shared knife, or when drug users share needles. These days, most

blood transfusion services carefully test all blood donations to ensure that they are not infected with HIV. However, many traditional ceremonies like circumcision continue to use unsafe practices, such as sharing one knife or razor blade among all the candidates. Never share razor blades with relatives or friends, and do not share unsterilised knives during a circumcision ceremony or any other traditional event.

There is no known case of getting the virus from saliva while kissing. However, if a person had a cut in the mouth, he or she could possibly get HIV from kissing an infected person who also had a cut or open sore. Because HIV can be in semen and vaginal fluids, oral sex is not safe. If a person has a small cut in their mouth and also gets semen or vaginal fluids in their mouth, they could get HIV.

HIV is **not** spread through casual body contact, such as hugging, shaking hands or touching an infected person. The virus can only survive for a short time outside the body, so it cannot be passed on through touching an infected person or sharing objects—such as dishes, eating utensils, clothes, books, etc.

Very many of us have people with HIV in our families, and we have to take care of them when they fall sick. It is important when you are giving this care that you protect yourself from infection. What you have to worry about are the body fluids, such as the fluid from wounds, menstrual blood, and diarrhoea. Protect yourself by using gloves when you help them wash or whenever you are cleaning anything with blood or any body fluids on it.

### HOW CAN YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE HIV?

You cannot tell by looking at your body if you have HIV. You cannot judge whether other people are infected by looking at them. Even if when people have AIDS—they have been infected with HIV for a long time and have become ill—you may not be able to know by looking at them unless you are a skilled health worker. This is because most of the illnesses that come with AIDS can also come by themselves to people who do not have HIV. For example, you can get tuberculosis whether or not you have HIV.



ANYONE CAN BE INFECTED WITH HIV, WITHOUT ANY OBVIOUS SYMPTOMS. DON'T RELY ON LOOKS ALONE TO DECIDE THAT SOMEONE'S FREE OF HIV.

There is only one way to know if you have HIV, and that is to test for HIV. In most countries, HIV testing is accompanied by counselling—in-depth discussions with a trained and sympathetic person who can help you to cope with your HIV status and learn how to take care of yourself. Or if you are not infected, the counsellor can help you take steps to keep yourself HIV-free.

The test is reliable, accurate, safe and painless. The health worker takes a small amount of blood from your arm. You cannot get weak from blood loss because so little blood is taken. Depending on the type of test used, you can get your result in just an hour, or you might have to come back in a week or two.

To know whether you are truly free from HIV, you will also be asked to come back in another 3 to 6 months for another test when the **“window period”** will be over.

### **WHY SHOULD YOU GET TESTED?**

There are many reasons to test for HIV. If you are worrying constantly about HIV infection and are anxious about every pimple or cough that you get, probably the only way to put your mind at rest is to have an HIV test. If you have had sex with someone who has fallen sick and you hear that he or she has AIDS, then you will also worry greatly. Probably the only way to put your mind at ease is to test and to find out whether or not you are okay. Never assume that you are infected. Always test to find out.

### **LIVING POSITIVELY WITH HIV**

If you do find out that you are infected with HIV, it will not be easy, but you can learn to cope with it. You will need a lot of counselling. It is also a good idea to tell someone close to you so that you do not carry the burden alone.

For many people, the disease progresses very slowly, and they can live with the virus for 10 to 20 years. Be hopeful. There are many scientists working on HIV. There could be a breakthrough any day.

If you find out that you have HIV, it is very important to “live positively.” Living positively can greatly improve your chances of staying healthy for a longer time. Living positively with HIV means:

- Cherishing your loved ones and practising your religion. Take time for your family and spiritual life.
- Eating nutritious food such as greens, beans, and dried fish because these help the immune system.

### **DO YOU KNOW about the window period?**

The window period is the time between the moment when HIV enters your body and the moment when the test can detect the antibodies to HIV. Usually the test can detect antibodies within 2 to 4 weeks of infection. But sometimes it takes 3 to 6 months for the test to detect the antibodies. This means that for 3 to 6 months after infection, the test may not be able to tell you whether or not you are infected. These months are the window period. During this window period, you are infected with HIV and can infect others. However, if you test during the window period, the test will not find HIV antibodies—even though the virus is there. If you return in another few months, the test will find the antibodies, and you will test positive.

**DO YOU KNOW what happens when you go for an HIV test?**

Susan, 19, decided to get tested for HIV and tells what happened:

“I found out that my boyfriend had had sex with another girl while we were together. I had chucked him, but was left worried that I might be infected with HIV. We had been having unprotected sex. We had known each other for a long time, and we trusted each other so we hadn’t used condoms. That was a big mistake, I know now.

I was so worried about HIV! I knew there was only one way to ease my mind: to go for an HIV test. One day, I finally got the courage to go. I went to the AIDS Information Centre in Kampala. When I got to the gate, I was so scared. I stood there for a long time. Finally, I went in.

I was registered, given a number and told to sit and wait for a counsellor. After five minutes, she came and took me and four others to another room. We were counselled as a group. She asked us what we knew about HIV/AIDS, and she answered our questions.

Next, the counsellor and I met alone. She asked me when I had last had sex, how many partners I’d had, and whether I’d used protection. She told me that I could leave at any time if I decided not to go forward with the test, but I told her that I wanted that test. Then, she took me to another room where a little blood was taken from my arm. It was very quick, and it didn’t hurt.

After my blood was taken, I went back to the counselling room and the counsellor talked to everyone about what it means to be HIV positive or negative. She asked us how we would cope if our results were positive, and how we would protect ourselves from getting re-infected and from infecting others. She asked us how we would ensure we stayed negative if our results turned out to be negative.

After the group counselling, we were called into a private room to get our results. I was called first. I was sweating, and my heart was beating very fast. I wanted to run out of there, but I needed to know the result.

‘Your result is negative. You do not have HIV,’ the counsellor told me. I closed my eyes and gave a prayer of thanks. I promised myself that I would not have sex again without insisting on condoms. The counsellor said that as it had been more than six months since I’d been with my boyfriend, I could trust this test and would not need another one to know for sure that I was free of HIV.

When I walked out, I felt so relieved and happy. And the whole process had taken only one hour.”

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- Treating all illnesses as they arise.
- Taking plenty of rest, as well as moderate exercise.
- Practising safer sex so you do not give the virus to anyone or get more virus into your body.

Living positively means making the most of your life everyday. Living positively is something we all need to do, even if we are not infected.

It's also important to help others live positively with HIV. Don't call people with HIV or AIDS "victims" because they are not victims. They are like other people, with much to offer. They can work and contribute. They need love and attention like anyone else. They often need special support from close friends and relatives. Have an enlightened attitude toward people with HIV. Never make fun of them, stigmatise them or disturb them in your community.

### DO YOU KNOW about living positively with HIV?

Hamza learnt that he was infected with HIV four years ago when he was 18, and tells his story: "I developed a skin rash. That prompted me to go for a test. It was a very hard time for me but with the help of counselling I came to face reality. I was able to complete my motor vehicle mechanic course. The counselling I got has made me live up to this moment. I have been able to change my behaviour. I have stopped smoking and taking alcohol. I have a girlfriend who is also HIV positive. To avoid re-infecting ourselves, we practise protected sex with a condom.

I also avoid stress. And I treat any simple disease that affects me. One important thing I have taught myself is to avoid self-pity, and this is what consoles me most. I'm actively involved in drama through which we educate the youth about HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

I advise the youth to wait for sex till they are older. Those who are HIV-positive should accept and join hands to save the lives of those who are not infected."

Hamza is living positively with HIV. He has bravely accepted his situation. He looks after his body. He is busy. He has love in his life: a girlfriend. But he does not re-infect her with HIV, and she does not re-infect him: they use condoms. Living positively can help you live longer with HIV.

### SAFER SEX

Safer sex means sexual practices that greatly reduce your chances of getting STIs, including HIV, or getting pregnant. If you want totally safe sex—100% sure safe sex—then the best choices for you are masturbation and abstinence (no sex). If you read Chapter 9, then you know masturbation is totally safe. You are alone. The only body fluids and private parts are yours. You cannot get infected with anything, and you cannot get yourself or anyone else pregnant.

---

**Andrew, 17, Tanzania**

*“I trust myself; I don’t have any sexually transmitted diseases because I have never had sex with anyone.”*

---

**Anthony, 15, Kenya**

*“The best reason for a young person to delay having sex is that he is sure that he does not get AIDS and STIs.”*

---

**Milensu, 13, Zambia**

*“Saying no to sex is another way of preventing risks of catching diseases and makes you feel in control of your life.”*

Kissing and hugging your partner are also safe.

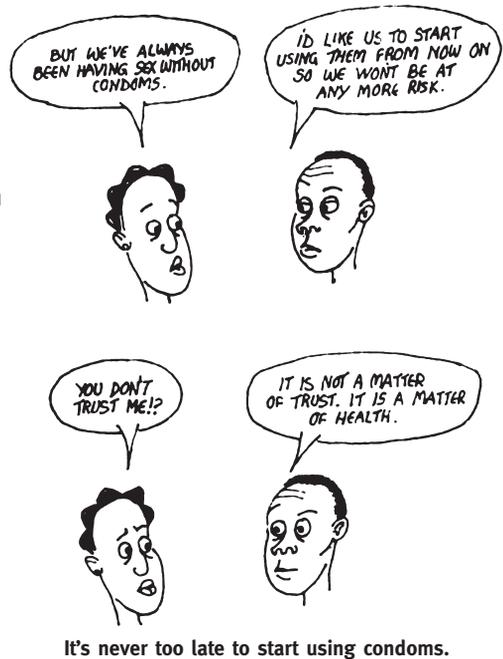
There are no known cases of HIV transmission through kissing or hugging. However, if one person was infected with HIV and had sores in his or her mouth, the other person could possibly become infected. There is also a possibility of infection with HIV if you touch each other’s private parts and get each other’s sexual body fluids on your hands. If you have cuts or cracks on your hands, you could get HIV if the other person is infected.

Sexual intercourse between two people who are both HIV/STI free is also safer sex. But, of course, you still have to worry about pregnancy. Many people think that if they have known someone a long time, they can trust them to be free of HIV and other STIs, but only a test is completely trustworthy. People you love and trust can give you STIs. They may not know that they are infected.

Condoms also make sex safer. In fact, condoms are a very important way to protect yourself and your partner. Even if you are not having sex, read the next section because one day you will need to know about condoms.

**CONDOMS**

A condom is a soft tube made of rubber that is put on a man’s penis before sexual intercourse. When the man ejaculates, the sperm is caught in the tip of the condom. Because the sperm is collected in the condom, the male’s fluid does not enter the woman. Likewise, the condom covers the male’s penis so that the female’s fluids do not touch it.



---

**Seif, 13, Tanzania**

*“Safer sex is using condoms. I heard this from people and also by reading the newspapers. I have never had sex.”*

---

**Sospita, 13, Tanzania**

*“I have heard about condoms. I read that they protect you from STDs and HIV.”*

---

**Godfrey, 19, Zimbabwe**

*“I’m not sure if I will make love to anyone without a condom. I don’t see that happening.”*

**If used correctly and consistently, condoms provide very good protection against STIs, including HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy.** Condoms keep bacteria and viruses in the vagina from coming in contact with the penis, and they prevent sperm, bacteria and viruses in semen from entering the vagina.

Even though condoms may look very thin, they are made of strong, latex rubber. They are tested electronically to be sure that they are of good quality. Some people say that condoms have tiny holes that are big enough to let HIV through, but this is not true. HIV cannot pass through condoms, and condoms can only get holes if they are old or have been stored badly or have been roughly handled.

It is very important to follow the rules of condom use—each and every time:

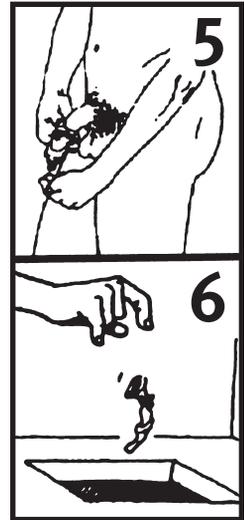
1. Open the package carefully along the edge. Do not use your teeth, and be careful that your fingernails do not damage the condom.
2. Do not unroll the condom. Put it on the palm of your hand. One side will stand up like a hat.
3. Put the condom on the penis as soon as it is erect and before the penis touches the vagina. Hold the tip of the condom as you unroll it down the penis. The condom should unroll easily. If it does not, it is inside out. Throw that condom out and use a new one. Do not use the condom that was inside out because it can have some semen on it, which can contain sperm or STI organisms.
4. Keep holding the tip of the condom as you unroll it down to the base of the penis. This extra space at the tip will catch the semen during ejaculation.



5. After ejaculation, hold the rim of the condom firmly as you withdraw the penis from the vagina. This will prevent the condom from slipping off. Take the condom off without spilling any semen.
6. Throw the condom away in a pit latrine, burn it or bury it. Do not leave it where children will find it, and do not flush it down the toilet.

Here a few more tips for using condoms properly so that they don't break or slip off:

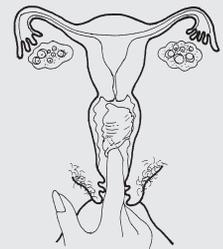
- Check the expiry or manufacture date on the package of the condom. If the expiry date has passed, do not use it! If the manufacture date is more than three years ago, don't use it!
- Never use a condom if it has torn or damaged packaging. In addition, don't use a condom that is unevenly coloured or discoloured, or if it feels brittle, dried out or very sticky.
- Store condoms in a cool, dark and dry place. Heat, light and humidity damage condoms. Do not store condoms in your wallet or pocket.
- If possible, use lubricated condoms or use lubricants if the condom is not lubricated. Lubricants can help prevent the condom from tearing or breaking during sex. Only use water-based lubricants. Good lubricants include water and spermicides. Natural vaginal fluids also act as a lubricant. **Never use lubricants made with oil.** Do not use vaseline, oils (cooking oil, baby oil, coconut oil, mineral oil), petroleum jelly, skin lotions, cold creams, butter, cocoa butter or margarine because they can weaken the condom.
- Do not unroll condoms before use. This may weaken them. In addition, an unrolled condom is difficult to put on.
- Use a new condom each and every time you have sex. **Never use a condom more than once.**



#### DO YOU KNOW what to do if the condom breaks or slips off?

If the condom breaks, remove it immediately and insert a spermicide into the vagina. Use another condom. Contact a health worker immediately (within 72 hours) to find out if you can get emergency contraception to prevent a pregnancy (See Chapter 11 for more on emergency contraception). Talk to the health worker about getting tested for STIs, including HIV.

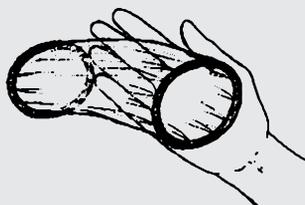
If the condom slips off the penis and stays inside the vagina, it can be removed by putting a finger into the vagina, hooking on to the rim of the condom and pulling it out (see illustration). The condom cannot travel anywhere in the body because the vagina is a closed tube—closed at the inside end by the cervix. If the condom comes off the penis inside the vagina, insert a spermicide. As with a broken condom, contact a health worker to find out if you can get emergency contraception, and whether you should get tested for STIs, including HIV.



A few people are allergic to latex rubber, so condoms give them a rash or irritate their skin. If you have this problem, there are non-latex condoms you can use. Talk to a health worker about how to get them.

### DO YOU KNOW about the female condom?

Have you heard of the female condom? It is another method of protection against HIV, other STIs and pregnancy. It is a pre-lubricated tube, like an ordinary condom for men. But, instead of covering the penis, it lines the vagina to create a barrier against infection.



**How it works:** There is a small ring inside the tube and a ring at the open end that stays outside the body. These rings hold the condom in place. Like the male condom, the female condom prevents sperm from coming into contact with the vagina. As long as the penis remains inside the tube, and the outer ring remains outside the woman, the female condom is working.

**How to use it:** It may take a couple of tries to get it right, just like the male condom, but you will get used to it. Squeeze the inner ring and push it in as far as you can. It cannot be pushed too far. When the condom is in place, guide your partner's penis into the tube. You should only use a female condom once. Do not reuse it.

**How to remove it:** It is easy to remove the condom. Twist the outer ring to keep the semen inside, then pull the condom out and dispose of it in a dustbin or pit latrine.

**Its benefits:** It is the only barrier method controlled by the woman that protects against STIs/HIV/AIDS and pregnancy. It gently lines the vagina and does not cover the penis tightly.

The female condom is made from *polyurethane*, which is an extremely fine material that is twice as strong as the latex used in male condoms. This material is unlikely to burst or tear, and it is not weakened by oil-based products like Vaseline, so massage oil and other lubricants can be used. It is pre-lubricated with a non-spermi-  
cidal lubricant. Neither the condom nor this lubricant cause allergies.

Many people who use condoms say they make sex more enjoyable for both partners. Both partners can relax more when they are not worried about the possibility of pregnancy or getting an STI. Some men also say that using a condom helps them to avoid ejaculating or “coming” too soon and to give more pleasure to their partners.

But many men—and some women—don't want to use condoms because they worry that they will not enjoy sex as much. As an excuse to not use a condom, a man may tell a woman that she should trust him and that she has nothing to worry about. He might try to make her feel bad by asking her why she does not trust him. However, either person could have an STI, including HIV, from a previous relationship without noticing any symptoms, so it is in everyone's interest to use a condom.



**Talk to your partner about using a condom. Explain how you feel and what you want.**

Condoms offer protection to both parties involved, and using a condom is a sign of trust, respect and caring.

## OTHER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROBLEMS

Not every problem in your private parts is an STI. Even if you have never been sexually involved with anyone, there are several infections you could get in your private parts, like an infection of the urinary tract, which causes irritation or pain when you urinate. If you notice a funny discharge or pain or bleeding when passing urine, you should see a health worker.

### CANDIDIASIS

If your private parts are itchy, and you have a funny discharge from your vagina, you may have candidiasis. This is a very common problem. Candidiasis, also called a yeast infection, is caused by a yeast-like fungus called *Candida albicans*. It disturbs many girls and women. Boys can also get *Candida* under their foreskin.

*Candida* is one of the organisms that live naturally on the body surface. *Candida* does not usually cause problems; it is held in check by the immune system and by other bacteria that normally live in the vagina. But if the body's immune system is stressed and therefore less effective than normal, the *Candida* organism will multiply. This often happens just before and after menstrual periods and during pregnancy.

Candidiasis can be transmitted through having sex with a person with too much *Candida*. But it can be caused by other factors too. Stress, such as exams, a death in the family or an argument, can trigger candidiasis. Sometimes you get candidiasis if you take antibiotics—the antibiotics kill the good bacteria that usually live in the vagina. People with diabetes or HIV infection frequently get candidiasis.

Candidiasis is not an STI because virgins can also get it. Too much warmth and moisture around the private parts can cause Candidiasis. This means that you can give yourself candidiasis by wearing the wrong clothes. If, for example, you wear nylon panties under tight biker shorts or a pair of tight jeans and sit for hours with your legs crossed, perhaps on a bus, you are creating just the moist warm climate that the *Candida* needs to thrive.

The symptoms of candidiasis are:

- Itching of the genitals in both girls and boys
- Discharge from the vagina or from under the foreskin that looks like spoilt milk
- Swelling and reddening of mucous membranes of the vagina and labia or penis head.

If you get any of these symptoms, seek help from a qualified health worker who will give you proper treatment. The proper treatment is usually an anti-fungal cream or sometimes a tablet that is inserted into the vagina. If you are sexually active, your partner should get treated as well to ensure that he or she does not re-infect you.

You can also gently wash the genital area with mildly salty water. Keep clean by washing twice a day. Don't rub the genitals because they will be sore, and they need to heal. Try not to scratch, and wash your hands after touching your private parts. Wear clean dry clothes and cotton panties. Remember to dry your panties in open air.

If you have repeated attacks of candidiasis, you might want to go for HIV testing. Repeated attacks are a sign of a weak immune system.

### **URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS**

Both men and women can get infections of the urinary system, but these are more common for women because it is easier for bacteria to get into their urinary tracts. Signs of an infection are:

- Needing to urinate frequently
- Feeling pain or burning when urinating
- Having blood in the urine.

These infections can be avoided by practising good hygiene—by washing the genital area every day and especially by making sure that after defaecating, you always clean from front to back. If you clean from back to front, you may spread bacteria from the anus to the urinary opening. Other steps you can take to avoid these infections are drinking plenty of fluids, urinating often (don't try to hold it in too long) and especially after sex, and wearing cotton panties and loose clothes that keep the private parts dry.

If you think you have a urinary tract infection, drink lots of water and go to see a health worker for treatment. Do not have sex until the signs have gone away.

## **CANCER OF THE CERVIX**

Cancer of the cervix is cancer of the entrance to the womb. When cells become cancerous, they grow and multiply faster than normal cells in your body. The cancerous cells invade and take over healthy tissues in your body, and eventually the disease can kill you. This disease usually happens to women when they are older (over age 40), but it is increasingly being seen in younger women.

Cancer of the cervix can be detected early by a procedure called a Pap smear. The health worker collects some cells from the surface of your cervix. Your cells are examined under a microscope to see if there are any abnormal cells that are likely to become cancerous. If there are any abnormal cells, it is possible to have them removed. Cancer of the cervix is very curable if it is detected at an early stage. Because it is so important to find cervical cancer early, doctors recommend that all sexually active women have a Pap smear test every 3 to 5 years.

If there is an unpleasant smell or discharge coming from your vagina or if you bleed when you have sexual intercourse, see a doctor because these can be signs that there is something wrong with your cervix.

You are especially at risk of cervical cancer if you start having sexual intercourse early (before the age of 20) or if you have 3 or more sexual partners in your lifetime. Having genital warts also greatly increases one's risk of getting cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is a very good reason to delay sex until after you are 20, to stay with one partner and to always use condoms.

**DO YOU KNOW about sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?**

**All STIs make you more vulnerable to HIV infection.** Some STIs are bacterial infections and can be cured. These include:

- **Chancroid** causes painful sores on the genitals and sometimes swollen glands in the groin. The lymph glands can swell to the point where they burst. The sores associated with chancroid increase the risk of getting infected with HIV.
- **Chlamydia** is spread through sexual intercourse and can remain dormant for some time and then start to cause problems. Symptoms include a discharge from the penis or vagina, a burning sensation when urinating, pain during intercourse for women, and swelling or pain in the testicles. Often, however, there are no symptoms—75% of women and 25% of men have no symptoms at all. If chlamydia is not treated, the infection may spread, causing inflammation in the womb and infertility. In men, untreated chlamydia can also cause infertility.
- **Gonorrhoea** causes a yellow/green discharge and pain on urination for many men, however, some men do not have any symptoms at all. Some women may also have a discharge, but most women have no symptoms. If the infection is not detected and treated, it will spread and may cause infertility. Untreated gonorrhoea causes blindness in babies.
- **Syphilis** causes a small painless ulcer at the sight of infection—usually the sexual organs or the mouth—which appears 9 to 90 days after infection. This ulcer disappears in a few days and may not be detected. The infection can remain dormant in the body for some time. Later, a non-itchy rash appears. Other symptoms include: mild fever, fatigue, sore throat, hair loss, weight loss, swollen glands and muscle pains. If syphilis is left untreated, it can cause major problems later in life. Heart disease is not uncommon and in the terminal stages, the infection affects the brain. Pregnant women may pass on syphilis to the foetus, and this can cause miscarriages and still births. Babies born with syphilis are very ill. Treatment can take place at any time once syphilis has been detected, but if detected early, the treatment is shorter and more successful in curing the disease.
- **Trichomoniasis** causes a smelly discharge, itching and soreness for women. Men usually have no symptoms at all. Symptoms start 3 to 28 days after infection.

Some STIs are caused by viruses. They cannot be treated easily or cannot be treated at all. These include:

- **Herpes** cannot be cured by antibiotics. It is spread through sexual intercourse and through contact with infected skin. Herpes causes small blisters/sores to appear on the genitals or around the mouth. The blisters may be accompanied by a high fever, general aches and pains and swollen glands. The blisters burst after 2 to 4 days and eventually heal. Once infected, a person is infected for life. The frequency of attacks depends on the health of the person. People with HIV have very frequent attacks of herpes. A baby who is infected with herpes is at risk of blindness, brain damage or death. In addition, herpes increases the risk of miscarriage or early delivery.
- **Human Papilloma Virus (Genital warts)** causes warts to appear on or around the sexual organs. These flesh-covered bumps can be very difficult to identify, especially if they occur in the birth canal of a woman. They usually appear 3 weeks to 9 months after infection. This very long incubation period can mean it is difficult to know where they came from and they can be passed on to others, unknowingly. The warts can be treated with an acid solution, and no sexual intercourse should take place until the warts have completely disappeared. Both partners need to be checked to see if they have any warts. Women who are infected with this virus are at much higher risk for cancer of the cervix.
- **HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)** is the virus that causes AIDS (**Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome**). When HIV enters the body, it attacks the immune system, which normally protects the body from infections. It can take years to notice any signs of being infected, but over time, a person becomes unable to fight off infections and even common illnesses that otherwise would not be serious. When the body can no longer fight off these illnesses, the person has AIDS.

## Chapter 10

# Taking care of your sexual health

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—also called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—are infections that are spread through sexual contact. They are spread through contact between two people’s body fluids—semen, vaginal fluids and blood.

Most STIs can be cured, but they can still cause big problems. They can damage the reproductive organs, making it impossible to have a child. Some of the signs of STIs include:

- Sores, blisters, bumps and rashes on your private parts.
- Discharge from the penis.
- Discharge from the vagina that has a strange colour or bad smell.
- Pain during sexual intercourse or while passing urine.

Some STIs cannot be cured. HIV is one STI that cannot be cured. HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Infection with HIV causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)—a disease in which the immune system (the body’s defences against illnesses) stops functioning. **There is no vaccine against HIV, and there is no cure for AIDS.**

**It is not possible to know whether someone is infected with HIV by looking at him or her.** The person may be perfectly healthy for a long time before any symptoms develop. The person might not know that he or she has the virus for several years. Never assume that anyone is free of HIV, and never assume that someone has HIV.

If you are worried about STIs, it is good to go to get tested and to get treatment if it is needed. **Never treat yourself with medicines and never share medicines with someone else.**

If you find out you are infected with HIV, get counselling. Do not cope with it all alone. If you take very good care of yourself, you can still have a healthy and productive life.

There are ways to avoid getting STIs, including HIV:

- Do not have sexual intercourse. Abstain from sex. Stick to kissing and hugging.
- If you are sexually active, always use a condom to protect yourself. Make sure that you know how to use a condom properly.

Not every problem in your private parts is an STI. There are some infections, such as candidiasis and urinary tract infections that are not caused by sexual intercourse. These cause great discomfort in the private parts. These infections can generally be avoided by practising good hygiene—by keeping the genital area clean. If you are experiencing pain or itching in your private parts, see a health worker.

# Pregnancy and contraception

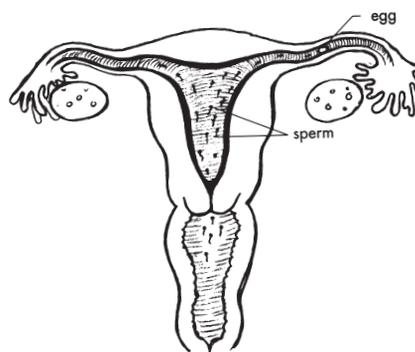
It takes two people—a male and a female—to become pregnant. Both people are responsible. Boys, this chapter is not just for girls. You should read it too. Pregnancy and preventing unwanted pregnancy are as much your responsibility and concern as they are your girlfriend's.

## HOW DOES PREGNANCY HAPPEN?

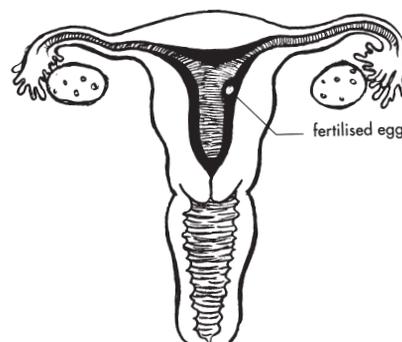
Whenever a male and a female have unprotected sexual intercourse, it is possible for the female to become pregnant. When a male ejaculates in a female's vagina, sperm are deposited, and they immediately begin to swim towards the cervix. The sperm will swim up through the cervix, into the uterus, and into the fallopian tubes where they can live for approximately 3 to 5 days.

If an egg is already there in one of the fallopian tubes or arrives in the fallopian tube within those 3 to 5 days, one of the sperm can enter the egg cell and fertilise it. The new cell (called a zygote), formed when the egg and sperm meet, divides to make two identical cells. These two cells divide into four, then the four divide to make eight, and so on. Soon a solid ball of cells has formed.

This ball of cells travels down the fallopian tube and attaches itself in the lining of the uterus. When the cells attach themselves to the lining of the uterus, it is called implantation. Implantation takes place about three weeks after your last period. This is the beginning of pregnancy.



Sperm swimming up through the uterus towards an egg



The beginning of pregnancy: a fertilised egg is implanted in the lining of the uterus

Keep in mind that pregnancy can happen if you have unprotected sex only one time. Pregnancy could even happen if the man ejaculates too close to the woman's vagina—even if they don't actually have sexual intercourse! If the sperm are deposited just outside the opening of the vagina, they can still swim their way up through the cervix and the uterus into the fallopian tubes. It sounds unlikely, but it can happen!

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF PREGNANCY?

The most common sign of pregnancy is a **missed menstrual period**. This is because the lining of the uterus is not shed when a woman is pregnant. It stays in the uterus, making a soft nest for the baby to grow in. Of course, a missed period doesn't always mean pregnancy because adolescent girls can have irregular menstrual periods for several years. Your period may simply be late or you may miss a month for no reason at all.

Other signs of pregnancy are:

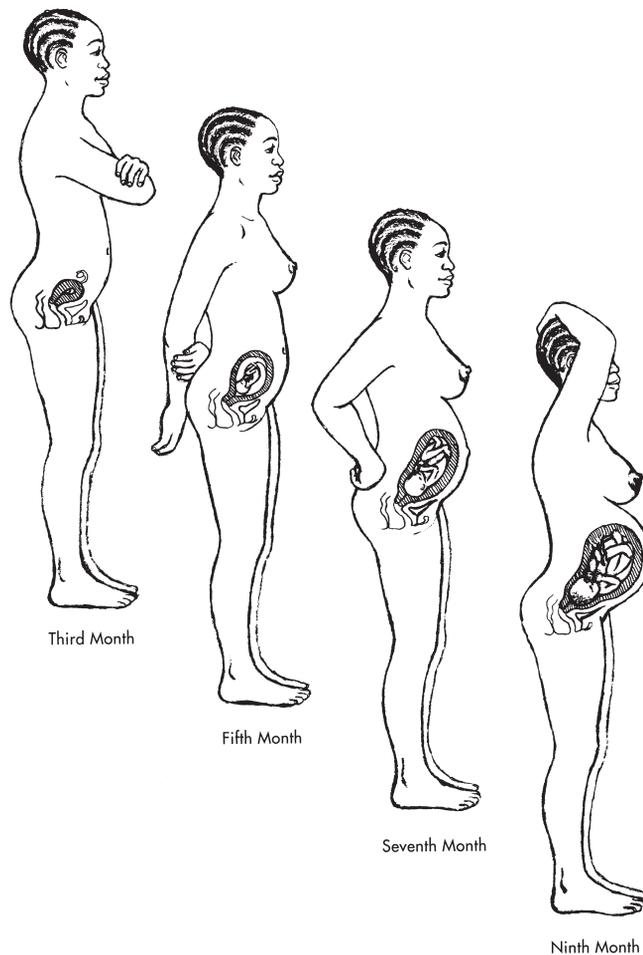
- Tenderness of the breasts;
- Nausea (a feeling of wanting to vomit);
- Fatigue (feeling very tired);
- More frequent need to urinate.

A few women do not notice any of these signs. For example, some women have some light bleeding during the first three months of pregnancy, so they might think that their period is just much lighter than normal.

If you are not sure whether or not you are pregnant, you can have a pregnancy test done. In some places, you can buy a pregnancy test at a pharmacy. You can also have a pregnancy test done in a clinic. Sometimes the test is done on urine, and it can detect certain substances that your body produces only during pregnancy. A health worker can also give you physical examination to see whether or not you are pregnant.

Pregnancy normally lasts a total of 40 weeks (measured from the beginning of your last menstrual period). By the time you miss your period—about 28 days after your last period started—the little ball of cells (called an embryo) has already been growing in the lining of your uterus for about one week.

The embryo grows very, very quickly. By six weeks after your last period, the brain and backbone are forming, and the heart starts to beat. By 9 weeks, the embryo is called a foetus. By 12 weeks, the foetus is recognisable as a human being, but has a rather big head. By about 20 weeks (five months), the pregnant woman can usually start to feel the foetus moving around inside of her. The foetus will turn and move, and it may also react to loud noises.



The growth and development of the baby inside the uterus

### THE RISKS OF PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS.

Pregnancy is risky for every woman, but it is especially risky for adolescent girls. The main problem for women under 20 is that the pelvis (the bones surrounding the birth canal) is still growing. Girls who become pregnant at a very early age often have very difficult deliveries because the pelvis is too small, and the baby cannot pass through it. This is called **obstructed labour**.

If the baby cannot pass out of the body, it may be necessary to have an operation called a **Caesarean section** in order to remove the baby through a cut in the woman's abdomen. In rural areas, many women with obstructed labour are not able to reach a hospital in time. The baby may die inside the uterus. In addition, the uterus may tear during a lengthy labour, and the woman may die of blood loss. This is one reason why many adolescent girls die in childbirth.

A lengthy labour can cause other problems. After many hours of labour, the baby's head can stretch or tear the vagina, causing a hole between the vagina and the bladder or between the vagina and the rectum. This hole is called a fistula. Because of the hole, the girl or woman will not be able to hold her urine or faeces. Urine or faeces will constantly leak out through the hole, and down her legs. She will smell bad and may get sores from the constant irritation of the urine on her skin. In some societies, the girl or woman becomes an outcast. The only solution is a delicate operation performed by a specialist to repair the hole. It can be difficult to find a specialist, and this operation does not always succeed.

In addition to lengthy labours, teenage girls are also at greater risk of anaemia (weak blood), high blood pressure and dangerous fits during pregnancy, which can lead to exhaustion, infection, injury and death. Young girls are also at high risk of delivering premature and low birth weight babies.

To reduce your risk for these problems you need to take very good care of yourself during pregnancy. Don't let pregnancy ruin your body or cause you permanent injury.

### **COPING WITH A TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

Nine months of pregnancy is a **big** strain on a girl's body. It can also be an emotional strain. Even for a married adolescent who wants to start having a family, pregnancy is a time when special care is needed.

Having a baby as an unmarried adolescent can have many different outcomes. Sometimes the girl's family is supportive and helps her make the best of a difficult situation. They help raise the baby, and they help the girl go back to school to finish her education. It is wonderful when families are so supportive. Unfortunately, this is unusual.

More often, an unwanted pregnancy triggers a disastrous sequence of events. The girl's parents may pull her out of school because they are angry and disappointed with her.

Or, she may be beaten and sent away from home. Or, she may be so terrified of her parents' reaction that she runs away. Her life becomes a misery, and the future of the baby is at serious risk, born to an unhappy, unprepared girl.

Many girls faced with an unwanted pregnancy seek illegal abortions. Even though they know that illegal abortions are dangerous, they prefer taking the risks to being forced to leave school or being sent away from home. Each year across Africa, thousands of girls die or damage their reproductive organs having unsafe, illegal abortions (read more on this at the end of this chapter).



**For many girls, pregnancy means an end to their studies**

Sometimes, a boy who impregnates a girl can run into problems too. He may be beaten by the father or the brothers of the girl. He may be expelled from school or even chased from his community. He may be forced to marry the girl and support the child, and therefore will not be able to pursue his own education and career goals. Or he may be made to pay a large fine to the parents of the girl.

If you find yourself faced with an unwanted pregnancy, do not condemn yourself, and do not try to cope with it alone. Find someone to talk to—someone who can help you make the best of this situation. Don't make sudden decisions without getting all the information and advice you need or without thinking through your options carefully.

While it may seem difficult, it is very important to inform your parents or guardian of the pregnancy. You will need their help during this time and afterwards, especially if you want to continue your studies. You have a right to education, but you may need other people's help and support in order to return to school.



**Don't try to cope with pregnancy alone. You need a lot of care and support.**

#### **DID YOU KNOW that a boy bears equal responsibility for pregnancy?**

Few boys imagine the possibility of becoming fathers when they are having sex. However, it takes two to become pregnant, and the boy bears equal responsibility.

If you are a sexually active boy, you should be extremely responsible and careful. Don't rely on the calendar method to protect you and your girlfriend. There are no "safe days" for adolescent girls. You could easily get your girlfriend pregnant, and an early pregnancy could be dangerous and risky for your girlfriend's health. It could be even worse for her future—and yours for that matter—by forcing you to end your studies early in order to support the baby. Therefore, do not take sexual risks. Practise safer sex such as cuddling or make sure that you and your girlfriend use contraception properly every time you have sex. It is better—morally, practically, financially and in every way possible—to be careful.

If you do unexpectedly become a father, accept responsibility for your actions. Think of yourself as a responsible father, and act like one. Talk to your girlfriend about how the two of you plan to raise the child. Ask how you can help her cope with the pregnancy (such as accompanying her when she goes for antenatal care, helping with chores, etc.) Even if you and the girl do not have a close relationship, don't run away. Talk to her about how you can be involved in the child's life.

You should also be open about it with your own parents and ask them to help you to negotiate for a joint responsibility and to share the care for the mother and child. Above all, don't make the same mistake again.

**Cissy, 17, Uganda**

*“It was not easy at first when I realised I was pregnant. I never imagined it would happen to me. I talked to a close friend who referred me to a counsellor, who persuaded me not to think of abortion, which I wanted. I lost many friends but I accepted my mistake, and now I have a baby girl. I will never take chances again, and please young girls, do the same.”*

**CARING FOR YOURSELF DURING PREGNANCY**

Because pregnancy is such a big strain on your body and a big risk for your health, it is important to get proper care.

- Start going for antenatal care as soon as you know that you are pregnant. Don't wait until you are “showing.” The purpose of antenatal care is to ensure that you and the baby are in good health. Antenatal care is also important for recognising any problems and treating them promptly.
- Be organised. Follow a schedule of regular visits for antenatal care. Go as often as the midwife tells you.
- Sleep under a mosquito net, and protect yourself from malaria.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Think about what you eat, and make sure that it is nutritious. Eat “grow foods” such as beans and eggs. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and greens. You also need minerals such as calcium. Calcium is found in milk but a less expensive source is small fish with bones still in them.
- Take the iron supplements provided by the hospital or clinic. Your body needs a lot of iron to stay strong and healthy during pregnancy.



**Make sure you go for antenatal care and necessary immunisations early**

**PREGNANCY AND HIV**

It is especially important to protect yourself against HIV infection while you are pregnant and afterwards, while you are breastfeeding. This is because if you get infected during these times, you are very likely to pass HIV to your baby. Insist on using condoms with your partner. You and your partner can go for HIV tests together. If either or both of you are HIV positive, you need to always use condoms. If you both test negative, remain faithful to each other and keep using condoms.

If you find out that you are HIV positive while you are pregnant, tell your doctor. There are now medicines available that you can take during pregnancy to greatly reduce your chances of giving the infection to your baby. Normally, about 30% of babies born to HIV-infected mothers are also infected with HIV. But by taking these new medicines, you can reduce these risks greatly.

You should also talk to your doctor about breastfeeding because there is a risk of transmitting HIV through breast milk.

### PLANNING FOR DELIVERY

As an adolescent, you should plan to give birth in a hospital where they have the staff and the equipment to cope with any complications that may arise. You should not try to deliver at home or with a local traditional birth attendant. Make all efforts possible to deliver in a health facility where they can perform the operation to remove your baby from your abdomen if needed.

A midwife or older woman can advise you on what you will need for your baby in terms of nappies, clothes and blankets. Depending on where you live and your country's health system, you may need to bring supplies for the delivery, such as cotton wool, plastic gloves, a new razor blade, new syringes and needles, soap and a disinfectant. You may need to organise transport to the hospital.

Try to have a trusted and older woman with you during labour, perhaps your mother, older sister or aunt. This can be very comforting and helpful as the labour can be very long and difficult, and the midwife will not be able to be with you throughout the whole time.

#### **DID YOU KNOW** that circumcised girls have special needs during delivery?

Female circumcision, also known as female genital mutilation (FGM), can cause particular problems in pregnant women. The most severe type of female circumcision is infibulation, which leaves only a very tiny hole for urine and menstrual blood to flow through. Often, this hole must be opened during childbirth so that the baby's head can pass through. This procedure, which is called "de-infibulation," must be performed by a skilled health worker to prevent further complications. Scarring from circumcision can also cause the genitals to tear more during childbirth, since the skin cannot stretch easily. Heavy bleeding may result.

If the baby is unable to come out, there can be serious complications. During a blocked birth, the lining of the vagina, bladder or rectum can tear. As a result, urine or faeces will leak out of the vagina. Many women have been rejected by their partners and families because of the smell.

#### **What to Do**

Plan in advance for childbirth. During the second half of pregnancy, you should try to see a trained midwife or other health worker with experience in helping circumcised women give birth. The midwife can tell you if there is a risk of complications, or if the vaginal opening should be made larger. Plan to deliver in a health facility. Delivering the baby at home is dangerous.

## CARE OF YOURSELF AND THE BABY IN THE WEEKS AFTER DELIVERY

Just as you went for antenatal care, make sure you go back for postnatal (after delivery) care. If you had your baby at home, you should go for a check up within three days. If you had your baby in a hospital, you should go after six weeks so that the midwife can check that your womb is returning to its normal size. The midwife also needs to check that you do not have an infection or that you are not bleeding too much. If you lost a lot of blood during labour, the midwife will give you iron tablets.

The midwife can also answer any questions you have about breastfeeding, sleep, immunisations for the baby, contraception and other topics. A new mother usually has a lot of questions, so talking to a caring midwife can be very helpful.



## ABORTION

Abortion is the ending of a pregnancy. Sometimes abortions just happen. This is called a **miscarriage** or a **spontaneous abortion**. The foetus dies and comes out of the uterus. Diseases like malaria or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can cause this to happen. A miscarriage can also happen if there is something wrong with the foetus.

If a woman has a miscarriage, she needs to see a health worker right away to make sure that she does not get an infection in her uterus. A health worker can also help identify what caused the miscarriage and provide treatment for an STI if it is needed.

Abortion can also be induced (deliberately caused) through a medical procedure. When performed by trained medical personnel under hygienic conditions, abortion is a very safe medical procedure—one that is safer than childbirth. However, in most African countries, abortion is not legal—except for rare circumstances such as rape or incest, when the woman's life is endangered by the pregnancy, or when the foetus is very abnormal and will not survive after delivery.

Not only is abortion illegal in most African countries, but it is also very unsafe. Abortions are performed under dirty and hazardous conditions, and frequently the person carrying out the abortion is not properly trained. Because abortion is illegal, the person may do the procedure in a rushed and panicky manner. All this puts the woman at very great risk. In fact, in many African countries, one quarter of all deaths of pregnant women are caused by complications of abortion.

Unsafe abortions can result in very serious health problems. When instruments are inserted into the cervix, there can be injury to the bladder or intestines, or the cervix and uterus can be damaged. A damaged uterus may have to be removed, which means that the girl will never be able to have a baby afterwards.

Unsafe abortions can also result in severe bleeding, infection and death. Inserting instruments into the cervix and uterus can cause heavy bleeding, and the girl could bleed to death. Herbs and other instruments used to induce abortion are often unclean, and they introduce germs into the uterus. The patient's uterus and fallopian tubes can become very infected, causing infertility or even death. Herbs, medicines or chemicals that are swallowed can make the girl very sick, and she may poison herself.

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**Diana, 15, Uganda**

*“Abortion is deadly, especially when one takes local herbs. Better not to engage in sex at all.”*

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**Nedinan, 18, Uganda**

*“If my girlfriend got pregnant, I would discourage her from having an abortion because of the dangers. I would encourage her to give birth and continue with her studies later.”*

There can also be sad social consequences from trying to end a pregnancy. If other people learn that a girl has had an abortion, she may be sent away from school, face disapproving attitudes or be stigmatised by friends or family.

Nevertheless, many girls end up having unsafe abortions once they find themselves pregnant. They forget the risks of abortion as they panic over what their families will do if they find out about the pregnancy. They are desperate to continue with their studies. Their boyfriends may have left them or may be pushing them to end the pregnancy.

**DO YOU KNOW** the consequences of unsafe abortion?

Jane was 15 and in her third year of secondary school when she got pregnant. She wanted desperately to continue in school. She lived with her aunt, who took her to a person who claimed to be a doctor working at the big government hospital in Kampala. This man put an instrument in her vagina. “Water” came out. It was very painful but she was told not to cry because after all she had “wanted” what had happened to her. The procedure lasted 15 minutes.

She went home and bled for a week, growing weaker everyday. Her abdomen hurt and her vaginal discharge became offensive. She was finally brought to a clinic for teens. The clinic found she had a big tear in her uterus. She had to have an operation and stayed in hospital for four weeks to treat the wound and infection.

Jane does not know yet whether she will be able to have children in the future.



**Unsafe abortion is very dangerous. It could cost you your life.**

If you or someone you know is faced with an unwanted pregnancy, get help. Be honest with your parents/guardians about the situation. If your parents are not helpful, visit a youth centre and ask a youth counsellor for advice about your options. Ask the youth counsellor where you can go to talk with a caring and sympathetic health worker.

If you or someone you know has had an abortion and feels unwell, go to a hospital quickly. Bleeding, chills, fevers and/or an offensive discharge are signs that something has gone seriously wrong. Your health and your life are in danger so medical care is very important. No matter what the legal status of abortion is, health workers have a professional and ethical obligation to help anyone in trouble. Don't let fear prevent you from getting life-saving medical care.

Of course, the best way to protect yourself against the consequences of unsafe abortion, is to avoid getting pregnant by mistake.

### **HOW TO AVOID PREGNANCY**

The only foolproof way to avoid pregnancy is to abstain from sex. Abstinence is 100% effective, and it is safe emotionally and physically. If you are not having sexual intercourse, there is no way you can become pregnant or can impregnate a girl.

If you are sexually active, make sure that you and your partner use condoms to protect yourself against pregnancy and STIs. You should also seek help from a family planning clinic. There are contraceptive methods that adolescents can use to protect themselves against pregnancy. You need to take action with your partner now so that you do not get a baby that you cannot care for.

There are many different kinds of contraceptives that are perfectly safe for adolescents (see the box on page 140). Whatever method you use, be sure to use it correctly. For example, forgetting to take a pill can lead to an unexpected pregnancy.

**ARE CONTRACEPTIVE PILLS SAFE?****Christine, 18, Uganda***“I have heard that pills cause cancer or a deformed baby.”*

Rumours like this are false and unscientific. Since the 1950s, millions and millions of women have taken contraceptive pills. Contraceptive pills are probably the most researched pills in the history of medicine. By following the lives of thousands of women for many years, doctors now know that contraceptive pills actually protect against cancer. Females who take pills have less cancer of the ovaries and less cancer of the lining of the uterus (endometrium) than females who have never taken pills.

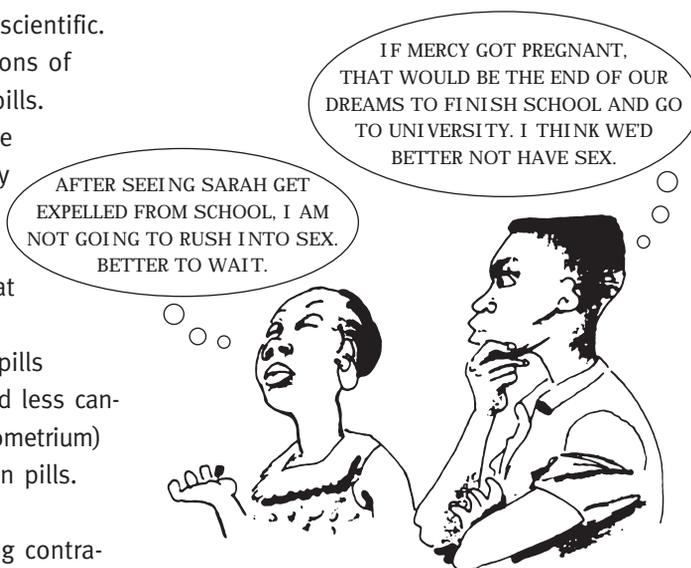
There is another rumour that taking contraceptive pills during adolescence can damage your ovaries and make it impossible to become pregnant later in life. This is also false. International medical guidelines say pills are fine for women who have not yet had children. In fact, they are sometimes used to help adolescents manage painful and heavy periods. You do not need to have had a baby before you take pills. Pills will not harm your ovaries.

Some girls and women experience nausea, breast tenderness and weight gain when they start taking pills. These side-effects pass after a month or so. Almost all young women and most older women can take pills. Only older women who smoke, who are over-weight or who have high blood pressure or certain diseases of their blood system are advised against using hormonal contraceptive methods (contraceptive pills, injections and implants).

**EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION**

There's one more method of contraception that you should know about. It is emergency contraception, a method that you can use to prevent pregnancy *immediately* after having unprotected sex—for example, if you forgot to use a condom or if you had the condom break or slip off accidentally (which is very rare if they are used properly).

Emergency contraception is becoming more widely available these days. If you do have unprotected sex and are very worried about pregnancy, you can rush to a health worker and ask about emergency contraception. If you have been raped, request for emergency contraception from a family planning clinic or a youth centre near you within **72** hours (three days).



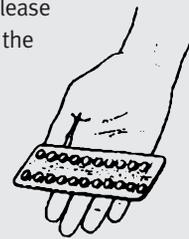
**DO YOU KNOW** which contraceptive methods are safe for adolescents?

All these contraceptive methods are safe for adolescents:

**Condoms:** A condom is a soft rubber tube that is put on a man's erect penis before sexual intercourse. When the man ejaculates ("comes"), the sperm is caught in the tip of the condom. The man's fluids do not enter the woman and the woman's fluids do not touch the man's penis. **Condoms provide good protection against STIs, including HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy.** Condoms are inexpensive, and they help some men avoid ejaculating too soon.



**Pills:** Pills contain a very small amount of hormones that prevent the monthly release of an egg (ovulation) from your ovaries. A woman does menstruate when taking the pills, but the pills make many women's periods lighter and less painful. Pills are very effective in preventing pregnancy, but you must take them every day. If you miss more than a day you can get pregnant because your fertility returns as soon as you stop taking the pills. **Pills do not protect against HIV or any other sexually transmitted infection (STI).** Therefore they are best if you are using condoms, or you have only one partner and you have both been tested and are free from STIs/HIV.



**Injections:** The injection contains hormones that prevent ovulation. Within 24 hours of the first injection, you are protected against pregnancy for three months. Injections are easy because you do not have to remember to take a pill each day or to do anything before you have sex. Injections are also very private—no one can tell that you are using this contraceptive method. The injection also makes your periods lighter and less painful, which can be helpful for adolescents who suffer painful or heavy periods. When you stop the injection, you are not fertile again immediately because the hormones stay in your body for some time. Most women become fertile again within year of stopping the injections, but some become pregnant more quickly. **Injections do not protect against STIs/HIV** so they are only suitable if you are using a condom or if you have one partner and you have both been checked for STIs and HIV infection.



**Implants (Norplant®):** Implants are six small tubes that are put under the skin of the upper arm. The small tubes release hormones that prevent ovulation. As with injections, you do not have to remember to take a pill or to do anything before having sex. The implants last five years, but they can be taken out sooner. They are very effective in preventing pregnancy, but **they do not provide any protection against STIs/HIV** so you should always use a condom or make sure that both you and your partner are free from STIs and HIV infection.



**Spermicides (contraceptive foam, tablets, jelly or cream):** Spermicide kills the man's sperm before it can enter the uterus, but it does not hurt the man or the woman. Spermicides come in different forms—creams, jellies, foams and tablets—and are inserted into the vagina just before sexual intercourse. Spermicides should be used with condoms because **they provide only a little protection against STIs/HIV.** In addition, they are not as effective as pills or injections in preventing pregnancy. Unlike pills and injections, you do not need to get spermicides from a health provider. You can get them straight from a pharmacy. This can be an advantage if you are shy about visiting a clinic, but remember to always use condoms.



Taking emergency contraception involves swallowing a certain combination of contraceptive pills over a 12-hour period within 72 hours of the unprotected intercourse. These pills can make you feel sick to the stomach, and they may also cause you to vomit. Emergency contraception prevents about 3 out of 4 pregnancies that would otherwise have occurred, but it does not cause abortion. Emergency contraception does not work once pregnancy has begun. That is why it is so important to get it *immediately* after unprotected sex. **Never try to take these pills without the advice of a trained health worker.**

#### DO YOU KNOW which contraceptive methods are NOT safe for adolescents?

**Withdrawal:** Withdrawal is when the man pulls his penis out of the vagina before he ejaculates. This is very unsafe because many men do not have the control to pull the penis out in time. Often men do not know that they are just about to ejaculate until it is too late. Also, a few drops of semen can leak out of the penis before ejaculation, and these few drops can be enough to cause pregnancy. **Withdrawal provides no protection against STIs/HIV.**

**“Safe Days”:** Some women try to wait for the days when they know that they are not fertile. This method only works for women with very regular menstrual periods and whose partners are cooperative. Most adolescent girls do not have regular periods, so it is not possible to know which days are “safe” days. Like withdrawal, **safe days provide no protection against STIs/HIV.**

**IUD (or coil):** The IUD is inserted into the uterus by a health worker. It is easier to fit in a woman who has had children so it is not recommended for adolescents. IUDs can also make an STI develop into a more serious infection (pelvic inflammatory disease). Because adolescents are more vulnerable to STIs, they should not use IUDs. **IUDs provide no protection against STIs/HIV.**

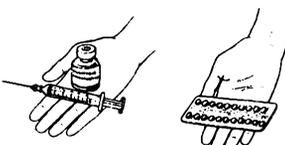
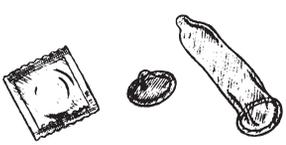
**Sterilisation:** Vasectomy and tubal ligation are permanent contraceptive methods. They are operations in which the tubes that carry the egg and sperm are closed off. They are for couples who have had all the children they want. Because you cannot have a child after the operation, no one would consider them for an adolescent. **Sterilisation provides no protection against STIs/HIV.**

#### DUAL PROTECTION

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has started to change a lot of people’s thinking about contraceptive methods. In the past, many people just focused on which methods were most effective in preventing pregnancy. They didn’t worry so much whether or not the contraceptive method protected against STIs including HIV.

Today, things are different. Getting HIV is even more disastrous than getting an unwanted pregnancy. These days, many people are talking about **“dual protection.”** Dual protection is when you use one method that is very effective in reducing the risk of STIs/HIV/AIDS. And **at the same time**, you use **another** method that is very effective in preventing pregnancy.

Look at the different methods below and how they protect against pregnancy and STIs including HIV.

Implants, Injectables and pills	Condoms	Foaming tablets and Spermicides
		
<p>Provide very good protection against pregnancy</p> <p>No protection against STIs/HIV</p>	<p>If properly used, provide good protection against pregnancy</p> <p>Provide very good protection against STIs/HIV</p>	<p>Provide some protection against pregnancy</p> <p>Provide some protection against STIs/HIV</p>

Of course, the best protection of all is abstinence—not having sex. But, as can be seen above, for someone who is sexually active, the best protection would be to use the pills, implants or injectables *with* condoms.

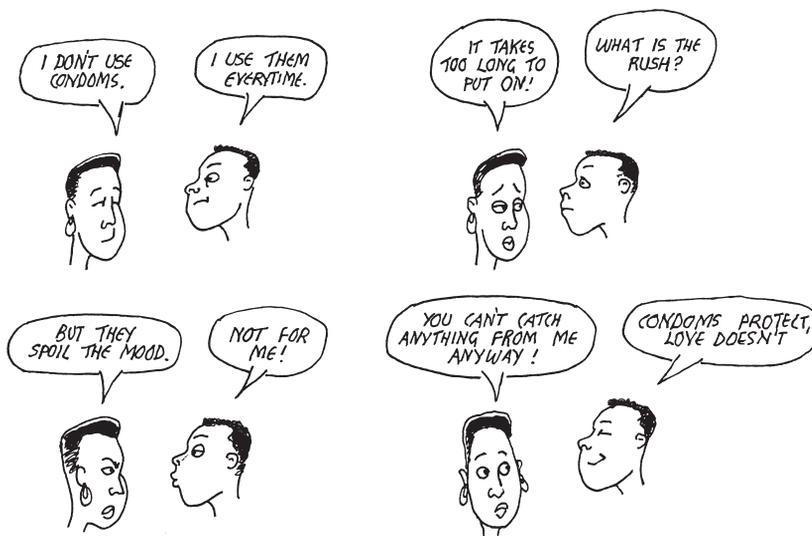
**Stabisile, 19, Zimbabwe**

*“If a guy refuses to use the condom, he is a waste of time.”*

**Cathy, 17, Uganda**

*“I recommend condom use to avoid HIV/AIDS infection, STIs, and unwanted pregnancies.”*

Yes, condoms are excellent devices for preventing pregnancy, and they help protect you and your partner from STIs/HIV. You can make them more protective by combining them with pills or other contraceptive methods.



**When someone says they don't want to use condoms, be ready with a good answer!  
And be prepared to walk away if they refuse to use a condom.**

## Chapter 11

# Pregnancy and contraception

Whenever a male and a female have unprotected sexual intercourse, it is possible for pregnancy to occur. Pregnancy can happen the very first time a female has unprotected sex.

Pregnancy can happen if one sperm cell meets with an egg and fertilises it inside the woman. If the egg is fertilised, it can attach itself to the lining of the uterus (womb). This is the beginning of pregnancy.

Signs of pregnancy include:

- A missed menstrual period.
- Tenderness (soreness) of the breasts.
- Nausea (feeling as though you need to vomit).
- Fatigue (feeling very tired).
- Needing to urinate more often.

**Pregnancy is especially risky for adolescent girls** because their bodies have not fully matured. Adolescent girls are more likely to have serious health complications during pregnancy and delivery than older women. Therefore, it is especially important for an adolescent girl to get proper care during pregnancy. It is advisable to deliver in a hospital where they have the staff and equipment to manage any complication.

Many adolescents get pregnant by mistake. They are desperate to end the pregnancy because they want to continue their schooling or because they do not want to shame their parents. However, in most African countries, abortion (the ending of a pregnancy) is illegal and very unsafe. **Unsafe abortion can cause serious health problems**, ranging from infection, damage to the reproductive organs, severe bleeding, infertility and death.

**The best way to avoid pregnancy is to not have sex.** Abstinence is 100% safe.

If you are sexually active, you and your partner should always protect yourself against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS. Most contraceptive methods are safe for adolescents.

If you forget to use contraception or if you have a condom slip or break, go immediately to a clinic and ask for **emergency contraception**. It can prevent pregnancy if it is taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex.

Pregnancy takes two people—a male and a female. Boys and older men bear equal responsibility for preventing pregnancy.

# Pressured sex and sex against your will

Sometimes, people—men and women, boys and girls—have sex when they don't actually want to do it. They may feel pressured by a boyfriend or girlfriend to have sex as a proof of love. They may be pressured to have sex in order to “pay back” for gifts or money they have received. Or, they may simply be forced to have sex by someone who is bigger and stronger.

Unwanted sex is dangerous. It puts you at great risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS. It also puts you at risk for emotional ill-health. It can be very painful and traumatic to have sex against your will.

The best way to protect yourself is to learn how to recognise and avoid situations where you may be pressured or forced to have sex against your will.

## PRESSURE FROM BOYFRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS

Sometimes boys tell their girlfriends that they should prove their love by having sex. And some girls tell their boyfriends the same thing. Some people will even threaten to break off the relationship if their partner will not have sex.

It can be very difficult when someone whom you love and care about tells you that you should have sex with him or her. You might feel as though the only way you can keep the friendship is by agreeing to have sex. You might feel as though you should have sex because you care about the person and you want him or her to be happy.



**Sex should never be a proof of love.**

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

In this type of situation, it can be very hard to know the difference between what the other person wants and what you want. It can be easy to get confused about what is right for you.

If your boyfriend or girlfriend is pressuring you for sex, think about these questions:

- What are **your** values? Do you believe it is okay to have sex at this point in your life? Or do you believe it is better to wait until later, such as when you are married?
- Do you feel okay about the idea of having sex? Or does it make you feel uncomfortable?
- Do you feel that you can refuse sex or does this go against what you think is right for a girl or a boy to do? For example, in some places, it is very hard for a girl to say “No” to a boy or man because she has been taught that she always should be submissive. In other places, it can be very hard for a boy to say “No” because he has been raised to believe that a man always wants to have sex. He may feel that saying “No” will mean that there is something wrong with him.
- Do you think your partner will still love you and respect you if you refuse?

Your answers to these questions can tell you a lot about whether or not you should have sex with your friend. Whether you are a girl or a boy, you have a right to refuse sex. It is your body, and you should make your own decision about sex. If you don't believe that sex is right for you at this point in your life, you shouldn't do it—no matter what your boyfriend or girlfriend says. If you don't feel comfortable with the idea of having sex, you are not ready.

Most importantly, if you think that your boyfriend or girlfriend will not love you if you refuse sex, then perhaps he or she doesn't really love you at all. **No one who truly loves you would pressure you to do something that you feel is wrong for you.**

If you are not sure whether or not your girlfriend or boyfriend will stay with you if you refuse sex, perhaps the best thing to do is to wait and see. Tell your friend that you love him or her, but that you have decided that you are not ready for sex. If he or she says that's okay, then you can relax. You can take your time. You can enjoy your good relationship without rushing into sex.

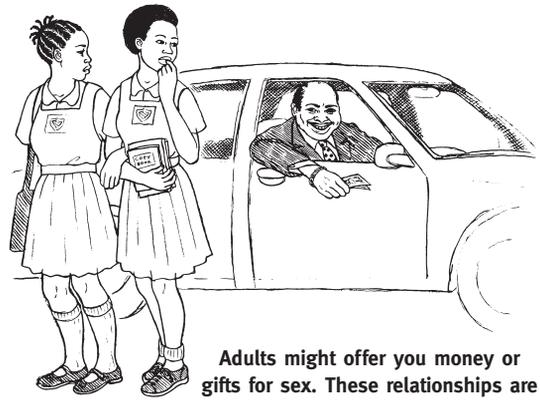
However, if your girlfriend or boyfriend decides to leave you, this can be hard because it shows you that your friend did not truly love you. You may feel very sad and lonely. You may think that you made the wrong decision, but you didn't! You did what was right for you. In the process, you found out that your boyfriend or girlfriend only wanted to use you and did not truly care about you. Of course, this is a very sad discovery, but it's better to have discovered it early on. It would have been worse to find this out after you had had sex with that person.

### **PRESSURE FROM ADULTS**

Sometimes older adults, including people who are married, pressure young people for sex. Most commonly, it is older men (sugar daddies) who want to have sexual relationships with

young girls. Sometimes, too, there are older women (sugar mummies) who want to have relationships with young boys.

Often, the adult gives gifts, money or special treatment to the young person. The adult might give money for school fees, clothes or sweets. If the adult is someone like a school teacher or a bus driver, he might promise to give good marks or to give free rides.



Adults might offer you money or gifts for sex. These relationships are dangerous for you.

But none of these gifts are really free. After some time, the adult wants “payment” for the gifts he or she provided. Usually, the young person has to “pay” through sex.

**Effie, 16, Kenya**

*“I had a friend who was 15. She had a sugar daddy, who was providing everything she wanted to have, and her mother knew about it and she didn’t even care about it. One day while the girl was on her way to school she saw the man’s car. He decided to give her a lift up to school, but while they were on their way to school the man took another route and drove the girl to a lodge and had sex with her by force.”*

Even though it can seem exciting to have an older person interested in you, and it might make you feel attractive and important, these kinds of relationships are very bad. They can be very dangerous for you.

- They can put you at risk for STIs, HIV/AIDS and pregnancy.
- They can disrupt your studies.
- They can make you the target for the anger of the wife or husband who might end up attacking you.

When there are big differences in two people’s age and income, the relationship isn’t equal. You might feel powerless. You may feel afraid to say “No” to sex because you know you took money or gifts. You may also feel afraid to tell the adult to use a condom.

This is very risky! This relationship could ruin your future.



Refuse gifts and money. Don't let yourself get indebted to someone.

It can be very tempting to enter into a relationship with a sugar daddy or a sugar mummy—especially if you don't have any pocket money and your parents cannot afford to buy you treats and nice things. However, no gift and no amount of money are worth the price you will have to pay.

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**Margaret, 17, Zimbabwe**

*“One thing I know about men is that a lot of them are just out to have fun with the opposite sex, and in the process they may promise you all the treasures of life. Therefore I have said No to many men and will keep on doing so.”*

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**Neema, 15, Kenya**

*“There was a businessman who was trying to make friendship with me but I refused. That man used to send other girls to try to convince me, but I refused.”*

If an older man or woman is trying to give you gifts or money, and is pressuring you to have sex, be assertive. Say “No!” and leave right away. Explain what happened to your parents, an aunt or uncle or a youth counsellor. Ask them to help you cope with the situation. Don't try to deal with it all by yourself.

Some young people are pushed into “sugar daddy” types of relationships by their own parents. This can happen because the parents are poor and cannot afford to pay for school fees, food, clothes and other things. This is a very difficult situation for any young person. If you are in a situation like this, you need to think creatively:

- Whom can you turn to for help? Can you talk to another relative, such as an aunt, uncle, grandparent or older sister or brother? Maybe they can pay your school fees or help your parents to make ends meet. Can you talk with someone else in the community, such as someone at your church or mosque or someone at a youth centre? They may know how to help you solve your problem.
- Can you talk to a teacher or the headmistress at school? Ask them how you should deal with this situation. Maybe they can help you by exempting your fees or by giving you some work to do around the school in exchange for your fees.
- Can you earn some money? Can you do some work, like selling vegetables, groundnuts, popcorn or sweets after school to earn some money?

There are many people around you who may be able to help you if they know your problem, so ask for help! Don't try to cope on your own.

## **SEXUAL ABUSE**

Any type of unwanted sexual touching or fondling is sexual abuse. It could be touching of the breasts or touching of the private parts. It could also be sexual intercourse. Any kind of sexual contact that is not wanted is abusive.

Sexual abuse is usually committed by an adult who knows the young person and has power over him or her. The adult might be a neighbour, family friend, teacher, religious leader or a community leader. The adult might also be a relative, such as a parent, step-parent, uncle or auntie, or an older brother or sister.



Any unwanted sexual contact is sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can involve threats, bribes, humiliation, tricks and violence. The adult might threaten you, or the adult might give gifts in order to make you co-operate. The adult might try to trick you or trap you into doing something. The adult might also threaten to hurt you or your family if you tell anyone about the sexual abuse. The adult might try to confuse you by saying that the relationship should be a secret.

Sexual abuse is very wrong, and it can be very confusing. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Your body is your own.
- You have the right to decide who touches your body, how they touch it and when.
- No one should look at or touch your private parts in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- You should trust your own feelings about touching and decide what is right for you. If you feel it is not okay, then it is wrong. Don't listen to someone who is trying to convince you otherwise.

If someone touches you in a way you don't like, say "No" firmly and loudly. Be assertive. Find someone to talk to about the incident. Talk to a parent, an aunt or uncle, a grandparent, a friend, a teacher, or the mother of a friend. Get help.



If someone is sexually harassing you or pressuring you, get help. Talk to your parents or another caring adult.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexual abuse is not always physical touching. Sometimes it is unpleasant sexual comments and physical gestures that make you feel uncomfortable.

Any kind of unwanted sexual attention is called sexual harassment. Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Calling a girl a slut, “loose” or “generous” because of rumours that she has had several sexual partners.
- Whistling or commenting on a person’s appearance as she or he walks past.
- Making sexual jokes, such as jokes about girls’ breasts or bodies.

Sexual harassment can occur almost anywhere—at school, on the street, at the market, in church or at home. Sexual harassment often occurs in public transport on the way to or from school. Sexual harassers can be complete strangers or they can be people you know, like a teacher, a neighbour, a relative or someone at work.

Sexual harassment is a serious matter. Words alone can damage your self-esteem. They can make you feel very embarrassed and uncomfortable. They can also make you feel scared.

Feeling scared by sexual harassment is natural. These feelings are your instincts telling you to be careful! People who make unpleasant sexual comments obviously don’t care about your feelings. They don’t mind if they hurt you. Sexual comments can be a warning that worse is to come.

The best way to cope with sexual harassment is to avoid people who make unpleasant sexual remarks. Don’t look scared. Look calm and confident, and move away. Try to avoid similar situations in the future. For example, if there is someone bothering on your way to school, try to change your route or the time you travel.

Other ways to cope with sexual harassment include:

- Don’t blame yourself. Remember, no one has a right to abuse you for the way you look, the way you dress, or your past sexual behaviour.
- Talk to someone. Do not keep quiet. Talk to a parent, an aunt or uncle, youth counsellor or a teacher you trust. Ask them to help you deal with the situation.

## **RAPE**

Rape is a violent act in which a person is forced to have sexual intercourse. Victims of rape are usually female, however, boys and men are also raped sometimes.

Rape is an act of force, violence, brutality and humiliation. Many people think that rapists are violent strangers, however, this is actually quite unusual, and rapes by random strangers are

very rare. Most rape victims know their attacker. The attacker is usually a boyfriend, a neighbour, an acquaintance, a relative or a family friend.

**Beth, 15, Kenya**

*“It was on 16th November when I visited my friend. He was not my boyfriend, just a normal friend. I usually go there and spend the day with him. But on that day things changed. He pulled me in the bed and we started to struggle. He wanted to force me to do sex, but I refused. He then gave me sweet words and did not want to hear me. But I stepped aside telling him I don’t want to be pregnant because I am too young. I got out of the house telling the boy goodbye. Since that day I have never again entered a boy’s house.”*

Many rapes of young people are **date rapes** and **acquaintance rapes**. Date rape is when a boyfriend forces his girlfriend to have sex against her will. Perhaps they were cuddling and kissing, but then the boyfriend forced the girl to have sexual intercourse.

Acquaintance rape is when the rapist is someone who is known, such as a friend, neighbour or family friend.

**DID YOU KNOW that many things people say about rape are not true?**

There are many myths about rape. Here are some:

1. *Girls enjoy it. **This is false!*** Rape is horrific and traumatic. It is painful, physically and emotionally. No one can enjoy being raped.
2. *Girls ask to be raped if they are wearing sexy clothes or walking in a sexy manner. **Not true!*** No one asks to be raped.
3. *A man cannot be held responsible if the girl or woman was exciting him by her dress or by being flirtatious. **False!*** All men are fully capable of controlling their sexual urges. Those who say they cannot are lying.
4. *If a girl or woman says “No,” she really means “Yes.” **Not true.*** When a woman says “No,” she means “No.” She doesn’t mean “Yes” or “Maybe.”
5. *If a girl or woman is raped, she is to blame because she could have prevented it. **False!*** The victim is never to blame. The rapist is responsible for the rape and is at fault. **Never blame the victim.**

Date rape and acquaintance rape are rape. They are violent, painful, upsetting and wrong. Even if the boy and the girl were getting physical, the boy has no right to force the girl to go further than she wants. Even if the two have had sex before, but the girl does not want to

have sex now, the boy has no right to force her. Even if the girl was wearing sexy clothes, the boy has no right to force her. In all these situations, the boy's act is still rape. It is very, very wrong.

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**Naana, 16, Ghana**

*"A friend of mine engaged in doing sex because her boyfriend forced her. She did not want to have sex, but was not assertive, because by the time her boyfriend was touching her breasts, she did not refuse. So the guy continued doing it. She ended up getting pregnant."*

Sometimes girls give conflicting signals. They may look as though they are enjoying what is happening, so the boy does not understand when she says she doesn't want to go further. Even if a girl does not give clear signals, the boy has no right to rape her. Rape is never a "fair punishment" for a girl who was giving unclear messages.

Some boys who rape their girlfriends hold the mistaken belief that a real man goes for what he wants without regard for the girl's wish. Other boys hold the mistaken belief that when girls say "No" they mean "Yes." Neither of these things is true.

A real man is caring and considerate. He listens to what his partner says and takes it seriously. Boys need to learn to believe what girls say. When a girl says "No," she means "No." When a girl says "Stop," boys should stop.

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**Regina, 15, Uganda**

*"I had a male friend. One day he invited me to his home to have lunch. When I went there I found him busy preparing the food. We ate lunch together and washed the utensils. I told him that I wanted to leave, but he insisted to sit for a while. He told me that there was a very interesting movie, and he would like us to watch. We sat down to the movie, for sure it was very interesting, but in the middle of the movie he asked me to kiss him and tried to force me to have sex with him, but I refused. I told him I couldn't, and asked him to leave me alone, or else I would scream for help. He panicked and left me alone. I told him that because of his behaviour the friendship was over."*

Everyone can learn how to reduce her or his risk of being raped. Whether you are a girl or a boy, the most important thing is to **trust your instincts**. For example, if someone is making you feel uncomfortable or threatened, pay attention to your feelings and act on them. Leave the person or situation immediately. Even if there is no obvious reason why this person is making you feel uncomfortable, you may be picking up some subtle signs that are important warning signals. You should never ignore these feelings. Pay attention to them and act on them.

Other ways to protect yourself against rape include:

- Do not be alone with someone whom you do not know well enough to trust. Go out with groups of friends and stay with the group.
- Do not go to someone's house if there is nobody else there. Do not go to lonely places where there are not plenty of other people around.
- If rape is a very common problem in your area, carry mixtures of ground pepper or sand so that you can throw it in the eyes of someone who is bothering you.
- If you are going out, make sure other people (parents, friends, an auntie or uncle) know where you are going and when to expect you home.



**Be assertive. Say “NO” loudly and firmly.**

- Know your own limits. Before you go on a date, think about what you want to do and what you do not want to do. Don't try to figure this out when you and your friend are already cuddling and kissing.
- Be clear about your limits. If you do not want to have sexual intercourse, explain this clearly to your friend when the relationship starts to ensure that you both have the same expectations.
- Always have money on you when you go for a date so that you can find your way home if the date turns sour.
- Split the costs with your friend. Do not let him or her think that you “owe” any sexual favours in return for money he or she has spent on you.
- Don't take alcohol or drugs. Alcohol and drugs can make it difficult for you to be clear about your limits. They can make it hard for you to explain yourself clearly.
- Never accept a drink from someone you don't know, and never leave your drink unattended while you go to the toilet because someone could put a drug into your drink.
- If you are out on a date, and your friend begins to pressure you, give a firm and strong refusal. Don't leave any doubt that you mean “No” when you say “No.” Use a strong, loud tone of voice and look your friend right in the eye. Do not smile or look away shyly. Do not give your friend the impression that you want to be convinced or coaxed.

If you are in a bad situation and someone is trying to overpower you, you can fight back. Whatever your sex and size, you have physical strength and the wits to fight back. Use everything you have to defend yourself. Yell and scream for help loudly and continuously.



Use your strength to push away and to fight back.

Ways to protect yourself include:

- The very best weapons you have are your fingers and fingernails. Stab them as hard as you can into the attacker's eyes. Do not worry about hurting him. He intends to hurt you!
- Use your knee to give a hard kick to the attacker's private parts. If you kick hard enough, this will hurt him a lot, causing him to double over in pain.
- If the person is on top of you, holding you face down on the ground, use your heel to kick him in the bones of the lower back, just at the top of the buttocks.
- If you are being overpowered, relax and try to fool the attacker into carelessness. Then stab the eyes or hit the groin. Run away when the rapist pauses due to pain.

### WHAT TO DO IF RAPE OCCURS

Sometimes, despite a person's best efforts to protect herself or himself, rape happens. The girl or boy might be overpowered by the attacker, and unable to fight him off. This is a very terrible situation, so it is important to know what to do afterwards.

If rape happens to you or someone you know, this is what should be done:

- **Get medical care as soon as possible.** You must have a medical check-up to make sure that you are okay and to take care of any injuries or cuts you have.
- **Ask a parent, auntie, sibling or close friend to accompany you** to the clinic or hospital to give you support. Find someone who is strong, caring and dependable—someone whom you trust and who will not tell others.
- **Do not bathe before going for medical care.** Although one's first instinct may be to wash thoroughly, this is not a good idea. Experts recommend that a rape victim should not even wash her hands because this can destroy physical evidence (dirt, semen, body fluids, hair, etc.) that could be used to prove that she was raped and by whom.
- **Wear, or bring in a bag, the clothes that were being worn** at the time of the rape. The clothes can be used as evidence to prove that the rape happened.

- **At the health facility, try to have a health worker of the same sex examine you.** If you are a girl, ask if there is a female health worker who can examine you. The health worker should check you for cuts, tears and bruises. She may need to take a semen sample from the vagina.
- **Ask for emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy** (see Chapter 11 for more on emergency contraception). Also ask about getting tested for STIs and HIV. For the HIV test, you may have to return after 3 to 6 months to be sure that you have not been infected (see Chapter 10 for more on HIV and other STIs).
- **Ask the health worker to write down everything she finds.** This information can be used to help you prove that you were raped.
- **Ask the health worker for advice about where to go to report the rape.** If the health worker doesn't know, go to a youth centre or a women's organisation. Ask them for advice about how to report the rape and where you can get legal help if you want to prosecute the rapist.
- **If you want to report the rape, do so as soon as possible.** Most countries have very strict laws and punishment for rapists. If you decide that you want to report the rape to the police or to the village elders, don't delay. It can take a lot of courage to report a rape because it may be painful and upsetting to talk about the experience. But you must summon your courage and report the rapist. If you don't, he will go free, and may hurt someone else.
- **Get counselling.** You must have someone to talk to about your feelings of fear, sadness, anger and pain. A professional counsellor can help you sort through your feelings so that you can go on with your life.

It's important to know that in many countries, it is legal for a woman to have an abortion to end a pregnancy that is the result of rape. If you think that you are pregnant, talk to a health worker or contact a woman's organisation to find out what options you have.

It can take a long time to heal physically and emotionally after being raped. Be patient with yourself. Most importantly, do not blame yourself or assume that you were responsible for the rape. It was not your fault.

## Chapter 12

# Pressured sex and sex against your will

Unwanted sex is dangerous. It puts you at great risk for unwanted pregnancy and for STIs/HIV/AIDS. It can also be bad for your emotional health. It is very painful and traumatic to have sex against your will.

Unwanted sex includes a number of different things. It can be:

- Unwanted sexual touches or contact. This is **sexual abuse**.
- Unwanted sexual comments. This is **sexual harassment**.
- Forced sexual intercourse. This is **rape**. Rapists can be complete strangers, but usually they are someone the victim knows—such as a boyfriend, a friend, a neighbour or a relative.

The best way to protect yourself is to learn how to recognise and avoid situations where you are at risk for unwanted sex:

- **Avoid relationships with sugar daddies and sugar mummies.** These relationships put you at great risk for STIs/HIV and pregnancy because these relationships are not equal. You may not have the power to say “No” to sex or to make the older person use a condom.
- **Trust your instincts.** If someone is making you feel uncomfortable or nervous, leave the person immediately. Your feelings are important warning signals. Don’t ignore them.
- **Do not ever be alone with someone you do not know well and trust.** Don’t go to someone’s house if no one will be there. Go out with groups of friends and stay with the group.
- **Know your own limits** and make sure your boyfriend or girlfriend understands them.
- **Don’t let other people give you gifts or spend money on you** because they may later ask you to re-pay them in sex.
- **Don’t take drugs or alcohol.**
- **Be assertive.** Don’t leave any doubt that you mean “No” when you say “No.” Do not give the impression that you want to be convinced or coaxed.
- **Fight back if you have to.** Use your strength and your wits to fight back.

Sometimes rape happens despite a person’s best efforts to protect herself or himself. If this happens, you need to **get medical care and counselling right away**. The health worker may also be able to give you **emergency contraception** to prevent pregnancy. Do not bathe first because this will make it harder to prove that you were raped. Take the clothes you were wearing with you.

Most importantly, **do not blame yourself**. It was not your fault. Give yourself time to heal physically and emotionally.

# Drug abuse

Sometimes people take drugs and other substances that do not have any healing purposes. These drugs change the way a person feels and thinks. They can make a person feel more sociable, smarter, cooler, braver and more exciting to be around. They can also make that person feel less worried or stressed. But these positive feelings do not last, and using a drug as a route towards happiness and success is very risky. Using drugs this way is called drug abuse.

Drug abuse is a bad problem, and it is all around us. In fact, some drugs like alcohol and cigarettes are so much a part of our societies and lives that we hardly think of them as drugs at all. But alcohol and cigarettes are drugs, and people often abuse them.

Drugs are bad for your mind, your body and your relationships with other people. They can make you ill, and they can turn you into someone who will never achieve anything in life. They can make you do poorly in school, lose friends and fight with your parents. They can consume whatever money you manage to earn.

Drugs can also make it very difficult for you to implement your safer sex strategy. At all times you need to be clear-headed about sex. You need to be able to say “No sex. Nothing at all,” or “I only want to kiss. I don’t want intercourse,” or “Only with a condom.” Drugs make it hard to be clear-headed. They can make you take risks, such as having unprotected sex. As a result, you could end up with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) including HIV/AIDS. You could also end up pregnant or impregnating a girl.

## TYPES OF DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES THAT ARE ABUSED

There are many different drugs and substances that are abused by people. They can lead to real problems. Here are some of the drugs that are common and some of the effects that they can have on you:

**Cannabis**, also called **marijuana**, **banghi**, **hash**, **pot**, **grass**, **weed**, **Acapulco gold** or **Thai sticks**, comes from a plant. Usually people smoke the leaves, but sometimes there is a stronger version made from the stems of the plant.

Cannabis can make people feel relaxed and happy, or it can cause people to have intense feelings of panic and fear. Smoking it can cause you to have red eyes, a dry mouth and throat and increased appetite. You may feel sleepy, and your worries float away for the time that you are high. But your judgement will be poor, and you will have trouble making simple decisions.

Heavy and long-term use of cannabis is harmful to the lungs and can cause cancers. It also can affect your memory and your ability to concentrate and understand things. It can become impossible to study or hold a job because your memory and ability to pay attention are reduced.

**Khat, qat, miraa, or mairungi** are names for a leaf that is chewed in the Horn of Africa and in much of East Africa. This is a popular drug in some communities because it makes you feel more awake, energetic and confident. It also reduces hunger. The negative side effects of chewing this leaf include anxiety attacks, aggression, impotence (when a male cannot have an erection), and hallucinations, which are visions of things that do not exist.

**Petrol, glue, paint thinner and industrial products contained in spray cans** are sometimes inhaled to get “high.” These substances may make you feel warm, less hungry, less scared and happier—at least for a time. After breathing in these substances, you become sleepy and feel removed from your surroundings. This effect—and the fact that these substances are very cheap—make them very attractive for street children.



These drugs can also cause nausea and vomiting. You may become disoriented and confused, and you may not be able to manage dangers in your environment. As a result, you could get hit by a car or bus because you cannot manage simple things like crossing a street.



Deeply breathing in these substances can cause unconsciousness (passing out or fainting), suffocation (inability to breath enough air) and death. Repeated use of these substances over time can permanently damage the lungs, brain and other organs in the body.

**Tranquilizers, including Valium and Mandrax:** These drugs make you feel sleepy, relaxed and calm. They reduce your heart rate and slow down your breathing. Overdose can quickly and easily lead to death.

**Hallucinogens, such as angel dust, LSD** (also called acid, sugar cubes, dragon) and **killerweed**, are drugs that cause you to have visions of things that do not exist. These drugs cause shaking, loss of appetite, sleeplessness and raised body temperature. They can cause anxiety, violent behaviour, depression and paranoia. While you are high on the drugs and seeing visions,

you could injure yourself. Long-term use can cause memory problems, and overdosing on these drugs can lead to convulsions, unconsciousness and death.

**“Hard drugs”** (narcotics) include drugs such as **heroin** (also called junk, brown sugar and smack) and **cocaine** (called coke, crack and snow). In some places in Africa such hard drugs are a real problem, and many people take them, often using needles to inject the drug straight into their bloodstream. These drugs are very addictive. Once you start taking them, it may be very difficult to stop. People who are addicted feel as though they cannot go without the drug.

These “hard drugs” are completely illegal, and to get them you have to hang around people who break the law. These drugs are also expensive so some people who take them begin stealing to get enough money to buy the drug. Other people sell their bodies to get enough money to buy the drugs. Some people who take these drugs share needles for injecting the drugs. This puts them at great risk for getting infected with HIV.

### **CIGARETTES AND ALCOHOL**

Most people don’t think of alcohol and cigarettes when they think of drugs. However, alcohol and cigarettes are frequently abused like other drugs, and abuse has harmful effects.

**Tobacco, cigarettes** (also called drags, butts and fags) and **cigars**. Nicotine is the active ingredient in tobacco, cigarettes and cigars. Nicotine does not make you high like marijuana or alcohol, nor does it impair your judgement. It can make you feel energetic, and it decreases your appetite.

One great danger of nicotine is that it is extremely addictive. Have you ever seen a smoker trying to quit? They become very depressed, they can’t sleep or concentrate, and they are irritable, angry and anxious. These feelings are so unpleasant that many people fail to stop smoking, and they try over and over again before they finally “kick the habit.”

Not only is nicotine very addictive, but smoking is very harmful to your health. Smoking has been found to cause many cancers, including cancer of the throat, tongue, lung, breast and the large intestine. It damages the heart and blood vessels and puts you at risk of high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks.

Smoking has also been found to cause impotence in men. This is because smoking damages the blood vessels in the penis, just as it damages other blood vessels in the body.

**Alcohol** is the most common drug in Africa and indeed all over the world. Unlike most other drugs, alcohol is legal. In addition, it is available in very cheap forms. Therefore, alcohol is the drug you are most likely to come into contact with. Often it is in the home. One or both of your parents may drink alcohol. You may have easy access to it, and it does not seem frightening because it is normal in your community.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

It is easy to start drinking alcohol and not think much of it. Think again! Alcohol is a drug like any other drug. It slows down the systems of your body. After taking a little alcohol, your reactions may be slower, and it can be difficult to think clearly. With a bit more alcohol, your speech becomes slurred, and you may become angry and aggressive. If you are unused to alcohol or take too much, you may vomit or become unconscious.

The long-term impact of heavy alcohol use is very serious. You may know people in your community who are heavy drinkers and who can't live without it. You may have seen how it destroys families, wrecks careers, and leads to health problems, such as brain damage and liver disease.

Alcohol is a very popular drug because it makes people feel relaxed and less self-conscious. However, feeling relaxed and less self-conscious is not always a good thing. It can get you into trouble.

Alcohol, like most mood-changing drugs, removes your inhibitions, which are those feelings inside you that stop you from embarrassing yourself in front of others. Inhibitions stop you from saying things or doing things that you will seriously regret later.

For example, most girls when sober would not walk up to a boy and suddenly kiss him on the lips. But when a girl has taken alcohol, she may feel very free. She feels like kissing him, so she does.



Alcohol can also cause boys to do things they wouldn't normally do. For example, after drinking alcohol, a boy might decide that he wants to have sex, whether his girlfriend wants to or not. He might try to force her to have sex. The alcohol makes him unable to think about his girlfriend's feelings. It also makes him unable to think about the consequences of his actions.

When you drink alcohol, the rules that govern your normal behaviour get loosened. Your ability to make good decisions is impaired, so you lose your good judgement. Here is what one teenager says about alcohol:



**Alcohol affects your ability to make good, safe decisions**

**Lazarus, 15, Zambia**

*“When I drink I forget about the dangers around me. I forget all about condoms. Therefore I just have unprotected sex because of alcohol influence. I know I’m vulnerable.”*

If a common drug like alcohol can cause you such problems, think what can happen if you take a harder drug like cocaine!

**DID YOU KNOW that drug use causes special problems for women and girls?**

While all drugs are harmful to the body, many affect girls and women more than men. For example, smoking causes special problems for women. It can:

- Cause health problems if a woman is using contraceptive pills.
- Shorten the number of years that a woman can have children because it makes the end of monthly bleeding (menopause) come earlier.
- Increase a woman’s risk of cancer of the cervix and uterus.
- Make a woman’s bones weak.
- Make it difficult for a woman to get pregnant.
- Increase a woman’s risk of having a miscarriage during pregnancy.
- Cause a woman’s baby to be born too small or too early.

Taking drugs and alcohol during pregnancy is especially dangerous because it can result in serious health problems and birth defects for the baby, such as a poorly formed heart, bones, head, face and internal organs, as well as low weight, slow growth and difficulty learning. Drug abuse during pregnancy can also result in the baby being born with an addiction to drugs.

Remember, if you take drugs while you are pregnant, your baby is taking them too, and in stronger doses than you are. The effect on the baby will be more than the effect on you.

**ADDICTION**

The earlier a person begins to use drugs, the greater his or her chances of developing serious drug-related problems later. The effect of many drugs grows over time. The effects build up in the body, like a time bomb waiting to go off.

There are many signs when drug use has become a serious drug problem. These signs are:

- Lying about how much of the substance is being taken. This includes lying to yourself about how much drugs or alcohol you are taking.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- Hiding the drug so no one will know.
- Having money problems because everything is spent on drugs.
- Embarrassing yourself and others in public.

In addition, if you or someone you know starts giving up hobbies, spending less time on homework, avoiding responsibility, wanting to party and getting into fights while drunk or high, then substance use has turned into a serious problem. You need to stop.

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### **Irinne, 16, Zambia**

*“A friend of mine was using drugs, and she became addicted to drugs. She couldn’t stay for even a few hours without taking them. She was used to them and at a time when she misses she starts fights with her family and neighbours.”*

One of the biggest problems with using drugs is addiction. Addiction happens when a person starts to depend on a substance to function in everyday life. Signs of addiction include:

- Feeling as though the drug is necessary to get through the day.
- Needing more and more of the substance to get the desired feeling.
- Experiencing extreme behaviour changes like anger, depression, violent outbursts.
- Blacking out (fainting or becoming unconscious) after use.

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### **Salome, 17, Kenya**

*“One of my friends who used to do drugs fell very sick. Her nose would bleed very abruptly. She even sometimes fell down.”*



**Many substances are very addictive, and you can easily become hooked.**

Once you become addicted, you need more and more of the substance to get the feeling that you desire. That is expensive, and it damages your body. For strong drugs such as cocaine and heroin, once you become addicted, you will feel very sick if you do not get the drug. When you stop taking the drug altogether, you will have unpleasant symptoms, such as shivering, sweating, nausea, vomiting, aches and pains, and difficulty sleeping and eating. These feelings can be so unpleasant that you want to go straight back onto the drug.

These unpleasant feelings are called “withdrawal symptoms.” They are your body’s reaction to the drug being withdrawn or taken away. Because your body has become dependent on the drug, it feels very ill without it.

**Julia, 17, Ghana**

*“I stopped using drugs when my best friend advised me on the dangers of drugs. The first time I ignored, but at last I was able to control myself. I was told by my friend not to take it about one week, but I told her that I cannot do without it. However, thanks to God that week I didn’t take anything, and now I know I can do without it.”*

Overcoming an addiction is very difficult, and different people have very different experiences. Some people are able to stop taking the drugs all at once. Other people need to stop slowly, by gradually decreasing the amount of drug consumed. This protects the body from the shock of stopping suddenly. Stopping gradually can allow the body to slowly wean itself off the drug.

**Omari, 18, Tanzania**

*“I stopped using drugs after I witnessed the results that come after one has engaged in doing drugs. Some of my friends have died through some chest infection or different types of diseases. I had to go for counselling against drugs and by that I have managed to stop.”*

Overcoming an addiction requires a great deal of willpower, courage and determination. There will be moments when you feel as though you cannot do it. Therefore, it’s important to find help and support. Talk to a youth counsellor or a health worker to find out if there is a support group or programme you can join. Most importantly, do not hang around with people who are going to pull you backwards. Do not hang around with people who aren’t going to help you kick your habit.

**WHY PEOPLE START TAKING DRUGS**

Of course the best way to avoid having a problem with addiction is to never start using drugs at all. Therefore, it’s good to understand why people start taking drugs so you can be aware of these reasons and make sure that you never fall into these traps.

There are a number of reasons why young people start using drugs—either serious drugs like cocaine and heroin or more common substances like alcohol and cigarettes:

**First, many young people take drugs because their peers are doing it and because they want to fit in with a group.** Some groups use drugs as part of their identity. If you want to be part of the group, you might feel pressure to take the drugs they use.



The group may beg you to try drugs and downplay the effects of the substance they are using. Or they may get angry or abusive if you don't try it.

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**Margaret, 16, Kenya**

*"I was 13 years old when I first was exposed to drugs. My friends started smoking bhanghi. They told me to take one puff, but I refused. Then, they all started laughing at me, and because I didn't want to be called a coward, I decided to take one puff."*

**Second, many take drugs because they want to escape from difficulties in their lives.** Maybe they had a fight with their parents. Or perhaps a friend has hurt them. They may be feeling sad, grieving, depressed or overwhelmed by problems. Drugs can seem like an easy way to take your mind off problems.

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**Marion, 17, Zimbabwe**

*"Some of my friends began taking drugs because of some minor problems at home or outside."*

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**Francis, 15, Uganda**

*"Some of my friends have lost their parents to AIDS, and they take drugs to forget their problems."*



**Third, some take drugs because they want to change who they are.** Many adolescents don't feel they are good enough the way they are. They want to be bolder, funnier, louder, cooler and more mature. Drugs can seem like an easy way to be someone different.

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**Juma, 17, Kenya**

*"I have some friends who take drugs now and then, like mental tablets and Bhanghi. They take these drugs to feel that they are adults and superior to others. But these drugs have caused them not to concentrate on their careers, dreams, goals and ambitions in future."*

**Fourth, some people think drugs will give them the courage to do something they are afraid to do.** There are many situations in life that require courage. You might be afraid to speak up in class. Or, you might be afraid to approach a girl or a boy you like. Drugs can seem like an easy way to get yourself over these fears.

**Fifth, some adolescents believe drugs will make them smarter.** They think that drugs will help

them stay awake so that they can revise longer and better.

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**Maryann, 15, Kenya**

*“My friend Katty was told by another girl that if she smokes bhanghi she could ask teachers hard questions, which they will never be able to answer. But things turned the wrong side for Katty. She started failing academically. She is now a desperate dropout who wishes to be given a chance to go back to school but her father does not want to hear of it. He says that she failed when she was given the chance.”*

**Sixth, many young people take drugs because of boredom.** They want to have fun and they don’t know how else to entertain themselves.

**Seventh, some adolescents take drugs because they feel hopeless.** They don’t feel as though they have a future to plan for and to live for. They take drugs because they feel as though it doesn’t matter what happens to them.

These are some of the reasons why young people take drugs. But none of these reasons *justify* drug use. Taking drugs is a very bad way to cope with any situation. Drugs will only make your problems worse. Adolescence is a big job, and there is a lot you need to achieve as an adolescent—in school and out of school. You need to learn how to cope with problems, how to handle your feelings, how to have rewarding friendships, and how to deal with your changing body. The list of things you conquer or “get on top of” as an adolescent is endless.

The trouble with drugs is that they can interrupt this process of becoming skilled and competent. They stop you from learning how to cope with everyday stresses. They prevent you from gaining the skills you will need as an adult.

Remember:

- You don’t need drugs to be liked by other people.
- You don’t need drugs to feel brave and courageous.
- You don’t need drugs to cope with sorrow or disappointment.

You can always cope without alcohol and drugs. You have, inside of you, the strength and inner resources to deal with any situation and any problem. You need to reach deep inside yourself for that strength.

In addition, whatever problem you are facing, there are sources of help available to you. You can talk to a youth counsellor, a trusted teacher or person in your church or mosque. Talk to a parent, an aunt or uncle, an older brother or sister, or a trusted friend. Help is available.

## HOW TO HANDLE PRESSURE TO TAKE DRUGS

Coping with pressure from peers who want you to take drugs is very hard. Here is the story of one teenager.

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**Jecton, 15, Kenya**

*“When I was 13, I was on my way home with some friends. We passed through a place where my friends sometimes went to meet some of their friends. When we got there, they met their friends and took from them a big pile of banghi. Within no time, one girl started smoking it, and she told me to take one puff. I refused, and they all started laughing at me. They called me bad names and told me to stop embarrassing them. They said that it was very sweet and would make me feel good. Because I didn’t want them to think I was scared, I decided to take some. After taking some, I can’t tell what happened next. I was confused for at least three days.”*

Does this remind you of situations you’ve been in with peers? These friends were really desperate for Jecton to smoke. Why the pressure?

Most people want company when they are doing something they know is not quite right. They feel that the “wrongness” is somehow less if someone else is doing it with them. When their friends do something daring with them, they feel less worried about the risks involved. If they have company, they can just relax and enjoy the feelings the substance is giving them. That is why they can put so much pressure on you.

Here are some tips for handling such situations:

- Remember that you do not have to make a friend feel better by joining him or her in doing something that is not good for you.
- As a true friend, you can tell your friend that what he or she is doing is risky.
- Be clear to your friend that you do not want to take the drug or substance. Show your friend that you know your own mind and that no amount of pleading will make you change your mind.
- Walk away if your friend continues to pressure you or if your friend starts to abuse you or laugh at you. Do not bother trying to discuss it further. Wait until he or she is not taking the drugs before you try to talk about it.

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**Kofi, 16, Ghana**

*“I have been pressured by my friends to take drugs when I accompany them, but I control myself and tell them with full confidence that I am satisfied without the drugs.”*

Sometimes, the problem is bigger than resisting pressure from a friend. Instead you might realise that your friend has a serious drug or alcohol problem—one that you feel is ruining your friend's life. This is also very difficult to cope with. Here are some things you can try:

- Talk to your friend about the drug use when he or she is not drunk or high.
- Do not blame or criticise your friend. This will only cause an argument between you. Instead, stay focused on the drug problem, and let your friend know that you are worried about him or her. Try to help your friend realise that he or she has a problem.
- Try to help your friend find help, and try to help him or her avoid situations where there is pressure to take drugs or alcohol.

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**Margaret, 16, Kenya**

*“Many of my friends were addicted to drugs. But after I came to know the risks and the truth about drugs I decided to help my friends. Most of them have changed, and I am glad about it.”*

Sometimes, however, people with drug problems are not ready to hear your concern and advice. They may resent your efforts to help, and they may get angry with you. You may end up having a big argument with your friend, but at least your conscience will be clear, and you will have tried to help your friend.

There is always the possibility that your friendship cannot withstand your disagreeing with your friend's behaviour.

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**Hanifa, 17, Tanzania**

*“I had a friend whom I really trusted for a long time, but I didn't know what he was doing behind my back. One time I met him with some very funny looking people. His eyes were red. I realised that he was smelling of bhang. I kept on trying to speak to him, but he wouldn't listen. So I gave him an option—either to stop taking what he was taking or to stop talking to me. I thought he would make up his mind the right way, but I was wrong: he immediately stopped talking to me.”*

It can be very hard to lose a friend, but at least you stood by your principles, tried to help the friend, and didn't get involved in anything risky yourself. Occasionally, with time, the friend will turn around:

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**Hanifa, 17, Tanzania**

*“After some months, my friend realised what those drugs could do to his life and friends. He came and pleaded with me to be his friend again. And because I felt pity on him, I agreed.”*

If you are worried about a friend, try to help him or her. But if the friend refuses your help or the friendship doesn't survive, don't blame yourself. You did the right thing, and you did the best you could.

### KEEPING OFF DRUGS

Many adolescents grow up in environments where they are surrounded by many different kinds of drugs. But not every adolescent in these places gets involved in drugs. Some do, but many do not. Many resist the drugs and the peer pressure because they see the problems caused by drugs. These adolescents are strong, thoughtful and independent. They stay cool, they stay clean, and they do what's right for them.

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**Anthony, 16, Zambia**

*"I think young people should keep themselves busy with activities they like and not be idle because an idle mind is the devil's workshop. They should also avoid bad friends and company. It is also better for your health to stay away from drugs."*

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**Prisca, 14, Kenya**

*"Avoid bad company that takes drugs and get involved in some youth activities."*

Drugs and alcohol are out there, and depending on where you live, they may be easy to obtain. If you want drugs, you probably have a way of getting them. But just because drugs are there does not mean you have to use them. You can be cool, do your own thing and stay free of drugs.

Stay in control. Take an honest look at who you are and how you want to live your life. What is important to you, and what are your goals for the future? How can you achieve these goals? Think about where drugs and alcohol fit into your plans. Will they help you achieve your future plans or will they get in your way?

Here are some other tips from young people for staying free of drugs:

- *Get active:* Get involved in activities like sports or a church group. These activities will fill your time and will make you feel good about yourself. You won't be bored. You won't need to look to drugs for entertainment.
- *Be different:* Do not take drugs just to fit in a group. Be yourself. Do what is best for you.
- *Respect yourself:* Don't take drugs or alcohol to impress other people or to find the courage to do something. Respect yourself, and other people will respect you. And when you know other people respect you, you'll find it's easier to find the courage for whatever you want to do.

- *Seek positive acceptance:* There are many ways to feel accepted and liked by other people. There are ways that are much more positive than taking drugs or alcohol. Join groups of people who are focused on doing something, like singing, playing sports, acting, studying, or cleaning up the neighbourhood. Find people who will like you for who you are and what you can do—people who aren't wasting their time with drugs.
- *Have your own values:* Look at yourself. What are your values? What's right for you? Stand up for yourself and your values.
- *Get aspirations:* What are your dreams? Look into the future and see where you want to go. Drugs will never help you get where you want to go.
- *Use every cell in your brain:* Don't let your brain cells be killed by drugs. Work hard and excel in your school work.
- *Get professional help:* If you are feeling pressure to take drugs, go talk to a youth counselor. Get help. If you think you have a drug problem, try to find counselling and treatment. It is never too late to stop abusing substances even if you have been taking them for some time. Help is available, but you have to take the first step of finding it.

## Chapter 13

# Drug abuse

**Taking drugs for non-health purposes and to have a certain feeling is called drug abuse.** There are many different kinds of drugs and substances that are abused: banghi (cannabis), khat (miraa), petrol, glue, and hard drugs like cocaine and heroin. Alcohol and cigarettes are also drugs, and they are often abused.

Drugs can have many harmful effects. Taking drugs can lead to addiction, which is when you cannot function without the drug. **Drugs also can destroy your brain, your heart, your blood vessels and your lungs.** Drug use during pregnancy can cause serious problems for the baby.

Drugs can cause other problems too. **Most drugs make it hard to think clearly and to make good decisions.** As a result, you could take risks with long-term consequences. You could have unprotected sex, and end up with an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection (STI) such as HIV/AIDS.

There are many reasons why young people take drugs:

- To fit in with peers.
- To escape problems.
- To cope with sadness.
- To try to change who they are and to be someone different.
- To find courage to cope with a difficult situation or challenge.
- To entertain themselves.
- To cope with feelings of hopelessness.

None of these are good reasons for taking drugs. Drugs will only make your problems worse. **You can always cope without drugs. You have inside of you the strength to deal with any situation or problem.**

Drugs can ruin your future. **Stay free of drugs by getting active.** Get involved in sports and other activities in your community. You won't need to look to drugs for happiness or entertainment. **Be different.** Don't do something that is risky for you to fit in with peers. Be yourself and do what's right for you. If you respect yourself, other people will respect you too.

If you are feeling too much pressure to take drugs, or if you think you have a drug problem, get help! Drugs are powerful substances. Don't try to fight drugs all alone. **Help is always available, but you have to take the first step of asking for it.**

# Reaching your dreams

Everyone has dreams for the future—dreams of doing something great and being someone important and successful. These dreams are called aspirations. They are our ambitions and desires. They are the visions we have for ourselves and for our futures.

Here are the dreams of some adolescents:

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**Sherifan, 15, Ghana**

*“I want to become an extension officer, and I want to become famous.”*

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**Omari, 18, Tanzania**

*“I’d like to be the kind of person whom people come to for advice—someone with a strong marriage and maybe a job as a manager in an office.”*

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**Naana, 17, Ghana**

*“I want to be a medical doctor. I especially want to deal with women and children.”*

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**Patrick, 16, Kenya**

*“I dream of having a small dairy farm with enough land so my parents can stay there with me. I’d like to have a wife and three children.”*

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**Milensu, 13, Zambia**

*“I dream of having a house in town with a sofa set in the living room. I want to be a nurse with my own clinic and respected by my community.”*



## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

What is your dream? Who do you want to be? How do you imagine yourself in 5 years? In 15 years? Who will you be, and what will you be doing?

This chapter is about reaching your dreams. It's about figuring out what your dreams are, and figuring out how to best achieve them. It's about making good decisions that will bring you closer to your dreams, and it's about coping with setbacks along the way.

It's not easy to achieve a dream. It takes a lot of hard work and determination, so the most important thing to do is to do something! Take action. Don't sit back and wait for things to happen to you. This is your future. You've got to build it!

### IDENTIFYING YOUR DREAMS

Some people are full of dreams, and their dreams keep changing. Take Remijia of Tanzania, for example:

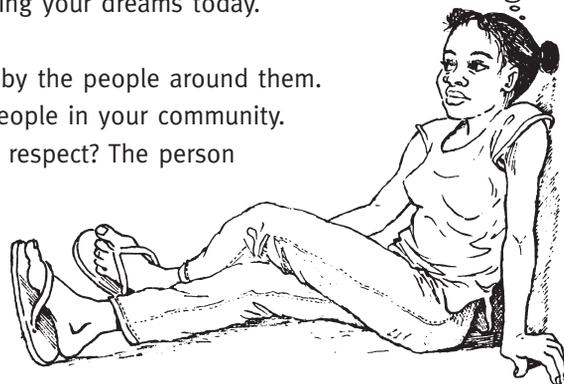
- At age 6, she wanted to be a police officer.
- At age 8, she wanted to be the captain of a ship.
- At age 10, she wanted to be an airplane pilot.
- At age 13, she wanted to be a teacher.
- At age 19, she wants to be an engineer.

How can a person's dream change so much? Is it bad to have so many different dreams? No! Dreams are wonderful. They motivate you, and they make you want to work hard. They help you look to the future and plan for it.

Other people seem to have fewer dreams. They don't know what they want to be when they are fully grown. They have a hard time imagining themselves 5 years from now.

If this sounds like you, don't worry. This is perfectly normal. It doesn't mean that you don't have dreams. It just means you haven't yet figured out what they are. But you can start identifying your dreams today.

Most people's dreams are greatly influenced by the people around them. So first, look around you. Think about the people in your community. Whom do you admire? Whom do you greatly respect? The person might be a teacher who always knows the answers to everyone's questions. It might be a doctor who knew exactly what was making you sick a few months ago. It might be the pastor at your church. It might be your own parents.



Spend time thinking about your dreams for the future.

Second, don't let your dreams be limited by what you see around you. Look beyond your community. Is there someone you've read about in the newspaper or in a book who did something that amazes you? Maybe it is a scientist who is learning how elephants communicate with each other. Maybe it is a nurse who is taking care of refugees in the middle of a war zone. There are many people who are doing interesting and worthwhile things with their lives. These people can serve as role models. They can start you dreaming about your future.

Third, let your imagination soar. Don't limit yourself by ideas about what you can or cannot do. For example, don't rule out a dream because of old-fashioned ideas about what jobs men can do or what jobs women can do. Things are changing, and women today hold jobs their own mothers never would have dreamed of. Today, women can become engineers, pilots, doctors, athletes, scientists, professors, astronauts, presidents, journalists, etc. Whether you are a boy or a girl, you can be almost anything, if you set your mind to it and work hard.

### **PLANNING CAREERS**

A few adolescents are extraordinarily talented at one particular thing, like math or music or drawing. It is almost as if the talent has chosen them. They become mathematicians, artists, piano teachers, choir masters, architects.

In addition, some people are very interested in one thing right from childhood, and that strong interest simplifies their decisions about what to be. You might hear a parent saying: "I always knew that John was going to be a veterinarian (a doctor for animals). He started caring for baby animals when he was just four years old."

For people like this, life appears easy. It looks as though their career path is a straight one. Their decisions seem easy because they know exactly what they want to do, and they have a talent in that special area.

But most of us are not like this. We are ordinary bright people who can do well at a number of different things. Who and what we eventually become is a mixture of our likes and dislikes, our abilities, our willingness to work hard and the opportunities we have.

For most people, achieving a dream is a long and winding path. It is not always straight-forward, and the right steps along the way are not always obvious. In addition, many unforeseen obstacles can appear in the path—things that must be dealt with creatively.

Try to expose yourself to as many different careers and jobs as possible. How else can you know what opportunities there are for you out in the world? In some countries, adolescents volunteer for different organisations during their holidays. Occasionally they get a little pay—enough to cover their transport to and from home—but usually they get nothing. They are truly volunteering.

Don't think that just because something is not school and it's not a paid job, that it's not worth doing. If you can organise a volunteer job for yourself, you will probably find the experi-

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

ence very useful and rewarding. For example, you can get a chance to see how an office works, and you can get a good sense about what the careers of the people working there are like. You might learn that such a career is perfectly suited to you, or you might learn that it is completely unsuited to you! Either way, the discovery will be an important one. Along the way, you will learn new skills, develop new interests and gain confidence in yourself.

As you think about the possible careers you would like to have, also think about the steps that you will need to take along the way. For example, think about the interesting role models you identified. What do you think they had to do to get where they did? What kind of education did they need? What kind of practical training did they have to get?

One good way to find out how people became what they are is to ask them. If there are people whom you respect and whose achievements you admire, ask them if they have some time to tell you how they got to be where they are. Before you meet, write down a list of questions you'd like to ask—such as what made them choose the particular career they did, and what kind of education and training they had. What do they like most about their work? What do they like least?

Most people are very pleased and flattered when someone is interested in their accomplishments and asks them for advice. Usually, people will be very eager to share their story with you and to try to help you along the path you are choosing. It can take some courage to approach an adult you do not know well, but most of them will be surprisingly nice and helpful. They can also give you some good advice about how to plan your own career.

### SETTING GOALS

It's important to have a dream—something you are heading for in the future. But you also need some more immediate goals along the way.

A goal is a specific thing you want to work toward. There are two types of goals—long-term goals and short-term goals. Your dreams are your long-term goals. They are things you hope will happen in the distant future. Short-term goals are more immediate. They are the things you hope will happen tomorrow, next week, or next year. Here are the short-term goals of some adolescents:

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**Sophie, 14, Uganda**

*“By the end of my first year in secondary school, I want to be in the top half of my class.”*

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**Essie, 15, Ghana**

*“By the age of 16, I want to know how to use a computer.”*

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**Francis, 16, Kenya**

*“Next year I want to sing a solo in my church choir.”*

**Miriam, 16, Zambia**

*“I want to do well enough on my exams to be admitted into the school of my choice.”*

**Patrick, 18, Zimbabwe**

*“I want to learn how to speak in public.”*

What are your goals? What are all the things you want to do by the end of this year? By the end of next year?

Goals are very useful. When you reach a goal, you can cross it off your list. It gives you a sense of achievement and accomplishment. It makes you feel good about yourself. It serves as proof that when you set your mind to something, you can succeed.

Goals should be realistic and possible. They should be something you **can** achieve. Sometimes people set unrealistic goals for themselves, such as being very rich. Most people don't ever become very rich, and those who do become very rich probably had more specific goals, such as to start their own business. They were so dedicated to their business, that they made it a very successful one.



**Achieving a goal makes you feel good about yourself.**

Sometimes people set negative goals for themselves, especially around sex. Some adolescents tell themselves:

- “This holiday I have to lose my virginity.”
- “I have to have sex by the age of 16.”
- “I have to try to have sex with another girl besides my girlfriend.”

These are not useful goals, and achieving them probably won't make you feel good about yourself. Think about it: is having sex truly your goal? Have you simply set this goal because you feel pressure to keep up with peers? Do you think that all your friends are having sex and you are being left behind? These aren't good reasons for setting out to achieve something.

Think about what you yourself really want to achieve, and keep in mind the following guidelines on goal setting:

- Make sure your goals are positive and constructive.
- Make sure that your goals are realistic and possible.
- Make sure they do not put you at risk.
- Make sure they are your goals and not anybody else's goal.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

After you've identified your goals, think about how you are going to achieve them. Make a good plan for yourself. Ask yourself four questions:

- **Why?** What are your reasons for working toward this goal? Why do you want to achieve this?
- **How?** What steps will you have to take to achieve this goal? What will you have to do?
- **When?** When will you have to accomplish each of the steps towards your goal? When will you be able to achieve your goal?
- **What?** What will you need in order to achieve your goal?

For example, supposing your goal is to do better in math. **Why** do you want to do better in math? Maybe it's because you know you could do better than you've done in the past. You get top marks in all your subjects, except math. You're smart, and you haven't really had to study very hard in order to do well in other subjects. However, you find math more difficult.

**How** are you going to improve your marks in math? Maybe you are going to start revising more. In addition, you might try getting extra help after class and doing extra problem sets.

**When** are you going to take all these steps? Maybe you are going to decide that you're going to spend a full hour on your math every day after school and two hours on the weekends.

**What** will you need to help you improve in math? Maybe you need more time. Perhaps you usually help out your aunt in her store in the afternoons. Tell your aunt about your goal, and ask her if she can let you go early so you can revise. Maybe you need more problem sets so you can practise. Ask your teacher to give you extra problem sets to do.

If you plan well and work hard, you can accomplish your goals.

### MAKING GOOD DECISIONS

Good decision-making can help you accomplish your goals and achieve your dreams. Good decision-making does not mean that at age 13 you make the right decision about what you are going to be in life. Thinking about what you want to be is not really a decision. That's a dream and a long-term goal.

Making a decision is different. A decision is a choice between two or more possible courses of action. Making a decision is an every-day event. You'll have to make hundreds of decisions along



**Make a plan for reaching your goals and dreams.**

the route to achieving your dreams. Should you go home to study after school or should you play with your friends? Should you agree to have sex with your girlfriend or should you wait? You have to make decisions every day.

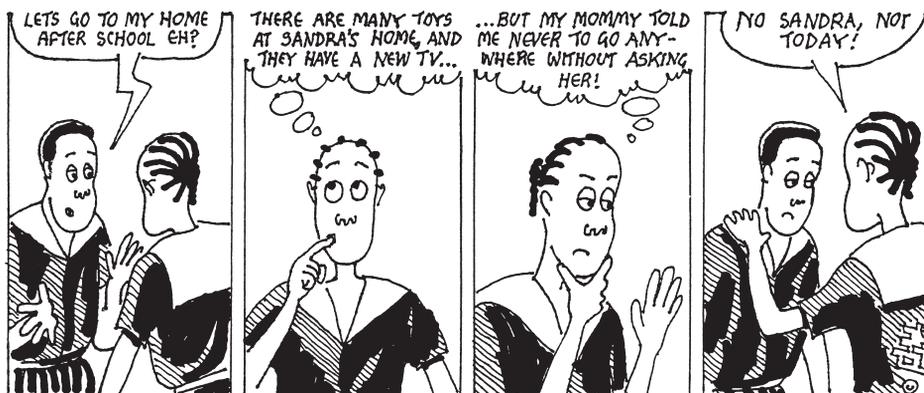
One of the most important parts of decision-making is looking ahead to see what might happen if you do something. This is called predicting outcomes or consequences. The better you are at predicting outcomes, the better you will be at making decisions that result in the outcomes you want.

For example, supposing you are trying to decide whether or not to go over to a friend's house after school. If you go over to her house, it will help strengthen your friendship. This girl is very popular at school, and she's invited several girls to come over. You've been wanting to be friends with this group for a long time, so you are very pleased to be invited.

On the other hand, your mother might be angry if you went without asking her. In addition, you have a big exam next week, and you had promised yourself that you would start revising this week—well in advance. If you go over to this girl's house, then you'll have less time to prepare for the exam, and you might get a poor mark.

### DO YOU KNOW the key steps for good decision-making?

1. Define the problem, situation or issue about which a decision needs to be made.
2. Identify all the possible options or courses of action you have.
3. Consider all the possible consequences or outcomes of each course of action.
4. Consider your own values—your beliefs about right and wrong—and which courses of action are consistent with your values.
5. Consider how your decision may affect other people.
6. Choose the course of action that seems best based on your knowledge, values, morals, religious upbringing and your goals.
7. Evaluate the decision and how you feel about it—whether you feel that you carefully considered all your options and are comfortable with the choice you made.



**Make your own decisions. Don't let other people make them for you.**

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Decisions like this can be hard. Your studies and your good relationship with your mother are important to you. But at the same time, you really want to be friends with this group of girls. That's very important to you too. Ultimately, you've got to weigh all these factors, and figure out what is best for you—what will be good for you in the long term. Whatever you decide, make sure it's your decision. Make sure that you choose one option because it's what you want—not because someone is pressuring you to do it.

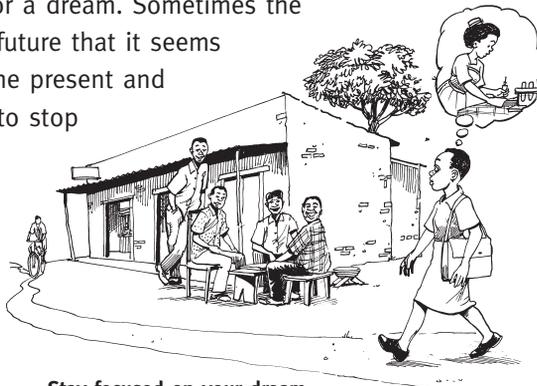
Lastly, always evaluate your decisions and how you feel about them. Do you feel as though you made the right decision? If not, what can you do to change it? For example, maybe you decided to start having sex with your boyfriend, but you know this was the wrong decision for you. You are desperately worried about getting pregnant and disappointing your parents. You know that you and your boyfriend could use contraception, but what you'd most prefer is stop having sex.

Many decisions can be changed, so it's important to always evaluate them. You can decide to stop having sex. It's never too late to make a better decision.

### STAYING FOCUSED ON YOUR GOALS AND DREAMS

Sometimes it's hard to stay focused on a goal or a dream. Sometimes the result you want seems so far off in the distant future that it seems unreachable. You might feel tempted to enjoy the present and let the future take care of itself. You may want to stop studying so hard and simply enjoy your friends.

At other times, people may discourage you. They may make you feel as though you will never be able to reach your dream. For example, some young people face a lot of pressure to get married early and start having children.



**Stay focused on your dream.  
Don't let other people distract you.**

It can also be hard if you are trying to follow an unusual path—pursuing a dream that is different than those of your peers. It can be especially hard if you are pursuing a career path that most people your sex shy away from.

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#### **Aromo, 19, Uganda**

*“My friends always tease me that being a mechanical engineer is for men, and that no man would marry me. But I want to get there and feel what it tastes like. I pay them a deaf ear and read hard. Other things will come later.”*

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#### **Sherry, 19, Ghana**

*“I want to be a civil engineer. My daddy is a building contractor and he told me it was a good field—the way Ghana is*

*going, anything where there was building and construction will be a good field. But it will be hard being the only woman. There will be some discrimination. Even my uncle is against it because he says that women are feeble. He says that he wouldn't hire a woman if he were in a position to decide. He is encouraging me to go into accounting."*

It can be hard to stay focused when other people are discouraging you and telling you that you cannot do something. It's just as hard to stay focused when other people are telling you to lighten up and have some fun.

No matter what other people say, stay true to your dream. If people tell you that you cannot do something simply because you are a woman or a man, prove them wrong. Work twice as hard. You can do almost anything you set your mind out to do. Men and woman are equally capable, even if they aren't always given the same opportunities.

If you are facing pressure from your parents to get married or to stop your studies early, try to get advice from a teacher, an aunt or uncle, a community leader or someone at your church or mosque. Ask these people for advice, and see if they can help you talk to your parents about the importance of continuing your education and training—your dreams are important, and it will be hard to pursue them when you are taking care of a family.



**If you are facing pressure to get married early, talk to someone, like a teacher, who might be able to help you.**

### **DOING WELL IN SCHOOL**

Excelling in school takes a lot of hard work and determination. It is very important to try your best. Education *is* a key to success. Knowledge is the best gift you can give yourself. Try to stay in school for as long as possible. Each year gives you more knowledge and more skills that will help you achieve your dreams.

Here are some basic tips for making the most out of your education:

- Be organised.
- Prepare for class. Don't leave assignments to the last minute.
- Put aside time for studying.
- Put aside time for fun and relaxation. All work and no play makes anyone tired and dull. So be sure to schedule time for fun, for exercise, and for friends and family.
- Eat well and get enough sleep so that you don't start dozing in class.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

- Participate in class. Even if you are very shy, you need to learn to speak up. Show your teacher that you are paying attention and working hard. This is especially important for girls. Some girls are afraid to speak in class, and they let the boys get all the attention.



Girls, speak up in class. Don't just sit there quietly, letting the boys get all the teacher's attention.

### DO YOU KNOW HOW to prepare well for exams?

At most schools, a lot depends upon the results of exams, such as O levels and A levels. Here are some tips on how to prepare for those crucial exams:

- Revise steadily and daily. Start revising the first day of school. Do not leave it to the last minute because last minute revision doesn't usually help. Revise up to the day before the exam. On the morning of the exam, stop revising and relax. Don't go into the exam already feeling stressed out.
- Make your daily timetable, setting aside time for your schoolwork.
- Take short notes summarising the key points you need to remember. These notes will be helpful as you revise before exams.
- Spend extra time on your weaker subjects and try to revise with the help of a teacher or a student who knows the subjects well.
- If you start feeling stressed, take a break. Play games or read a light novel. Go skip rope or go for a walk to deal with your nerves.

On the day of the exam itself, the key is to stay calm!

- Go on time to the examination room. Going late will make you worried and will make it hard to concentrate.
- When you are given the paper, do nothing for the first few minutes. Let your heart beat quiet down because if you jump straight in you may make careless mistakes.
- Read the instructions and questions carefully to make sure that you understand them. The examiner who reads your paper is going to look at how you interpret the question. Plan your answer. Organise your points.
- Begin with the questions that are easiest for you. This will boost your confidence. Most examiners will not penalise you for not answering questions in the right order as long as you label them clearly. Don't start with the most difficult question as it may make you lose hope and confidence.

**DO YOU KNOW HOW to prepare well for exams? (continued)**

- Do not to look around during the exam. You may get anxious and worried if you see other students flipping over pages or writing quickly. Don't panic when others ask for more paper. It is not the amount you write that matters, but how you have approached the question and the thoughtfulness of your answers. Some people write nonsense!
- Remember, handwriting is important. The examiner needs to be able to read what you have written.
- After the exam, try to avoid discussing your answers with others. If you talk about it, you may end up feeling that your answers were not good enough, and this will not help you prepare for the next exams.

When you get your exam papers back, look at them carefully. Look at the questions you answered incorrectly, so that you know where you need to work harder. Think about which types of questions give you problems so that you can prepare better next time. Don't forget to look at the questions you answered correctly and to give yourself a pat on the back for a job well done!

**BEING OUT OF SCHOOL**

Many adolescents are forced to leave school before they finish their studies. Perhaps their parents cannot afford their school fees. Or maybe they become pregnant by mistake and have to leave school.

These are difficult situations, but they don't mean that you won't be able to achieve something in life. You may have to re-think your dreams and goals, but if you're creative and resourceful, you can still reach them. Don't think that your life is over.

- **Look around you.** How are other young people who are not in school trying to realise their dreams? What are they doing?
- **Look at the opportunities and resources available to you.** Even if you cannot continue school, there may be other ways for you to get good training. For example, if you left school because of pregnancy, find out if there is a centre for adolescent mothers where you can go for training or courses. Or perhaps there is a community loan fund available to help people start up small income-generating activities.
- **Ask people for advice,** such as your parents, uncles, aunts, neighbours, community leaders or even your former teachers. These people may have very good ideas about work or things you could undertake.
- **Rethink your goals and your strategy for reaching them.** Maybe it won't be possible to become a doctor, but there are plenty of other things that you can do well. You might decide that you want to start a small business. How can you do it? Perhaps you can form a group with some friends. Ask everybody to contribute to a common pot that will be used as start-up funds for the business. Perhaps you can talk to successful business people for advice about how to get started. You could even ask them to invest in your business, if you can convince them that it is a good idea.

- **Be creative.** If all your friends are selling newspapers at the traffic lights, you may need to think of selling something else or undertaking another activity. Joining them to also sell newspapers will most likely not give you enough of an income to save up some money to start another activity.

## DEALING WITH SETBACKS

Whether you are in school or out of school, things don't always go as you plan. Sometimes a big obstacle appears in the road and makes it difficult to achieve your goals and dreams. These obstacles are called setbacks. They make it difficult to go forwards, and sometimes they send you backwards.

Setbacks can be very hard and disappointing, but they do happen to everyone. It's how you handle the inevitable setbacks of life that will determine how well you do in reaching your dream—maybe not your original dream but a good dream nevertheless!

Setbacks can happen because of events outside of you—things you cannot control, such as a change in the economic status of your family. Perhaps your father's business fails or your mother falls ill, and they can no longer pay your school fees. If this happens, you will have to draw on all your strength to solve the problem. Is there a relative who can help pay? Can the school reduce the fees for you because you've been a good student? Can you switch to a cheaper school?

Sometimes you may experience setbacks that are completely beyond your control. Maybe there are 20 places at university for students from your district to study engineering. Competition is particularly tough for engineering this year. There are 80 of you competing. You are 21st in exam results.

### DO YOU KNOW how to cope with setbacks?

Tom always wanted to be a doctor. But a war came to his area when he was 15, and he missed his exams. When he finally did sit them, he couldn't afford the chemistry text and had to study from notes. He failed to get into medical school.

Tom was extremely disappointed, but he remained very interested in health. So his parents encouraged him to do a course in health education. Tom felt this was a poor substitute for medicine, but he worked hard and qualified in two years. Then he got a job as an assistant health inspector in a small remote sub-district. He excelled at his work and later was hired by an organisation that then sent him for several training courses. Last year Tom was promoted to run the organisation's health programme across three districts. He supervises three doctors.

Tom is a success. Some of the keys to his success are:

- A genuine interest in health.
- A willingness to try something else if the first plan falls through.
- An ability to work hard and apply himself to whatever he does.

This can be very hard. How are you going to deal with the problem? One option is to get very depressed and discouraged. The other option is to be practical and positive. How can you deal with this situation? You only missed getting in by one point! Is there another course at the university that you can start, and then switch back to engineering later? Is there another university? Can you re-sit the exam? Are all the 20 students going to take up their places or do you still have a chance if you push?

Whatever setback you encounter, don't lose heart and don't give up. Try to solve the problem. There's an expression "Where there's a will, there's a way," which means that if you are determined, you'll find a way to succeed.

Sometimes setbacks happen because of problems inside of you—either because your strengths aren't suited to the path you've chosen or because of your own attitudes and the way you are approaching something.

Setbacks caused by your own weaknesses are hard to take. You might have had your heart set on doing something, but it turns out you are not suited to that thing. For example, you had your heart set on being a doctor, but you simply are not good at biology and chemistry. You cannot remember these things, even when you revise constantly. You do poorly on all your tests in these subjects, even though you perform well in your other classes.

When something like this happens, you need to take a good look at yourself. Think about your strengths and weaknesses. What do you do well? What can you do that will make the most of your strengths?

Figuring out what your strengths are and how to make the most of them can be difficult. It's hard to step outside yourself and look at yourself objectively. If you are having

#### **DO YOU KNOW** how to make the most of your own strengths?

Susan was sure that she wanted to be a journalist. She took a volunteer job with a woman's magazine. The staff gave her some writing assignments and gave her some suggestions for how to write the articles. But everything she wrote was boring, no matter how hard she tried. Ideas just dried up when she tried to write. It took her hours to write just one paragraph.

She spent three months there without publishing anything. Susan became worried. She had counted on doing a journalism course after high school.

Although all the staff at the magazine had been nice to her, one woman, who designed the magazine had been especially nice. Susan decided to go talk to her and ask for her advice. The woman told Susan not to worry so much. She also advised Susan to try out different things at the magazine. Then she let Susan try her hand at the computer, and it turned out that Susan had a good eye for images and layout. Susan happily switched to a course in graphic design.

Even though the journalism itself did not work out, Susan found a new line of work that she really loves. Susan was flexible. She didn't give up on herself. Instead, she made the most of her strengths and the opportunities around her.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

trouble identifying your strengths, try talking to someone who knows you—a parent, a brother or sister, an aunt or uncle, or a teacher or counsellor at school. These people may have seen strengths that you haven't noticed.

The most dangerous causes of setbacks are your own attitudes. One day you don't feel like trying anymore. You're tired or you feel hopeless. Or you suddenly think that your chosen path is too hard and that the rewards are too far away.

Your own attitudes can be traps. Some of these traps are:

- **The “NEGATIVE THOUGHTS” trap.** You tell yourself that you are unlucky and that you are stupid, and you use these negative thoughts as excuses for not doing anything.
- **The “FEAR OF MAKING A MISTAKE” trap.** You worry so much about making a mistake that you don't even try to do something.
- **The “FEAR OF SUCCESS” trap.** You don't try because you are worried about calling attention to yourself if you do succeed.
- **The “BUT I CAN'T” trap.** You tell yourself that you cannot do something before you even try.
- **The “FEAR OF NOT LIVING UP TO OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS” trap.** You worry so much about disappointing others that you are afraid to try.

Watch out for these traps. Don't let yourself fall into them.

You will never know what you are capable of doing unless you make an effort to do something. Do not simply talk about it or hope for it to happen. Start working towards your goals and dreams.

Many times we think that the successful people we hear about are born with so much talent and skill that it was easy for them to get where they want to be. However, if you look at what these people did, you will be surprised at how much effort they put into achieving their dream.

Sometimes we think that successful people are simply lucky. But there is an old saying about luck:

*Luck is where preparation meets opportunity.*

Make sure that you are constantly preparing yourself and keeping an eye out for opportunities! Then you'll be “lucky.”

Finally, remember, success doesn't mean becoming a superstar, having a fancy car or having a lot of money. Success is very personal. Success means different things for different people, but for most people, success means feeling good about yourself and what you do.

## CHAPTER 14 | REACHING YOUR DREAMS

You determine your own success. Don't wait for other people to make you successful. Your success will be determined by your happiness, your spiritual richness, your wisdom, your flexibility, your creativity, your determination and your attitudes toward other people. You hold the keys to your future and your dreams!

## Chapter 14

# Reaching your dream

**Reaching your dreams takes a lot of hard work and determination.** Don't wait for things to happen to you. This is your future. You need to build it!

Some people know what they want to be and what they want to do. They know what their dreams are. Other people don't know what they want to be. This doesn't mean that they don't have dreams. It just means they don't know what they are yet. You can start identifying your dreams today:

- **Look around you at the people in your community.** Whom do you admire and respect? These people can be role models.
- **Look beyond your community.** There are many people who are doing interesting and worthwhile things with their lives. They can be role models too.
- **Let your imagination soar.** Don't let yourself be limited by ideas about what you can and cannot do. Whether you are a girl or a boy, you can do almost anything you want to do if you set your mind to it and work hard.

Talk to people who are doing things that interest you. Ask them how they got where they did. What education did they need? What training did they get? What do they like most about their work? What do they like least?

Your dreams are your long-term goals—the things you hope to accomplish in the long run. But you also need more immediate goals—things you can accomplish in the short run. **Think about what you want to achieve this week, this month and this year.** When you achieve these goals, you will feel good about yourself. You will see that when you set your mind to something, you can succeed.

**Reaching your dreams will not be a clear and straight-forward path.** The right steps along the way will not always be obvious, and you may run into many unforeseen obstacles. You will need to be able to:

- **Make good decisions** by looking at the possible consequences of the options before you.
- **Stay focused** on your dream and do not let yourself get discouraged or get distracted by other people.
- **Work hard.** Whether you are in school or not, make the most of the opportunities you have.
- **Cope with setbacks.** Don't ever give up. Where there's a will, there's a way.

You determine your own success. Your determination, creativity, wisdom, flexibility and attitudes towards other people are the keys to your future and your dreams.

# Glossary

Abdomen	The trunk of the body below the ribs, containing the stomach, liver, guts and reproductive organs. Also called the belly.
Abortion	The ending of a pregnancy. It can happen on its own (spontaneous abortion or "miscarriage"), or it can be caused by a medical procedure (induced abortion).
Abstain	To avoid doing something. For example, you can decide to abstain from sex or from drugs or alcohol.
Acne	A skin problem found chiefly in adolescents and marked by a lot of pimples (spots) especially on the face.
Acquaintance rape	A rape committed by someone who is known by the victim, such as a neighbour, friend, relative, etc.
Addiction	A dependency on a drug. A person with a drug addiction cannot function without taking the drug.
Aggressive	Being forceful, unkind and hostile towards other people.
Alcohol	Beer, wine and "hard" liquors are types of alcohol. Alcohol makes people feel relaxed and less self-conscious. It removes their inhibitions and slows down reactions. Alcohol is addictive and can cause long-term health problems.
Allergy	A bad reaction of the body to a food, drug or other substance. When a person is allergic to something, they may have reactions such as itching, sneezing, rashes and difficulty breathing or shock.
Ampulla	The place in the male reproductive system where semen is stored.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Anaemia	A health condition in which the blood is weak and thin. It is often caused by lack of iron in the diet. Signs include tiredness, pale gums, tongue, eyelids, palms and soles of the feet, and lack of energy.
Anaesthetics/ Anaesthesia	A painkiller medicine used to ease pain and discomfort during an operation.
Antenatal	The period before birth. For example, antenatal care is the care needed by a woman throughout pregnancy/before birth.
Anti-fungal cream	A medicated cream that kills fungi, which are certain parasites that can grow and live in or on your body, such as in the vagina or on the feet.
Antiseptic	A medical substance that prevents the growth of bacteria. Antiseptics are used to prevent infections.
Anus	The opening of the body where waste (faeces) comes out.
Areola	The ring of darker-coloured skin around the nipple of the breast (male and female).
Aspirations	Dreams for the future. They are ambitions, long-term goals and hopes of doing something great and being someone successful.
Assert (assertiveness, assertive)	To state clearly, confidently and strongly without being hostile, rude or nasty. To assert oneself is to stand up for oneself.
Assumption	A belief that is not necessarily based on complete factual information. If you make an assumption, you arrive at a belief based on whatever information you have. However, your assumption may be proven wrong by additional information.
Awkward	A feeling of being uncomfortable, ill-at-ease, embarrassed, clumsy or self-conscious.
Bladder	The organ in which urine is stored before leaving the body.
Buttocks	The round, fleshy part of the body a person sits on.
Caesarean section (or C-section)	A medical operation to take the baby out of the uterus by making a cut in the woman's abdomen (belly). This operation is performed when a woman is not able to deliver the baby through the vagina.

## GLOSSARY

Calorie	A unit that measures the amount of energy in foods.
Candidiasis	A yeast infection in the vagina. Symptoms of candidiasis are increased discharge from the vagina and itching.
Cannabis (also called marijuana, banghi, hash, weed)	Cannabis is a drug that comes from the leaves of a plant. People smoke the leaves, but sometimes there is a stronger version made from the stems of the plant. Cannabis can make people feel relaxed, happy and sleepy. Cannabis can limit your ability to make decisions and can cause intense feelings of panic or fear.
Cavity	A hole in the tooth caused by decay or rot.
Cervix	The opening or neck of the womb.
Circumcision	In a man: when the loose fold of skin (foreskin) at the end of a man's penis is removed. In a woman: when part or all of a woman's genitals are removed.
Clitoris	The small, pea-shaped organ in a woman's genitals that is a centre of sensation and sexual pleasure. It is located just in front of the opening of the urethra.
Cocaine	An illegal drug that makes a person high. It is extremely addictive.
Condom (rubber, protector)	A soft tube made of rubber that is put on a man's penis before sexual intercourse. Condoms provide protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
Criticise	To find fault with; to say negative things about something or someone.
Crush	A feeling of intense admiration and liking for someone. Crushes usually last a short time, unlike love, which may last for a long time.
Dandruff	Flakes of dry skin on the head.
Date rape	Rape committed by a boyfriend. For example, when a boyfriend forces his girlfriend to have sex against her will, it is considered date rape.
Deodorant	A product that hides strong under-arm odour.
Depression	A feeling of being extremely sad and hopeless. Depression is a serious emotional problem, which may result in difficulty thinking and sleeping, as well as loss of appetite (desire to eat), and thoughts about suicide (killing oneself).

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Detergent	A strong cleansing soap, usually used for cleaning laundry.
Ejaculation	The release of semen from a man's penis.
Embryo	The term used between the second and eighth week of pregnancy to refer to the mass of cells that will become a foetus.
Emergency contraception	A contraceptive method that can be used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, such as if the condom broke or slipped. To be effective in preventing pregnancy, emergency contraception must be taken within a few days of unprotected intercourse. Emergency contraception does not cause abortion.
Empathy	The ability to understand someone else's concerns, worries, fears and needs. Being empathetic means that you can imagine yourself in the shoes of someone else and understand how they feel.
Erection	When the penis becomes hard and stiff as a result of feelings of sexual excitement.
Exploit	To use someone or something (usually negative). To take advantage of someone.
Fallopian tubes	The two tubes that lead from the female ovaries to the uterus (womb). After an egg is released from one of the ovaries, it travels down these tubes to the uterus.
Female circumcision (also called female genital mutilation-FGM)	A traditional practice in which all or part of the female genitals are removed. This practice has negative health consequences and is considered by many people to be a violation of girls' and women's rights.
Fluid	A liquid. Sexual fluids are the vaginal discharge or the male semen.
Foaming tablets	A method of contraception. The woman puts foaming tablets into her vagina just before sexual intercourse. The foaming tablets contain a substance that kills sperm.
Foetus	The term used to refer to a baby in the uterus (womb) from the ninth week of pregnancy until birth.
Follicles	Tiny holes in the skin out of which hair grows.

## G L O S S A R Y

Foreskin	A fold of delicate skin that covers the tip of the penis of an uncircumcised man.
Genitals	The private parts; the external sexual organs.
Genital warts	A sexually transmitted infection that causes fleshy bumps to grow in the genital area.
Glands	Cells in the skin that perform a certain function. For example, sweat glands produce sweat or perspiration, which helps cool the body.
Gonorrhoea	A sexually transmitted infection that causes discharge from the vagina or penis.
Growth spurt	A period during which an adolescent's body grows quickly.
Haemorrhage	Heavy bleeding.
Hallucinations	Visions of strange things and hearing voices that others do not see or hear. Hallucinations can be caused by taking drugs.
Heroin	An illegal drug that causes hallucinations and is extremely addictive.
Herpes	A sexually transmitted infection that is caused by a virus and cannot be cured. It causes small painful blisters, usually on or around the genitals or around the mouth.
Heterosexuality	Sexual attraction toward members of the opposite sex (men being attracted to women, and women being attracted to men).
HIV/AIDS	HIV, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus, is the virus that causes AIDS. The term "HIV/AIDS" is often used because infection with HIV eventually leads to AIDS, which is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. A person has AIDS (rather than just being infected with HIV) when the immune system gets so weak it can no longer fight off common infections and illnesses.
Homosexuality	Sexual attraction between people of the same sex.
Hormones	Natural chemicals that are produced by the body and that serve as messengers that tell the body how and when to do things, such as grow.
Hygiene	The practice of keeping clean.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Hymen	A delicate piece of tissue inside the vagina. Because the hymen can be stretched or torn during sexual intercourse, hymens are seen as a sign that a girl is a virgin. However, some girls are born with no hymen at all. For others, the hymen can become stretched or torn during sports or for no obvious reason at all. Therefore, not having a hymen is not necessarily a sign that a girl is not a virgin.
Implants (Norplant)	A contraceptive method in which six small tubes containing hormones are put under the skin in a women's upper arm by a specially trained health worker. Implants prevent pregnancy for about five years, but can be removed sooner if the woman wants to become pregnant.
Implantation	When a fertilised egg attaches itself to the lining or wall of the uterus (womb). This is the beginning of pregnancy.
Incest	Sexual contact between members of the immediate family.
Infibulation	A form of female circumcision in which the external genitals (the labia) are cut away and the opening to the vagina is sewn almost completely closed.
Inflammation	Swelling caused by injury or infection.
Inhibitions	Feelings of shyness or embarrassment that stop you from shaming or embarrassing yourself in front of others.
IUD (or Coil)	The IUD (intrauterine device) or coil is a method of contraception. It is inserted into the uterus by a health worker to prevent pregnancy.
Khat (quat, miraa, mairungi)	A drug that is chewed in the Horn of Africa and in much of East Africa. It can make the person feel more energetic and confident, and less hungry. It can cause anxiety attacks, aggression and hallucinations.
Labia	The inner and outer folds of skin that protect the vagina. Also called the "lips."
Labour	The work that a woman's body does during childbirth to push the baby out of the body.
Lubricant	A cream or substance used to make dry surfaces wet and slippery. Lubricants are often used on condoms during sex.
Masturbation	Touching one's own body for sexual pleasure.

## GLOSSARY

Menarche	The beginning of menstruation; the first menstrual period.
Menopause	The time a woman stops having monthly periods, usually between the ages of 45 and 55.
Menstruation, menstrual period, monthly period	The flow of blood and tissue from the uterus (womb) out of a woman's body, usually occurring every 28 days. Menstruation starts during adolescence and ends between the ages of 45 – 55.
Monogamous	The state being committed emotionally and/or sexually to only one person at a time.
Mucus	A thick, slippery fluid that the body makes to protect the inside of the vagina, nose, throat, stomach and intestines.
Nausea	A feeling of being sick to the stomach and wanting to vomit. This often happens during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and is also called "morning-sickness." Many drugs also cause a person to feel nausea.
Nervous	A feeling of being anxious, easily excited or irritated.
Nicotine, cigarettes	Nicotine is the active ingredient in cigarettes. It makes a person feel energetic, and it reduces the appetite. Nicotine is highly addictive. It causes many cancers, and it damages the heart and blood vessels.
Oestrogen	The female sex hormone produced by the ovaries. Oestrogen causes the monthly changes in the uterus, as well as the development of the breasts and the growth of hair in the female private parts.
Orgasm	The peak or height of sexual pleasure.
Ovaries	Two small egg-shaped organs on each side of the uterus (womb) that release an egg each month during a woman's reproductive years.
Ovulation	The release of an egg from one of the ovaries. It usually occurs 14 days before the next menstrual period.
Ovum, Ova (plural)	A female egg. A cell which, when released from a woman's ovary, may be fertilised by a man's sperm.
Pap smear	A test in which some cells are taken from the cervix and examined. This test is used to detect the early signs of cervical cancer.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Paranoia	Extreme and unreasonable worries and fears; often caused by taking drugs.
Pelvis	The bones in the area of the hips that surround the reproductive organs.
Penis	The male sex organ, also used to pass urine.
Periodic abstinence	A method of preventing pregnancy by avoiding having sex during the days a woman thinks she may be fertile.
Perspire	To sweat or release water through the skin.
Petrol, glue, industrial products in spray cans	Substances that can be inhaled for drug-like effects. These substances can make the consumer feel warm, comfortable and happy. They reduce fear and hunger. They can cause nausea, vomiting, disorientation and confusion, and they can damage the brain.
Physical	Of or relating to the body.
Pills (contraceptive pills, family planning pills, birth control pills)	A method of contraception that prevents the monthly release of an egg from the woman's ovaries. Each pill contains a small dose of hormones that prevent ovulation (the release of an egg). The pills must be taken every day
Pores	Tiny openings in the skin. If pores become blocked with dirt, sebum or sweat, a person may develop pimples.
Postnatal/postpartum	The time after childbirth or delivery.
Pre-ejaculate	A small amount of fluid at the tip of his penis as it becomes erect. This small drop is called pre-ejaculate because it appears before ejaculation. It can contain sperm and can cause pregnancy.
Premature	Happening too early or before the proper or usual time. For example, a premature baby is one born too early.
Promiscuous	Being too loose or too free, especially regarding sexual activity. Someone who is promiscuous has many sexual partners.
Protein	A body-building substance found in various types of foods, such as meats, eggs, milk, beans, and some vegetables. It is essential for growth and development of the body.

## GLOSSARY

Psychological	Related to the mind or brain.
Puberty	The period of life when a person changes physically from a child into an adult. Most girls and boys enter puberty between the age of 10 and 16 years.
Pubic hair	The hairs that grow in the genital area or private parts.
Pus	White or yellow fluid that is the result of infection.
Rape	Forced sexual intercourse that takes place against a person's will. Females and males can be raped, but most often rape victims are female.
Saliva	A person's spit or the fluid in one's mouth.
Scars	A mark left on the skin after a deep cut, wound or burn has healed.
Sceptical	Feeling doubt and disbelief about something.
Scrotum	The bag or sac of skin that contains a man's testicles.
Sebum	An oily substance that is produced by the skin. Too much sebum can cause pimples.
Self-awareness	An awareness and understanding of one's own feelings and emotions.
Self-confidence	A feeling of trust in oneself and in one's own skills and abilities.
Self-esteem	Feeling good about oneself and respecting oneself.
Semen	A sticky, whitish liquid that comes out of a man's penis during ejaculation.
Seminal vesicles	Two glands in the male reproductive system where semen is made.
Sexual abuse	Any type of unwanted sexual contact, touching or fondling.
Sexual harassment	Any type of unwanted sexual attention, such as unpleasant sexual comments or physical gestures.
Sexual intercourse	The act by which a male's erect penis is placed inside the vagina of a female.

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, YOUR DREAMS

Smegma	The white lubricating substance under the foreskin of the penis. Smegma helps the foreskin slide back smoothly over the glands at the head of the penis.
Sperm	The male's reproductive cells. They are tiny cells that can fertilise a woman's egg, leading to pregnancy.
Spermicides	A slippery cream or gel that kills sperm. Spermicides are used as a method of contraception.
STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases. Infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. Also called sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
Sterilisation	A permanent method of contraception for either males or females. It is done through an operation.
Sterilised instruments	Medical instruments that are clean and free of bacteria that might cause infection.
Stimulate	To excite, arouse, make awake.
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections. Infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. Also called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
Stunt	To hinder or block normal growth or development.
Syphilis	A sexually transmitted infection that causes small sores in the genital area. Later stages are marked by fever, headaches, and pain in the bones and muscles.
Tampons	Small hard pieces of cotton that are put inside the vagina to absorb or catch menstrual blood as it leaves the body. A string is attached to the tampon so that it can be pulled out.
Tendency	A habit or common practice.
Testes, testicles	Part of the male reproductive organs inside the scrotum where sperm and male hormones are produced.
Testosterone	The male hormone produced in a man's body.
Trait	A recognisable feature; an inherited characteristic.

## GLOSSARY

Tranquilizers	Types of drugs that make a person feel very calm, relaxed and sleepy.
Unprotected sex	Sexual intercourse without any protection against pregnancy or STIs.
Urethra	A short tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body.
Uterus (womb)	The muscular organ inside a woman's belly in which a baby grows.
Vagina	The passage that goes from a woman's womb to the outside of the body. It is also called the birth canal.
Vaginal fluid	The discharge or fluid that comes out of a woman's vagina. Strangely-coloured and bad smelling discharge may indicate an infection.
Vas deferens	The tube through which sperm travels from the testicles to the urethra.
Vessels	Small tubes through which a body fluid (such as blood) travels around the body.
Vulnerable	At risk of being physically or emotionally wounded; easy to hurt; easily damaged.
Vulva	The external female genitals.
Wet dream	The release of semen (ejaculation) during sleep. A wet dream is a way for the male body to get rid of excess sperm and semen.
Window period	The time between the moment when HIV enters a person's body and the moment when testing can detect the antibodies to HIV (3 to 6 months). During this window period, a person may test negative, even though he/she is infected with HIV and can infect others.
Withdrawal	When the man pulls his penis out of the vagina before he ejaculates.
Withdrawal symptoms	The bad reaction of the body when a drug to which one is addicted is taken away.
Womb	See uterus.
Zygote	An egg that has been fertilised by a sperm.

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## Evaluation Form

### *You, Your Life, Your Dreams: A Book for Adolescents*

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Recipients of *You, Your Life, Your Dreams* are requested to complete the following evaluation form and return it to Family Care International (FCI). Your comments and suggestions will help us to evaluate our materials and plan for the development of future health education materials.

Please fill in your name and address in the space below, then answer the following questions, using a scale of 1 to 5 (1 is poor, 5 is excellent). Additional comments are welcome, and can be written in at the end of each section, or in response to the questions at the end of the form. FCI's address is provided at the end of the form. If you would like to receive additional copies of *You, Your Life, Your Dreams* or other adolescent materials produced by FCI (single copies free to qualifying organisations), please complete the order form on the last page.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick the box that best describes you:

Adolescent (please specify age and sex): \_\_\_\_\_

Youth counsellor/peer educator

Teacher

Health worker

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us how you used *You, Your Life, Your Dreams* (check all that apply):

Read the book at a youth centre, school, library, health centre, etc.

Used the book as a reference for leading an educational programme with young people

Used the book as a reference for counselling

Used the book as the basis for developing health education materials (pamphlets, posters, etc.)

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**A. OVERALL CONTENT**

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- |                                                                     | <b>POOR</b>                |                            | <b>GOOD</b>                | <b>EXCELLENT</b>           |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. How would you rate the book overall?                             | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
|                                                                     | <b>Not at all</b>          |                            | <b>Somewhat</b>            |                            | <b>Very</b>                |
| 2. Are the issues in the book relevant?                             | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 3. Is the information culturally appropriate?                       | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 4. Is the book enjoyable to read?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 5. Is the level of the language easy for adolescents to understand? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**B. ILLUSTRATIONS AND QUOTES**

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- |                                                                           | <b>POOR</b>                                                                                                  |                            | <b>GOOD</b>                | <b>EXCELLENT</b>           |                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. What do you think of the illustrations and cartoons?                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 2. What do you think of the quotes from adolescents?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
|                                                                           | <b>Not at all</b>                                                                                            |                            | <b>Somewhat</b>            |                            | <b>Very</b>                |
| 3. How culturally appropriate are the illustrations/cartoons?             | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 4. How well are the illustrations linked to the text?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 5. How well are the quotes from adolescents linked to the text?           | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 6. In terms of the number of illustrations, does the book have:           | <input type="checkbox"/> too many <input type="checkbox"/> too few <input type="checkbox"/> the right number |                            |                            |                            |                            |
| 7. In terms of the number of quotes from adolescents, does the book have: | <input type="checkbox"/> too many <input type="checkbox"/> too few <input type="checkbox"/> the right number |                            |                            |                            |                            |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**C. "DID YOU KNOW" AND SUMMARY BOXES**

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- |                                                                 | <b>Not at all</b>                                                                                            |                            | <b>Somewhat</b>            | <b>Very</b>                |                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. How interesting are the "DID YOU KNOW" boxes?                | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 2. How useful are the summary boxes at the end of each chapter? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| 3. In terms of the number of boxes, does the book have:         | <input type="checkbox"/> too many <input type="checkbox"/> too few <input type="checkbox"/> the right number |                            |                            |                            |                            |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## D. GLOSSARY

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1. Did you use the glossary?  Yes  No
2. How useful is the glossary? **Not at all**  1 **Somewhat**  2  3 **Very**  4  5
3. How understandable are the definitions?  1  2  3  4  5
4. In terms of the number of terms or difficult words included, does the glossary have:  too many  too few  the right number

Comments:

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## E. DESIGN

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1. How would you rate the overall design of the book (size, layout, binding, etc.)? **POOR**  1  2 **GOOD**  3  4 **EXCELLENT**  5
2. How would you rate the cover?  1  2  3  4  5
3. How would you rate the size and design of the type?  1  2  3  4  5
4. How would you rate the spiral binding?  1  2  3  4  5
5. Do you think that the size of the book is:  too small  too large  the right size

Comments:

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**If you have time, we would appreciate your responses to the following questions:**

1. What chapters of *You, Your Life, Your Dreams* do you think are **most** useful? Why?
- 
- 
- 

2. What chapters of *You, Your Life, Your Dreams* do you think are **least** useful? Why?
- 
- 
- 

3. Were there any sections or chapters that you found culturally inappropriate? Which ones and why?
- 
- 
-

4. Were there any sections or chapters where the wording was confusing or unclear? Which?

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5. Were there any topics that were not fully covered or were oversimplified? Which topics?

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6. Are there any topics that should be added or taken out of the book? Which topics?

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7. Do you think any of the illustrations should be changed? If so, how?

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8. Do you think the design of the book should be changed? If so, how?

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9. Additional comments:

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**Thank you for your time and assistance.  
We appreciate any additional comments or suggestions you have.**

If you would like additional copies of FCI's adolescent publications, please specify below:

- You, Your Life, Your Dreams: A Book for Adolescents*** (1–4 copies free to developing country organisations, 5+ copies are \$6/copy; \$12/copy for international organisations and recipients in Europe/North America)
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