

# **You, your life, your dreams:**

**A BOOK FOR CARIBBEAN ADOLESCENTS**

Written and adapted by

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Based on the original version by

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## GLOSSARY

## SOURCES



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# FOREWORD

Everyday young people face situations where they must make choices that not only have implications for their individual futures, but for our common future. The choices they make are largely influenced by the values and skills they have been taught, or acquire over the years. To ensure a better quality of life for young people and a better world for all, it is essential to equip them with the tools to make right choices. These include providing access to education, health (including sexual and reproductive health), employment, and other opportunities that promote their social advancement and political inclusion.

This peer education manual, *You, Your Life, Your Dreams*, developed by Family Care International (FCI), which the CARICOM Secretariat and UNFPA Caribbean Office have partnered to adapt for use in the English-speaking Caribbean is an investment in the region's young people. It provides information for young people to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections including HIV, unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexual abuse, violence, and exploitation.

It is an important educational resource for young people and those who work with youth, as it provides information about those issues that affect this fast growing segment of the population, using a simple and youth-friendly approach. The fact that the information contained in this manual has been validated by young people from the region gives us confidence that it reflects their realities.

At UNFPA, we stand by our commitment to invest in young people's education and training, as well as their health (including sexual and reproductive health), as a means of ensuring their healthy transition to adulthood. This peer education manual complements other initiatives that we are involved with in the region that are designed to empower adolescents and youth to think critically, express themselves freely, and ultimately to achieve their dreams.



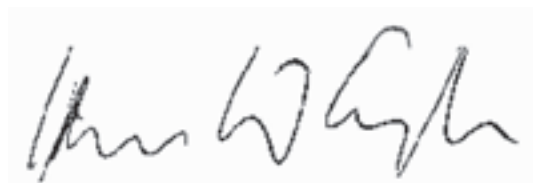
Harold Robinson  
Representative, UNFPA  
Office for the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean

# FOREWORD

On behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), I wish to commend the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for producing a comprehensive manual for Caribbean youth, on issues which are central to their personal and socio-cultural development. The manual is reader-friendly, frank and open **and bring** to the table many issues that have been traditionally treated with secrecy, a situation which has often resulted in misinformation for our youth. Although the main focus of the manual is peer education among youth, it could also serve as an important resource for adults who seek to help youth to grapple with the myriad and often conflicting perspectives relating to their personal development.

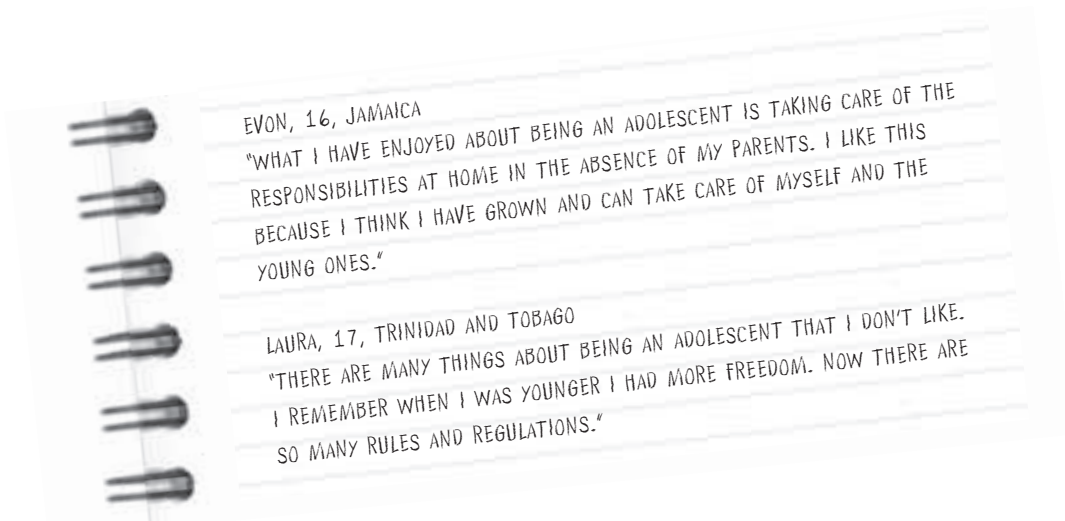
It is recognized that given the nature of the issues addressed in the manual, **countervailing perspectives must** be brought to bear on the treatment of the material. Even as the Secretariat reviewed the material, it was conscious of the imperative for critical analysis and **careful** use of the materials by stakeholders within the context of legal frameworks of our societies and also their own cultural and religious environments.

It is our hope that the manual will prove to be useful to its intended target audience, not only in their **efforts** to understand themselves better and engage in healthy interpersonal relationships, but also **in their quest for empowerment** to make more informed decisions and participate in, and contribute to the social and economic development of the Caribbean Community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edwin W. Carrington', is displayed on a light gray background.

EDWIN W. CARRINGTON  
SECRETARY-GENERAL

# Adolescence: The Big Change, The Big Challenge



Many people around the world define adolescence as the period of life between 10 and 19 years of age. If you are between 10 and 19 years old, you are an adolescent. Congratulations! You are a special person!

During adolescence you will be going through a lot of changes and trying out new things—from new looks and identities to new experiences, such as going out with friends, holding hands, kissing, going to parties, driving, and maybe even having a job. This is a very critical stage in your lifetime and it requires making serious choices, choices that will shape the rest of your life. You will start making decisions on your own, and some of these decisions may have unexpected outcomes. This is a period of learning, experiencing, and discovering the world outside your family circle. Most of what you learn you will learn from trial and error and you will have many opportunities to learn from your mistakes.

Your new looks, experiences, and identities may worry your parents, aunties and uncles because they don't want you to get hurt or make mistakes. They may be nervous because they know that these years will have a big impact on the person you will become and the kind of life you will lead.



Your parents may find your adolescence a bit nerve-wracking.

## WHAT IS ADOLESCENCE?

Adolescence is the time when your growth and development speed up. Your body will change a lot in a short period of time, as will your way of thinking, your dreams, and your relationships with others. It is a time of confusing feelings and of changing moods—one moment you may be laughing your head off and the next you may be very sad, for no obvious reason. You will enjoy being with friends; you will be more autonomous and aware of both your rights and the rights of others.

Adolescence is a time when we physically and mentally develop into adults. During adolescence a lot of things start happening:

- Our bodies change—in ways that we like and some that we don't.
- We have sexual feelings and may not always know what to do about them.
- We think more independently and want to make our own decisions.
- Our feelings about our family and our relationships with our parents may also change. Our parents may give us more responsibilities, which is a sign that they trust and rely on us. But they might also become stricter—keeping us from our friends and trying to make decisions for us about our schooling or our future.
- Our friends—and what they think—may matter to us much more than it used to.
- Our emotions may feel much more complicated to us than they did in the past. We may experience sudden changes in mood and sometimes we may not understand exactly what we are feeling or why.
- We may want to feel close to and loved by someone.
- We may face difficult decisions, and go through times when we don't know to whom to turn for advice and guidance.

All in all, adolescence is a wonderful time that you will never forget. It is a special time for everyone, everywhere, from Belize to Tanzania. But it is mainly a very challenging time. It's a time of big changes—physical, emotional, social—and big changes take time.

There's a lot that we can do to make sure we have a happy and healthy adolescence. We can learn about our bodies and how our bodies will change and develop. We can try to understand ourselves and what we want out of life and from those around us, and think about and plan for our future. Planning is important because we don't want things that affect us to happen, or not to happen, just by chance. Since we will be making choices, we'll need to develop our ability to think independently and responsibly, and start paying more attention to the needs of others.

Adolescence can be complicated, especially when we face problems like:

- Pressure to have sex.
- Drugs and alcohol in schools and the community.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and AIDS.
- Being orphaned (for example, as a result of AIDS or an accident).
- Parents who are too busy or shy to talk with us about the changes we are going through.
- Parents who are overly strict or even violent.

Remember that we don't have to go through these challenges alone. There are many people in our lives who can give us support when we are confused or sad and who can help answer our questions. These people include friends, partners, parents, other members of our families, teachers, and other trusted adults.

To cope with all these issues and experience a fulfilling adolescence, we need to be strong, creative, resourceful, and hopeful. Try to cope with the challenges you face with a positive attitude. You can also learn from the people around you who are strong and calm in the face of hard times.

### ADOLESCENCE IS A TIME OF DISCOVERY AND LEARNING

During adolescence we become more conscious of ourselves as individuals, more independent, and we firm up our personalities. During adolescence, we experience and experiment with new feelings like attraction or shame. It is a time for dreams, hopes, planning, and falling in love. We start developing our own way of seeing reality which is based on our experiences, interests, opinions, and values. There are many factors that influence how we see reality, including social norms and expectations. But each of us will develop our own set of values and our own way of life.

### ADOLESCENCE IS ALSO A TIME WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE FACE RISKS

All learning involves practicing and making mistakes. However, in wanting to try things out, sometimes we take risks that we cannot handle. This may be because we are not yet totally aware of our strengths and limitations, or of the challenges that new difficult situations bring. It may also be because we cannot anticipate problems and prepare ourselves for these challenges ahead of time.

Taking risks is not necessarily bad, but it is important that we take calculated risks that we can handle. To do this, we must have enough information to evaluate the risk, try to anticipate the consequences of our decisions, and trust in our own capacities to respond responsibly.

Young people engage in risky behaviours for many different reasons. They may feel that nothing bad will ever happen to them. They may be seeking admiration or approval from their peers. Or they may feel pressured to behave in a certain way. Often boys are told that men should be fearless, and may feel pressured to take risks they would prefer not to take. That can have serious consequences. One important sign of maturity is to be aware of our abilities and limits, and to take calculated risks.

For example, some young people may be pressured to join a gang or to get involved in a criminal activity like selling drugs. Some adolescents may drive a car at a high speed or under the influence of alcohol, endangering their life and the lives of the other passengers. They may behave this way due to peer pressure or to get approval from those around them.

Or maybe a couple may know about contraceptives, but think that as long as they don't have sex frequently, they will be safe from an unwanted pregnancy even without using contraceptives. Or they may believe they know a lot about HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. They know that it can be transmitted through unprotected sex, but they don't believe that either they or their partner could be infected. They may not consider that HIV could affect them or the people they know.

Here are some things to 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.
- **HIV infection does happen among adolescents.** The trend over the last few years indicates that adolescents and young adults are the most vulnerable group, whether in or out of school, with girls ages 15 to 19 years being very highly at risk of contracting HIV.



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

SIX MONTHS LATER...



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

As you read this book carefully, you will find out how to avoid some of these risks, make good decisions, and experience a healthy and fulfilling adolescence. It is also helpful to share this book with your friends so they can also learn how to make smart and healthy choices. If you also share it with your parents or other adults around you, they may be better prepared to understand and talk with you.

The facts of life, values, and life skills are helpful as you go through adolescence.

## THE FACTS

Facts are essential pieces of information—things you have to know to cope with everyday life and make good decisions. For information to be useful, it has to be clear, accurate, and timely.

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

Most importantly, knowing the facts is learning the difference between reality and myths or hearsay. It is very important to have the facts right when you're looking at your options and making important decisions. Knowing the facts will also help you help and respect your peers.

This book will provide you with 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—including 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 dollars or any other currency to buy that particular object.

But the word “value” can also refer to the things we believe in and the things we think are important in life. We inherit our values from our family, culture, and environment and we adopt new ones as we grow up and mature. Some examples of universal values are:

- Honesty and solidarity.
- Kindness and compassion.
- Cooperation and perseverance.
- Forgiveness and respect.
- Acceptance of differences.
- Justice and equality.
- Freedom and respect of rights.

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, and being active in your community or church, mosque, or temple.

Values shape your decisions and guide your actions. For example, someone who values kindness and acceptance will stand up for a disabled classmate or neighbour that other people are treating unkindly. Someone who values honesty will 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. Being aware of your own values will help you make the right choices. Even when you face pressure from others, you will be able to make decisions that feel right for you and that you are comfortable with.



Standing up for yourself is a life skill.

## LIFE SKILLS

Life skills are abilities that will help us act on our values and principles. We need life skills to stay happy and healthy during adolescence in order to:

- **Talk about our feelings.** Our feelings are important, but other people may not understand how we feel unless we 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..." Practice using "I" statements until you feel comfortable saying them.
- **Communicate what we feel.** We usually have good reasons for feeling the way we do and it's important to learn how to get those reasons across to others without putting people down or making them feel bad by being unkind, aggressive, or overly critical.
- **Know what we think and stand by, no matter what other people say.** Everyone has beliefs about what is right and wrong. These beliefs are called principles. Sometimes we may know exactly what our principles are, while other times things aren't as clear and we may have to carefully think through what is right for us and why. It is alright to feel unsure and if we do, we can talk it out with someone we trust. When we are clear about what we think is right and why, we'll be able to stand up for what we believe in.
- **Learn to make good decisions under pressure.** Making good decisions means carefully weighing all our choices and thinking about their consequences. It can be hard to do this if someone is rushing us or putting pressure on us to decide quickly. One important part of making good decisions is being clear about our principles and our overall goals in life. Another important part of decision making is giving ourselves the time we need. Remember, we can always tell someone: "I need to think about this. Let me get back to you."

Assertiveness, creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, coping, and self-awareness are examples of life skills.

Life skills are just as important as knowing the facts of life. For example, you may know that unprotected sex can lead to pregnancy and STIs, including HIV and AIDS. With this in mind you may decide that you want to abstain from having sex for the time being, and you use assertiveness with your boyfriend or girlfriend to communicate your point.

As adolescents, we have the right to recreation and education, to a dignifying job, and to live without violence. Our laws protect young people from discrimination based on age, sex, socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs. All adolescents should be able to make decisions about their sexuality, and decide without pressure whether or not to have sex, and when and whether or not to have children. To do this, young people need access to information, counselling, and health care services.





We need life skills to stand up for our rights and beliefs, especially when people we care about, and whose respect we want, think differently.

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

Although adolescence may be considered a complicated stage of life, it doesn't have to be a time of problems. All these new opportunities and experimenting can be challenging but if we learn the facts and build our values and life skills, adolescence can be a very creative and fulfilling period of our lives.

Reading this manual will help you make good choices and keep yourself safe and healthy. If you share it with friends, or even teachers, parents or other adults, you can help start an open dialogue and debate on these and other personal topics that are so important to you.



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



# Our Changing Body and Mind

Our body starts to change the moment we're born, and continues changing throughout our lives. During adolescence body changes became faster and more obvious. **Puberty** is the first stage of adolescence, when these big changes in your body—but also in your mind, your emotions, and your relationships with others—start taking place. Most girls and boys enter puberty between the ages of 10 and 16 years of age. We each have a biological clock that determines when this stage will start. It differs from person to person and between girls and boys. Girls start puberty around two years earlier than boys. You shouldn't worry if your puberty is delayed or if it happens at an earlier age.

## THE GROWTH SPURT: THE START OF PUBERTY

Up to the age of 9 or 10, boys and girls have different sexual organs but they both have flat chests and similarly sized muscles. Physical differences between girls and boys start becoming obvious during puberty. The first sign of puberty in girls is the breast button. In boys puberty starts with a sudden growth of the testicles (over 3 mm).

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 (up to two years 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.

Remember, these are only average ages. Some adolescents start their growth spurt earlier and others start later. Starting your growth spurt early or late doesn't have much effect on how tall you will be or how fast you will grow.

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

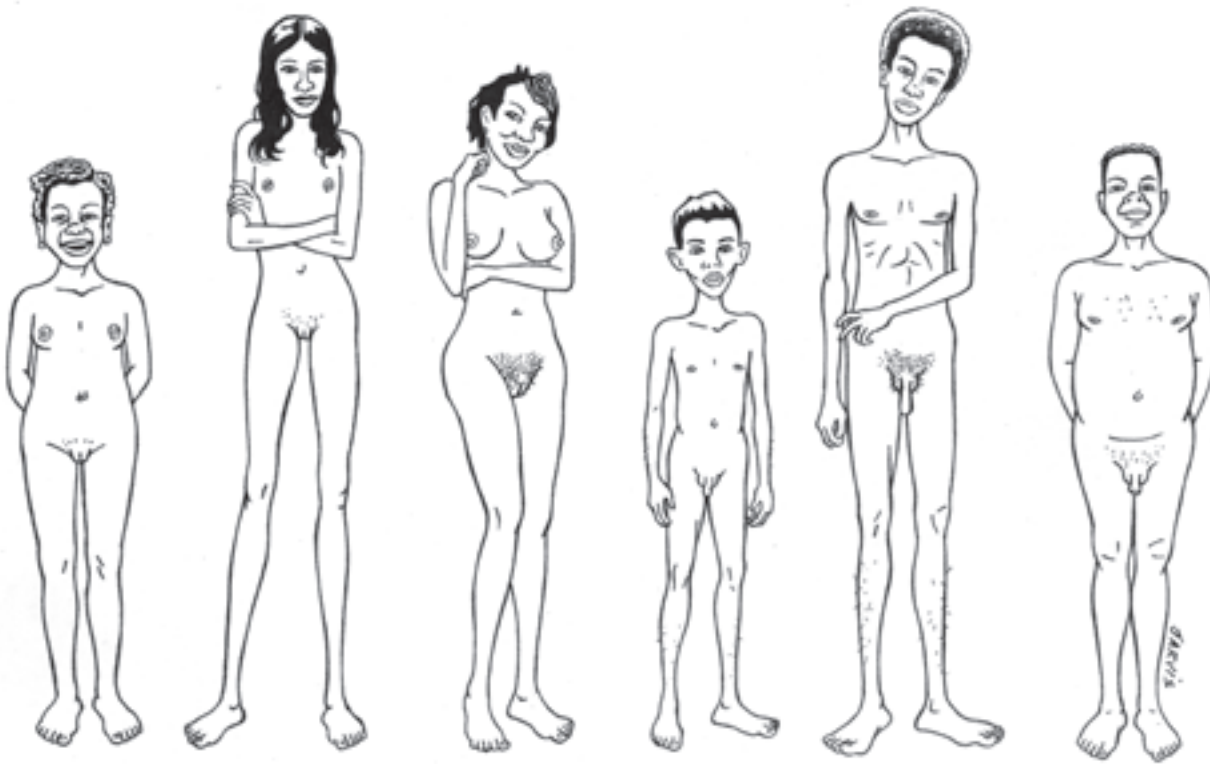
Some boys and girls grow so rapidly in puberty that their skin can't keep up with their fast-growing bones and they sometimes develop "stretch marks". Stretch marks are light or darkish lines on skin which may fade or get less noticeable as a person gets older, though they usually do not disappear completely.



Puberty is actually a gradual process even though it seems like you are growing very fast. It will take some time before you have become fully grown physically and emotionally. In the meantime, here are some things to keep in mind:

### **EVERYBODY IS DIFFERENT, EVERYBODY IS SPECIAL**

Each person enters puberty at a different time and speed. If you are a girl, your breasts may be slower to develop than those of your friend, but you may start to menstruate earlier. Or you may experience everything much later on. 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 muscles already, whereas you have yet to start your growth spurt.



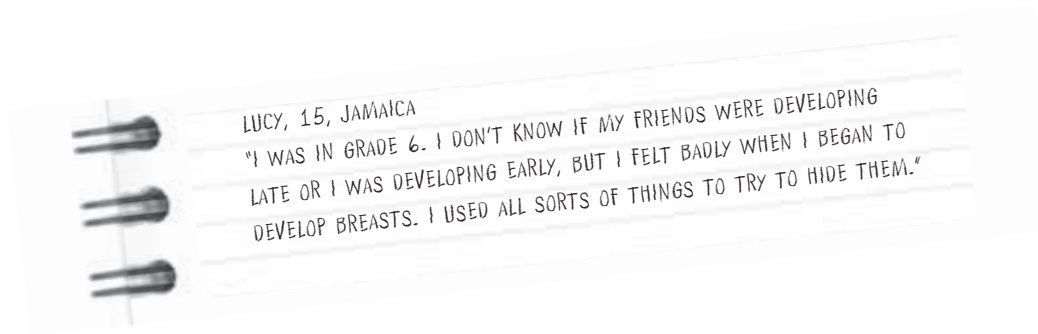
**All of these girls are 13 years old, but they are developing at different speeds.**

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

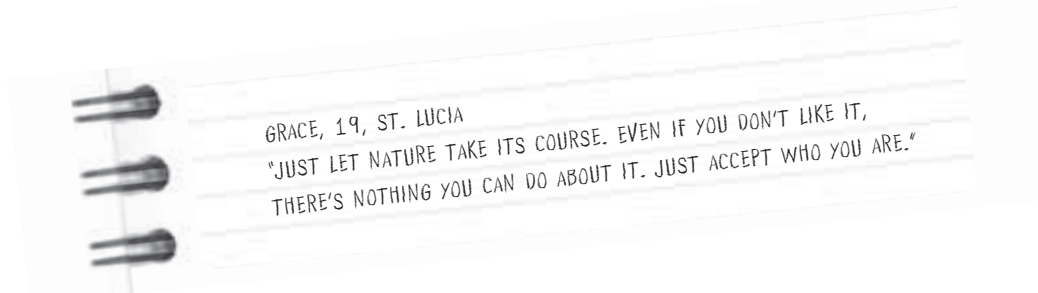
Remember that everyone is different and whenever these changes happen to you is the right time for you, since it is genetically determined.

In terms of health, it does not really matter if you are developing faster or more slowly than your peers. Your body will change when it is ready and nothing you do will make you develop faster or more slowly, so be patient. However if you are worried about your growth rate, you may want to consult with a health worker. In any case, even if you're not concerned, you may find it helpful to meet with a health worker to check on your growth and development—a good opportunity to ask the many questions that most adolescents have about their bodies and their feelings.

Sometimes it can be hard to be different from others, for instance, if you are the first girl in your group to develop breasts or the last guy to have your voice change. Being different may affect your self-esteem and you may even isolate yourself from your friends. If you are a boy, what may worry you most is to have a delay in your development. If you are a girl, you may be more worried about your faster development.



Try to remember that none of these things will matter in the long run. By the time you are twenty, it will not make any difference whether your voice started to change when you were 13 or 16. It will not matter if your periods started when you were 11 or 14.



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

- You can try to be the best person you can be—work hard in school and on anything else you wish to accomplish. You can try to improve your personality, sense of humour and character. Focus on who you are and who you want to be—not what you look like.
- Try your best to ignore teasing and don't let other people's teasing words get to you. After a while they will get tired of teasing you. Also, remember not to tease others.
- Don't give in to pressure in seeking the approval of your peers. Don't let your need to fit in with people push you into doing things that you know are not right for you—like abusing drugs or alcohol or taking risks that may hurt you or your future.
- Inform yourself. Make sure you know where to get the correct information you need and the answers to your questions as you go through adolescence.

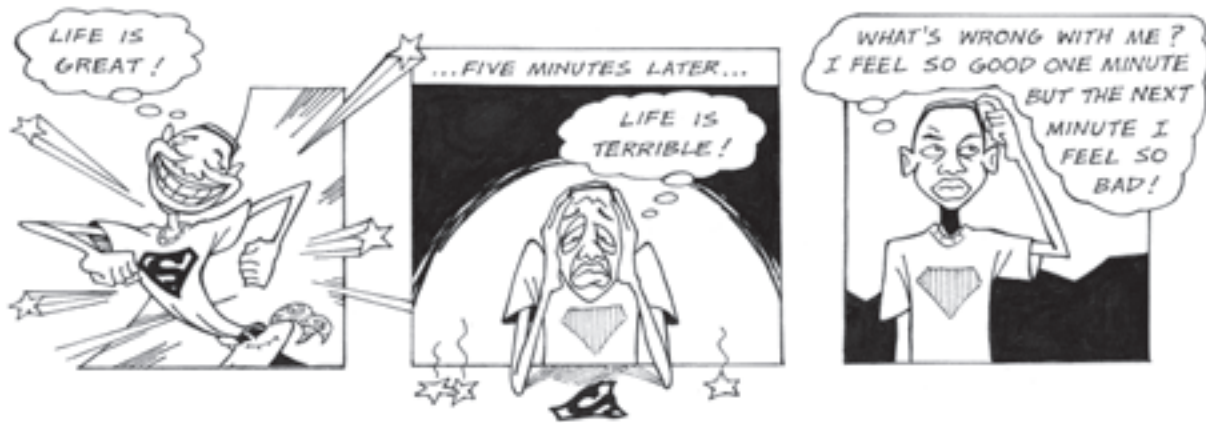
We should keep in mind that people of our age often know more myths (false information) than they do facts—especially when it comes to explaining puberty and sex. Our friends may tell us things that are not true, so we need to know where to get the right facts. Myths can be dangerous because they can add to our worries and confusion. At times believing myths can lead us to want to change things that are beyond our control (like our skin colour or the size of our breasts or genitals) or even to do things that could harm us.

## HORMONES

What controls the changes in our bodies? What makes us develop faster or slower?

The answer is **hormones**, which are natural chemical substances in our bodies. Hormones act like messengers that tell our body how and when to grow and develop. Growth spurts are caused by a growth hormone, which is released by the brain in increasing amounts during puberty.

In addition to the growth hormone, sex hormones are also released during puberty. Female sex hormones, called **oestrogen** and progesterone, are produced in the ovaries. In boys, the sexual hormone is called **testosterone** and is 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 develop, often at a faster pace than their shoulders. Girls' hips can become wider and rounder, making their waists seem smaller and narrower in comparison. Their breasts also grow and develop.



Adolescence can be a time of very strong emotions.

In boys, sex hormones cause their shoulders to broaden and their arms and legs to become thicker and more muscular. Boys' chests do not change as dramatically as girls' breasts do at puberty, but they do change. Some boys experience some swelling of their chests during puberty, though it goes away in time.

Hormones influence our emotions too. We often feel intense emotions: one minute we may feel happy and excited and the next minute we may feel like we want to cry.

These changes in our emotions are called "mood swings" and most young people experience them from time to time. The production of hormones which suddenly increases in puberty causes young people to experience many strong emotions in a short time. As we get older and the production of hormones drops, we will feel more in control of our emotions.

## OUR EXTERNAL GENITALS

In addition to causing changes in girls' and boys' body shapes and emotions, hormones also make our genitals develop and grow. **Genitals** or **genitalia** are the collective terms for the reproductive and sex organs in both men and women. In boys these include the epididymus, vas deferens, seminal vesicles, prostate gland, urethra, penis, scrotum, and testes (see Chapter 3) ; in girls they include the ovaries, Fallopian tubes, uterus, vagina, vulva, and clitoris (see Chapter 4). Before adolescence, our genitals were mostly the place from where we relieved ourselves. During adolescence they become larger and have a role in our sexual and reproductive lives.

In girls, the skin and tissue in the **vulva** becomes softer and thicker. In boys, the **penis** starts to lengthen and thicken; the testicles also grow and start to produce **sperm**. Sperm are the male reproductive cells.

Reproductive organs start producing new fluids during puberty. Girls and women start producing **ovules** (female reproductive cells), menstrual blood, and vaginal fluids. Menarche (the first menstruation) starts around two years after the appearance of the breast button. Boys and men produce **semen**, a mucus-like fluid in which sperm swim. Semen comes out of the penis when a boy ejaculates (read Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 for more on boys and girls).

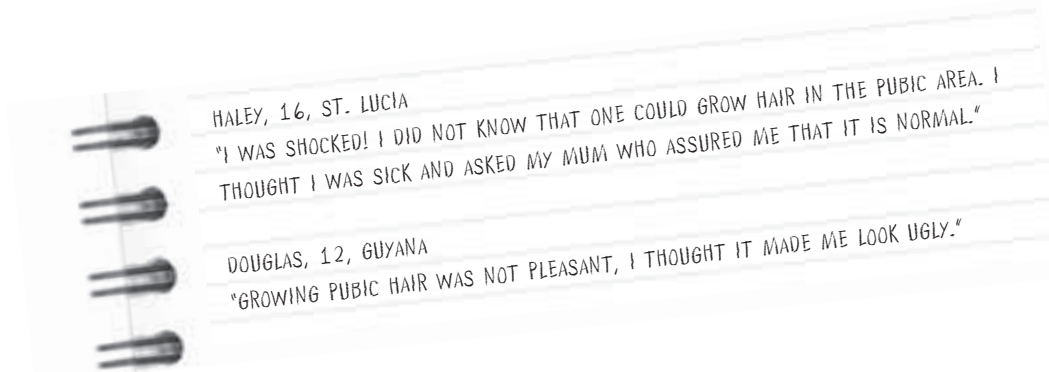
## BODY HAIR AND SKIN CHANGES

Our skin and body hair change during puberty as well. The skin of many adolescents becomes oilier. This can lead to pimples, which is a common condition in adolescents (read Chapter 5 for information on good skin care).

Another sign of puberty is the growth of body hair in new places. Both boys and girls may notice the growth of a little more hair on their legs and arms. In addition, boys grow hair around the base of their penis, on their face, chest, and in their armpits; girls tend to have new body hair growth around their external genitals and in their armpits too.

Body hair that grows around the genitals is called **pubic hair**. Pubic hair helps keep the genital area clean, which is very important because the skin there is delicate and easily irritated. Pubic hair also helps to hold sweat and other secretions away from the sensitive skin of the genitals.

It is normal for young people to have a variety of reactions to the appearance of pubic hair.



Keep in mind that pubic hair is natural and has a job to do. Whether you have a little or a lot of pubic hair on your genitals, try not to worry too much about it.

We also experience growth of body hair in our armpits during puberty. Like pubic hair, underarm hair has a job to do—armpit hair keeps sweat away from our skin.

Facial hair is usually the last new body hair to appear for boys and young men. Hair starts growing on the corners of a boy's upper lips. Sideburns often grow at the same time. Lastly, facial hair appears on the upper part of the cheek, just below the middle of the lower lip, and finally on the chin. Like with other features, the genes you inherit will determine when you start to grow facial hair and how much of it you will grow.

## OUR MINDS

While there are many obvious changes to the body during puberty, our minds are also changing in less visible ways.

During adolescence, our mental abilities increase a great deal, along with our capacity for critical and independent thinking. We start developing our own individual identity as a result of these changes. We will want to think more independently and make our own decisions. Often we may feel like questioning our parents' beliefs and reasons for doing things, and this is very healthy! We may want to try new things for ourselves, and, at times, to take risks.

All these mental changes are exciting and critical signs that mean we are developing fast and maturing. But, even though our mental abilities are increasing and we are learning from new experiences every day, there is still a lot we don't know. In fact, nobody knows everything, so it is important to know where or who to go to for the information or advice you may need. Ask questions and learn all you can!



## Summary of Chapter 2

# Our Changing Body and Mind

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

What should you expect to happen during puberty?

- A growth spurt: your hands, feet, arms, legs, hips and chest will become larger. Your body produces hormones, which are a natural chemical substance in your body. Hormones act like messengers and tell your body how and when to grow and develop.
- Your external and internal genitals will develop, mature, and begin producing fluids.
- If you are a girl, you will start to menstruate.
- Your skin may become oilier.
- 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, including mood swings.
- Your mind will mature and 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 try to be patient as you adjust to your changing body.



# Boys

## 3

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. Although this information is about boys, it is also important for girls to know what boys go through during adolescence.

### BODY SHAPE AND SIZE

Most boys enter puberty at the age of 11 or 12, and have their growth spurt between the ages of 13 and 16 years. Of course some boys start a bit earlier, and some boys start later. Your body will start getting much taller and bigger during the growth spurt.

One of the first parts of our body to grow may be our feet. In fact, the bones in our feet often grow much faster than the other parts of the body, so our feet may reach full size long before the rest of our body. 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 time for the rest of your body time to catch up!

Some bones in your body will grow more than others, causing your body shape to change. For example, your shoulders may 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 you will get stronger as these muscles develop. Your chest will also get bigger as muscles and some fat accumulate. Many boys also notice that their nipples and chests change during puberty. The nipples may get a little bit bigger and the area around the nipples may get larger and darker in colour.

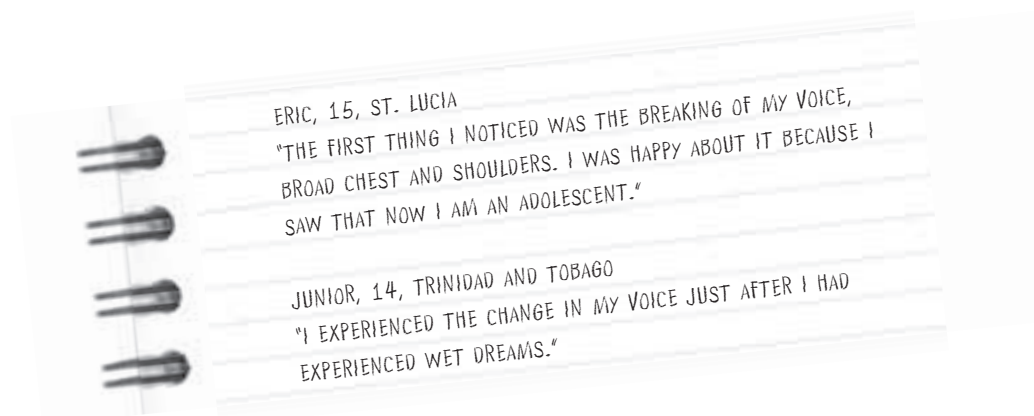
Some boys find that their chests swell and become painful. A few boys have a lot of swelling, which might worry them into thinking they will develop breasts like those of a woman. Don't worry because this is perfectly normal. The swelling and tenderness are caused by all the hormones in your body and will eventually disappear once your body stops producing so many hormones.

Try to be patient through all these normal changes. You may grow faster or slower than your friends, but your body **will** develop during puberty and adolescence. **When** 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 sign that you are going through puberty, as it will change usually some time after you begin your growth spurt.

Boys will notice that their voices become lower and deeper during puberty, which takes place because of the effects 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.



ERIC, 15, ST. LUCIA

"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."

JUNIOR, 14, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

"I EXPERIENCED THE CHANGE IN MY VOICE JUST AFTER I HAD EXPERIENCED WET DREAMS."

One of the first signs that your voice is changing is often a sudden squeak or cracking of the voice when talking. It can happen very unpredictably: your voice will be normal one minute, but the next minute it may be high and squeaky. Some boys find it embarrassing when their voice cracks and others do not notice it very much. Either way is normal and a healthy sign of development.



Voice changes can happen at embarrassing moments.

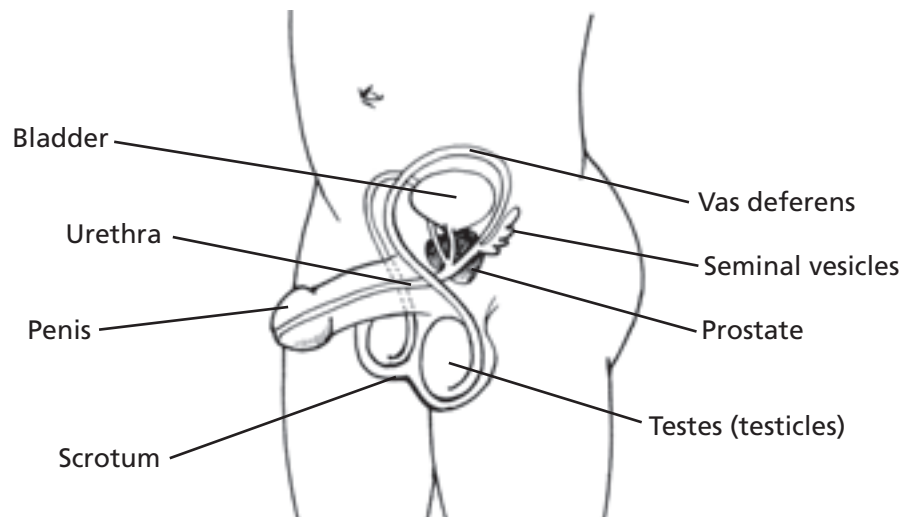
## YOUR GENITALS

The penis has a "body" or shaft which is the tube-like part of the penis and a "head" or glans which is the tip of the penis and its most sensitive and delicate part. The penis is made of muscles that surround a narrow tube, called the **urethra**. Urine and semen pass through the urethra (refer to illustration "male reproductive anatomy").

The head of the penis is covered by a small, thin fold of skin, called the **foreskin**. Sometimes this skin is removed in an operation called circumcision (see next page for more on circumcision).

The size of the penis varies from man to man and it has no relation to body size. Sometimes adolescent boys (and even grown men) worry about their penis. Is it too small or too big? Why does it curve like that? Is there something wrong with it?

Although sometimes the size of the penis is associated with masculinity or sexual performance, this is a myth. Sexual performance and pleasure do not depend on penis size. The size of the penis actually has little effect on the enjoyment of sexual activity. In fact, sexual enjoyment is mostly determined by how you feel and your state of mind. It's the relationship that counts—not the size or shape of the penis.



Male reproductive anatomy {penis, bladder, vas deferens, prostate, seminal vesicles, urethra, testes (testicles), scrotum}.

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. The skin of the scrotum can be a bit hairy and oily and can collect dirt. If it is not washed regularly, it can become odorous.

During childhood the scrotum is drawn up close to the body. But, as we go through puberty, the scrotum begins to loosen and hang down. This happens because the testicles need to be kept at a temperature lower than that of our body to make sperm. When we are cold or frightened or feeling sexually aroused, our scrotum may get tighter and draw up close to our body again.

## Do you know about circumcision?

The foreskin covers the glands of the penis and it can be pulled down the shaft. **Circumcision** is a procedure where this fold of skin around the top of the penis is cut.

Circumcision is a medical—and sometimes a religious or cultural—practice that some men and boys have undergone, and others have not. There is nothing wrong with being circumcised, and there is nothing wrong with not being circumcised. Does circumcision affect sexual pleasure? This is a difficult question since each person experiences sex in his or her own way. What is true is that both circumcised and uncircumcised males can enjoy sex and please their partners.

While circumcision can be a religious and cultural practice, in some cases it is performed for health reasons—mainly because circumcision makes it easier to keep the penis clean. But there are other health reasons for circumcision too. Sometimes the foreskin can be too tight or attached to the head of the penis and cannot fully roll down the shaft. This can cause swelling and pain and often circumcision is a good solution.

Research has found that circumcision helps protect against HIV and AIDS because the foreskin may be particularly sensitive to HIV infection, **but even if you have been circumcised, you are at risk of HIV and AIDS and STIs and should always practise safer sex.**

What does all this mean for you? If you are not circumcised, 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 your foreskin carefully. That's all you need to do. However, boys and young men who cannot roll back their foreskin and feel pain when they get an erection should talk to a health worker.

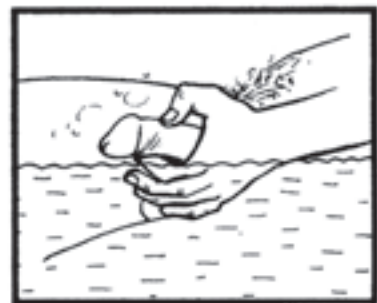
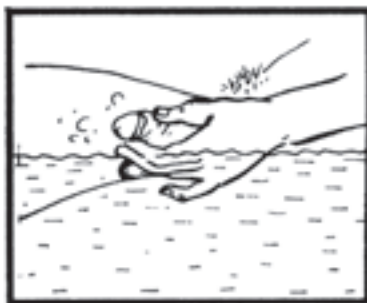
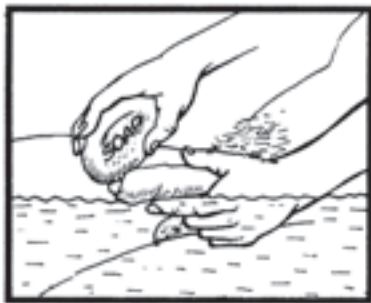
## DO YOU KNOW there are myths about the penis?

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. Abstaining from sex altogether or waiting to have sex does not 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 please a sexual partner. False!* The size of the penis has little effect on the enjoyment of sexual intercourse.
4. *Boys with penises that are too big or too small cannot use condoms. Not true!* Condoms are made to fit tightly and everyone can use them.
5. *You need to have sex whenever you get an erection. False!* This is definitely not true. Erections go down on their own and it is not necessary to have sex when you have one. You may experience painful swelling in the testicles (also known as “blue balls”) but this will not prevent you from having another 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 penis size and any other body part. 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 sperm to build up and cause problems. No harm will occur to you if you delay sexual relationships.
8. *Wet dreams are a sign that you need to have sex. False!* A wet dream is just one way that your body releases sperm and semen and is not a sign that you need to have sex. Your body can regulate itself perfectly without your having to take any risks.

### PRACTISING GOOD HYGIENE

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



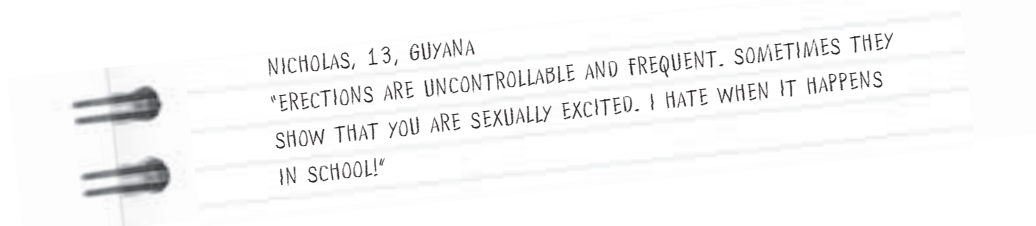
If you are not circumcised, roll back the foreskin and wash gently beneath it.

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** (sometimes called “cheese” or “custard”). Smegma helps the foreskin slide back smoothly over the glans. However, if smegma accumulates beneath the foreskin, it can become odorous or cause an infection. It is very important to keep the area under the foreskin clean at all times.

## ERECTIONS

Normally the penis is soft and hangs down, but during an erection more blood flows into the penis than usual and less blood flows out. This makes the penis become larger, harder, and stand out from the body.

When your penis is erect, you will find that you cannot 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 a penis is touched or caressed, 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. Your penis will probably become erect and then go down about 5 to 7 times while you sleep, which is also completely normal.



Erections may occur in men of all ages, including babies and old men. Sometimes boys worry that they have too many erections, but this is a normal and healthy part of growing up. Though it can be embarrassing to get an erection in class or in a public place, most of the time you are probably the only person who is aware of it.

## EJACULATION

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

This fluid comes out of the penis when a man ejaculates or “comes”. Ejaculation is the climax of sexual excitement; though keep in mind that we don’t necessarily ejaculate every time we have an erection.

The mucus-like fluid is made up of two things. About 10% of the fluid is made up of 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. The other 90% of the fluid is a milky liquid called **semen** or seminal fluid. Semen allows the sperm to swim, provides nourishment for them, and keeps them alive.



Sperm are produced in the **testicles** (see illustration, page 17). Semen—the white milky fluid—is made in the **seminal vesicles**, which are two glands behind the bladder. When a man ejaculates, sperm mix with semen from the seminal vesicles, passing through tubes called the **vas deferens**, into the **urethra**, and 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 it is only about a teaspoonful. Each teaspoonful contains about 500 million sperm! Each one of those sperm could cause a pregnancy.

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

Some people worry that a latex condom will not be able to hold all 500 million sperm. But those sperm are very, very small, and provided a condom is put on correctly and used consistently, it will be able to hold them all (see Chapter 10 for more on condoms). Also, sperm cannot cross the latex wall and condoms are carefully tested.



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

Some boys worry that each time they ejaculate they reduce the amount of semen in their body and that they will run out of semen and won't have enough when they need it. This can never happen because the male body continues to make sperm throughout a man's life. Also keep in mind that there is no way that too much sperm and semen can accumulate and build pressure in your body, as it has ways to release excess sperm and semen. One of these ways is wet dreams.

### **WET DREAMS**

Boys sometimes release semen or "ejaculate" while they are asleep. This is called a wet dream or nocturnal emission. It is the body's way of getting rid of excess semen and is perfectly normal. The first wet dream is often also the first time semen is released from the body. Boys and young men will probably wake up and find a damp patch in the bed or on their clothes when experiencing a wet dream.

Wet dreams can be confusing or worrisome if you do not know about them or if they catch you by surprise. You might think that you have wet your bed or that you are sick, but ejaculate fluid is milky white and nothing at all like blood or urine.

Wet dreams only happen when we are asleep. Many boys who wake up to find that they have ejaculated recall that they were dreaming about something sexually arousing, but we can have a wet dream even if we have not been having a sexy or erotic dream.



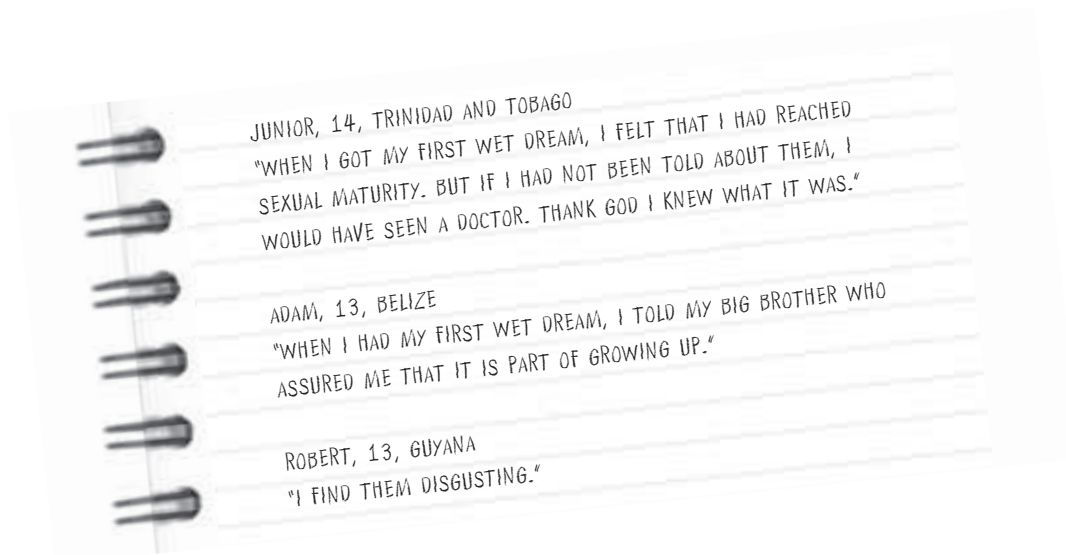
Wet dreams are nothing to be embarrassed about. They are the natural and normal way our bodies make room for new sperm.

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

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



That first wet dream...



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. Also, being well informed will enable you to help younger boys understand what is happening to them as they go through adolescence.

### Summary of Chapter 3

## Boys

A boy can expect many changes to occur in his body during puberty. These changes are gradual and occur at different ages for different boys. Here are some of the changes we can expect:

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

As we go through these changes, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Penises come in a variety of shapes and sizes, all of which are normal.
- There is nothing wrong with being circumcised or not being circumcised.
- We should wash and clean our penis every day, always rolling back and washing under the foreskin if we are not circumcised.
- We do not need to have sex when we have an erection.
- Wet dreams are normal, common and nothing to worry about.

Whenever these changes occur is the right time. We are each unique and completely normal!



# Girls

## 4

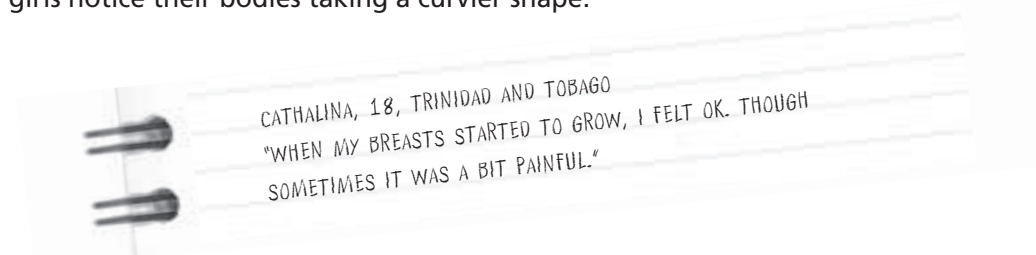
Chapter 2 addressed some of the changes that girls and young women experience during puberty. This chapter will provide even more information. Although this information is about girls, it is also important for boys to learn what girls go through during adolescence.

### BODY SHAPE AND SIZE

Most girls start growing quickly around the time they are 10 or 11 years old—but there are girls who may start growing when they are younger or older than this. Different parts of our body grow at different rates. Our feet are often the first part of the body to grow. We might even feel like our feet are too big for our body, but our body will soon catch up with our feet.

Other bones will also start growing, at their own speed. Our arms and legs may start growing quickly while our backbone grows more slowly.

Another change we may notice is that our hips start developing. The hipbones become larger, as soft, fatty tissue collects on our hips, thighs and buttocks. Around this time breasts start developing and girls notice their bodies taking a curvier shape.



### YOUR BREASTS

The development of the breast button—which usually happens when a girl is between 9 and 11 years old—is the first sign of puberty in girls. Some girls begin to develop breasts when they are 8 or 9, but other girls do not start until much later. The development of breasts is caused by a hormone called **oestrogen** which makes breast tissues grow.

There are an endless variety of breast shapes and sizes, all of which are unique and normal. The size and shape of our breasts are determined by the traits we inherit from our parents and by the amount of fatty tissue deposited in them.

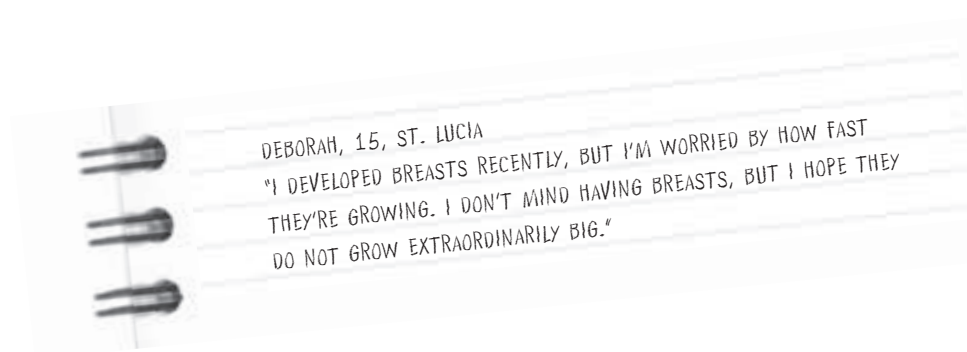
The nipples will probably get larger and stand out more than they used to and the skin surrounding the nipple—the **areola**—gets darker and larger. We also may see tiny bumps in the areola, which is normal. These bumps are little glands that produce a substance that helps protect the nipple when a woman has a baby, if the baby breastfeeds.

As the nipples and areola get larger and darker, breasts grow larger and fuller. Our breasts might feel sore, making it painful if they are bumped or hit. This is normal and is no cause for alarm. Breasts are very sensitive, especially the nipples. When stimulated by different sensations, such as touch or even cold weather, nipples can become hard and erect.

Some girls' breasts grow slowly, while for others development is quick. On average it takes about four years for breasts to fully develop, but the process can be slower or faster depending on the girl.

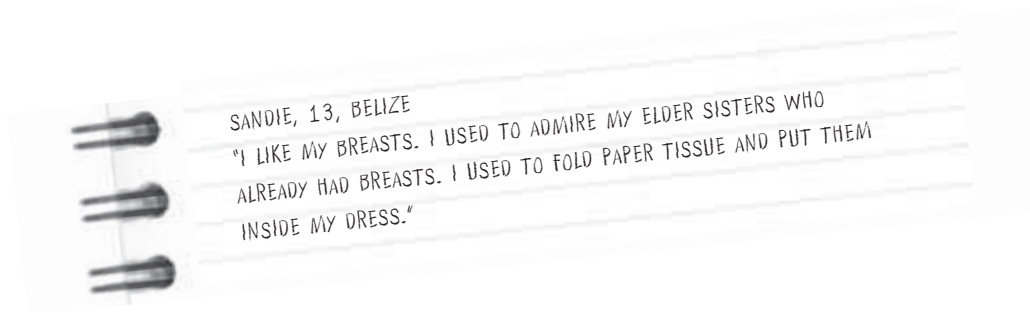


**Whether your breasts are large or small they are the right size for you.**



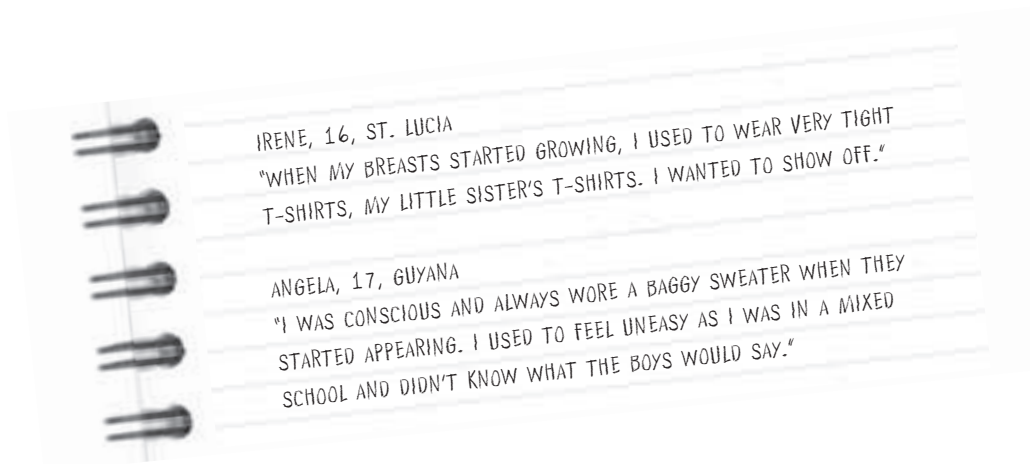
Also, breasts grow unevenly and one breast may become a bit bigger than the other breast. In fact, no one has two breasts that are exactly the same size, but usually this difference is not really noticeable. The shape of nipples also varies. Some women's nipples turn inward and instead of pointing out, they sink into the areola.

Breasts have different meanings in different contexts. 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, the development of breasts is usually an important event in the life of a girl or young woman—it is a sign of growing up.



4

Some girls feel embarrassed when their breasts begin to grow, which is normal too. They may be embarrassed about their breasts because none of their friends have begun to develop breasts. Though some girls may feel happy about their breast development and others could feel embarrassed at first, we can all learn to like our bodies.



It would be great if people did not tease others about their breasts, but teasing can happen and can be cruel. Try your best to ignore people who tease and concentrate on what you like about yourself without paying too much attention to what other people may say. Also remember that you should not tease others.

## DID YOU KNOW that there are myths about breasts?

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

1. *The sexiest girls have pointed breasts. This is false!* Sexiness is a feeling, and different people find different things sexy.
2. *Rubbing onions or scallions on nipples or letting insects bite them makes breasts grow faster. Not true!* Hormones are what make the breasts develop—nothing else will make them grow faster or slower.
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 breasts is genetically determined. Nothing you do will make them bigger or smaller.
5. *Girls with breasts that droop have already had sex, an abortion, or a baby. False again!* Breasts droop because of gravity. If you have larger breasts they are more likely to droop because of their weight.
6. *Wearing a bra makes breasts droop. False!* Bras actually support breasts. They prevent the skin and breast tissue from stretching and losing their elasticity.
7. *Girls with big breasts will have more milk for their babies. False!* Milk production does not depend on the size of the breasts. Even small breasts produce enough milk to feed and satisfy a baby.

### TAKING CARE OF YOUR BREASTS

Breasts are very sensitive and there are a few things you should know about taking care of them. You should never pluck body hair that may grow around nipples, as doing so can cause an infection. It is normal to have some body hair there.

Some girls and women may have a little discharge coming from their nipples, which is also normal. However if the discharge seems to have blood in it or is brownish in colour, see a health worker.

Breasts are very sensitive to touch for many women. Touching and caressing your breasts is very pleasurable and can be sexually exciting. It is important that you learn how and when to obtain pleasure fondling your breasts. Since this is part of the sexual foreplay and exciting for your partner as well, it is also important to establish your boundaries and discuss them with your partner beforehand. Nobody should ever touch your breasts without your consent.

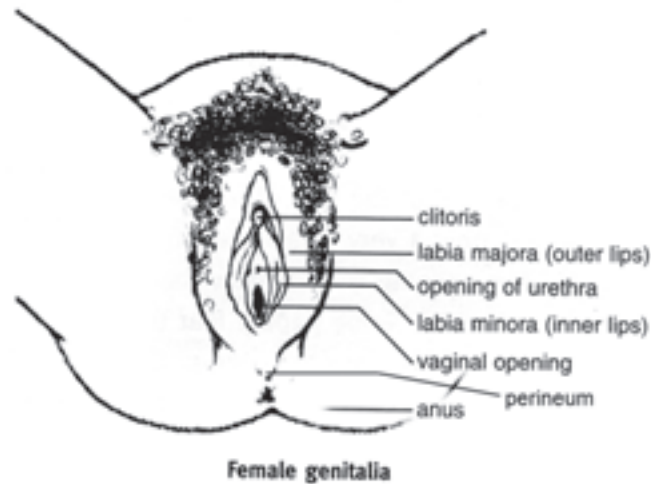
### BRAS

A bra provides support so your breasts don't move or bounce when you walk, run, dance, or play.

There are different types of bras and it is best to purchase one with good fit and support. Many women figure out their bra size simply by trying on different sizes to see which one is most comfortable. This works just fine. You can also take measurements to figure out the right bra size. To take your measurements, wrap measuring tape around your torso just underneath your breast and around the fullest part of your breast. Knowing these two measurements can be helpful when purchasing a bra.

## YOUR EXTERNAL GENITALS

The external genitalia in a female body are collectively called the **vulva**. Women's vulva includes the lips, the clitoris, and three openings in the genital area. From front to back these are the urethra, the vagina, and the anus (see illustration of the female genitalia). The opening of the vagina is the biggest of the three and connects to the internal reproductive organs through a short tube about 7 cm deep and 3-4 cm wide, made up of soft folds of skin, which is the vagina.



Female genitalia {clitoris, labia majora (outer lips), opening of urethra, labia minora (inner lips), vaginal opening, perineum, anus}

The vagina in an adult woman is very strong, extremely stretchy, and very muscular. During childbirth, it has to stretch to many times its usual size to allow a baby to leave the mother's body. But the vagina of a young girl is thin and cannot stretch very much, causing it to tear or burst during childbirth (for more information see Chapter 11). This causes serious problems, which is one of the reasons why childbirth can be dangerous for girls.

The walls of the vagina begin to produce a fluid or discharge during puberty. This fluid is thicker and stickier than saliva, and its purpose is to keep the vagina clean and maintain an environment where good bacteria and fungi can grow and prevent infections. It is common and healthy to have more vaginal discharge at certain times of the menstrual cycle and during sexual arousal.

## DO YOU KNOW the facts about the vagina?

There are many myths about the vagina. Here are some:

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 may make them odorous.
2. *The vagina is not closed at the end. It is just a big hole.* **False!** The vagina is closed at the end by the cervix. Condoms or tampons will not travel up into the body.
3. *It is obscene to touch the vagina.* **Not true!** Your vagina is a part of your body, and as such, you are free to touch it in private. Unless you feel comfortable and have given consent, no one except you should touch your vagina.
4. *The vagina is only for the pleasure of men.* **False!** The vagina is part of a woman's body, and it functions as a reproductive organ as well as a source of pleasure for her and for her partner. But it is hers and hers alone!

The vagina is also extremely sensitive to touch and is the centre of orgasms in women, no matter how the orgasm is primarily brought about (see Chapter 9). Stimulation of any sexually sensitive zone can provoke a vaginal orgasm in women.

The opening of the vagina is surrounded and protected by the **labia majora** and the **labia minora**, which are the outer and inner vaginal lips made up of folds of skin. There are many small glands in the labia, and you may perspire and have some white secretions there.

The **clitoris** is where the inner lips (the labia minora) join at the front. The clitoris looks like a small bump of flesh. It is filled with nerve endings, making it extremely sensitive to touch. When stimulated it enlarges—similar to what happens to the penis—and results in great pleasure and sexual arousal, sometimes ending in orgasm. In fact, stimulation of the clitoris is essential for some women to bring about orgasm.

Deep inside you, at the end of the vagina, is the **cervix**. The cervix closes the end of the vagina, with only a small opening leading to the uterus (womb). The opening is really narrow and meant to allow the passage of menstrual blood going out and sperm swimming in. Some people fear that during sexual intercourse a condom could slide off the penis and travel up into the uterus. This is impossible because the opening of the cervix is much too small. The cervix only stretches 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 be damaged or infected by bacteria, fungi, and viruses that may enter the body during sexual intercourse. This could lead to cancer of the cervix. Girls who have sex while they are very young, who have many sexual partners, or who have HIV are more at risk for cancer of the cervix than girls who have not been involved in these practices and are HIV negative. You can protect your cervix by delaying sex, or if you are sexually active, by using latex condoms and practicing safer sex (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 friends or family members as towels can pass infections from one person to another. Try to 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 and fungi. If you cannot find cotton panties, wear ones with a cotton lining.

After you pass urine or defecate, you should wipe from the front of your genitals backwards towards the anus. Make sure to avoid wiping forward, as you risk pulling germs from the anus to the vagina and urethra. This can cause an infection.

You should never wash inside the vagina unless a health worker instructs you to do so. Some girls and women try to wash inside the vagina with harsh soaps, or 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 normal vaginal fluids and irritate the skin inside the vagina.

Sometimes women introduce herbs, pieces of cloth, and other objects into the vagina to “clean” or “tighten” it. This is not a healthy practice because the skin inside the vagina is very delicate. Introducing foreign objects can cause small cuts, and sores in the wall of the vagina, which could become infected and also increase the potential risk of HIV infection.

You should never introduce any object inside your vagina, except for tampons or medicines indicated by a health worker. In this case, be sure to follow the instructions carefully. For more details on tampons, see section “What to Use” on page 35.



It is necessary to pay close attention to your normal vaginal discharge and how it changes during your monthly cycle so that you can recognise any unusual 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. Female vaginal fluids also change with sexual arousal.

If the discharge becomes heavier or thicker, changes colour to yellow, green, or brown, or causes your genitals to itch, it is possible you have an infection. Strong smelling discharge and pain or bleeding in the vagina (when you are not on your menstrual period) may also be signs of infection. You should see a health worker if you experience any of these changes.

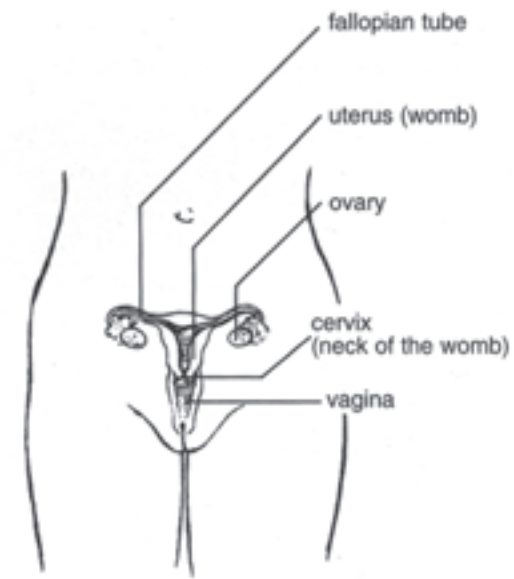
You are unlikely to experience these problems if you practice good hygiene and use condoms in every sexual relationship. When taken care of properly, the vagina is a perfectly-balanced, self-regulating environment. All you need to do is gently wash the genital area daily with clean water and bath soap, separating the outer lips to clean away secretions that collect there.

### THE INTERNAL GENITALS AND THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Around two years after the beginning of puberty, usually between the ages of 10 and 16, many girls begin having menstrual periods (also called monthly periods). Menarche (the beginning of menstruation) is a sign that big changes have taken place inside a young woman's body. It also means that she could become pregnant if she has unprotected sexual intercourse with a boy or man.

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

Before the ovum matures each month, a soft lining begins to form in the **uterus**. This is how the uterus prepares itself to receive a fertilised egg. If there is no fertilisation, the lining of the uterus will break down, 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**.



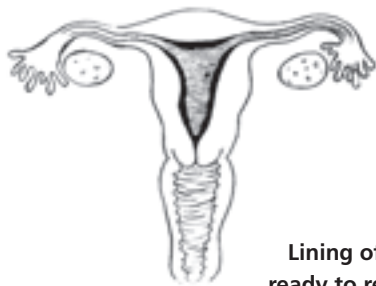
The female reproductive organs

The female reproductive organs {fallopian tube, uterus (womb), ovary, cervix (neck of womb), vagina}

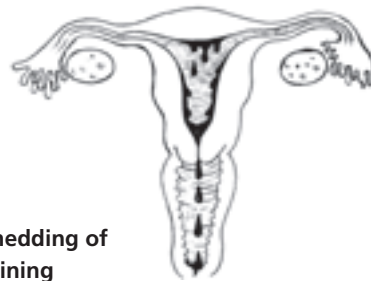
Girls who have started menstruating have monthly cycles. For the first few years, most girls' menstrual cycles are very irregular, and they can't tell when they will get their periods. There seems to be no pattern to it, and they sometimes will go several months without getting their periods at all. 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 also normal.

Even when it is regular, the length of the menstrual cycle varies for different women. 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 3 to 8 days her body will be shedding the lining from the walls of her uterus since it knows there is not going to be a pregnancy that month. The woman loses about 60-70 ml of blood, which is a small amount. Immediately another egg starts maturing. The egg will ripen in one of her ovaries, and soon afterward the uterus will start to build up another lining.



Lining of the uterus  
ready to receive an egg



Menstruation: shedding of  
the uterus lining

Halfway through the cycle—sometime around Day 14 or two weeks after she started bleeding—the mature egg is released from the ovary and floats down the fallopian tube on its way to the uterus. The egg spends a few days (2 to 5) inside the fallopian tube and if it meets a sperm there, it can be fertilised and the woman could become pregnant. This is the **fertile period**, when a woman's chances of becoming pregnant are highest (see Chapter 11 for more on pregnancy). If the egg isn't fertilised, it goes into the uterus, down through the cervix and vagina, and out of a woman's body. This will be around Day 20. We do not notice the egg leaving our bodies.

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

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 regular 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. Also bear in mind that the ovum takes a few days to travel down the fallopian tube so the fertile period lasts several (4-5) days.

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 have an unintended pregnancy because they have sex during what they think are their "safe days"—the days when they think that the chances of pregnancy are low.

Having sex on "safe days" is not an effective way for anyone to avoid unintended pregnancies, but especially for adolescents and young women. Menstrual cycles can be very irregular during adolescence, and even if your periods have been consistently regular they can suddenly become irregular. Also, if you have intercourse in your fertile period, you can get pregnant even before your period starts. There are much better and more effective ways to prevent unintended pregnancies, such as abstaining from sexual intercourse and practicing safer sex by using condoms and contraceptives. You can find more information about contraceptives in Chapters 10 and 11.

It is also very important to keep in mind that there are no "safe days" against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. You can get infected every day of the month which is why it is important to use latex condoms when you are having sexual relations.

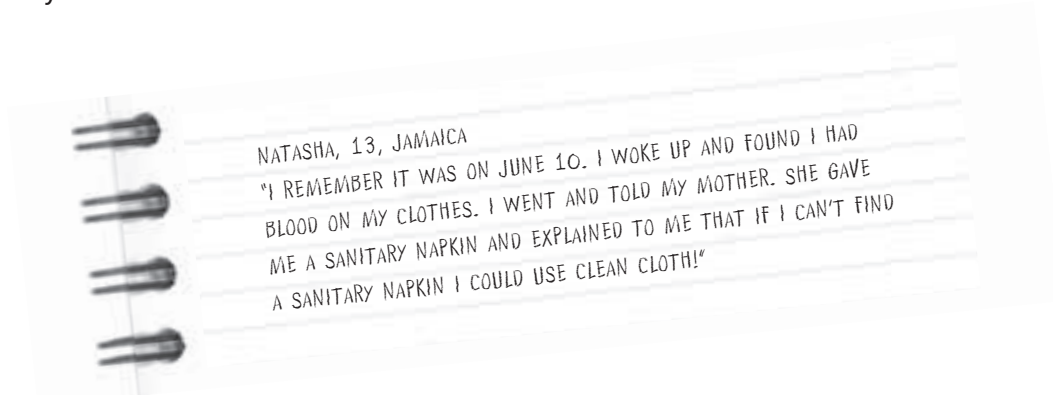


There are no "safe days" for adolescents.



## THE FIRST MENSTRUATION, OR MENARCHE

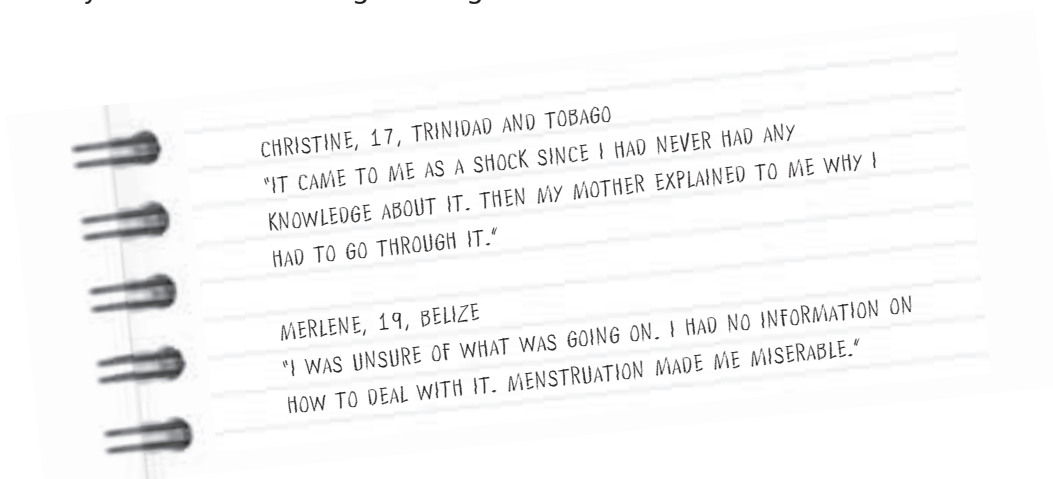
Starting to menstruate can be a significant event in a girl's life. Many girls can remember the exact day they started.



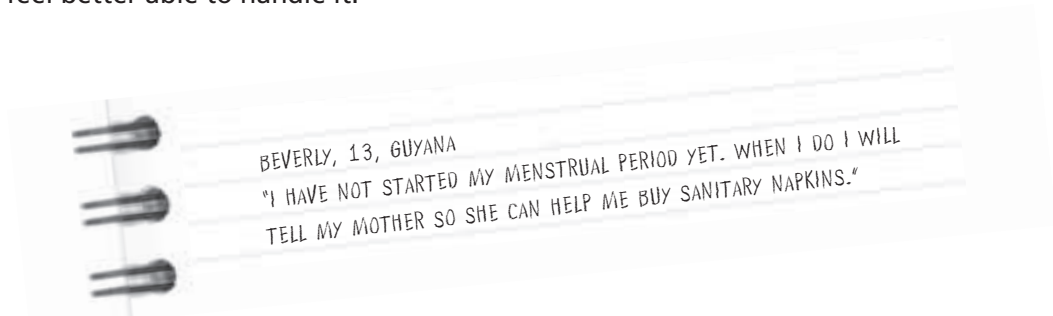
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Menstruation means that your body is developing and working in a new way. Once you begin to menstruate, you can become pregnant if you have vaginal sex with a man. Still, menstruation does not mean you are emotionally and physically ready to be sexually active or to give birth. The vagina and pelvis of young girls and women are still small until about the age of 18 to 20, when they become fully developed.

Though menstruation is a normal and healthy part of a woman's life, some girls and young women are very shocked and unhappy when they first menstruate—usually because they do not know what it is, or they think that something is wrong.

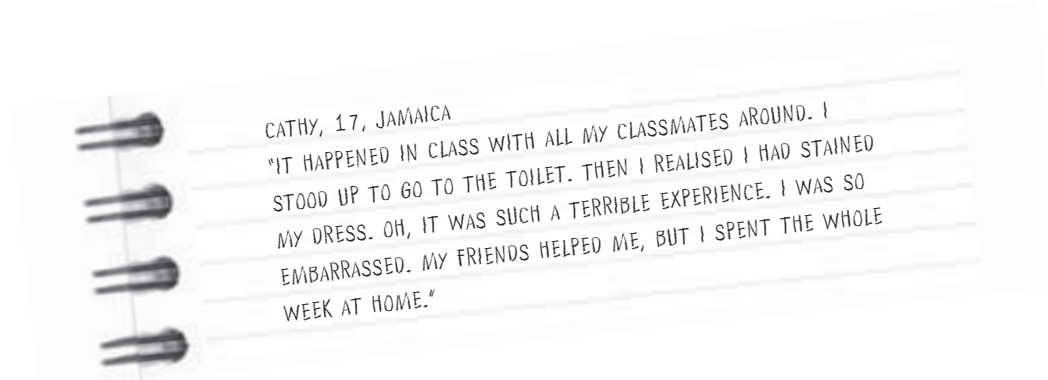


Girls who know what to expect from menstruation often find it easier to experience this change and feel better able to handle it.



You will know that you have started to menstruate when a little blood comes out of your vagina and stains your underwear. The blood does not pour like water from a tap; rather, it dribbles out slowly. Usually by the time you notice a feeling of unusual wetness, your panties have absorbed most of the blood and the rest of your clothes will be fine.

But sometimes there is more blood or it comes more suddenly.



If this happens to you, try to stay cool. It's not your fault—you didn't know it was going to start! It takes everyone some time before they figure out how to deal with their menstrual period.

## DO YOU KNOW the facts about menstruation?

Here are some common questions and answers about menstruation:

1. *How much blood will I lose each month?* Over the whole monthly menstrual period, the average woman only loses about 60-70 ml of blood. If you measure 70 ml in a glass you will see that it is not very much! However, this is just an average. Some women lose even less—just a few tablespoons of blood a month—while 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. The "safe days" method is generally not effective preventing pregnancies for anyone, especially adolescents. This is because girls and young women can 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. Safe days are not a good way to protect yourself!
3. *Can I menstruate twice in one month?* Yes, look at the following section. 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 or other barrier method). If you have HIV, the HIV will be in your menstrual blood so your partner could easily become infected. But you are also at risk. If your sexual partner is infected with HIV or any other STI, you are more likely to get infected during your period than at any other time of the month.
5. *Does sex cure menstrual cramps?* No, sexual intercourse will not cure menstrual cramps. It's just a myth that young people pass around.

## KEEPING A CALENDAR

It can take some time for many girls to get used to menstruation. If you feel unhappy or worried about it, your feelings are perfectly normal, but try to remember that menstruation is a sign of physical maturity and health. You should also know that most women stop having their periods in their late 40s or 50s. This time is called **menopause**.

Many girls find it helpful to keep a record of when they menstruate each month. This helps them have some idea of when they might menstruate so that they can prepare for it, even if their periods are irregular. 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 and how regular (or irregular) your cycle is.

Susan, age 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.



Keep track of your periods using a calendar.

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 practice safer sex to protect yourself against pregnancy and against STIs, including HIV and AIDS (see Chapters 10 and 11).

## DISCOMFORT WITH PERIODS

Many girls have swelling and 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 can help you feel more comfortable, and eating less salty food will help reduce the amount of water that your body stores.

Periods can affect one's mood too. Some girls feel tearful or depressed right before their period starts each month. Sometimes girls feel bad tempered because their breasts feel sore or their body feels a bit swollen and bloated. This moodiness is called "premenstrual tension" or "premenstrual syndrome" and it is a common condition.

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



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

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 use 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 may not bother you as much when you are older, though some women can continue to have uncomfortable periods and heavy bleeding.

If you have severe menstrual discomforts (terrible period pains or very heavy bleeding) you should see a health worker. Some health workers will prescribe contraceptive pills to relieve heavy, painful periods. The pills make menstrual periods more regular and reduce the amount of bleeding each month. If you need to consult a health worker about your periods, ask about contraceptive pills. You can take these pills even if you have not been or are not sexually active. The pills contain very low doses of the hormones that naturally occur in your body and they are safe for adolescents. You should not take oral contraceptives without seeing a health worker first.

If you do not want to take these pills, ask the health worker what else you can do to reduce menstrual discomfort. You should not have to stop your normal activities 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 eight days.

## **SEX AND MENSTRUATION**

Some people have sex during menstruation. This is perfectly acceptable, but bear in mind that menstruation does not prevent pregnancy or HIV or STI infection. In fact, having sex during menstruation increases the risk of getting STIs, including HIV. Menstrual blood is a rich environment in which bacteria, fungi, and viruses can grow very quickly. If a woman or girl who is menstruating has vaginal sex with a man or boy who has an STI, she is more likely to get infected than during other times of her monthly cycle. This is because the opening of the cervix is wider than usual so that the menstrual blood can flow out. The STI can travel up into the uterus and fallopian tubes and can cause an infection in the female reproductive organs, which can lead to infertility.

For the boy or man, having sex with a girl or woman who is menstruating is also risky. If she is infected with HIV, her menstrual blood will be rich with the virus. Therefore, if you are sexually active, you should never have sex—especially during menstruation—without a latex condom.

## COMFORT, HEALTH, AND HYGIENE

Menstrual blood is clean, but once it leaves the body, bacteria, and fungi grow quickly in it, which is why good hygiene is especially important during menstruation. While menstruating, wash yourself more than once a day to keep clean. Do not use deodorants or perfumes on your genitals as they can cause irritation.

Here are some tips to make your periods easier and more comfortable:

- 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.
- Eat foods that are rich in iron like fish, beans, meat, and lots of green vegetables. This will help you to replace the iron lost in bleeding.

## WHAT TO USE

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 pharmacies today. So even if you choose not to purchase pads or tampons, you will be able to handle your periods well.

One of the cheapest things to use is clean cloths. You can cut them to fit your panty area, sewing several layers of cloths on top of each other. Make sure that they are clean. Wash them thoroughly with cold water and hang them in a sunny place to dry. The sun is a very good disinfectant and kills germs. Toilet tissue is also inexpensive. You will need to make a thick long wad of toilet tissue. But toilet tissue is usually rough 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 minimize leakage. If you use pads, you need to dispose of them correctly after use. Do not flush them down the toilet, as they will block the pipes.

Some women choose to use tampons, which are small, hard cotton cylinders 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 short 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, but they are not always recommended since the bleaches used to whiten the cotton can cause irritation; also using tampons will require extra care. If you choose to use them occasionally, always wash your hands before and after inserting a tampon. You also need to change tampons frequently (every three hours), as you can get an infection in your vagina if you leave a tampon in for an extended period time. Avoid using tampons at night because you sleep longer than three hours.

Whatever you use, clean cloths, toilet tissue, pads, or tampons, change them frequently to avoid staining. When menstrual blood comes in contact with air, bacteria grow quickly and develop an odour. If your panties or clothes get stained with blood, soak them in cold 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, do all the things you enjoy, and still have fun during your periods—they shouldn't cause you to stop your daily routine.

## Summary of Chapter 4

### Girls

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

- Your body will grow, especially the bones in your hips, arms, legs, and feet. Around this time girls notice their bodies taking on a curvier shape.
- Your breasts will develop and your nipples will become larger and perhaps darker.
- Your genitals will mature, and the walls of your vagina will begin to produce fluid or discharge.
- Your ovary will release an egg each month, and you will begin to menstruate 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 normal.
- Wash and clean your external genitals every day. Try to wear cotton panties.
- It is necessary to pay attention to your normal vaginal discharge so that you can notice any changes that might be a sign of a vaginal infection.
- “Safe days” are not a good method of contraception for anyone, especially for adolescents. This is because an adolescent girl’s menstrual cycle can be very irregular. There are no “safe days” against getting pregnant, and there are never any safe days against HIV and other STIs.
- Keep a record of your menstrual cycle and prepare yourself for menstrual periods.
- Although cramps, swelling, and mood swings are normal, your menstrual cycle does not have to be uncomfortable. Exercise and low-salt diets can help reduce some of these problems. If you have terrible pains or bleed very heavily, you should see a health worker.
- A girl can get pregnant even before she starts having her periods.
- Tampons are not really recommended for adolescents. If you use one, remove it after three hours.



# Basic Body Care

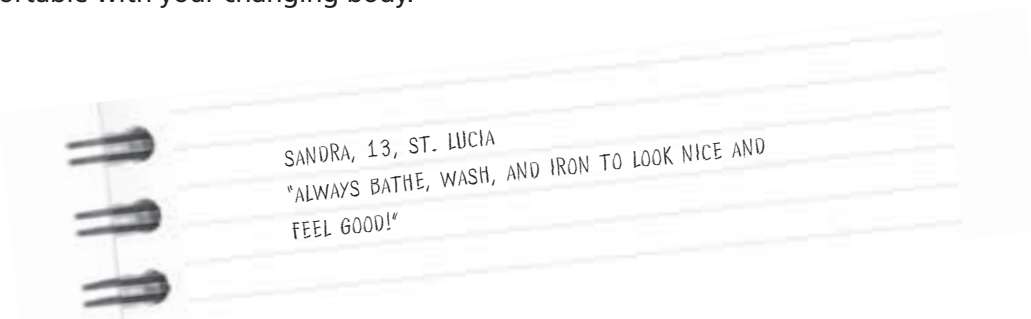
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This chapter is about how to take care of your overall health. Knowing how to stay healthy is very important because many health problems can be avoided altogether if you eat well, exercise, practise good hygiene, and feel good about yourself.

Now that you are not a child anymore, it is your responsibility to take care of your body so you can look and feel as good as possible. 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 be especially important during adolescence because of all the big changes you experience. Not only does your body change shape during puberty, but it starts producing new smells and new fluids. You may find these changes both interesting and worrisome at times. Practising good hygiene is one very good way to feel more comfortable with your changing body.



SANDRA, 13, ST. LUCIA  
"ALWAYS BATHE, WASH, AND IRON TO LOOK NICE AND  
FEEL GOOD!"

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 when 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 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, and you perspire 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.



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



Although some people worry about the smell of their sweat, and especially their underarm perspiration, bathing regularly and wearing clean clothing is 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 use deodorants (roll-on, cream, or spray) to prevent underarm odour, which you can also decide to use.

Like sweat, other bodily fluids—menstrual blood, vaginal fluids, semen and smegma—are basically clean. But once these fluids leave the body, bacteria and fungi can grow in them, causing bad smells or sometimes infection. Therefore, it is important to clean the genital area—around the vagina and penis—daily. Boys and young men 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).

Using ordinary bathing soap to wash your genitals is fine, but 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 and fungi that live in places like the vagina and that help protect against certain infections. After washing, always dry yourself and put on clean underwear.

If you have dry skin, putting some body lotion, Vaseline, coconut oil, or cocoa butter on your hands, arms, and legs will help. Putting on lotion just after bathing helps to keep moisture in your skin.

Wash your hands frequently to keep away bacteria, especially after using the toilet and before eating or preparing food. Keeping your nails short can help keep them clean.

### CARING FOR YOUR TEETH

Your mouth is another place where bacteria live, so taking care of your teeth is important in practising good hygiene. The bacteria in your mouth can eat holes (cavities) into the teeth, which can be very painful. Decayed teeth can also cause infections that may affect other parts of your body.

Brushing your teeth at least twice a day—after meals and before going to 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 make sure your breath smells fresh.

You should clean the surface of every tooth, both in the front and the back of your mouth and in between your teeth. Toothbrushes and toothpaste are best, but if you don't have toothpaste, even rinsing and brushing with 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.

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

### PIMPLES

During puberty, the oil glands in your skin become more active, and they start producing an oily substance called **sebum**. These oil glands are spread throughout your skin and 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. During adolescence, your oil glands can produce too much sebum which then blocks the pores (small openings) in your skin, causing pimples.

Some teenagers have a lot of pimples, which is called **acne**. Some people have acne as teenagers and into their adulthood. The oiliness of your skin and how much sebum you produce during puberty determine how vulnerable you are to pimples. It is normal and common to have pimples. In fact, 8 out of 10 teenagers have pimples sometime during adolescence. Pimples are most common between the ages of 14 and 17, but you can get pimples before or after these ages.



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

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

### WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT PIMPLES?

Pimples are a normal part of adolescence and 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 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 like your face, neck, shoulders, back, and upper chest. Washing these areas at least once a day will help remove the oil from the surface of the skin and keep your pores clean and open.

Do not wash your skin too much or use strong, harsh soaps or detergents because they can irritate your skin and make pimples worse. You should also make sure that any oils and grease that you put on your hair do not get on your face because they can also block the pores in your skin. Lastly, be careful about using certain 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 and bleaches 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 normal part of adolescence. A lot of teenagers feel as though they are the only person with acne or pimples, 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 your skin and not you. But people have many other things to think about and what they really notice is who you are, not what your skin looks like.

You will not have them forever. Don't let a few pimples get you down!

## BODY PIERCING AND TATOOS

Before you decide to get a tattoo or body piercing, you must know that:

- Unsterile tattooing and piercing equipment and needles can spread serious infection, hepatitis, tetanus, or possibly even HIV.
- Tattoo removal is very expensive. Tattoos are not easy to remove and in some cases may cause permanent discoloration. Think carefully before getting a tattoo. You can't take it back if you don't like it.
- Some people are allergic to the tattoo dye. Their body will work to reject the tattoo.
- Blood donations cannot be made for a year after getting a tattoo, body piercing, or permanent makeup.

If you still choose to do it, here are some tips:

- Visit several tattooists or piercers before you decide to go ahead with this. Be sure their work areas are clean, that they sterilise their equipment, use packaged needles, and throw away needles and leftover ink.
- Do not use a piercing gun since it crushes the tissue pierced and cannot be sterilised properly.
- Use non toxic metals such as surgical steel, 14k gold, niobium, or titanium to avoid infections and allergic reactions and choose a type of jewelry that accommodates the swelling that follows the piercing procedure.
- Both piercing and tattooing require very careful care for a long period. Caring for a tattoo is similar to caring for a minor burn. Follow instructions from the tattooist very carefully, and be attentive to allergic reactions. If a skin reaction or an infection develops, seek specialised help immediately.

### HAIR CARE

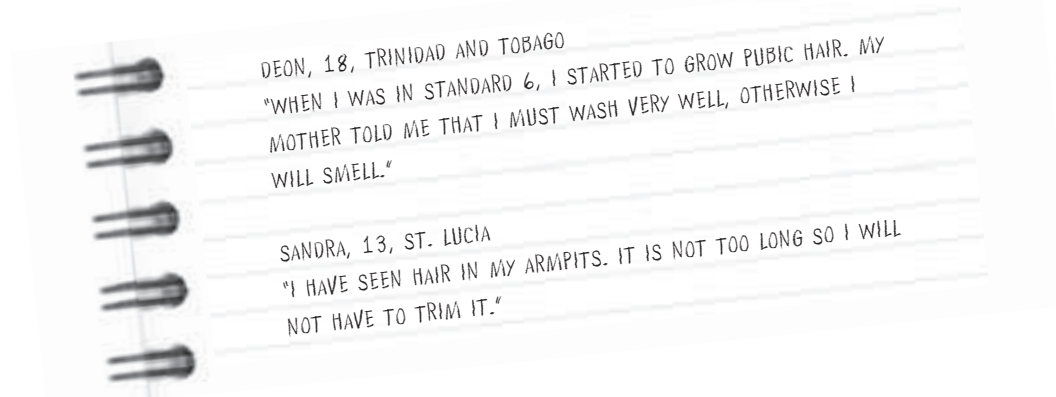
We have hair all over our body, but especially on our heads, armpits and around the genitals. Taking care of your hair is another part of practising good hygiene and taking good care of your body.

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

Some people have dandruff, which happens when the skin on your head is very dry and flakes off. There are special medicated shampoos that may help control your dandruff.

Simple, regular bathing is necessary to keep your body hair clean. As you read in Chapter 2, this hair serves a good purpose: it keeps sweat and dirt away from your skin. However, some people choose to remove or trim some of this hair. For example, some people feel the genitals look nicer without hair, while others think it is better to keep their genital hair for good hygiene.

Armpit hair can be trimmed or removed with special hair-removing creams or shaved. If you want to shave it, the best way to do it is while you are bathing, using abundant soap or shaving cream and a good razor. This will help prevent cuts or abrasions. Avoid using deodorant shortly after shaving or use a deodorant without alcohol. Also, never share razors with anyone else or use a rusty razor.



If you would like to trim your pubic hair, always use clean scissors. Do not shave or use hair-removing creams in the pubic area. These creams will irritate and hurt the delicate skin this area, and shaving also has risks. If you shave your pubic hair, you may make some very small cuts in the skin. If you have sex, these cuts are like open doors for HIV to pass through, which is dangerous. Also, when shaved pubic hair grows back, the hairs are so sharp that they can pierce a condom. Thirdly, the naked pubic area tends to get little infections around the hair follicles or the base of where the hair grows. Trimming pubic hair a little bit is safe when done carefully.

### EATING WELL

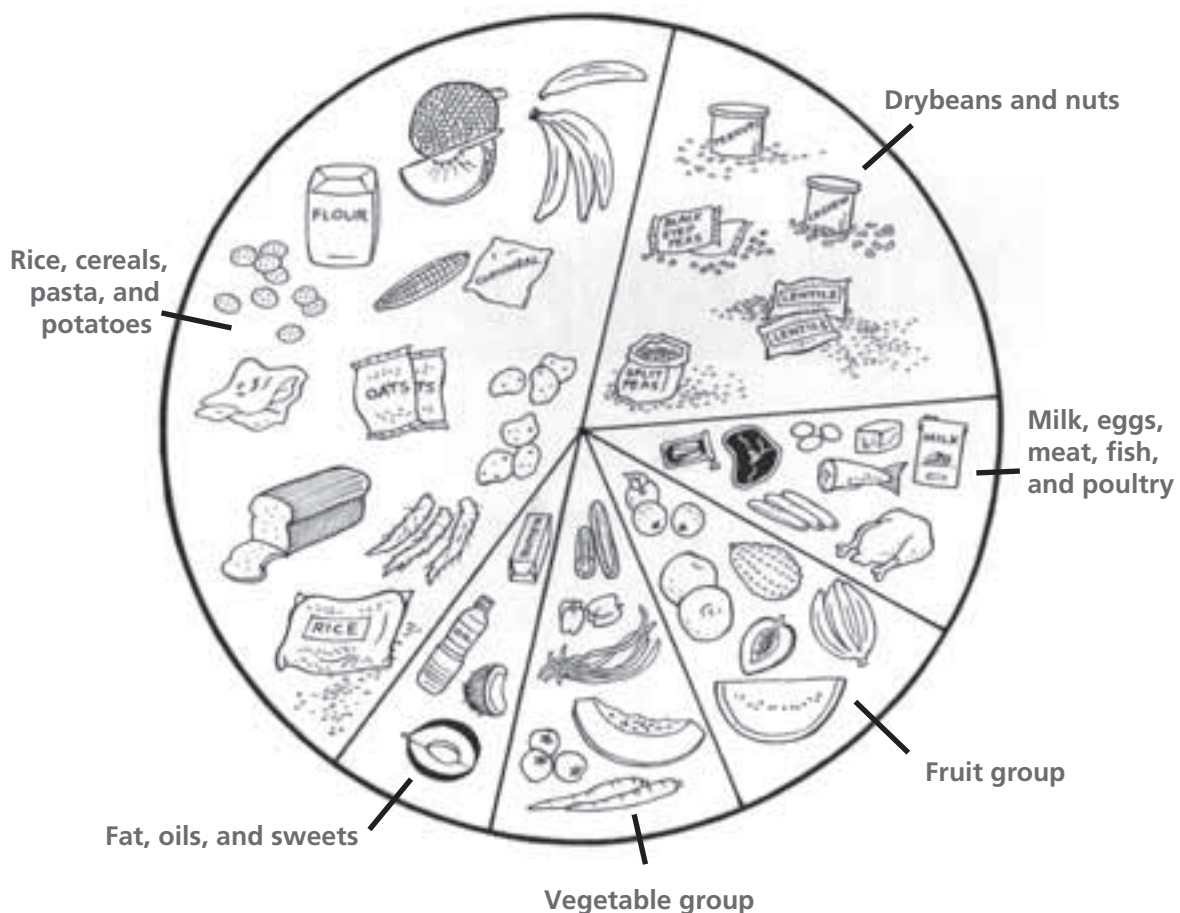
Good nutrition is essential for good health. Eating a nutritious and balanced diet is important throughout life, but it is especially important during childhood and adolescence when your body is growing and developing very fast.

Your body needs healthful 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 than this to stay healthy.

Different types of food do different jobs in your body so you need to eat meals with each type of food. Look at the illustration and description of the food groups and compare it with your eating habits. How well do you normally eat? How can you improve your diet?

- **Bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group.** These foods provide energy and include staple foods such as cereals (rice, wheat flour, pasta) and starchy fruits, roots, and tubers (green bananas, plantain, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, dasheen, cassava, etc.). The best sources of energy are whole grains such as oatmeal, whole wheat bread, and brown rice since they take longer to digest and provide you with more energy over a longer period of time.
- **Vegetable group.** This group includes dark green leafy and/or yellow vegetables. These vegetables (pumpkin, carrot, callaloo/baghi, dasheen leaves, cabbage bush, kale, spinach) are important because they contain carotene, a substance that the body transforms into vitamin A, which helps improve your night vision. The dark green leafy vegetables also contain iron. Iron is especially important for girls and women because they need more iron when they are menstruating or during pregnancy. Also, a diet rich in vegetables reduces the risk of heart attack, high blood pressure, intestinal problems, and adds it variety to your diet.

- **Fruit group.** Most fruits (mango, guava, citrus, pineapple, West Indian cherry, pawpaw/papaya, golden apple/june plum, sugar apple/sweet sop) are a rich source of vitamin C, especially when eaten fresh. Vitamin C helps the body use iron from other foods. Fruit also helps reduce the risk of heart attack and high blood pressure.
- **Milk, yogurt, and cheese.** You need calcium, vitamin D, and regular exercise to strengthen your bones. Dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese are important sources of calcium. Since these dairy products contain saturated fats, which are not healthy for you, stick to no-fat or low-fat dairy products whenever possible.
- **Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts.** These are important sources of 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. Try to eat more white meat (fish and poultry) which is low in fat and less red meat which is rich in bad (saturated) fats. Dry beans (legumes) are an excellent source of fibre, vitamins, and minerals, while nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, peanuts, etc.) contain healthy fats.
- **Fat, oils, and sweets.** Fats are also a source of energy. Some fats, such as soya oil, coconut oil, avocado, dried coconut, and Jamaican ackee come from plants and are good sources of unsaturated fats. Others, such as butter or ghee that come from animals, should be avoided. 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 are bad for your teeth and can lead to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, and other disorders. Fresh fruits and sugar cane, which are naturally sweet, are better snacks than sweets.



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



In short, a balanced diet should include:

- Lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Plenty of ground provisions and cereals.
- Moderate amounts of foods from animals, beans and nuts.
- Small amounts of dairy products.
- Very small amounts of fats, oils and sugar.

In some contexts and because of cultural and fashion demands, some girls and boys are very conscious about their weight. While this concern may be helpful to a point, you should never take this concern to extremes. Make sure you eat a balanced diet every day. One thing you should never do is “make up” for an eating “binge” by forcing yourself to throw up (see next box for bulimia and anorexia), by taking laxatives, or by avoiding food after you feel you have overeaten. This is not good for you and can lead to serious long-term health problems.

5

## DO YOU KNOW about anorexia and bulimia?

Anorexia and bulimia are eating disorders that both women and men can have, although they tend to be more frequent among young women. They are emotional and mental conditions, in which a person has a fear of gaining weight and may refuse to eat, even though they may be really skinny. People with anorexia or bulimia may also be exercising in order to lose weight. Some people with bulimia will try to make themselves sick, by using excessive laxatives or vomiting to eliminate the food in their bodies. People with anorexia and bulimia are afraid of being fat, and may tend to see themselves as overweight even though they have a normal weight and shape. Although anorexia and bulimia are normally seen in Caucasian contexts they are beginning to appear among African descents in the Caribbean.

### ***What causes anorexia?***

It is believed that anorexia is a combination of biological, social, and psychological factors.

**Biological causes:** Studies show that higher levels of serotonin (a brain chemical) can cause a person to withdraw socially and not want food. However, the higher level of serotonin may be caused by the anorexia, rather than be a cause of it. Individuals with anorexia often have family members with the disorder.

**Social causes:** The cultural or social environment may cause or contribute to one's likelihood of suffering from anorexia. Some cultures value being thin as the key to being attractive, especially for women. Thus, social pressure can be a cause of anorexia. It is also a sign of low self-esteem.

**Psychological and emotional causes:** Major life events (life transitions, emotional upsets, or sexual or physical abuse) can sometimes trigger anorexia. Mental health experts think that the feelings of being overwhelmed and powerless in adolescence can bring about a desire to maintain control in some part of your life; this part might be controlling one's body weight to stay extra thin.

### ***What are the effects of anorexia?***

Anorexia can have severe medical consequences. Because the anorexic individual does not consume enough calories or nutrients to support the maintenance and growth of the body, all body processes slow down to conserve energy. This slowing down can have serious effects on a person's physical, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

**Physical effects:** loss of the menstrual periods, lowered resistance to illness, fainting, fatigue, and overall weakness, etc.

**Emotional and behavioral effects:** isolation from family and friends, loss of concentration, depression, irritability, etc.

#### **What is the treatment for anorexia?**

Treatment for anorexia involves both the body and the mind. Early treatment for anorexia may include behavioural, psychological, or nutritional therapy, massage, and/or relaxation exercises. It also involves the support of the whole family circle of the person with anorexia.

If you feel that you may be suffering from anorexia or bulimia, or think that one of your friends is, consult with a trusted adult (parent, health care worker, or teacher) to see how best you can help yourself or your friend. Sometimes people with these disorders deny they have a problem—you can help them out!

#### **HOW MUCH AND WHAT KIND OF 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, adolescents need more energy than most adults.

Energy is measured in calories. If you consume more energy or calories than your body needs during the day, the extra calories will be stored as fat for a time when it is needed. For most people this is healthy and normal, but it can be a problem if you have too much fat. Obesity, which is an excessive build up of body fat, can weaken physical health and well-being, and can shorten life expectancy. Unfortunately, obese people are also often made fun of unfairly due to their appearance. We need to be particularly careful not to tease people for being unusual or different than the norm.

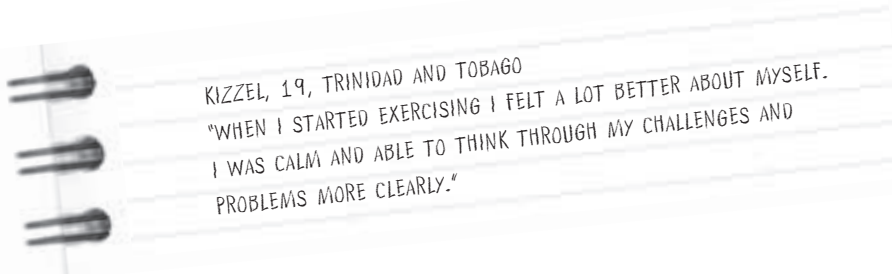
Sometimes it can be hard to get the right amount of exercise and eat a balanced diet. Even though fried food can be prepared quickly and conveniently, eating it in excess can cause you to be unhealthy. Also, try to avoid eating sugary foods and drinks in excess. To stay in good health try to maintain a balanced diet, drink lots of water, and exercise regularly.

#### **EXERCISE**

Everyone needs exercise: children, adolescents, adults, girls, and boys. Exercise makes you feel 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 and can help you sleep.

Exercise has some other benefits. It can improve your mood, build your self-confidence, help you make friends, and make you feel good. If you are feeling stressed, moody or sad, go for a fast walk or play a game of football. Anything that gets your heart pounding can lift your spirits.

Exercise can also be a good way to work on some important life skills, like confidence, coordination and teamwork. Many people learn and practice 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. Helping with work on a farm, in a garden, or around the house can be good exercise. Making yourself useful at home can also improve your relationship with your parents.

You should get plenty of exercise even if you don't think you are athletic. Everyone's body needs to be used, stretched, pushed, and tested. As you exercise, you may find that you enjoy it more and more. You might even turn into an athlete before you know it!

Exercising can be difficult at first, especially if you are not used to it. You may find that you get out of breath when you run. It may feel unpleasant and turn you off exercise. Start gradually. Find an activity you like and build up your strength so that you can begin to do it more and more. The aim is to get your heart pounding and feel that you are breathing faster than normal. Try to do this for at least 20 minutes, 3 times a week.



There are lots of fun ways to get exercise.

Keep up your exercise routine and you may notice your skin is brighter, your eyes glow, you feel happier and calmer, more confident, and better able to handle difficulties. You will be stronger and healthier too. Keep it up! Don't let exam time stop you from exercising. It is during exams and other stressful times that you need exercise the most.

You can improve your posture through regular exercise; try to sit up and to stand straight. Poor posture can lead to aches and pain in your chest and back.

## REST

Along with good food and plenty of exercise, you need to get enough rest. Resting allows your body to store up more energy. You can rest by relaxing your mind and body or by 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. Watching television can be relaxing, but try to avoid spending too much time watching television, DVDs, or videos. Your mind doesn't fully relax when you are watching or playing electronic games.

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 stress or injury. You need a lot of sleep during adolescence because your body uses up a lot of energy. Most people need about eight hours of sleep every night, though some people need less and others 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 be sure you give it a chance to rest!



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

## Summary of 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 fresh 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 they can damage your skin.
- Eat a nutritious diet full of fruits and vegetables, legumes and nuts, and foods from animals. Avoid eating too many sweets and fried foods. Drink lots of water.
- 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 and sleep around eight hours per night.

By practicing good hygiene, eating well, drinking plenty of water, 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 Mind

6

This chapter is about our 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 ourselves. It also means having the inner strength to cope with life's ups and downs.

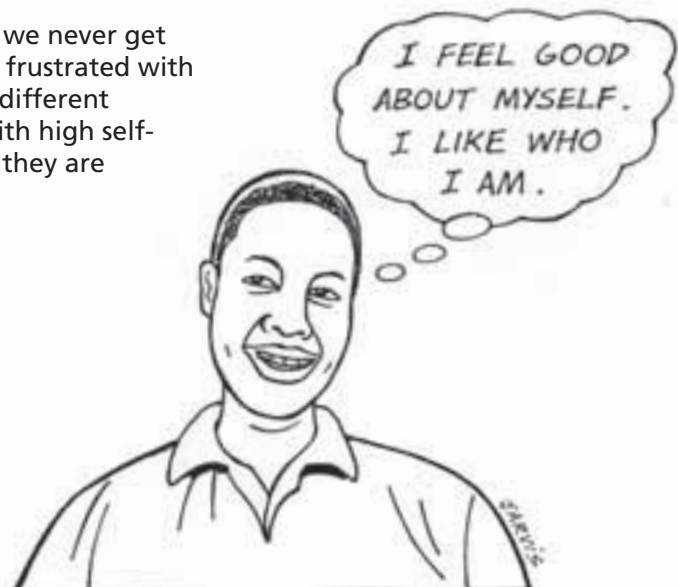
Being emotionally healthy is affected by our own attitude. Are you willing to work on being emotionally healthy?

## 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 you know you are a worthwhile person, someone worthy of love. You respect yourself and you accept yourself and who you are.

Good self-esteem generally has to do with the quality of the relationships we've had and we build with people throughout our lives. These people may be our parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, partners, or friends. If the relationships we build, and the messages we exchange with those people close to us are positive, friendly, and respectful, and if they value us for what we are, then we've probably developed a strong sense of self-esteem. If, on the contrary, we've been rejected and not valued, then it will be more difficult for us to love ourselves. Young people who are or have been exposed to violence, even under the pretence of discipline or care, are likely to have a very low self-esteem, and what's worse, they often feel guilty and unworthy. Sometimes they may even feel adults have the right to use violence against them.

Having high self-esteem does not mean that we never get upset or angry with ourselves. Everyone gets frustrated with themselves at times. High self-esteem is also different from pride or being too conceited. People with high self-esteem like themselves, but they don't think they are perfect or 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 ups and downs.

- If she gets a poor mark, she accepts it and works harder.
- When her boyfriend breaks up with her, she cries but then realizes that it's not the end of the world.
- She doesn't get too stressed out. When she feels stress coming on, she talks to her best friend and tries to exercise.

Rose has high self-esteem. 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, Nicholas, who in a similar situations deals with stress differently:

- He can't accept criticism and blames his teachers when he gets a low mark.
- When left by his girlfriend, he becomes depressed, spreads rumours about her, and starts flirting with other girls.
- He drinks beer and smokes cigarettes to relieve his stress.

Why does Nicholas have so much trouble coping with the same problems? One factor may be his self-esteem. He is hurt when his girlfriend leaves him, and he copes with the pain by saying bad things about her. He tries to reassure himself that he's desirable by rushing into the arms of another person. His way of coping with stress is not very effective; alcohol and cigarettes may help you forget temporarily about your problems, but they don't solve them.

Self-esteem is something deep inside you and you can work on it and nurture it on a daily basis. To do this, you should:

- 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 in the middle, and other times behind.
- Recognise your special talents and try to 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? Singing may be your talent and you should practice in front of others in order to improve. Work on some of the bright lights that make you shine, and ask others what they most appreciate about you.
- Be aware of things that you have already accomplished in life such as receiving an athletic or music award, your high school diploma, CXC (Caribbean Examination Council) awards certificate, or an Associate's Degree.
- Think about the person you are and be proud 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 overly self-critical.
- Be realistic. Set 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 about you, make you feel good about yourself, and boost your self-esteem. Stay away from people who hurt your self-esteem, particularly if they do it on purpose!

Working on your self-esteem won't mean that you will never have ups and downs, but it will help you get through them more smoothly. For example, imagine that your friends have deserted you. They are teaming up and are leaving you out. Suddenly you feel shaky and unsure of yourself. You may wonder, "Is it because of my skin colour? Is it because of the way I dress? Did I do something wrong?" Your self-esteem may start to fall and you may start to feel very sad or badly about yourself.

Some people panic in such circumstances and look for an easy way to boost their self-esteem and feel liked by others, even if this involves doing something that they think is wrong. For example, they may start to use drugs or drink alcohol, cheat on an exam, or steal to feel accepted.

Acceptance feels nice and it gives you a boost, but if your self-esteem is low, acceptance by others won't make the problem go away. You might feel better for a while, but soon a little voice inside you starts saying, "You are not being true to yourself and you are holding yourself back from doing the things you like and are good at." That little voice is your conscience. It's always a good idea to listen to it.

Boosting your self-esteem will take more work than fitting in with a new crowd or numbing your unhappiness with drugs or a drink (see Chapter 13 for more on drugs and alcohol). Also it will serve you better in the long run. When you are going through a self-esteem crisis there are a few things you can do to get through it:

- Put your immediate crisis into perspective. Try to remember that life is full of ups and downs and that it isn't the end of the world.
- Talk to someone you are close to about your problem and your feelings. Find a youth counsellor, peer educator, or someone who cares about you and will be able to help you through your crisis.
- Remind yourself that many people value you for who you are, like friends, teachers, parents, or relatives, and are more than willing to help you through a hard time.
- Have patience. Low self-esteem doesn't go away overnight, but you will feel better about yourself soon.

## SELF-CONFIDENCE

**Self-confidence** is another key to emotional health. If self-esteem means feeling good about your *character* and the *person you are*, self-confidence means feeling good about your *abilities*, *the things you are capable of achieving*.

People who are self-confident try new things without worrying too much about failure. They are not afraid to put themselves into new situations and they are not overly worried about what other people might think about them.

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 because:

1. You learn that you can succeed at things that you never even imagined you could.
2. You learn that even if you fail at something, it's okay!

Self-confident people are often well-liked because they seem to be enjoying life to its fullest, taking on new challenges and new experiences.

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

- Think of yourself as a competent person, as someone who can achieve things.
- Give yourself challenges. Try new things and be open to new experiences. Practise saying to yourself, "I may not know how to do that, but I certainly would like to try."
- Have a sense of humour. Try not to let embarrassment or what your peers 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 can do differently next time. Then let it go.



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

## **DO YOU KNOW there is a connection between self-confidence, self-esteem, and gender?**

Sometimes girls have more problems with low self-esteem and low self-confidence than their male peers. Why is this? Self-esteem and confidence should not be determined by whether you are a boy or a girl. Everyone has the right and the capacity to be appreciated and respected and to develop a healthy self-esteem. However, a person's self-esteem and confidence is greatly affected by how she or he is treated by parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, neighbours, religious and community leaders, etc.

In some places, unfortunately, sometimes boys and girls are treated very differently. This is very unfair and can greatly affect how boys and girls see themselves and their abilities. Boys are often taught to be "macho", but machismo is tied to thinking of girls and women as being inferior. This is not a good way to relate to females as it is degrading. On the other hand, girls may not get the same opportunities. They may not be allowed to spend time playing or going out with friends or playing sports like their brothers. Furthermore, their hard work seems to go unnoticed and unappreciated. As a result, girls and women may feel less worthy, less capable of making decisions or of defending their rights. But men and women are equal! If given the same opportunities, girls will do just as well as boys in school, jobs, and anything else they want to do.



If you are a girl, and living in an environment where girls are less valued than boys and the rights of girls are not respected, here are few things you can do:

- Always remember that you are worth just as much and have the same rights as others, no matter what anybody else says. You are intelligent and capable.
- 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.
- Involve yourself in recreational and volunteer activities that help you feel good about yourself.
- Be realistic about the challenges that face you, but don't give up hope. If you live in a society where women are undervalued, 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 want to pull you out of school, try to talk to them more and find another supportive adult to talk to. Explain how important your education is to you and ask if they can help you find a solution.
- Most of all, stand up for your rights! We all have the same rights and should have the same opportunities to be educated, to develop, and to plan our future.

### 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 young people have many worries—worries about themselves, their appearance, their friends, success in school, the future, etc.

When you worry, ask yourself if the situation 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, the texture of your hair, and the size of your breasts or penis. 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**. When you see expensive clothes in a shop, don't spend your time worrying that they may not be within your means. Worldly things don't bring happiness or an end to worries, so focus on those things that are within your means. Be content with yourself, the way you are, and with what you have. Work hard for what you want.
- **Not having a girlfriend or boyfriend**. Some people find a girlfriend or a boyfriend when they are young. But many do not find a special person until much later in life. It can take time to build lasting relationships. Be patient and don't rush into a relationship only because you may think you should have a girlfriend or boyfriend by now.



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



- **Pressure from your peers.** Do only those things that you think are right for you. Don't let the desire to impress other people cause you to do things that you think are wrong and with which you are uncomfortable.
- **Being lonely.** Loneliness is something that everyone experiences at times. There will always be a few moments when you feel as though you have no one to talk to or that no one understands you. Usually these moments are short-lived and everyone has them.



Some situations are worth worrying about. For example:

- **Your parents cannot afford your school fees,** and you are really worried about your education. 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 someone respected in your community to see if they know of anyone who can help you. Maybe you can switch to a less expensive school or get a weekend job to earn some money.
- **You and your girlfriend or your boyfriend had unprotected sex, and it may have resulted in a pregnancy.** Speak with a trusted friend or adult about your situation. The best thing to do is to go to a clinic for a pregnancy test and advice. Go with your girlfriend for support or ask your boyfriend to go with you. If there is a pregnancy, remember you are both responsible. Calm down and take your time to decide together how to face this situation. Ask the advice of a trusted adult and do your best to support each other (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? 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 and AIDS).
- **An older adult or a classmate has been giving you small gifts and treats, but now he or she wants you to have sex as payment for all the money spent on you.** Don't give into the pressure of doing something that makes you feel uncomfortable. Relationships like these may not be in your interest and can result in a pregnancy or an STI. These situations can be difficult, and you may need the help of an adult. Try talking to your parents, a relative, or some other trusted adult about your situation and doubts.
- **You are subject to any kind of violence, abuse, or sexual harassment** (for more information, see Chapter 12). You need to talk to someone you trust and can speak confidentially, get their support and think of ways to address this problem. Most of all, do not feel guilty about being in a violent situation and do not ever think you deserve it. You have the right to live without violence and can seek protection and safety.



In situations like any of these, you need to think very hard about all the options you have and the possible consequences of each one so you can pick the best course of action.

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

Yet worrying about situations like these can add more stress, which can make you feel overwhelmed by your problems. When you feel stressed, your body will give you signals: you may not be able to stop thinking about the problem, you may not want to eat, your heart may pound, you may feel short of breath, you may have trouble sleeping at night, or you may have nightmares or feel depressed. In very serious situations, you may even have thoughts about suicide. If you are experiencing any of the above signs of stress, you can take the following action:

- **Take a deep breath.** If you are so stressed that you feel short of breath and light-headed, stop what you are doing. Slowly take several deep breaths, holding air in your lungs for a few seconds before you exhale.
- **Look for the source of stress.** Make a list of all the things that are making you feel stressed, and then look at it carefully. What do you think is causing your stress? Have you taken on too many responsibilities? Is there something you can take off your list, or delay a little?
- **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, a relative, a close friend, a teacher, a neighbour, a health worker, a youth counsellor, a religious leader, or another trusted adult. These are just a few people who may be able to suggest a solution.
- **Exercise.** Run, play football or netball, or take a brisk walk. Go swimming. Exercise is an excellent way to help you cope with stress. It can be fun to exercise with a friend.
- **Get enough sleep.** Try to go to bed in a good frame of mind. Try to relax all your muscles one by one as you lie in bed and avoid watching television right before you go to sleep.
- **Eat healthy food.** Always eat breakfast, and avoid skipping meals, even when you aren't feeling hungry.
- **Use prayer or meditation as a way to calm yourself,** relax, and cope with your stress.
- **Do something you really enjoy.** Do something that will help you take your mind off your worries, like spending time with a close friend, drawing, writing about your feelings, singing, gardening, cooking, listening to music, etc.

You should avoid these ways of coping with stress:

- **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.
- **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, and make you do things that you will regret later.
- **Bottling up your feelings.** Holding all your anxieties inside won't help you cope with them, and it won't make your stress disappear. You will eventually feel like exploding. Try to share your feelings with people close to you in that you can trust.

These ways of coping with stress are not effective and they can complicate your life even more. Stress is something you can control, so don't let it control you!

## COPING WITH SADNESS

Sometimes life can make you feel down, and no amount of trying to get a positive angle on life, good eating, sports, or sleep make you feel better.

Sometimes you have every reason to feel sad. For example, experiencing the death of someone close to you can be very upsetting. You may miss the person terribly and feel an enormous sense of grief. Losses like this one can be difficult, but you can get through them. Though the sadness of losing someone you love will always be with you, eventually you become happy again. After a period of grieving, you will feel ready to move on.

## DEPRESSION

Sometimes people start to have very deep sad and negative feelings about life. They may feel as though nothing in their life has meaning and there seems to be nothing worth living for.

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 even 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 eating habits (such as loss of appetite or overeating) or drinking or drugs habits (drinking alcohol or using drugs 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. Here are some steps you can take or help a friend take :

- Try to identify what is making you feel sad.
- Talk to other people about your feelings and what is making you feel sad. Don't try to push it aside or ignore it.
- Exercise and do things that give you pleasure and make you feel good about yourself.
- Find support and guidance from a counsellor or a trusted adult.

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 or help a friend or neighbour with their chores. It may sound 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. Also remember to get the sleep you need.

However, if these things don't help and the depression persists for several months, or if you are feeling so sad and hopeless that you have thoughts of suicide (killing yourself), it is very important that you seek professional help. If this happens, 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 confidential support and advice to people all the time. Many countries also have telephone hotlines you can use to seek confidential help when you have a problem. There are solutions to your problems, so don't try to cope all by yourself when you are feeling depressed.



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

6

## 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.

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 they slow down the brain and other organs in the body. Alcohol and other depressants actually make depression worse. All they do is prevent a person from dealing 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 their problems 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 help you cope with life's ups and downs. Getting along with other people involves many important skills and qualities, such as:

**Self-awareness.** Being self-aware means being able to recognize *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 helps you understand what the problem is and what has caused it. With this information you can begin 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 stay away from that person who makes you feel bad.

Lastly, self-awareness can help you recognise your own shortcomings, those weaknesses you need to work on yourself. Do you have any habits or tendencies that you would like to change? 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."

Blaming other people is an easy habit to get into, but it prevents you from being honest with and taking responsibility for yourself. 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.



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

**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.

**Problem solving and creative thinking.** Finding good solutions to difficult problems requires creative thinking, or 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 limiting yourself to what you have seen other people do.

For example, imagine that you became pregnant while you were still in school and all the other girls you know who became pregnant left school and didn't finish their education. Creative thinking means not assuming that you have to 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, and friends) and exploring all the options that might be open to you.

**Listening and negotiation skills.** These are skills 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 home. This kind of situation requires good listening and negotiation skills. Listening and negotiating can be difficult and frustrating to the point where you might feel ready to explode or yell. It's best if you remain patient and calm as you explain why you feel the way you do and what you need, while still trying to listen to, understand, and respect other people's needs and feelings.



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

Anne, 16, lives with her aunt since her parents died. Her aunt wants her to work in her shop every day after school, which is a big problem for Anne because she feels she needs more 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. Anne 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 **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 because her aunt gets cross and says that she is being disrespectful.

So this time Anne 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, but at the same time I do want to help you in the store."

In expressing herself this way, Anne stands up for herself and for her own need for more time to study. At the same time, she understands her aunt's needs for help in the store. She shows **empathy** for her aunt, who needs her help in the shop.

Her aunt reacts positively and is understanding. 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 after working through her problem. Suddenly she feels less stressed and life seems manageable again.

However, not every problem can be negotiated. 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.

**Assertiveness.** 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. It also means that you are aware of your rights and ready to defend them. For example, you remain committed to defend your right to get an education even if you are pregnant, or to make informed decisions about matters that can compromise your health and development.

People who aren't assertive may not stand up for themselves even if they are being treated poorly. 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 behave aggressively can be rude and unkind and not care about other people's feelings. Being too aggressive can harm your emotional health because afterwards you can feel badly about being unkind.

Golden rules of assertiveness are:

- **Decide what you feel or want and say it in a respectful and non-hurtful way.** 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 or girlfriend touched your genitals. If this happens, say something like, "I felt unhappy when you touched me and I don't want you to touch me like that anymore." Someone who respects and cares about you will not want to do things that make you uncomfortable.

- **Maintain eye contact.** Eye contact 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.
- **Don't make excuses. Say what you really mean.** 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," "I have a stomach ache," or "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 will do it if a condom is used. 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."



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

- **Don't seek other people'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 with many 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 and 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." Someone who respects you will understand if you change your mind and decide to wait.



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 key to good emotional health. If you master them, you will succeed at many things you try in life and you will have the building blocks for establishing healthy relationships.



## Summary of Chapter 6

# Taking Care of Your Heart and Mind

Being emotionally healthy means that you are able to:

- **Feel good about yourself.** You like and respect yourself. You have good **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 place 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 ways to cope with it. You can find solutions that aren't immediately obvious.
- **Explain to someone else what you want and why you feel the way you do and listen carefully to their responses.** You can convey what you want when you are trying to resolve a problem or a difference of opinion, while listening and being respectful of the other person's feelings and needs. You can try to work out a solution that is good for both of you. You have good listening and negotiation skills.
- **Assert yourself.** You can stand up for what you want and 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. Remember, you have the right to make decisions about things that affect your life.

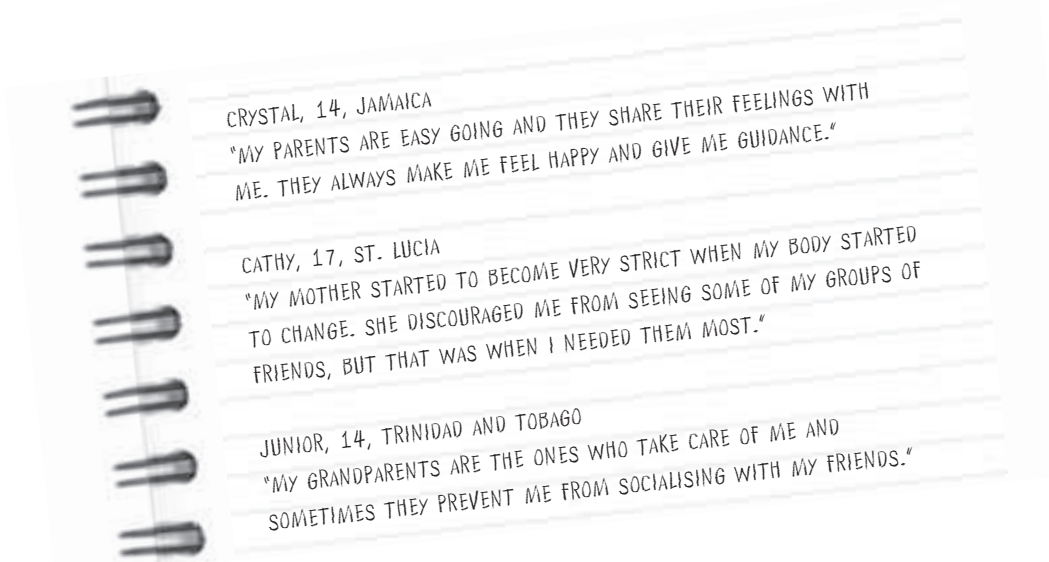
There will be times when you will need to get advice and help from others—from a parent, friend, teacher, aunt, uncle, older sibling, religious leader, or youth counsellor. Asking for help when you need it is an important part of maintaining emotional health.



# Our Parents and Ourselves

Adolescence is a time of radical change and transformation. Many of these changes will help you broaden your horizons beyond the family nucleus and become more autonomous. During adolescence, we become less dependent emotionally on our family and we start thinking on our own. Remember that our parents or the adults in charge of us love and care for us and only want the best in life for us. They don't want us to make the same mistakes they made when they were growing up.

Some adolescents have parents and adults around them with whom they can easily get along and discuss important things. Others may have trouble talking to their parents or guardian, especially during adolescence, when relationships with parents or guardians can become more complicated. Sometimes we start struggling and arguing with our parents or adults in charge of us, because we feel they are too old-fashioned and traditional, or perhaps we feel they don't trust us enough. **Keeping an open mind, and learning how to communicate well with parents and other adults will help us resolve conflicts and build balanced relationships.**



Although it is important that adults try to understand the changes young people undergo during adolescence, as well as our feelings and needs, we can also make an effort to be open and honest with them about ourselves, our feelings, and our beliefs.

It is not always easy for parents to accept that their children are growing up. The fact that we become independent, that we question their values and rules, and seem less attached to the family, is hard to understand and can be a source of friction in the family. In this chapter we will learn how to value our family group, gain insight into understanding our parents and other adults, and think about how to deal with expectations and difficulties relating to these relationships.

It can be hard work to maintain or improve a relationship with your parents or guardians, but your efforts will pay off when you find getting along with them becoming easier and easier.

### APPRECIATING OUR FAMILY

What are some of your best traits, the things that you like most about yourself? Perhaps you think your sense of humour is one of your best features, or maybe you consider yourself generous. Perhaps you feel good about your musical talent or your quickness in mathematics.

Then 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 generosity?

Sometimes it's easy to get so caught up in struggles with parents and other family members that it's hard to see how much they have given you. You may have trouble seeing what you have in common because of the differences of opinion you may have. Other times you may even feel embarrassed by your family. Maybe your parents don't have much money, you feel that your house is too small and you may be embarrassed to bring friends home. Maybe you feel that your family is different since you live alone with your mother or with your grandparents.

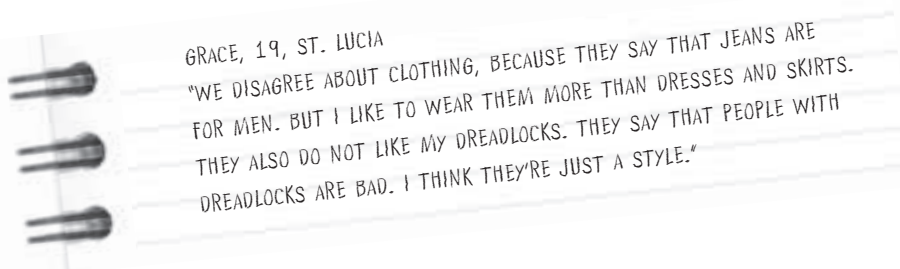
No matter how big, how small, how rich or poor, or how different, it's important that you appreciate your family and learn to accept it as it is. Focus on what your family has been able to give you rather than on what it couldn't give you. Your family has played a big part in shaping who you are; it has given you many values by which you will live your life.

### UNDERSTANDING OUR PARENTS' VALUES AND BELIEFS

Adolescence is often a time we want to explore the differences between ourselves and our parents. We 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 those going through adolescence and for our families.

Our family may find it difficult when we try out new identities, different looks, and new ways of being, and they might wonder about our new ideas.

It can be difficult for parents and adults to recognise that we are becoming adults who can think for ourselves and who have our own opinions. They may still think of us as children. Though it can be frustrating to deal with our family sometimes, we should try to be patient while we all try to adjust to these big changes, and try to communicate openly among ourselves within our family.



Remember that our parents grew up during a different time. Even if they seem too traditional or old-fashioned, sometimes that's not such a bad thing. Our parents' thinking and traditions can be a link to our culture and family history, which are an important part of who we are. We can learn a lot about our culture from our parents and other family members such as the history of our family and community; traditional musical instruments, songs, and stories; and 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? Our ancestors, their language, culture, and beliefs are an important part of our identity! Take pride in your history and try to see the value of certain traditions.

Of course, modern progress and thinking has a lot of good things too; things that make our lives better, like formal education, modern medicine, and new ideas about the roles and rights 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, and attitudes about traditional practices such as early marriage are also changing. And this is good news, since some of these beliefs have not been helpful to young people, particularly girls, and have limited their opportunities for development.



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

We are living during an exciting time with many ideas and options in terms of how we want to live our lives. We can choose the best of both worlds: the best of traditions and the best of modern thinking and progress. We have the choice to embrace what we like and think is good and reject those things which we do not feel are right for us.

As you try to make your own decisions about which traditional and modern customs you want to live by, try to listen and be sensitive to the beliefs of your parents and other family members. It can help if you try to explain your own feelings and thoughts, and ask the adults close to you why they feel the way they do.

### COPING WITH OUR PARENTS' AND OTHER ADULTS' EXPECTATIONS

Parents' and grandparents' expectations can seem like a heavy burden sometimes. We may even feel as though they are so focused on the plans they have for us that they aren't listening to our ideas. Some parents do expect a lot from their children, and this can be hard to deal with as we go through puberty and adolescence.



LAURA, 14, ST. LUCIA  
"MY PARENTS PUT TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON ME. THEY EXPECT ME TO DO EVERYTHING RIGHT AND NOT TO MAKE ANY MISTAKES."

Maybe your parents have their heart set on you becoming a doctor, but you don't really like science. Or maybe your mother expects you to marry and stay in the community where you were born, but you want to go to university and be a journalist. These situations can be very hard. Our parents often believe they know what is best for us. It can be hard for them to recognise that we are independent persons with our own talents, ideas and dreams. They may have a hard time acknowledging the differences between our dreams and the dreams they have for us. Try to be patient with them and to keep in mind that they want our future to be bright. It can help to talk to them and tell them about our own goals and dreams and why we want to pursue them and to exchange ideas with them. This will make them see that we are thinking through our decisions and dreams, which will likely make them take us more seriously.



## COMMUNICATING WITH OUR PARENTS

Lack of communication is the cause of many struggles between us and our parents or guardians. Having an honest discussion can be surprisingly hard for many people.

Most parents want very much to help their children go through adolescence, but often don't know how best to do so. It is likely that their own parents probably didn't talk to them about adolescence and all the changes they were going through as an adolescent. It may be hard for them to help us when they did not get much help from their own parents, or have much experience in this area.

How does one learn to talk openly with parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents or other family members? How can we learn to listen better to the adults in our lives? What needs to happen to have a trusting relationship with our parents? How do we even start, especially if we've been arguing lately? There's no simple answer, but here are some helpful tips:

- **Help create goodwill.** Volunteer to help your parents with chores around the house. While you are at it, bring up the specific issue you want to discuss. While you are working together they may feel more prepared to listen to what you have to say.
- **Choose a good time to talk.** Timing is everything! Choose a time when your parents are not too tired or busy, like the weekend when they are feeling more relaxed and less worried about work. Though it can be frustrating to feel as if you are working around their moods and schedule, good timing is essential to open communication.
- **Start with easy topics.** Sometimes it also helps to start with topics that aren't too embarrassing or on which you agree. In many families, parents and their children only start talking to each other when there's a disagreement, like when the children want to do something the parents may not agree with. This can be a hard place to start a conversation.
- **Respect each other's differences.** Try to understand the perspective and concerns of your parents and to respect their points of view. This way, they will be more likely to respect your views and perspectives. Both you and your parents have very good reasons for feeling the way you do, and respecting the differences you may have is the first step to open communication.
- **Earn their trust.** Parents are more likely to grant you more independence if you show them that you are responsible and trustworthy. If they tell you to be home by a certain time, make sure that you are home by then. They are more likely to let you go out next time (or maybe even let you stay out later!) once they see how responsible you are.
- **Be open with your parents/guardian.** Remember that you are changing so fast that your parents may feel as though they hardly know you. Try to let them see the person you are becoming! Talk to them about your dreams, your expectations, and your needs so that they feel confident that they know the person you are becoming and what you hope to achieve. It can also help to share your concerns and worries with them and let them meet your friends so they know with whom you are going out. Your parents can provide you with valuable guidance in times of need.



Show your parents that you care about pleasing them.





When your parents feel they know you well, they will feel better able to trust you. It will also help them begin to accept you as the adult you are becoming and treat you accordingly. Ultimately they will feel more comfortable allowing you to make more and more decisions on your own.

Show your parents you care about them, just as you want them to show you that they love you. Small demonstrations can go a long way!

Getting along well with your parents can be hard if you feel that they are being too strict or over-protective, or that their expectations are too high. It will take time and patience to improve your communication, but will be worth the effort you put into it. You'll appreciate it when you feel they start to trust you more or when you can go to them for support and advice.



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

#### WHEN WE NEED OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

Sometimes the difference of opinion between our parents and ourselves can feel too big. We may have tried talking to them, and gotten nowhere. We may feel that we aren't being listened to on an important matter. For example, suppose your parents told you that they want to pull you out of school. You have tried to explain to them how important your education is to you. You have even told them about your dreams of becoming a journalist, but they have a different opinion.

There are many difficult situations like this one which can be hard to manage alone. In these cases it helps to have another adult whom you can speak to and who can advocate for you.

Try talking to another 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 them for advice. Also you can try other ways of discussing this issue with your parents. Try to keep the lines of communication open!

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



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



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



## Summary of Chapter 7

# Our Parents and Ourselves

Adolescence is a time when we may have trouble getting along with parents and other adults. But it doesn't always have to be this way, below are some tips:

- **Appreciate your family.** 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 what they bring you and learn from them about your history, traditional customs, and music.
- **Remember that your parents want what they think is 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. Let them see that you are serious about your dreams and will work hard to achieve them.
- **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 and let them see how trustworthy and responsible you are.
- **Respect each other's differences.** Ask your parents why they feel the way they do and try to understand and respect their concerns.
- **Be patient with your parents.** Give them time to get used to the fact that you are becoming an adult who may have opinions different than theirs. Show them you can handle responsibility and they will be more likely to give you more freedom.
- **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. If this happens, find a caring adult you trust—an aunt or uncle, older sibling, family friend, teacher, religious leader, or social worker—and ask for advice and help in resolving the problem with your parents.

# Friendship and Love

This chapter is about friendship and love. Friends become especially important during adolescence.

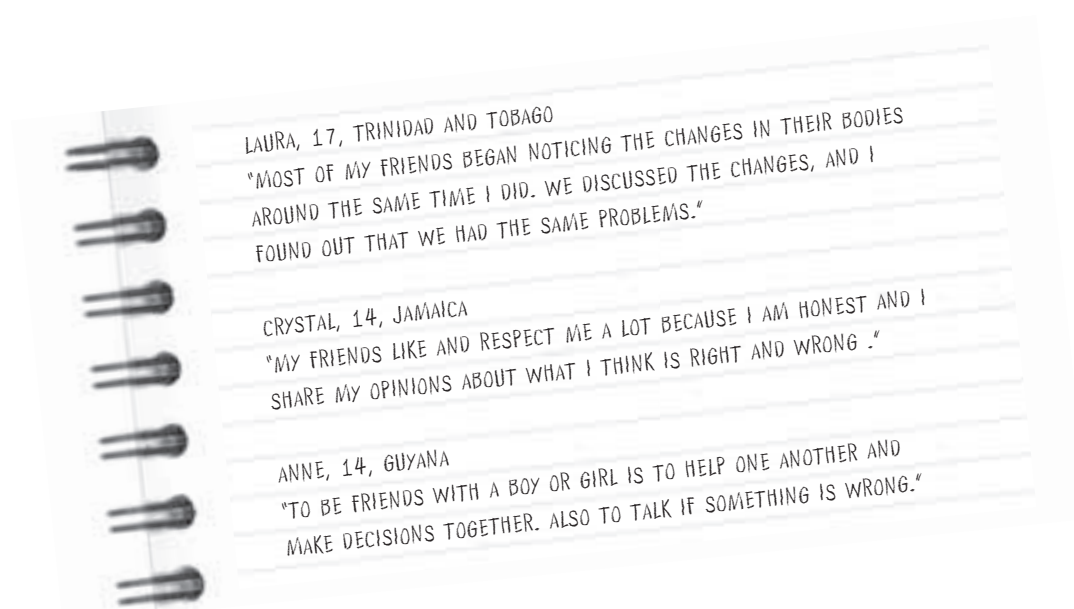
## FRIENDSHIP

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

Our friends can also answer many of our questions during adolescence, helping us feel comfortable with all the changes we are going through. When we're in trouble, friends encourage us and help us with our problems. They help reassure us about ourselves. Friendship is based on trust. It is great to be able to confide in someone and to know that that person respects us and will not let us down.



Friendships are important during adolescence and throughout life.

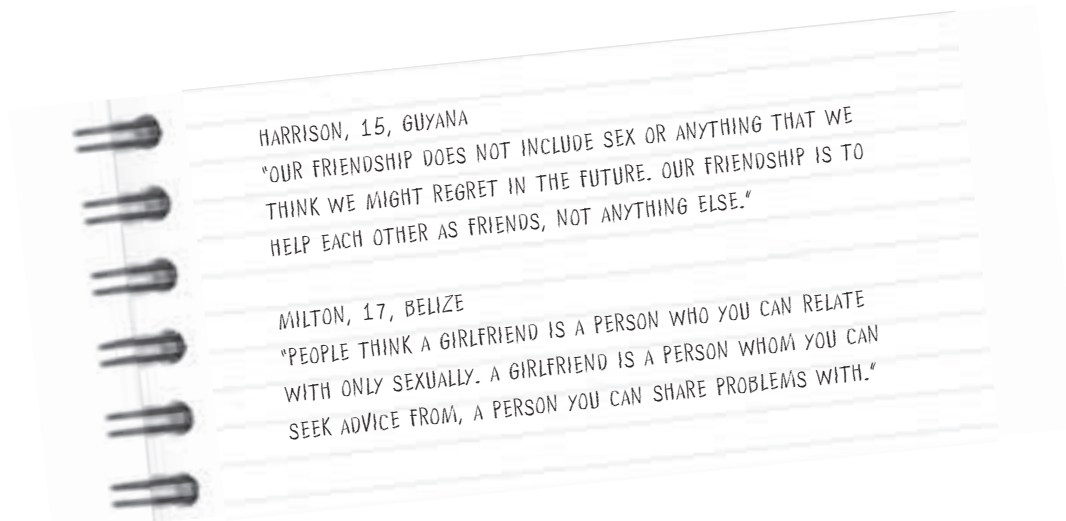


LAURA, 17, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
"MOST OF MY FRIENDS BEGAN NOTICING THE CHANGES IN THEIR BODIES AROUND THE SAME TIME I DID. WE DISCUSSED THE CHANGES, AND I FOUND OUT THAT WE HAD THE SAME PROBLEMS."

CRYSTAL, 14, JAMAICA  
"MY FRIENDS LIKE AND RESPECT ME A LOT BECAUSE I AM HONEST AND I SHARE MY OPINIONS ABOUT WHAT I THINK IS RIGHT AND WRONG."

ANNE, 14, GUYANA  
"TO BE FRIENDS WITH A BOY OR GIRL IS TO HELP ONE ANOTHER AND MAKE DECISIONS TOGETHER. ALSO TO TALK IF SOMETHING IS WRONG."

We can express affection in friendships and romantic relationships without becoming sexually involved:



There is nothing quite like having a good friend! Good friends respect and love us for who we are. They help us feel good about ourselves and help us learn to really trust another person.

Through a close friendship, we can learn how to agree and disagree. We also become strong enough to have our own opinions. Being able to stand up for ourselves and what we believe is a life skill, and is important as we develop relationships with other people. In fact, friends help us build many important skills that will help us succeed in life, such as:

- Communicating well and being open about our feelings and thoughts.
- Listening and understanding someone else's feelings and opinions.
- Being supportive when someone is in trouble or feeling down.
- Negotiating (for example when you and a friend disagree about something, you may have to negotiate some compromise, or middle ground, between you).
- Co-operating, working together, and sharing responsibility.
- Accepting and respecting differences of opinion and beliefs (you and your friend may not always agree on everything, but that's okay).

Friends can start becoming especially important during adolescence, because many of us may relate more to our peers than to adults. This is one of the first stages towards independence. If your parents think that spending time with friends is a waste of your time, try to explain why you feel they are so important to you. Ask them to remember their own adolescence and how important it was for them to have friends.

Good, strong friendships take time and effort to build and building friendships doesn't happen overnight. They are built slowly, step by step over time. Building a friendship means learning to accept another person and learning to be accepted in return.

## DO YOU KNOW how to deal with conflict?

You may find yourself having a major disagreement or even a fight for which you see no end in sight. However there are steps we can take to deal with disagreements. Conflicts don't have to be avoided and they definitely don't have to lead to violence. Conflicts can give us the opportunity to examine our beliefs and attitudes. If worked out in a positive way, conflicts can actually help us strengthen our relationships. When you're going through a conflict with another person, consider the following **steps for building bridges**:

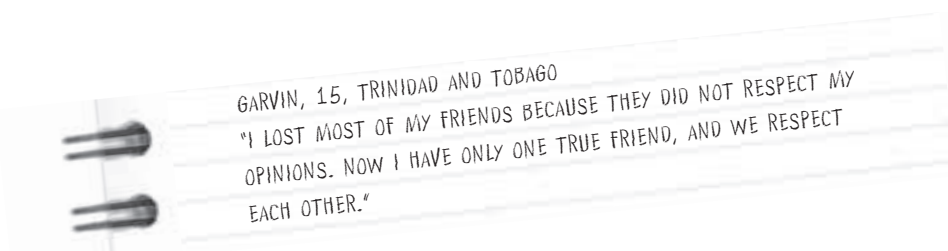
1. **Set the stage.** Agree to work together to try to find a solution peacefully, and establish ground rules (e.g., no name-calling, blaming, yelling, or interrupting).
2. **Gather perspectives.** Each person has the chance to describe the disagreement from his or her perspective, without interruption. Listeners pay close attention and then ask for clarification in a respectful way if anything is unclear. Just by helping the other person feel respected you're on the right track to resolving the conflict.
3. **Find common interests.** Agree on what the key issues are and why different issues are important to each person. Identify common interests (for example you both want to resolve the problem without violence).
4. **Create options.** Take time for each person to brainstorm about possible solutions to the problem. Come up with a list of options without immediately judging or feeling committed to any one in particular. Try to think of solutions where all parties gain something—think win-win! Too often we assume that for one person to win, the other person has to lose. In reality, it is often possible to come up with a solution that everyone feels good about.
5. **Evaluate options.** After a number of options are suggested, each person discusses his or her feelings about each of the proposed solutions. Both parties can negotiate and most often both will need to compromise to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both people. They may need to agree to disagree about some points to reach an understanding.
6. **Create an agreement.** The two parties each state their agreement and may even want to write it down or share it with a third person. Also, they might set a time to check back to see how the agreement is working.

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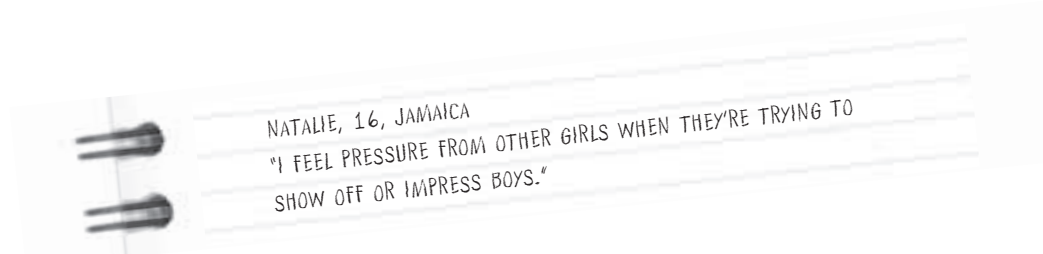
### FINDING OUT SOMEONE ISN'T A TRUE FRIEND

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

This can be a very painful situation. Try talking to the person, explaining how you feel and asking 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 better friends.



Friends can also be a source of pressure; that is, our friends can have a great influence on the way we think, and on how we behave. This influence can be both positive and negative. Positive peer pressure can encourage us to adopt worthy behaviours such as studying harder or doing good deeds. However, negative peer pressure can be a cause for concern. It can lead young people to do things that are harmful, like use alcohol or drugs.



Sometimes when friends form groups we may feel pressure from the group to do certain things or behave in a certain way to fit in. Peer pressure can be very powerful because we want to be liked and be part of the group. We may want to impress our group of friends and we probably want to make sure that we aren't left behind.

Try to remain true to yourself. Take some time to think about your values and principles, the things that you like about yourself. Avoid doing things that you are not comfortable with, or taking risks just because you want to keep a set of friends.



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.

There may also be times during adolescence when you feel as though you don't have close friends. This can make you feel lonely, sad or anxious. Don't worry or think that there is something wrong with you; you will meet new people and you will have the opportunity to make wonderful, strong friendships.

## GETTING ALONG WITH THE OTHER SEX

Getting along with the other sex can be difficult. Sometimes we don't know how to treat each other respectfully and appropriately, or how to be ourselves around the opposite sex. Sometimes this may be because we feel shy or self-conscious. Many of us may feel that there is social pressure for boys to be tough and dominant, and for girls to be gentle and passive, and that we don't fit in these descriptions. Also, some people may believe that girls should not actively seek a partner and should wait to be seduced.

Here are some tips for boys:

- Remember boys and girls are equally able, and have the same right to start a relationship, to invite someone out, or to end a relationship they don't want.
- If you have a girlfriend, listen and respect what she says. If she does not agree to something and says, "No", she means it. Don't try to convince yourself that she means, "Maybe", or "Yes", when she says, "No".
- Don't stare or whistle at girls or make rude comments when they walk by. Don't loiter near girls' toilets or block their path.
- Don't harass or scare people, especially at night or in lonely places.
- Don't start rumours.

Girls can also have difficulties getting along with boys. Here are some tips for them:

- Remember girls and boys are equally capable, and have the same right to start a relationship, to invite someone out, or to end a relationship they don't want.
- Don't use boys for money and gifts.
- Keep in mind that boys are also sensitive; they have fears and insecurities and sexual feelings the same as girls have. Don't laugh at boys or make fun of them.
- Be clear about what you do or do not want from other people. Say what you really think, and don't be afraid to express yourself. Express your wants and needs, and when you don't want to do something, say "No!" and stick to it.
- Don't start rumours.

Here are a few tips for leading a healthy relationship:

- **Both girls and boys want love, care, trust, and respect.** Respect and listen to your peers. Most boys and girls want to be with someone who is caring and supportive, someone who will listen, who takes them seriously, and respects them.
- **Company.** Girls and boys can find each other's company fun and exciting. They like to be with people who can support them when in trouble and with whom they can have fun and share jokes and laughter.
- **Freedom.** Both girls and boys want to be given a chance to think for themselves. They also want to be with someone with whom they can be free to share their feelings. Girls may want boys to acknowledge that they are independent, while boys may feel a lot of pressure to act tough, as though they didn't have emotions. This can cause some difficulties in relationships, which is why listening and respecting your girlfriend or boyfriend is so important.



- **Confidence.** Both girls and boys admire people who are confident in themselves.
- **Genuine personality.** Being genuine is attractive to both girls and boys. It is unattractive when someone is always putting on a show or pretending to be somebody that they are not.

At the root of a good relationship is a strong respect for the other —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.

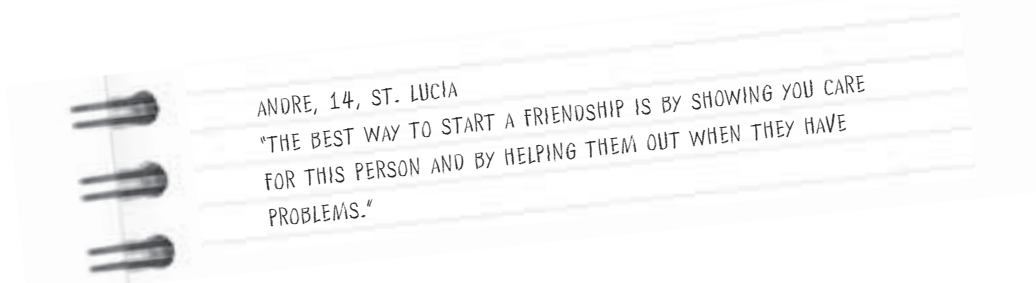
A satisfying relationship does not develop overnight. It takes time for people to really get to know each other and to build a strong friendship.

### STARTING A RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE YOU LIKE

You may see someone at your school or at your job with a fun and interesting personality who looks good to you and you think you'd like to get to know them. But you aren't sure how to begin because you don't know if she or he is interested in you.



**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 we are interested in them romantically. We may feel afraid to approach a person because we don't want to be rejected. On the other hand, if we don't approach someone, we may never know what they are like or who they are!

There are many ways you can find out if someone likes you and is interested in you. Two of these ways are talking to them yourself or asking a friend to talk to them.

If you decide to have a friend approach a person you like, choose someone completely trustworthy. 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 shy and nervous. All these things are normal reactions.

Try to relax, and remind yourself that you are an attractive person with nothing to lose. Just be friendly toward the person you like. Start up a conversation with her or him and find out what she or he is interested in. 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 do something with you sometime. But remember, you should never force a person into a relationship, and never pressure another person to have sex or hurt them. Never allow someone to use force on you either.



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

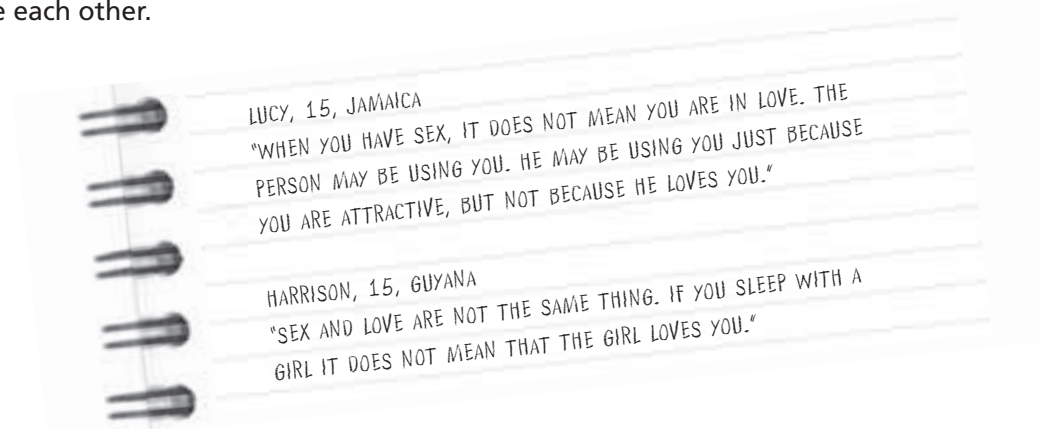
### BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP

There are many ways to get to know someone well and develop a good relationship. You can take walks, go to the movies, or simply go out for a snack together. You can also play sports and get involved in community or religious activities together. Studying together is also a good activity or you can spend time together while you are with a group of friends.

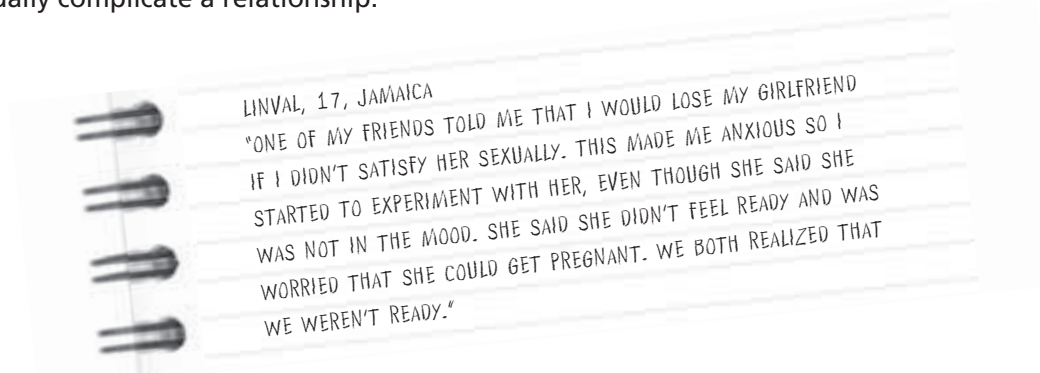
If your goal is to get to know someone and to develop a close relationship, doing different activities together is important. Keep in mind that becoming sexually active before your relationship is close or strong can damage it or make it a relationship only based on sex.

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

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Many people think that sex will make their relationship stronger, but becoming sexually active can actually complicate a relationship:



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

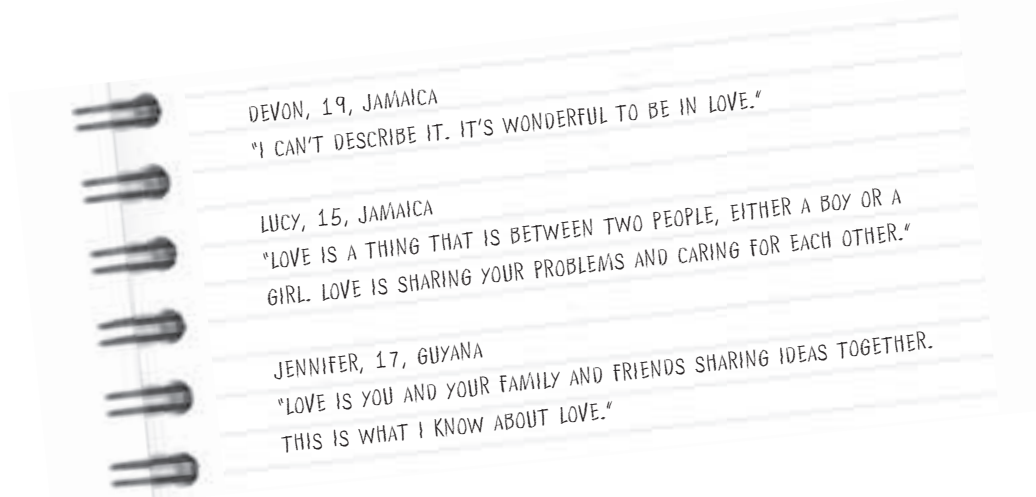
Remember, we can have very close relationships without having sex. By talking and sharing experiences, we can learn important things about each other: how each of us views life, how we would make decisions together, what kind of partner each of us would make, and how each feels about the other's plans for life.

It is a good idea to be friends first before beginning a sexual relationship with someone.

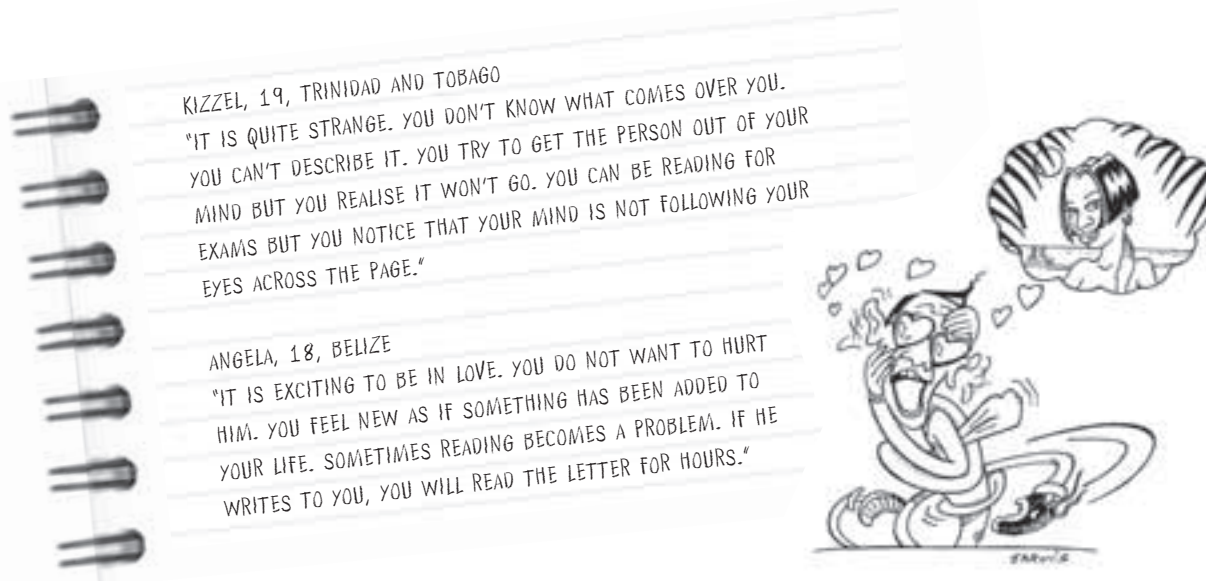
## LOVE

Love is difficult to define because it involves many different feelings. There are different kinds of love: love for our parents and friends, love for our boyfriend or girlfriend, spiritual love, or love for our community.

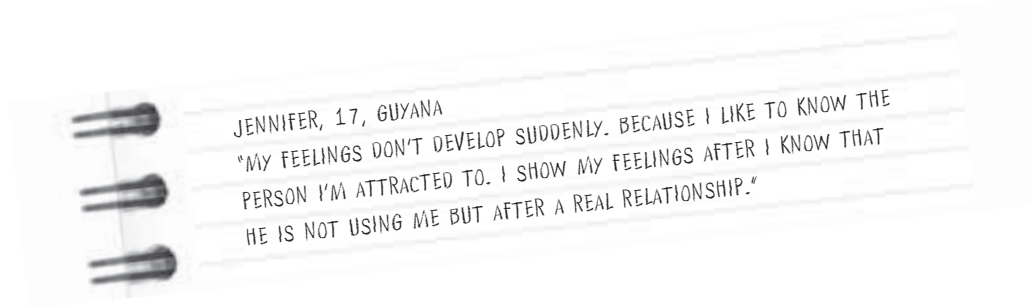
Love is a complex emotion and people may define love differently based on their own experiences with loving relationships. Generally, love refers to a deep feeling of fondness, attraction, respect, caring, and understanding for another person. Love also involves commitment and responsibility.



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 for the first time can be one of life's most intense experiences. Try not to rush into anything, and handle your heart and your loved one's with care.



When you are in love with someone you respect each other and try not to do anything that might hurt the other. You will not force the other person to do anything he or she does not want to do. You will want her or him to be happy. Here are some points about love:

- Love makes you and your loved one feel good about yourselves and about each other.
- Love is honesty, caring, and truthfulness.
- Love is respect.
- Love does not allow one person to take advantage of the other.
- Love involves a sense of responsibility, especially when it comes to sex.

Love involves trusting the other person and wanting what is best for them. 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.

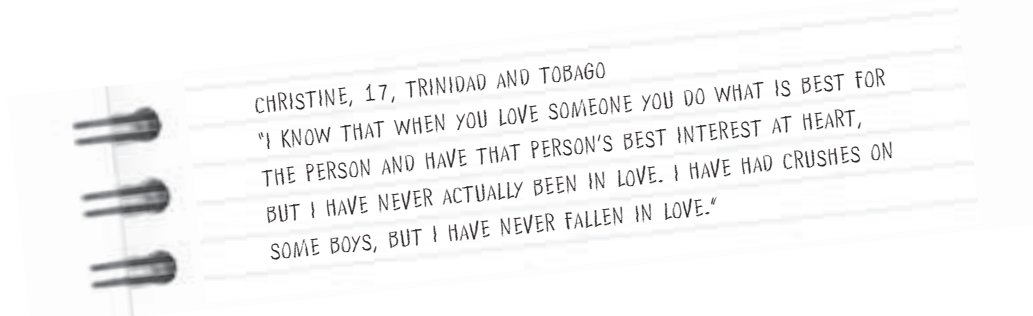


Jealousy is not a sign that someone loves you. It is usually a sign of insecurity.

Sometimes jealousy is a sign of a more serious problem. For example, jealousy can be a sign that one person wants to control the other person. Many abusive relationships (like those involving physical violence or rape) start out with jealous behaviour, which then gets worse and turns violent.

### INFATUATION OR CRUSHES

Sometimes, it is difficult to know if we are in love. Our heart pounds and we feel breathless and dizzy at the sight of a certain someone. We think it must be love. It's overwhelming! But when we get to know the person better, the wild feelings suddenly disappear and we no longer feel attracted to that person. That usually means it was an infatuation or a crush.



Crushes are perfectly healthy and normal and most adolescents and young people have them. Having a crush can be exciting and fun. 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.

Crushes differ from real love because in a mature relationship love involves responsibility, sacrifice, loyalty, empathy, and respect towards each other.

### FALLING OUT OF LOVE

Love doesn't always last. Feelings of being in love can disappear as quickly as they appear, though they were once real and powerful.

Sometimes as you get older, you and your girlfriend or boyfriend 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.

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 difficult, 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 partner's feelings, but at the same time, don't leave her or him hoping or thinking that you will change your mind.

It can be very painful and difficult if your loved one breaks off a relationship with you. It can be hard not to keep thinking that she or he will change her or his mind and come back to you.

If this happens, give yourself time to cope with your feelings. Avoid rushing 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 try not to 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. Focus on being a kind and loving person. Liking yourself makes it easier to love others and to be loved.

## Summary of Chapter 8

# Friendship and Love

Good friendships and relationships help us feel good about ourselves. **Good friends help us with our problems, introduce us to new ideas and share our dreams for the future.**

Sometimes people we take as friends can pressure us to do something we 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 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. People can have a close and loving relationship without sex.

Getting along with our peers 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. We all want respect, trust, honesty, and understanding.

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 and sex does not necessarily mean that two people love each other or that they are close.

Falling in love is a wonderful feeling. It makes us feel good about ourselves 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,** and it is not an excuse for 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 partner, but be kind and considerate too. Try not to hurt his or her feelings.

If someone ends a relationship with you, you may feel very sad and alone, but do not despair. 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

This chapter is about sexuality and sex and how people express their sexual feelings. There is a lot of information you need to know to make healthy decisions about sex and how to express your sexuality.

We are sexual beings from the time we are born, but adolescence is a time when we become more aware of our sexuality, how we feel, think, and behave, and what we want in terms of close relationships and physical affection. We become more aware of what it means to be a sexual being, of being a man or a woman. We may also may feel attracted to other people and notice our own sexual feelings and desires.

These are exciting changes, but they can also be confusing, especially because sexuality and sex are treated as forbidden subjects. We don't have much information about sex and sexuality, and some of the information we hear isn't true or is based on myth. For example, some people think that having sexual feelings is a sign that they should have sexual intercourse, but having sexual feelings is simply part of being human. Every person has sexual feelings, every person is different, and every person will need to decide if, how, and when to act on these sexual feelings.

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 erotic stories in your head.
- Having sexy thoughts or feelings.

## 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 shouldn't take risks with your own feelings and health or anyone else's.

We can start working to be sexually healthy persons by making sure that we are well-informed and know the difference between fact and fiction when it comes to sexuality and sex. We should take time to learn about our body, our emotions, and how to be sexually safe and healthy.

Most importantly, we can take some time to think about our choices related to sexual activity. There are several options: masturbation, different levels of sexual practices such as cuddling, fondling, kissing, having sexual intercourse, or abstinence. One of our choices can be "Not right now" or "No sex". We can wait until we find the right person, and both people understand the consequences of unprotected sex and know how to best protect ourselves before making the decision to be sexually active.

Sometimes it can be hard to be sexually healthy if no one ever teaches what healthy sexuality is and very often our main sources of information—peers, older brothers and sisters, videos, music, and magazines—may be confusing and misleading.

## DO YOU KNOW what sexuality means?

Sexuality is complex. It's much more than simply your sexual feelings or being sexually active. Sexuality includes:

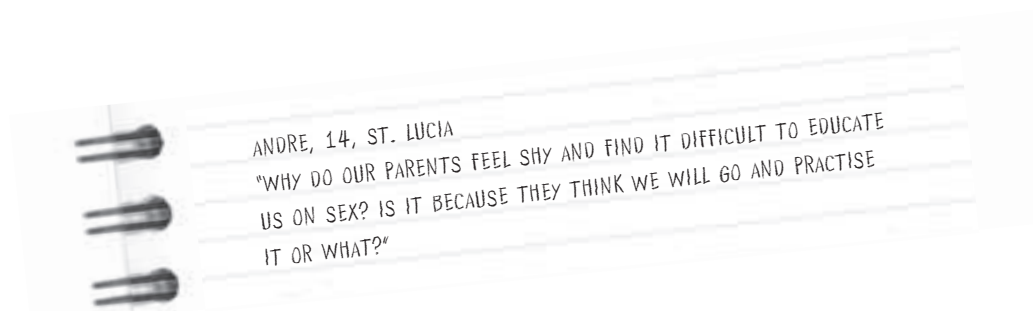
- Your awareness and feelings about your own body and other people's bodies.
- Your ability and need to be emotionally close to someone else.
- Your understanding of what it means to be female or male.
- Your feelings of sexual attraction to other people.
- Your physical capacity to reproduce.

Sexuality is an important, joyful, and natural part of being a person. It is a form of communication and a source of pleasure, health, and tenderness that is expressed through looks, hugs, kisses, and cuddling. These are referred to as sexual practices. It also includes sexual intercourse in all of its forms. You'll learn more about this later on. There is more than one way of living your sexuality and expressing your sexual feelings, and all of them can be joyful and fulfilling. It may be helpful to know that sex refers to the biological characteristics that define a man and a woman, while gender is how men and women are defined socially and culturally.

Sexuality is influenced by stereotypes related to the role of men and women, many of which are not based on fact or what is fair. For example, there is a stereotype that women are expected to be passive and men to be aggressive in sexual relationships, another that women should have sex to reproduce but that men will have sex for pleasure. It is important that you don't let these stereotypes guide how you think or behave. You are your own person!

Sometimes people use their sexuality in unhealthy ways to influence or control another person. This can range from flirtation and seduction to sexual harassment and abuse. Your sexuality should not be a tool to get something or hurt someone else.

In some videos and romance novels, sex looks like something that just happens. There's no discussion between the two people about what they want, or their plans, or whether they should have sex or use condoms. And even when they don't use condoms, the people in videos and novels never seem to have unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections (STIs).



Even the people we know and love can also mislead us about sex and sexuality. Many parents don't want to talk about sex with their children, sometimes because they are afraid to see us as sexual beings, and because they lack the information, and it can be hard to learn much from them.



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

Many of our peers and friends may say that they have had sex even when they have not, and we might start to think we should have sex to keep up with them. Our peers may also tell you myths such as: you must have sex to be sexy, or to make your penis bigger. But being sexually active won't make us sexy or cause our penis to get bigger.

It can be hard to make sense out of all the messages we get about sex and sexuality. However, an important part of achieving a healthy sexuality is being able to tell the difference between sexual behaviours that are healthy and those that are harmful to you or to others. Before you act on your sexual feelings, think about the possible consequences of your actions. Will acting on your sexual feelings cause any misunderstandings in your relationships? Will it make you or your partner feel uncomfortable? Will anyone's feelings get hurt? Will you or anyone else be put at risk for unwanted pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, or other STIs? Being sexually healthy means taking the time to think about these things before you act on your sexual feelings. The list in the following box provides some aspects of what it takes to be a sexually healthy person.

## ARE YOU a sexually healthy individual?

YOU ARE if you:

- Appreciate and respect your own body.
- Affirm your own sexual orientation and respect the sexual orientation of others.
- Express love and intimacy in appropriate ways.
- Develop and maintain meaningful relationships.
- Avoid relationships in which one person tries to exploit or manipulate the other.
- Identify and live according to your own values.
- Communicate effectively with your family, peers, and partners.
- Discuss sexuality with your partner before having sexual relations.
- Take responsibility for your own behaviour.
- Use contraception effectively to avoid unintended pregnancy.
- Take the necessary steps to avoid contracting or transmitting a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV.
- Show tolerance and avoid showing prejudice.

## YOUR SEXUAL IDENTITY AND ORIENTATION

Adolescence is a time when many people become more aware of their sexual identity and sexual orientation. Sexual identity is the way in which a person identifies himself or herself as male, female or some combination of the two.

Sexual orientation is related to whom a person feels sexually and romantically attracted to. Attraction to people of the opposite sex (i.e., men attracted to women, and women attracted to men) is called **heterosexuality**.

Some people feel romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same sex. This is called **homosexuality**. Some men feel attracted to men and are called “gays”, and some women feel attracted to women and are called “lesbians”. Furthermore some people are attracted to both men and women, and are called **bisexuals**.

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 it is also part of discovering and developing our sexual identity.

Some people are consistently attracted only to people of the same sex; being homosexual is for them a life option. The realisation that you are homosexual can be painful because you may feel very different than your peers and you may find it difficult to accept and express your sexual feelings or to share this with others. 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 can help answer your questions and be willing to listen and talk openly, and confidentially with you.

In many contexts homosexuality is considered something that is wrong and homosexual practices may even be censured by law. Regardless of the context, homosexuals, both gays and lesbians, shouldn't be rejected or discriminated against.

## SEXUAL FEELINGS

You know when you start feeling sexually aroused in the way your body reacts. An obvious physical sign of sexual feeling is erection of the penis for boys, whereas girls often experience wetness in the genital area. 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, thicker, and erect. In girls, the spongy tissue swells up inside the walls of the vagina making them produce more vaginal fluids, lubricating the area and making it wet.

You might feel sexual excitement just by reading a romantic or erotic novel or by thinking about a person 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, keep in mind that sexual intercourse is only one way that people express sexual feelings and there are plenty of other ways people sexually express themselves—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 arousing and satisfying, and they carry little risk of HIV infection (read Chapter 10 for more on HIV and other STIs). Your whole body may feel very sensitive and stimulated, possibly staying at this level of sexual excitement for a long time without having to go further. Or, you may want to go further and involve your genitals by caressing and rubbing them.

It is important to know that not all physical touching leads to sexual excitement. If a person is pushed unwillingly into sexual activity, they are not likely to be excited or take pleasure from it. Sexual excitement usually only happens when people are relaxed and consent to the sexual activities in which they are taking part (read Chapter 12 for more on sexual abuse and unwanted sexual activity).

## SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

**Sexual intercourse (often referred to as “sex” or “having sex”) occurs when two people put their bodies close together and the male’s erect penis goes into the body of his partner.**

Why do people have sexual intercourse? There are many reasons. Here are some:

- **To be loving and intimate.** For people who are very close, sexual intercourse can be very intimate and loving. Intimacy comes from talking honestly and sharing emotions. 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, though it does not usually work. Sexual intercourse 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 sexual intercourse 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 sexual intercourse 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 respect you or your decisions (see Chapter 12 for more on this).
- **For gifts.** Some people have sex to get gifts, money, or other favours. 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 likely 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 sexual intercourse 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 and or impress peers.** Many young people feel as though everyone around them is having sex and 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 or may not know much about it.
- **To have a baby.** Vaginal sexual intercourse is the only kind of sexual activity that will give you a baby. Many 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 been infected with HIV. If you are not ready to protect yourself and your partner by always using a latex condom, you are not ready for sexual intercourse.



Also, even without intercourse, if you have an orgasm by touching and cuddling someone else and if you are naked and the semen is released close to the vagina, there is a risk of pregnancy or HIV infection. If one or both of you is infected, you or your partner can become infected, even if you did not engage in sexual intercourse (read Chapter 10 for more on STIs and HIV).

## **DID YOU KNOW that there are other types of sex and intercourse besides vaginal sex?**

**Vaginal sex** is the best known type of sexual practise. But there are other kinds such as anal sex and oral sex.

- Anal sex is the stimulation of the anus during sexual activity. It can be done in several ways: manually, orally (anilingus), or by anal intercourse that is the insertion of a man's penis into his partner's rectum. Anal sex is often thought of as an activity in which men who have sex with men engage, but it is also practised by heterosexual couples. It can be pleasurable but it can also be a source of discomfort. Some people have strong negative attitudes toward anal sex, whether it takes place between homosexual or heterosexual couples.

It is important to note that many STIs, and particularly HIV, the virus causing AIDS, can be transmitted through anal sex, especially anal intercourse. In fact, the risk of HIV transmission is greater than it is in vaginal intercourse because the lining of the rectum is not lubricated and tears more easily than the vagina does. Among the STIs, chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhoea, and hepatitis types B and C may be transmitted by anal sex. Also, anal sex increases risk for anal cancer as a result of infection with human papilloma virus (HPV). Therefore the use of a latex condom during anal intercourse is very important.

- Oral sex or oral-genital sex means both mouth contact with the vagina, which is called cunnilingus, and mouth contact with the penis, which is called fellatio. Either form of oral sex can be done with one partner stimulating the other individually or both partners doing it simultaneously. The latter is called "69" because the position of the couple in simultaneous stimulation resembles this number. Although these are very common sexual practises and for many people quite enjoyable, some people have reservations about them. These reservations are based on hygiene, taboos, or the individual's beliefs about masculinity and femininity and what is appropriate behaviour. For persons who are not infected with a sexually transmitted infection, neither vaginal fluid nor semen is harmful to another person. Before engaging in sexual activity of any kind, everyone should be sure that they and their partners are free from STIs, particularly HIV. Remember that the anus and genitals should be clean before performing oral sex.

Many people have great reservations regarding these practises, mostly based on cultural notions and on legal and religious restrictions that are still very powerful. In some contexts, these practices, especially anal sex and fellatio, may be associated with pressured sex, often involving some degree of violence.

All in all, an individual's sexual practises should be private decisions. Sex is very intimate, and sexual relationships are to be pleasurable and satisfying. Couples should feel comfortable together and able to discuss openly all of these forms of sexual expression. Most of all each person should be very respectful of the feelings of the other person. Nobody should be pressured to engage in a practice that he or she dislikes. If necessary or helpful, the couple can seek professional counselling to discuss their options.



**Sexual Arousal Responses**

Sex can be a pretty steamy subject. But if you hope to understand anything about pleasing yourself or your (potential) partner(s), you need to understand how your body works during sex.

**It Starts with Desire**

Sexual response for both men and women can be divided up into five stages: desire, excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution.

Just about anything can set off the desire stage: a person's cologne, beautiful hair, an accidental touch, or almost anything imaginable. You can feel desire for someone of the same sex or the opposite sex, for someone older or younger, for someone tall or short. Each person will have their own feelings, and these feelings will change over the course of the person's life.

**Excitement Builds**

During the excitement phase, the body responds to this feeling of desire and prepares for sexual contact: muscles tense, and heart rate and blood pressure increase. In both men and women, nipples may get hard, and women's breasts enlarge. Blood flow increases to the genitals, so that the clitoris swells or the penis becomes erect. In women, the vagina lubricates itself; in men, the scrotum thickens and the testes move closer to the body.

**Plateau of Arousal**

With stimulation, usually involving physical contact, the excitement phase gradually becomes the plateau phase. The contact does not have to be genital contact or intercourse; kissing or touching of almost any part of the body can have the required effect. During the plateau, the body remains at a heightened state of arousal.

Genitals are usually the most sensitive parts of a person's body, but for most people, other areas can also cause arousal when touched. These places, called erogenous zones, often include breasts, feet, or ears. Just about any part of the body can be an erogenous zone.

**Orgasm: The Climax**

When sufficiently aroused, both women and men may experience orgasm. During orgasm, certain hormones called endorphins are released into the body, bringing intense pleasure and relaxation. At the same time, both women and men experience a loss of muscle control, and increased heart rate and blood pressure.

For most women, stimulation of the vagina alone is not sufficiently stimulating to cause orgasm. Orgasm usually also requires more direct stimulation of the clitoris. For men, orgasm is usually accompanied by ejaculation. During ejaculation, the prostate gland and seminal vesicles contract, forcing semen out of the penis. Some women, about 10%, also ejaculate fluid from their vagina at orgasm.

**And After, the Resolution**

After orgasm, the body relaxes in a phase called resolution. Heart rate slows and blood pressure lowers; nipples, clitoris, penis all lose their tension and become soft. The scrotum relaxes, allowing the testes to drop away from the body once again. Most men experience a "refractory" period during which time they can't get another erection. Refractory periods are usually briefer in younger men and longer in older men. Most women, on the other hand, can have repeated orgasms right after the first one.

**Making It "Good"**

For sex to be "good", both partners need to be relaxed and at ease. Some people take longer than others to become comfortable with a possible new partner, even if they're sexually attracted. And once involved, the process of figuring out what is and isn't enjoyable during sex can take a long time and requires trust and respect. Every individual has the right to make his or her own choices, to take a relationship at his or her own pace, and to change his or her mind about any activity at any moment.

## MASTURBATION

**Masturbation** is the act of touching oneself in a sexually stimulating way, and it is another way that people sometimes express their sexual feelings. Apart from the external genitals, our bodies have “erogenous zones” which are particularly sensitive to touch and respond by sexual arousal.

Both men and women can satisfy their sexual feelings and experience sexual pleasure through masturbation. Most people masturbate sometime or other during their lives. Some people 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 others feel that having sexual fantasies and masturbating conflicts with their religious or moral beliefs.

There are myths that are meant to discourage people from masturbating. Here are some myths 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.
- Masturbating makes you use up all your sperm, or causes you to stop menstruating.
- Masturbation makes you weak and makes it impossible to bear children.
- Masturbation causes you to lose your sexual desires.
- Masturbation makes you become a proud and self-centred person.

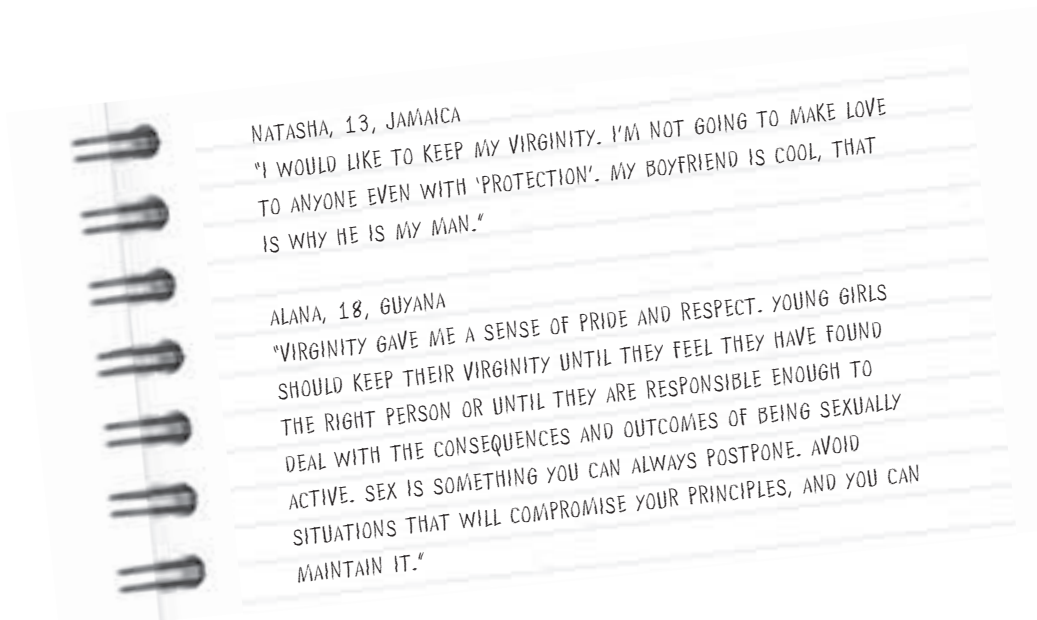
None of these myths are true. There is no scientific evidence that masturbation causes any physical or psychological harm. From a medical point of view, masturbation is a normal part of the human experience. It is normal if you do masturbate, and it is normal if you don't.

Masturbation is only considered a problem when it is excessive, when a person cannot function or get through daily tasks without masturbating.

Experts in human sexuality consider masturbation one normal way for people to get to know their bodies and feelings, and to express their sexuality without risking pregnancy or STIs, including HIV and AIDS. Nothing bad will happen to your body, even if you masturbate a lot. Your genitals might get sore from rubbing them too much. On rare occasions, a boy may contract non-specific urethritis (NSU), which is an inflammation of the urethra from excessive rubbing.

## VIRGINITY

**Virginity is a concept that means a person has never had sexual intercourse and it applies for both boys and girls.** In some contexts in our societies, virginity is considered a virtue, especially in girls who should preserve their virginity until marriage as a symbol of innocence and purity. This is not always true for boys. In many cultures, sexual experience before marriage is encouraged and celebrated in men while condemned in women, which is an example of gender inequality.



Whereas in men there is no physical indication of virginity, virginity in girls is sometimes 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. The hymen usually tears during sexual intercourse, but some girls who have never been sexually active 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 the first time they have vaginal intercourse with a boy, whereas girls who have little or no hymen tissue may not bleed at all. This can be confusing. People may say: "There was no blood; therefore she was not a virgin." But she may have been. If she had not had sexual intercourse before, she was a virgin. **You only stop being a virgin through sexual intercourse**, not through sports, using a tampon, or any other activity. While it is true that these activities could stretch or tear the hymen, having a torn or stretched hymen doesn't mean that a girl is not a virgin. People who think that an intact hymen is proof of virginity are mistaken.

Since a girl can have sexual intercourse and still preserve the hymen, specialists now define anatomical virginity and moral virginity. According to the latter, any person who has experienced sexual intercourse, that is penetration, whether it is vaginal, oral, or anal is not a virgin anymore. By the same token, boys who have experienced any kind of sexual intercourse are not virgins anymore.

## DID YOU KNOW there are myths about virginity?

There are many myths about virginity:

1. *I heard that a girl can lose her virginity through sports. Is this true?* No! Being a virgin only means you have not engaged in sexual activity. Playing sports is good for girls and it can't cause them to stop being virgins.
2. *Can some herbs restore a person's virginity?* No herb can restore virginity. Once you become sexually active, you are no longer a virgin.
3. *My friends say that if I remain a virgin too long, I will develop illnesses and abnormalities.* Not true! You can abstain from sex and be 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?* 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 become sexually active, 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 hymen—so much that you will break the condom. Is this true?* No! Anyone, whether they have had sex before or not, can use condoms comfortably without any problem. The hymen is a very thin piece of tissue, which tears easily.
8. *Having sex with virgins will cure STIs.* No! This will only cause the virgin girl or boy to become infected with an STI.

It is important to think about the value you give to virginity whether you are a boy or a girl since it can be used to manipulate your feelings and your sexuality, especially if you are a girl. The fear of preserving—or losing—your virginity should not push you to do things you are not comfortable with. The decision to engage in any kind of sexual practice should be based on your—and only your—moral and ethical values and not on those of your partners or friends.

### DECIDING TO BECOME SEXUALLY ACTIVE

You should be the one to decide when to become sexually active. Don't let other people decide for you or pressure you into it. Wait until you are sure that you can always protect yourself against STIs, including HIV and AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy. If you do decide to become sexually active, it is recommended that you get tested for HIV and AIDS and be monogamous, and that you have access to contraceptives.

ADAM, 13, BELIZE

"I THINK THE RIGHT TIME FOR SEX WILL BE WHEN I FINISH MY STUDIES, AND MAYBE WORK. EVEN WHEN THE TIME COMES I WILL USE CONDOMS TO AVOID THE RISKS INVOLVED."

DERRELL, 12, JAMAICA

"SOME BOYS WHO ARE OLDER THAN WE ARE OR WHO ARE BLESSED WITH BIG BODIES LAUGH AT US SAYING WE ARE VIRGINS."

ANDREW, 17, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

"MY FRIENDS LAUGH AT ME AND TRY TO ENCOURAGE ME TO HAVE A GIRLFRIEND. THEY SAY THAT IF YOU LIVE WITHOUT A GIRLFRIEND, YOU ARE NOT A MAN!"

CHRISTINE, 17, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

"AT TIMES, YOU FEEL LEFT OUT WHEN YOUR FRIENDS ARE TALKING ABOUT SEX ISSUES. 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."

MILTON, 17, BELIZE

"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."



Sometimes your peers may pressure you to have sex. But, many adolescents today are very clear that having sex should be their own decision, and that no one should push them into sex.

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

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

LOIS, 13, JAMAICA

"NOBODY CAN FORCE ME TO HAVE SEX. IT WILL BE MY OWN DECISION."

ANDREW, 17, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

"IF I WANT TO HAVE SEX IT WILL BE MY OWN WILL. MY FRIENDS WILL NOT INFLUENCE ME."

## SETTING SEXUAL LIMITS

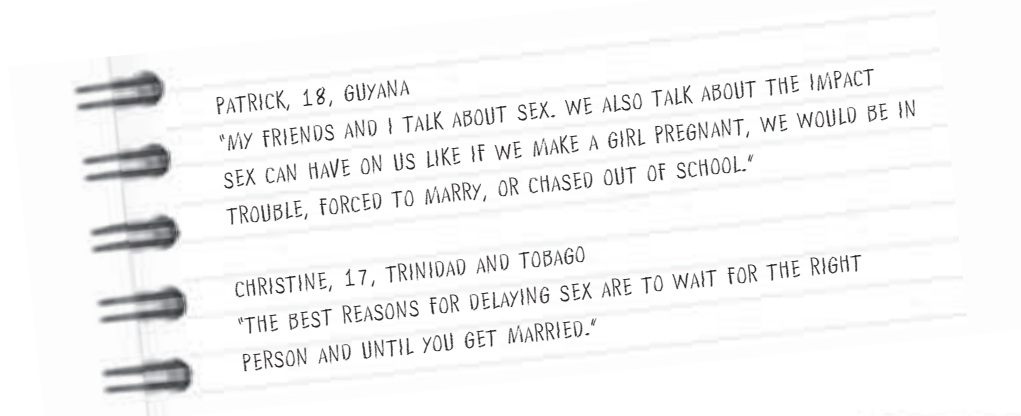
Some people think that sex is a powerful and uncontrollable force that just happens, like thunder or rain. But the truth is that becoming sexually active is a **deliberate decision** a person takes. When you have sex, it is not nature overcoming you. It is you who make a decision. In fact you make many decisions about sex: When? With whom? Why? Where? What kind of sex? How often? With or without a condom? Where do you get contraceptives?

Make sure that it is your decision whether to have sex or not. Block out all those voices who say that "everybody" is having sex. "Everybody" is not having sex, and you are you, 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, correct and consistent use of contraception, HIV counselling and testing? Many 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.

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 uncomfortable.

## DECIDING NOT TO HAVE SEX



Many young people, both boys and girls, choose not to have sex for some very good reasons:

- They are worried about pregnancy and STIs/HIV and AIDS, and they do not want to take risks.
- They have not made up their mind and feel confused about this choice.
- 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 loves them.
- They need more time to develop a feeling of trust and intimacy.





If you are faced with the decision of whether or not to have sex, remember that as pleasurable as it may be, sexual intercourse can have serious consequences like HIV infection or unplanned pregnancy. You need to think through this decision very carefully, keeping the following in mind:

- Sometimes waiting is the surest 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 and AIDS, and other STIs. Therefore: **No condom, no sex.**

### The ABC Approach

In the last few years, many youth programmes for HIV prevention have put forward an approach to deal with decisions regarding sexual behaviour. It is a three-pronged strategy called “ABC”, standing for: Abstinence, Be faithful, and use a Condom.

Since only abstinence is 100% effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies and HIV and STI infections, the ABC approach proposes that young people practice **sexual abstinence** until they are fully informed and prepared to engage in sexual activity. This means **delaying having sex** until you are emotionally ready and that you and your partner know the risks and responsibilities involved and how to protect yourselves. This behaviour is of course recommended for very young adolescents who are in the process of discovering their sexuality and their sexual feelings and who are not yet prepared to negotiate safer sex. Many older adolescents and young people also practise abstinence for different reasons, including religious beliefs. Also, anyone who has been sexually active can opt for abstinence at a certain stage later in life.

Nevertheless, opting for abstinence should not preclude education on sexual and reproductive matters. Everyone should have information and develop skills to lead a healthy sexual life, even if they choose to delay sexual activity or abstain from sex until marriage. Sooner or later you will have to make choices and you will need both the information and the skills to do so. Also, bear in mind that abstinence (or remaining a virgin) does not only refer to vaginal intercourse, but to all forms of sexual practise. Many young people have misinterpreted this notion engaging in other forms of sexual practices like oral sex or anal intercourse which are potentially more risky in terms of HIV and STI infection. Lastly, for abstinence to be effective, it has to be consistent, which means, no “slips” should be accepted.

The **be faithful** component of the ABC strategy has different connotations depending on the context. If you are sexually active and do not have a stable partner, it means you should reduce the number of sexual partners. If you do have a stable partner, or if you are married, it means, be faithful, do not engage in “sex on the side” with other people. Of course it also means helping to ensure that your partner is also faithful. Many women who practised abstinence and were faithful to their partners have become infected with HIV by their unfaithful partners.

The last component of the strategy and perhaps the most important for sexually active adolescents is the correct and consistent **use of condoms**. This means, when you decide that you and your partner are ready for sex, be sure to always use a latex condom correctly. You have the right and the knowledge to protect yourself!

## TALKING WITH YOUR PARTNER ABOUT SEX

Decisions about sexual intercourse involve you and your partner and require good communication skills. It's very important to be able to tell your partner how you feel and 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 what you want and what you don't want to do.** Know what your reasons for this 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 of you is distracted by other things, and when you both are feeling relaxed and comfortable. It's also important to choose a good place to talk. Choose a place where you don't have to worry about other people overhearing you and where you will have the time you need to discuss these important issues.
- **Don't wait until you are already "in the heat of the moment" to begin discussing sex.** It can be pretty difficult to have a good conversation about sex when one or both of you is already feeling sexually excited. 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 partner that you don't want to have sex because you're afraid of STIs and pregnancy, or that your mother will find out. If you tell your partner this, she or 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 much about your feelings. Stand your ground, and make sure your partner understands what you want.
- **Pay attention to your feelings and instincts.** If deep in your heart you don't feel that something is right for you, don't do it. Listen to your fears, worries, or concerns and wait until you feel more confident.
- **Always allow yourself to change your mind.** Suppose you told your boyfriend or girlfriend that you would have sex with him or her, 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 always have a right to change your mind about sex.**

Even if you have had sex before, you can always decide to stop without having to justify it. Just remember, people have a right to change their minds.

## Summary of Chapter 9

# Sexuality and Sex

Adolescence is a time when you become more aware of yourself as a person—man or woman—who has sexual feelings. You become more aware of your sexuality, how you feel, think, and behave as a sexual being, 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 and AIDS.

Everyone has sexual feelings, and **you don't need to have sex when you have these 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 masturbating alone or with a partner, talking to each other, holding hands, hugging, and kissing.

A person, whether girl or boy, who has never had sexual intercourse is considered a virgin. **People can only stop being virgins by having sexual intercourse,** not through using a tampon, playing sports, or any other activity.

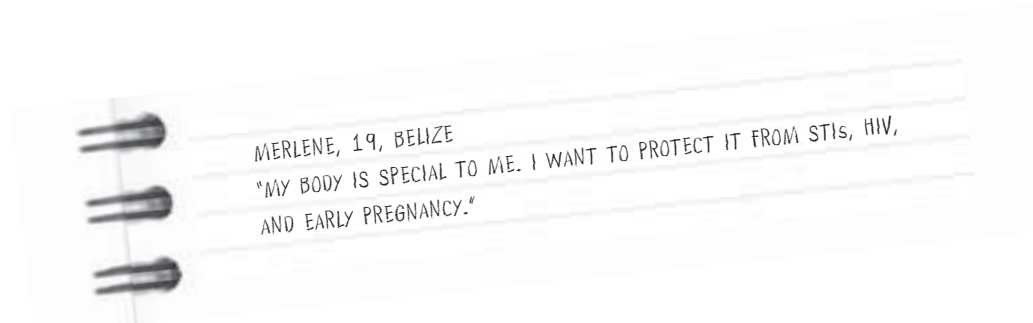
**Waiting to have sex may be right for you.** Many adolescents decide not to have sex because they feel that they are too young, and they do not feel ready. You have a right to wait to have sex or abstain from it for as long as you want.

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.



# Taking Care of Your Sexual Health



Being sexually healthy means that we can express our sexuality in a way that is pleasurable and fulfilling both for ourselves and our partner, without putting either of us at risk.

There's important information we should know about staying healthy and protecting ourselves from sexual and reproductive health problems. Our sexual and reproductive rights include having access to this information and to appropriate health services. Sexually transmitted infections and HIV and AIDS can result from sexual activity, so it's important that we know how to take good care of ourselves and our partners.

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), also called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or venereal diseases, are infections that are spread mainly through sexual contact, through contact between people's body fluids, semen, vaginal fluids and blood, or through contact with infected skin. STIs can be spread in different ways:

- From a man to a woman and from a woman to a man, and between two people of the same sex through sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal, or oral) or even when penetration doesn't take place.
- Through sharing needles with an infected person.
- A pregnant woman with an STI can infect her infant through the baby's contact with his or her mother's blood or infected vagina.
- Through maternal milk (breastfeeding), especially in the case of HIV.

One of the most severe STIs which you can become infected with is HIV. There is no vaccine against HIV, and there is no cure for it once you are infected.



Other STIs, like syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhoea are also very serious. While they can be managed and cured, they can still have long-term effects:

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

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

1. **Abstaining from sexual intercourse.** Delay the beginning of your sex life or stop having sexual intercourse.
2. **If you have sexual intercourse, always use a latex condom from start to finish of the sex act,** even if you are using oral contraceptives. Use a new condom for every sex act.
3. **Go with your partner for an STI check-up,** including an HIV test, before becoming sexually active. Depending on whether and when you last had unprotected sex, you may need more than one HIV test to be sure you are free of HIV (see page 101 for more on this). Make sure that neither of you have any sexually transmitted infections before you begin having sexual relations. If neither you nor your partner tests positive for an STI, you can avoid contracting STIs by having a mutually monogamous relationship, meaning that you and your partner are faithful to each other.

If you and your partner or partners use latex condoms every time you have sexual intercourse, you should continue to do so! Many people start out using latex condoms, but after a while they start to think: "I trust my partner. We can stop using condoms." This is a big mistake! Some people think that using a latex condom is a sign of mistrust. On the contrary, using a latex condom is proof that you love and care for your partner. Even if you and your partner or partners have check-ups and do not have any STIs, it is best to continue using latex condoms to avoid pregnancy and catching or passing on STIs.

#### HOW DO WE KNOW IF WE HAVE AN STI?

**Many people, and especially women, who are infected with an STI, have no obvious symptoms at all.** This is especially true for HIV infection. Be sure to think about your risks of having caught an STI. If you have had unprotected sex, you could have exposed yourself to an STI.

There are several STIs that can have symptoms which disappear. If you get a sore or a rash on your genitals that goes away without treatment, you may still need to see a health worker. The syphilis sore always goes away, and herpes sores come and go. If you ever notice any sore, rash, or blister on or close to your genitals, you should see a health worker. Even if the symptoms of an STI disappear, it is likely that the infection is still there and won't cure itself.

We need to know what our genitals look like when we are healthy in order to be able to recognise a problem. To see your genitals better, use a mirror under bright light. Syphilis, for example, causes a painless sore that we might not notice it unless we look closely.

Girls should be familiar with the appearance and smell of their normal vaginal discharge. Normal vaginal discharge:

- Is clear or whitish, a bit like egg white.
- Smells neutral or healthy and not offensive.
- Does not cause itchiness.

STIs often cause discharge to be yellow or green in colour and to have a distinct odour.



Some infections that are not sexually transmitted also cause abnormal discharge (read the end of this chapter for more on this), and even someone who has never had sex could get one of these infections. If you notice anything different in your genital area, see a health worker. In fact, if you have a partner, you should **both** go for a medical check-up, even if you feel perfectly fine.

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

Some STIs have no obvious signs, 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 urinating.
- Pain during sexual intercourse.
- Pain and swelling of 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 an unusual smell or colour.
- Pain in the lower abdomen.
- Pain or a burning feeling when passing urine.
- Pain during sexual intercourse.
- Abnormal or irregular vaginal bleeding.
- Itching in the genital area.
- Abnormal swelling or growth of the genitals.

**If you have any of the signs above you and your partner should visit a clinic immediately.**

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### GOING FOR AN STI CHECK-UP

You need an STI check-up if you have had unprotected sex, whether or not you have any symptoms.

Going for a check-up can be a bit nerve-wracking. Unfortunately, some health workers can be judgmental and unsympathetic towards young people who are sexually active and they let you know! Try not to let it get to you if a health worker does pass judgment on your sexual behaviour. Even if the health workers are unfriendly, remain calm, stand your ground, and be assertive. It's your right to receive quality health care in all matters regarding your sexuality.

These days, many clinics charge fees for STI services, but some clinics provide reduced-cost services to adolescents and young people so ask around, and try to find a youth-friendly health centre. If you need to, you can borrow the money you need to visit a health centre.

At certain health facilities you will also get counselling about important choices you face, such as:

- Are you happy with your decision to have sex?
- Do you want an HIV test?
- How can you talk to your partner about using latex condoms?
- Should you use contraception? What method is right for you?

Many health clinics will give you free latex condoms and you should make use of them correctly and consistently.

If you find out that you have been diagnosed with an STI:

- Finish all the medicines that the health worker gives you.
- Do not have sex until the health worker says that you can.
- Discuss sexual health with your partner (or partners), mentioning that you have been diagnosed with an STI so that you can protect yourselves.

Your sexual partner (or all your current or former sexual partners, if you have or have had more than one) also need(s) to see a health worker to seek treatment. An untreated partner will infect you again. Even if you are no longer sexually active with that person, you should still urge him or her to go for a check-up and treatment. If you do not urge them to do so 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 and he/she may be infecting others. It might be very hard to go talk to an ex-girlfriend or an ex-boyfriend, but you need to do it and to strongly urge her or him to go for a check-up.



Telling your partner can be difficult,  
but it's very important.

**Never** treat yourself for an STI without first consulting a health worker because you may not have or get the right medicine or medicines or treatment. Using the wrong medicine can make the STI-causing organisms 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 AND 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 protects your body from infections. Over time, a person infected with HIV becomes unable to fight off infections, 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 once you have contracted HIV or developed AIDS.

It takes a long time to notice signs of the virus. As a result, a person living with HIV might look and feel healthy for years and might not know that he or she has the virus. During that time, he or she could spread HIV to others without knowing it.

The length of time it takes for someone to notice any sign 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 five to ten years before there are any signs of infection with HIV.

Because the virus attacks the immune system and makes the person living with HIV more vulnerable to other infections, the symptoms vary greatly depending on what other infection or illness the person contracts. Some of the typical symptoms of HIV are:

- Swollen lymph glands.
- Tuberculosis (TB).
- Severe weight loss and fatigue.
- Sweating, especially at night.
- Recurrent fever.
- Severe and persistent diarrhoea.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Persistent cough.
- Skin rashes and sores.

There is no cure for HIV and AIDS, but there are medicines called anti-retrovirals (ARVs) that help people live with HIV for many years without becoming ill. They help strengthen your immune system and fight off infections. Unfortunately, these medicines tend to be very expensive and are not always available to many people who are living with AIDS. In the Caribbean there are special government programmes that provide access to anti-retrovirals to people living with AIDS.

Therefore it's best to stop HIV from entering your body in the first place:

- Never decide someone is "safe" (i.e. healthy) 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 latex condom. If used correctly and consistently, latex 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, or ear-piercing equipment.

#### HOW DOES HIV ENTER THE BODY?

HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, lives in blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk in HIV positive people. It 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. These cuts and scrapes are often so small that they are not visible, but they are big enough for HIV to pass through if the torn skin comes in contact with the semen of an HIV positive man. HIV can also enter the body as a result of unprotected anal sex, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual, since the tissue inside the anus is very delicate.

When a man has unprotected sex with an HIV positive woman, he is at risk of contracting the HIV virus. His penis is exposed to vaginal fluid, which carries HIV if the woman is HIV positive. 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 into the blood stream, especially if there are sores, scratches, or cuts in this area.

HIV can be spread in other ways too. These include:

- From mother to infant during pregnancy, delivery, 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 razor, or by sharing needles. These days, most blood transfusion services carefully test all blood donations to ensure that they are not infected with HIV. Be sure to never share razor blades with relatives or friends.

There is no known case of getting the virus from saliva while kissing. However, if a person had a cut in his or her mouth, he or she could possibly get HIV from kissing an HIV positive person who also had a cut or open sore. Because HIV can be in semen and vaginal fluids, oral sex without a latex condom can expose you or your partner to HIV and AIDS. If a person has a small cut in their mouth and also gets semen or vaginal fluids in their mouth, they could get HIV. Anal sex is even more dangerous since anal tissue is delicate and can tear easily therefore opening the door for HIV transmission.

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 or sharing objects such as dishes, eating utensils, clothes, books, etc.

**Here are a few examples of common MYTHS about HIV and AIDS...  
WATCH OUT, NONE OF THESE ARE TRUE!**

You cannot get HIV if you have sex in the Caribbean Sea.

You do not get HIV if you "do it from behind".

Rough sex is good in preventing HIV transmission.

Cleaning your sexual organs with bleach right after sex will kill the HIV infection.

Having sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure AIDS.

Only white people can get HIV.

Only gay people can get HIV.

People with HIV get skinny all of a sudden and are easy to recognise.

A visit to the obeah woman can cure HIV or AIDS.

You can tell that someone has AIDS by the way he or she looks.

Some of us have people with HIV or with AIDS in our families and we 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. Use a household detergent when you are cleaning items with blood or body fluids.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE HIV-POSITIVE?

Usually you cannot tell by looking at your body if you have HIV (also called being HIV positive or serum positive; HIV negative means that you do not have HIV). Even 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. 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.

The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested for it. HIV testing is often accompanied by counselling, in-depth discussions with a trained and sympathetic person who can help you to cope with your HIV status and tell you how to take care of yourself. Or if you are not HIV positive, the counsellor can help you take steps to keep yourself from contracting STIs including 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 are two broad categories of HIV tests: screening and confirmatory. The screening test (**ELISA**) is easier to perform than the confirmatory test and less costly. The test is reliable, safe, painless, and free in most health centres. The results of the test should be kept confidential. You have the right to be informed of the results of your screening test, and the responsibility to share the results with your partner if you have one. The health worker takes a small amount of blood from your arm. 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. If your screening test was positive—meaning that you are probably infected with HIV—a confirmatory test will be performed in order to verify the screening test result. Usually the **Western blot test** will be used as the confirmatory test as it is more accurate but it is also more expensive.

If the result is negative, to know whether you are really not infected with HIV, you will also be asked to come back in another three to six months (depending on the date of your last sexual intercourse) for another test when the “**window period**” will be over. In the meantime, you should avoid all sexual intercourse.

### DID 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 ELISA test can detect the HIV virus in you. Usually the test can detect the virus within two to four weeks of infection, but sometimes it takes up to three to six months. This means that for three to six months after infection, the test may not be able to tell you whether you are infected. This is the **window period**. During this window period, you can be infected with HIV and unknowingly infect others. Thus, if you test during the window period, the test will be negative even though the virus is there. If you are infected and you return in another few months, the test will find the virus, and you will test positive.

## WHY SHOULD YOU GET TESTED?

There are many reasons to test for HIV antibodies. If you have had unprotected sex and you are worrying constantly about HIV infection and are anxious about every pimple or cough that you get, you may feel more reassured having 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 should get tested to find out your status.

## LIVING POSITIVELY WITH HIV

If you do find out that you are infected with HIV, you can learn to cope with it though it may not be easy. You will need counselling, and it is also a good idea to tell someone close to you so that you do not feel alone.

The disease tends to progress very slowly, especially if you follow the treatment carefully, and people can live with the virus for 10 to 20 years or beyond. Because there are many scientists working on HIV, there could be a breakthrough and a cure could be found any day.

If you find out that you have HIV or AIDS, it is very important to learn to “live positively”. Living positively can greatly improve your chances of staying healthy for a longer time. Living “positively” with HIV means:

- Seeking professional help so that you have emotional support and guidance as to how to lead your life and regular medical follow up.
- Demanding from health professionals all the information you need; ask all the questions you need in order to understand what is going on to be able to control your new life.
- Eating nutritious food such as greens, beans, and fish because these help the immune system.
- Getting plenty of rest and practising some moderate exercise.
- Treating all illnesses as they arise.
- Following your anti-retroviral treatment regime conscientiously (if and when you need one). This can make a big difference in your quality of life.
- Informing your sexual partner that you have HIV. It is important that you protect each other from infection or re-infection.
- Using a latex condom during every sexual intercourse to avoid giving the virus to someone or getting more viruses into your body.
- Although it is not necessary to inform everybody around you of your infection, having a supportive environment can be good for you. You can discuss with your counsellor the best way to inform your family and friends so that you have all the support and care you will need.
- Cherish your loved ones and practise a religion if you follow one. Take time for your family and friends and spiritual life.
- Join a support group for people living with HIV or a group fighting for HIV-positive people's rights. This can give you a lot of satisfaction and a strong feeling of self-worth. There is a lot of information on this on the Web, if you have access to it, and many youth-friendly chat groups you can join for support.

Living positively means making the most of your life everyday. This is actually 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. They are called "people living with HIV" (PLWHIV) or "people living with AIDS" (PLWA). They have much to offer and need love and attention like everyone else. They often do 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 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 broken up with him but was left worried that I might be infected with HIV because we had been having unprotected sex. We had known each other for a long time, and we trusted each other so we didn't use latex condoms. I now realize that was a big mistake.

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 Voluntary Counselling and HIV Testing Centre in town. 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 and 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 a condom. 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 it. Then, she took me to another room where a little blood was taken from my arm. It was very quick and 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 also 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 using latex condoms. The counsellor said that as it had been more than six months since I had sexual relations with my boyfriend, I could trust this result. However, she told me that as long as I am sexually active, I need to be tested regularly.

When I walked out, I felt so relieved and happy. And the whole process had taken only one hour."



## DO YOU KNOW about living positively with HIV and AIDS?

John learned 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, to stop smoking and drinking alcohol. I have a girlfriend who is also HIV positive. We practise protected sex with a latex condom to avoid re-infecting each other.

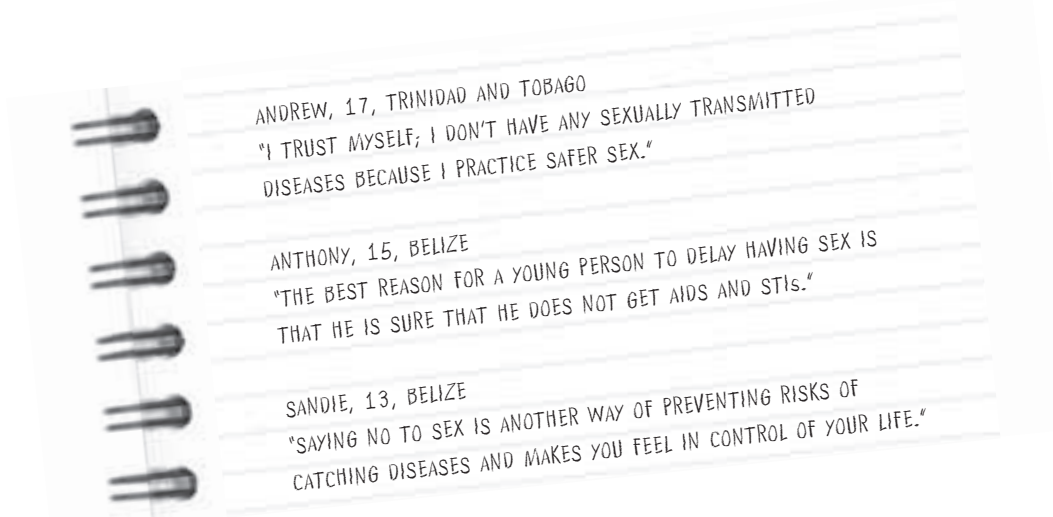
I also avoid stress and treat any small illness that affects me. One important thing I have taught myself is to try to think positively, and this is what consoles me most. I'm actively involved in a drama group through which we educate the youth about HIV and AIDS prevention and care.

I advise youth to wait for sex till they are older and ready to protect themselves. Those who are HIV positive should accept and join hands to save the lives of those who are not infected."

John is living positively with HIV and has bravely accepted his situation. He looks after his body, keeps busy, and has the love and support of his girlfriend. 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 (see Chapter 9 on masturbation), abstaining from rubbing genitals or sexual intercourse, and using sex toys. If you read Chapter 9, then you know masturbation is totally safe. The only body fluids and private parts you are in contact with are your own. You cannot get infected with anything, and you cannot get yourself or anyone else pregnant. Sex toys or sex aids (the most popular ones being vibrators) are devices which are made to enhance sexual pleasure. They are used mainly on the genitals or around the genitals. You can use a sex toy by yourself or as a couple. If you are sharing a sex toy with your partner make sure to wipe it clean before giving it to your partner so that you don't exchange body fluids. Also remember to clean the sex toy after use.



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 genitals 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.

Protected sexual intercourse between two people who are both HIV/STI free is another way of avoiding HIV. 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 the only trustworthy way to know a person's status is through a test. People you love and trust can give you STIs. They may not know that they are infected.

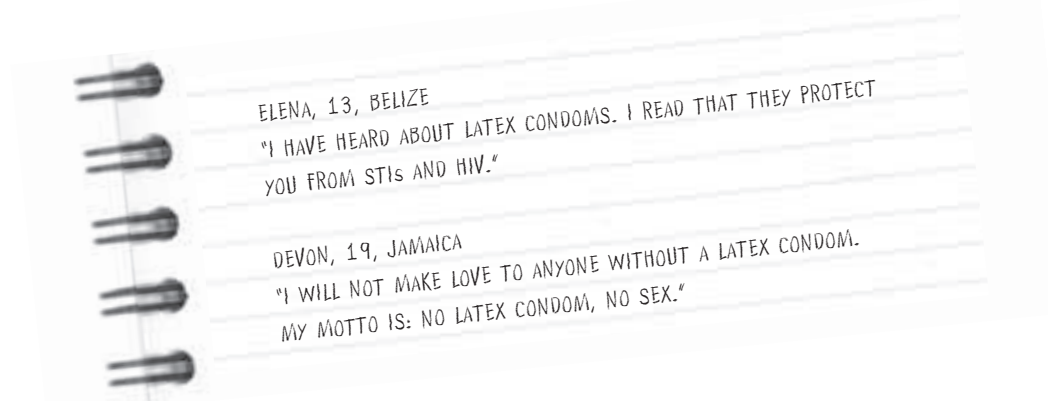
Latex condoms make sex safer and are a very important way to protect ourselves and our partner. Even if you are not having sex, read the next section because it is still important to know about latex condoms.



It's never too late to start using condoms.

## LATEX CONDOMS

A latex condom is a soft tube made of latex rubber that is put on an erect penis before sexual intercourse. The sperm is caught in the tip of the latex condom when a man ejaculates. Because the semen is collected in the latex condom, it does not reach the other person. Likewise, the latex condom covers the penis so that the woman's (or man's) fluids do not touch it.

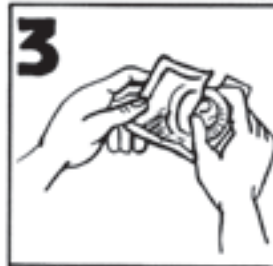


**If used correctly and consistently, latex condoms provide very good protection against pregnancy and STIs, including HIV and AIDS.** Latex condoms keep bacteria and viruses in the vagina, anus, or mouth from coming in contact with the penis, and they prevent sperm, bacteria, and viruses in semen from entering the other person's body.

Even though latex condoms may look very thin, they are made of strong, latex rubber. They are tested electronically to make sure that they are of good quality. Some people say that latex condoms have tiny holes that are big enough to let HIV through, but this is wrong, HIV cannot pass through them. Latex condoms can only get holes if they are old, have been stored badly, or have been roughly handled. Normally, latex condoms come in only one size, since they can stretch to fit any size of penis. In recent times however, condom manufacturers have recognised the need for different sizes of condoms and are making them available more widely.

It is very important to follow these steps each and every time you use a latex condom:

1. Check the expiration or manufacture date on the package of the latex condom. If the expiration date has passed, do not use it! If the manufacture date is more than three years ago, don't use it!
2. Open the package carefully along the edge. Do not use your teeth, and be careful that your fingernails do not damage the latex condom. **Only use one latex condom at a time and not longer than 30 minutes.**
3. Do not unroll the latex condom before use. One side of it will stand up like a hat.
4. Put the latex condom on the penis as soon as it is erect and before the penis touches the vagina, mouth, or anus. Hold the tip of the latex condom as you unroll it down the penis. The latex condom should unroll easily. If it does not, it's because it is inside out, throw it away and use a new one.
5. Keep holding the tip of the latex condom as you unroll it down to the base of the penis. This extra space at the tip will catch the semen during ejaculation.
6. After ejaculation, hold the rim of the latex condom firmly at the base of the penis as you withdraw the penis. This will prevent the latex condom from slipping off. Take the latex condom off without spilling any semen. It is best to tie the latex condom into a knot so no semen spills out.
7. Once you have tied it securely, throw the latex condom away in a trash bin. Do not leave it where children will find it, and do not flush it down the toilet.
8. Use a new latex condom for each sexual act. **Do not reuse latex condoms.**



## DO YOU KNOW what to do if the latex condom breaks or slips off?

If the latex condom breaks, remove it immediately and insert a spermicide into the vagina. Use another latex 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 (both of you) tested for STIs, including HIV. If the latex 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 latex condom and pulling it out (see illustration). The latex condom cannot travel anywhere in the body because the vagina is closed inside by the cervix. If the latex condom comes off the penis inside the vagina, insert a spermicide immediately. As with a broken latex condom, contact a health worker to find out if you can get emergency contraception, and whether you should get tested for STIs, including HIV.



Some people are allergic to latex rubber, so latex condoms can give them a rash or irritate their skin. If you have this problem, there are non-latex condoms (such as polyurethane condoms) you can use. Talk to a health worker about how and where to get them.

Here are a few more tips for using latex condoms properly so that they don't break or slip off:

- Never use a latex condom if it has torn or damaged packaging. In addition, don't use a latex condom that is unevenly coloured or discoloured, or feels brittle, dried out, or very sticky.
- Store latex condoms in a cool, dark, and dry place. Heat, light and humidity damage latex condoms. Do not store latex condoms in your wallet or pocket.
- If possible, use lubricated latex condoms or use lubricants if the latex condom is not lubricated. Lubricants can help prevent the latex condom from tearing or breaking during sexual intercourse, but only use water-based lubricants. Good lubricants include water, spermicides and natural vaginal fluids. Never use lubricants made with oil, like 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 latex condom.
- Some condoms come lubricated with a spermicide, nonoxynol-9, or N-9. This has the double function of helping eliminate sperm and facilitating the use of the condom. Nevertheless, bear in mind that N-9 may cause irritation in some people and that it does NOT have any effect on STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, or HIV.
- Aluminium foil, cling wrap, and plastic bags are not substitutes for condoms.

Many people who use latex condoms say they make sex more enjoyable for both partners because both can relax more when they are not worried about the possibility of pregnancy or getting an STI. Some men also say that using a latex condom helps them to avoid ejaculating or "coming" too soon and thus giving more pleasure to their partners.



## 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 polyurethane (plastic) sheath or pouch about 17 cm (6.5 inches) in length that is inserted in the vagina creating a barrier against infection.

**How it works:** There is a small ring at the closed end of the tube that adapts to the cervix, and a larger ring at the open end that stays outside the vagina. These rings hold the latex condom in place. Like the male latex condom, the female condom prevents semen 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 will be effective.

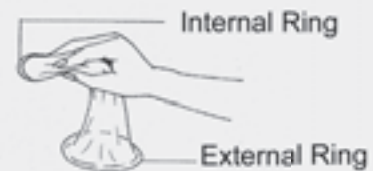
**How to use it:** There are three positions for insertion. You will need to read the instructions before using it. It may take a couple of tries to get it right, but you will get used to it. Squeeze the inner ring and push it in as far as you can—it cannot be pushed too far. When the latex condom is in place, guide your partner's penis into the tube. You should only use a female condom once. Do not reuse it. Do not use it with a male condom.

**How to remove it:** It is easy to remove the condom. Twist the outer ring to close the bag and keep the semen inside, then pull the condom out and dispose of it in a dustbin.

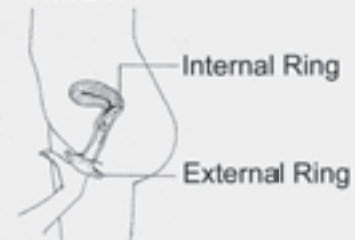
**Its benefits:** It is the only barrier method controlled by the woman that protects against STIs/HIV, AIDS, and pregnancy. It gently lines the vagina and does not cover the penis tightly. The female condom is made from polyurethane, which is an extremely fine material that is twice as strong as the 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-spermicidal lubricant. Neither the condom nor this lubricant causes allergies.

As with the latex condom, using a female condom can provide more enjoyable sex since both partners can relax free of the worry of pregnancy or STI infection. Also, since it is so soft and slippery, it may also increase the sensation of pleasure for both the male and female during intercourse.

### INSERT THE CONDOM



### USE IT



### PLACE IT



### REMOVE IT



Some people don't want to use latex condoms because they worry that they will not enjoy sex as much. As an excuse to not use a latex condom, a person may tell his or her partner that he or she has nothing to worry about. He or she might try to make his or her partner feel bad by saying they should trust each other and asking why his or her partner does not display trust. 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 latex condom.

Latex condoms offer protection to both parties involved, and using a latex condom is a sign of care, trust and respect.





Talk to your partner about using a condom. Explain how you feel and what you want.

## OTHER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROBLEMS

Not every problem in your genitals is an STI. Even if you have never been sexually involved with anyone, there are several infections you could get in your genitals, like a urinary tract infection, which causes irritation or pain when you urinate. If you notice unusual discharge or pain or bleeding when passing urine, you should see a health worker.

### CANDIDIASIS

If your genitals are itchy, and if you are a girl and have an unusual discharge from your vagina, you may have candidiasis. **Candidiasis**, also called a yeast infection, is caused by a yeast-like fungus called *candida albicans*. It is a common condition for many girls and women. Boys can also get *candida* under their foreskin.

*Candida* is one of the organisms that live naturally in the body surface. Candidiasis 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. Stress, such as exams, a death in the family, or an argument, can trigger candidiasis.

Candidiasis can be transmitted through having sex with a person with too much *candida*. But it can be caused by other factors too. 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 and people who are not sexually active can also get it. Too much warmth and moisture around genitals can also cause candidiasis. This means that you can give yourself candidiasis by wearing certain clothes, for example nylon panties under tight biker shorts or a pair of tight jeans. Then, if you sit for hours with your legs crossed (like on a bus) you are creating just the moist warm climate *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. 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 and 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 your genitals because they will be sore, and they need to heal. Try not to scratch, and wash your hands each time you touch your genitals. Wear clean dry clothes and cotton panties. Remember to dry your panties in open air.

If you are repeatedly infected with candidiasis and are sexually active, 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 in their urinary system, though they 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 defecating you always wipe 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 (especially after sex), not holding your urine in too long, and wearing cotton panties and loose clothes that keep your genitals 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 symptoms have completely 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 and they are later examined under a microscope to see if there are any abnormal cells that are likely to become cancerous. If there are, it is possible to remove them. Cancer of the cervix (or cervical cancer) is curable if it is detected at an early stage. Doctors recommend that all sexually active women have a Pap smear test every year because it is so important to find cervical cancer early.

If there is an unpleasant smell or discharge coming from your vagina or if you bleed when you have sexual intercourse, see a health worker because these can be signs that there is something wrong with your cervix. You are at risk of cervical cancer if you have unprotected sex with numerous partners. Cervical cancer is a very good reason to delay sex and always use latex condoms.

## DO YOU KNOW about sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

**One important point is that all STIs make you more vulnerable to HIV infection.** Some STIs are **bacterial** infections and can be easily 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** 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 during 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 in pregnant women can cause 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 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 in women. Men usually have no symptoms at all. Symptoms start 3 to 28 days after infection.

Some STIs are caused by **viruses** and cannot be cured by antibiotics. They are difficult to treat or cannot be treated at all. These include:

- **Herpes** is spread through sexual intercourse, childbirth, and through contact with infected skin. Herpes causes small blisters/sores to appear on the genitals or around the mouth. The blisters may sometimes 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, with or without symptoms. The frequency of attacks depends on the health of the person. People with both HIV and herpes 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 in pregnant women 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 vagina of a woman. They usually appear 3 weeks to 9 months after infection. This very long incubation period means that 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 developed AIDS.

## Summary of 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 difficult or impossible to have a child. Some of the signs of STIs include:

- Sores, blisters, bumps, and rashes on your genitals.
- 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 by HIV causes AIDS, 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 just 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 get tested and to get treatment if it is needed. **Never treat yourself with medicines without consulting a health worker and never share medicines with anyone 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. Postpone or stop sexual relations and stick to masturbation, kissing, and hugging.
- If you are sexually active, always use a latex condom to protect yourself and your partner. Make sure that you know how to use a latex condom properly.

Not every problem in your genitals 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 genital area. 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 genitals, see a health worker.

# Pregnancy and Contraception

Always bear in mind that both girls and boys have the right to decide on their own whether or not to have sexual relations and whether or not to have children. To do this, you have to have access to all the necessary information and to appropriate services including contraceptive counselling and methods, whatever your age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, or ethnic background. Remember also that men and women are equally responsible for preventing unwanted pregnancies, or for choosing to have children. This chapter is equally relevant for boys and girls.

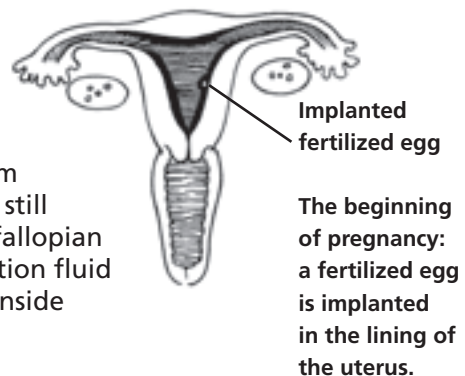
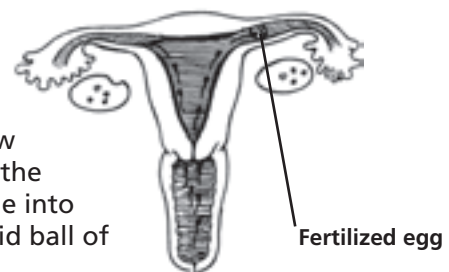
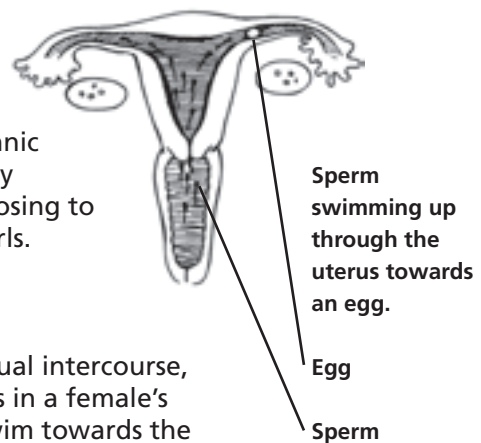
## HOW DOES PREGNANCY HAPPEN?

Whenever a male and a female have unprotected vaginal sexual intercourse, it is possible for a pregnancy to occur. When a male ejaculates in a female's vagina, sperm is deposited, and they immediately begin to swim towards the cervix. The sperm will swim up through the cervix, into the uterus, and up into the fallopian tubes where they can live for approximately three to five days.

If an ovum (egg) is already in one of the fallopian tubes or arrives in the fallopian tube within those three to five days, one of the sperm can enter the egg cell and fertilise it. The new fertilised cell (called a zygote), formed when the sperm enters the ovum, 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.

The ball of cells travels down the fallopian tube and attaches itself in the lining of the uterus. This process is called **implantation**. Implantation takes place about three weeks after your last period, and is the beginning of pregnancy.

Keep in mind that pregnancy can happen even if you have unprotected vaginal sex only one time. **Pregnancy could even happen if the man ejaculates too close to the woman's vagina—even if he doesn't actually penetrate the vagina!** 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 is also important to keep in mind that the pre-ejaculation fluid may contain sperm so even if the boy does not ejaculate fully inside the vagina, the girl can still become pregnant. It is unusual, but it can happen!



## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF PREGNANCY?

The most common sign of pregnancy is a woman's **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. If you are not pregnant the lining will eventually break down and come out of the body in the form of menstrual blood.

Other signs of pregnancy are:

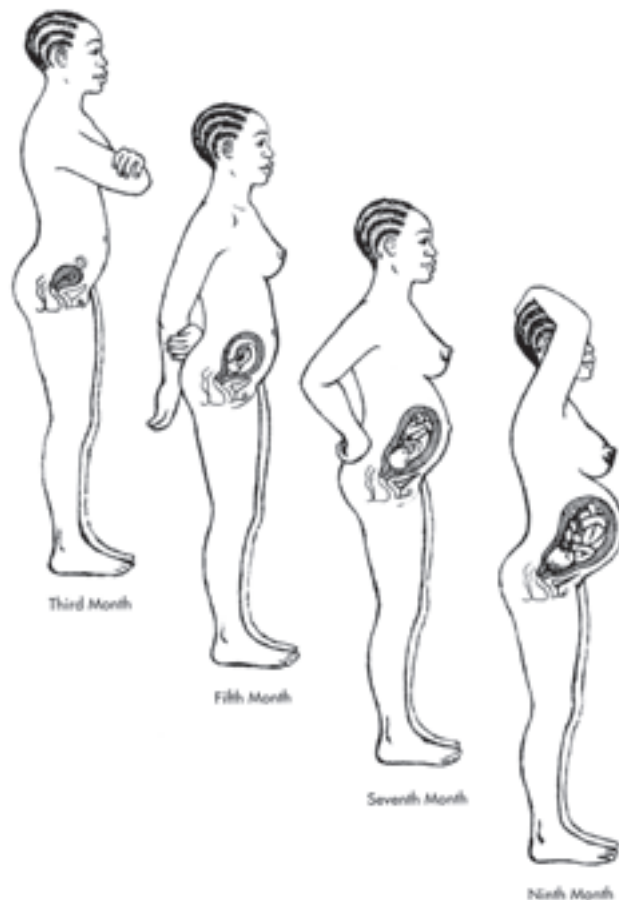
- Tenderness of the breasts.
- Nausea (a feeling of wanting to vomit).
- Fatigue (feeling very tired).
- More frequent need to urinate.

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 hormones that your body produces only during pregnancy. A health worker can also give you a 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 nine weeks, the embryo is called a foetus and it is attached to the uterus by the umbilical cord. 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 foetus inside the uterus.



## RISK OF PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Pregnancy can be risky for every woman, but it is especially risky for adolescent girls. The main problem for adolescent girls 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 narrow, and the foetus cannot pass through it. This is called **obstructed labour**.

If a 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 some rural areas, many women with obstructed labour are not able to reach a hospital in time and the baby may die inside the uterus. In addition, the uterus may tear during a lengthy labour (delivery), and the woman may die of blood loss. This is one reason adolescent girls die in childbirth.

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 birthweight babies.

To reduce your risk for these problems you need to take very good care of yourself during pregnancy and visit the health centre periodically. Also it is very important to deliver in a hospital where you will have access to skilled care in case any difficulty arises. Don't let pregnancy ruin your body or cause you permanent injury.

### SOCIAL VULNERABILITY OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Pregnancy can have serious medical and physical risks for adolescents. In addition, pregnant teenagers often face serious social pressures .

Many young women choose to become pregnant for many reasons. A girl may choose to get pregnant and have a baby to keep the father of the child involved with her. In other cases, motherhood is so highly valued, that a girl may choose to get pregnant and have a baby to attract the attention and affection she does not normally have. This can be a trap, since public attention shifts quickly to the newborn baby and the girl may soon need another way to attract attention, including becoming pregnant again.

Also, adolescent pregnancy can significantly limit a girl's chance for development and education. Younger mothers must devote time, financial resources, and energy to taking care of their baby, resources that they should be devoting to their own growth and development. In most cases, girls have to abandon or limit their formal education, or get a low paying job to meet the basic needs of the baby. Sometimes the social environment limits possibilities open to a young mother: pregnant teenagers may get expelled from school, and young mothers may find it difficult to hold down a job given all their new responsibilities as a mother.

## 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 an adolescent with a stable partner who wants to start having a family, pregnancy is a time when special care is needed.

Having a baby as an adolescent can have many different outcomes. Sometimes the girl's family is supportive and helps her make the best of a difficult situation. The family can help raise the baby or look for other viable and safe options, helping the girl complete her formal education. It is wonderful when families are so supportive.

Sometimes, an unwanted pregnancy can trigger a disastrous sequence of events. The girl's parents may chase her out the house because they are angry or disappointed with her. Or, she may be so terrified of her parents' reaction that she runs away, and the future of the baby is at serious risk, born to a girl who is still developing and lacks a support network. It is not easy to grow up having to take care of a child who is growing up too.

Also, many schools still expel pregnant girls or put pressure on them to leave school, even when there are laws in place to ensure that all young women have the right to complete their formal education.

Many girls faced with an unwanted pregnancy seek illegal abortions, which are dangerous. Each year across the Caribbean, many girls die or damage their reproductive organs having unsafe, illegal abortions (read more on this at the end of this chapter).

A boy who impregnates a girl also faces serious challenges. He may be forced to marry the girl and support the child. Because he is equally responsible for the pregnancy, a boy should be supportive of his pregnant partner and help support the child financially. Having a child during adolescence may affect both the girl's or boy's opportunity to pursue a formal education or career goals.

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 all your options carefully. You should speak with a health worker or youth counsellor; go to a clinic or your local family planning association.



**For many girls, pregnancy means an end to their studies.**



**Don't try to cope with pregnancy alone.  
You need a lot of care and support.**

## **DID YOU KNOW about the responsibilities boys bear during pregnancy?**

Some boys may believe that having a baby will make them more popular among their peers. But adolescent pregnancy can seriously affect boys' lives and opportunities for development as well.

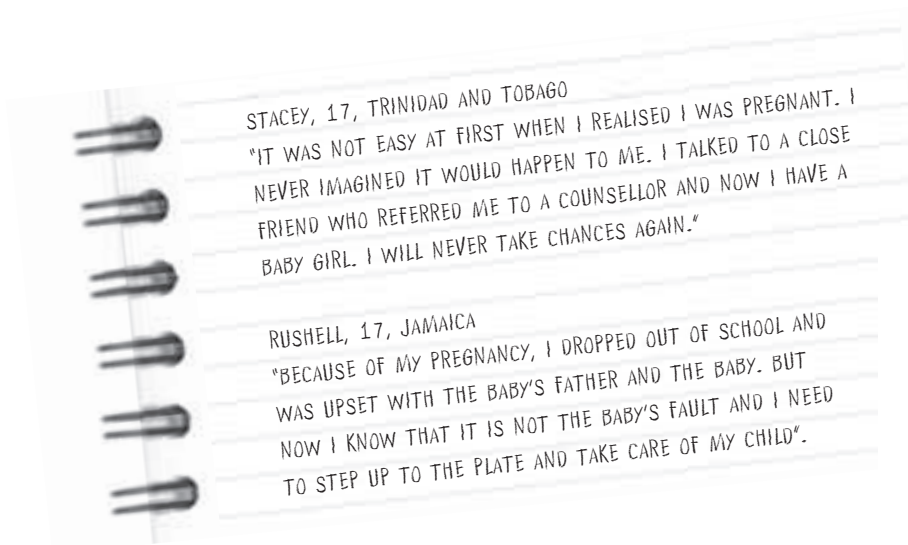
In general, few boys imagine that they might become a father when they are having sexual relations. However, it takes two to become pregnant, and the boy and girl bear equal responsibility for a pregnancy.

If you are a sexually active boy, you should be extremely responsible and careful. Don't rely on the calendar (safe days) method to protect you and your girlfriend. 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 both of your futures because you may be forced to end your studies early in order to support and raise the baby. Therefore, do not take sexual risks. Abstain from sex and cuddle instead 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, 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 prenatal care, helping with chores, etc.). Even if you and the girl do not have a close relationship, be responsible and 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 joint responsibility and to share the care for the mother and child. Above all, practise safer sex and use contraception or a condom to avoid any more unwanted and unplanned pregnancies.

While it may seem difficult, it is very important that you 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 to return to school after a pregnancy.



### 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.

- Seek a youth counsellor when you realise you are pregnant. You need to make important decisions and the counsellor can help you analyse your options, prepare for what's ahead, and plan how to talk to your family and other adults who can help you.



Make sure you go for antenatal care and necessary immunisations early.

- Start going for prenatal (before delivery) care as soon as you know that you are pregnant. Don't wait until you are "showing". The purpose of prenatal care is to ensure that you and the baby are in good health, to recognise any problems and treat them promptly, and to prepare yourself for a safe delivery and motherhood.
- Be organised. Follow a schedule of regular visits for prenatal care. Go as often as the health worker tells you.
- If you live in a tropical climate, sleep under a mosquito net, and protect yourself from dengue and malaria.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't drink alcohol and don't take drugs. If you need to take medicines, be sure you ask your doctor if you can take them while pregnant.
- Think about what you eat, and make sure that it is nutritious. Eat 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 iron supplements which may be provided by the hospital or clinic. Your body needs a lot of iron to stay strong and healthy during pregnancy.
- Take a voluntary HIV test, just in case, since you will have to take several measures to protect yourself and the baby if you are HIV positive.

#### **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 periods, you are very likely to pass HIV to your baby. Insist on using latex condoms with your partner. You and your partner can go for HIV tests together. Regardless of your test results, you should always use latex condoms.

If you find out that you are HIV positive while you are pregnant, you should tell your doctor. There are now medicines available that you can take during pregnancy and delivery that can greatly reduce your chance of passing 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 if you are HIV positive, there is also a risk of transmitting HIV through breast milk.

#### **PLANNING FOR DELIVERY**

As an adolescent, you should plan to give birth in a hospital which has the staff and equipment to cope with any complications that may arise. You should avoid a home delivery. Make all efforts possible to deliver in a health facility where they have skilled health providers and equipment to perform the operation (Caesarean section) to remove your baby from your abdomen if needed. Remember you are entitled to, and should seek, good quality health care.

A midwife or a trusted adult can advise you on what you will need for your baby, including diapers, hygiene, clothes, and blankets. Depending on where you live and on your country's health system, you may need to bring supplies for delivery, such as cotton wool, plastic gloves, a new razor blade, new syringes and needles, soap, and a disinfectant. It is important to organise timely transport to the hospital and to have some money saved up, or someone to borrow money from to cover the costs of this transportation.

Try to have a trusted person with you during labour, perhaps your mother, older sister, your aunt, or your partner. This can be very comforting and helpful as the labour can be very long and difficult, and the midwife or skilled attendant may not be able to be with you throughout the whole process.

### CARING FOR YOURSELF AND THE BABY AFTER DELIVERY

Just as you went for prenatal care, make sure you go back for postnatal (after delivery) care so that the health worker can check that your womb is returning to its normal size. The health worker 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, she or he will give you iron tablets. If you bleed a lot or if you have any signs of infection (abdominal pain, odorous secretions) you should go to the health facility immediately.

A health worker can also answer any questions you have about breastfeeding, sleep, immunisations for the baby, contraception (family planning), and other topics. A new mother (and a new father too!) usually have a lot of questions, so talking to a caring midwife or nurse can be very helpful. Prepare a list of questions beforehand so that you make the best of each visit to the health centre.



In a few cases, women go through a period of depression after delivery usually called “maternity blues” (see box). If a situation like this does develop, the first thing you should do is take a step back and allow yourself some time to adjust to your new life. Take time for yourself, be sure to get a lot of rest, do things to distract yourself such as getting exercise or seeing friends but allow some time for being alone too.

If these suggestions don’t help, you need to talk to your healthcare provider. Women with mild depression are usually referred to a therapist to talk about their fears and concerns or to support groups. There is also medication available to help treat these types of reactions. Tell your healthcare provider if you are breastfeeding before he or she recommends any medication.

### DID YOU KNOW about “maternity blues”?

More than eight out of every ten women may suffer some mood disturbances during and after pregnancy. For most women, the symptoms are mild and go away on their own. But for 10% of women, a more disabling form of mood disorder may develop.

- **Postpartum blues** (also called baby blues or maternity blues) is a passing emotional state that occurs in about 50% of women who have recently given birth. It peaks 3 to 5 days after delivery and can last several days to several weeks. You may cry more easily than usual, have trouble sleeping, feel irritable, sad, and more emotionally on edge. Because maternity blues are so common, they are not always considered an illness. Postpartum blues may not affect your ability to care for your baby. You can get maternity blues even if you’ve never been depressed in the past. They are not caused by stress in your life. But sometimes baby blues can lead to major depression.
- **Postpartum depression** can occur within six months of having a baby. You are more likely to experience postpartum depression if you have gone through a serious depression or severe stress in the past, or if you have certain types of severe premenstrual symptoms. If you have postpartum depression, you may feel moody, unable to enjoy things, or tired. You may have trouble sleeping or eating regular meals. You may feel inadequate and wish you could disappear. While you may have fears about harming the infant, you should know that women rarely act on these fears. However, postpartum depression is serious and you should seek treatment and professional help if you have these symptoms.



## 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. Women cannot control miscarriages; they happen frequently, especially during the first three months of pregnancy.

If a woman is having a miscarriage, she will usually experience heavy spotting or bleeding through her vagina, and occasionally severe cramping. If this happens 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 even safer than childbirth. However, in most Caribbean countries, abortion is not legal except under 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.

Illegal abortions are often performed in unsafe and hazardous conditions, and frequently the person carrying out the abortion does not have the skills or the necessary equipment to perform the procedure. Because it is illegal, the person performing the procedure may do it in a rushed and panicky manner. They may not be working in clean or hygienic conditions. All this puts the woman at very great risk. In fact, in many Caribbean countries, more than 20% of all deaths of pregnant women are caused by the complications of unsafe abortions.

Unsafe abortions can result in very serious health problems. When instruments are inserted into the cervix, they can cause injury to the bladder or intestines, or the cervix and uterus can be damaged. The woman may bleed to death or 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. Herbs, medicines, or chemicals are sometimes used and can also make the girl very sick, and she may poison herself and die.

### DO YOU KNOW the consequences of unsafe abortion?

Rachel was 15 and in her third year of secondary school when she became 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. 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 the hospital for four weeks to treat the wound and infection.

Rachel does not know yet whether she will be able to have children in the future.

A woman that undergoes an abortion, whether natural or induced, should receive counselling since it is a strong emotional strain.



If you or someone you know is faced with an unwanted pregnancy, get help. Be honest with your parents or 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 vaginal discharge are signs that something has gone seriously wrong. Your health and your life are in danger so medical care and emotional support are 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 and counselling.



Unsafe abortion is very dangerous. It could cost you your life.

Of course, the best way to protect yourself against the consequences of unsafe abortion, is to avoid an unplanned pregnancy.

### HOW TO AVOID PREGNANCY

The only foolproof way to avoid pregnancy is to abstain from sexual intercourse. Abstinence is 100% effective. If you do not have sexual intercourse, there is no way you can become pregnant or impregnate a girl.

If you are sexually active, make sure to use latex condoms to protect yourself against pregnancy and STIs. You should also seek help from a family planning clinic or a health worker. There are contraceptive methods that adolescents can use to avoid becoming pregnant. All adolescents have the right to information and counselling on contraception and to family planning methods.

There are many different kinds of contraceptives that are perfectly safe for adolescents (see the box on page 125). Whatever method you use, be sure to use it correctly and consistently. For example, forgetting to take a contraceptive pill can lead to an unexpected pregnancy.

If you are sexually active or are planning to be so in the near future, you should visit a health centre and inform yourself and your partner of your contraceptive options. Remember you have a right to information and to good quality contraception counselling and services.

AFTER SEEING SARAH GET EXPELLED FROM SCHOOL, I AM NOT GOING TO RUSH INTO SEX. BETTER TO WAIT.

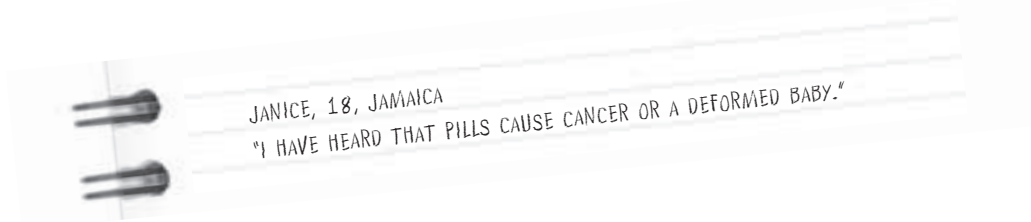


IF CATHY GOT PREGNANT, THAT WOULD BE THE END OF OUR DREAMS TO FINISH SCHOOL AND GO TO UNIVERSITY.

I THINK WE'D BETTER NOT HAVE SEX.



## ARE CONTRACEPTIVE PILLS SAFE?



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. Doctors now know that contraceptive pills actually protect against cancer. Women who take pills have less cancer of the ovaries and less cancer of the lining of the uterus (endometrium) than women 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 menstrual 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 older women can take pills. Only older women who smoke, who are overweight, 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: **emergency contraception**. This is a method that you can use immediately after having unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy; for example, if you forgot to use a condom or if the condom breaks or slips off accidentally (which is very rare if they are used properly). It is not a permanent method and should not be used frequently. As the name states, it is a useful solution in emergencies. If you are sexually active, you should adopt a regular contraceptive method.

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 within **72 hours** (three days).

Taking emergency contraception involves swallowing a set combination of contraceptive pills over a 12-hour period within 72 hours of the unprotected intercourse. These pills can make you feel sick to your stomach, or 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.**

Emergency contraception should never be used as a permanent method to avoid pregnancy. Some boys may insist on having unprotected sex (not using a condom) and suggest that their partner take emergency pills afterwards. This is a big mistake! To begin with, you are still exposed to HIV infection if you do not use a condom. Also, the hormones contained in emergency pills can produce unwelcome imbalances in your hormonal system. Emergency contraception should only be used in extreme cases. If you are sexually active you should choose a different method to avoid pregnancy.

## DO YOU KNOW which contraceptive methods are safe for adolescents?

All these contraceptive methods are safe for adolescents:

**Condoms:** A condom is a soft latex rubber tube that is put on a man's erect penis before 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 and 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 used with condoms.

**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 a 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 also using a condom.

**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 removed 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.

**Spermicides (contraceptive foam, tablets, jelly, or cream):** Spermicides kill 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.

## DO YOU KNOW which practices or contraceptive methods ARE NOT safe for adolescents?

These 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 often 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 think that they are not fertile. This method is unreliable for anyone, but especially for adolescent girls, who do not have regular periods. **Safe days provide no protection against STIs/HIV and do not provide reliable protection against pregnancy.**

**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.**

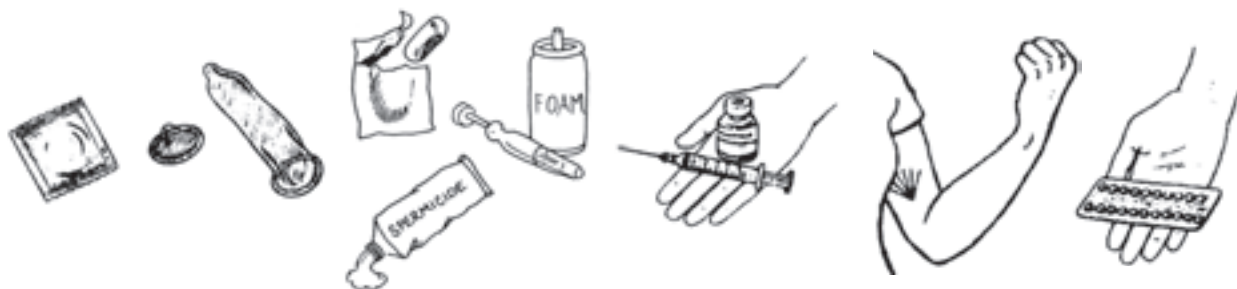
**Sterilisation: Vasectomy and tubal ligation** are permanent contraceptive methods. They are operations in which the tubes that carry the egg and sperm are closed off. They are for couples who have had all the children they want or adults who are sure they **do not** want to have children. Because you cannot ever have a child after the operation (it is not reversible), adolescents should not consider this option. **Sterilisation provides no protection against STIs/HIV.**

### DUAL PROTECTION

The HIV and 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.

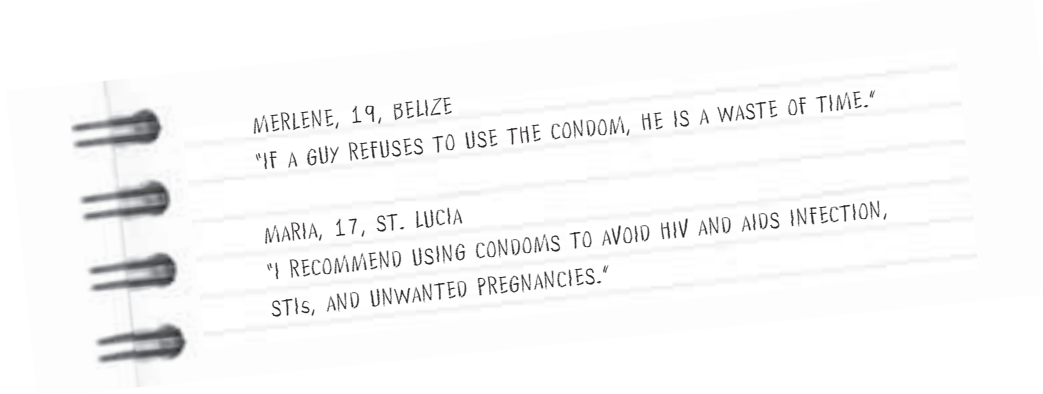
These days, people are talking about **“dual protection”**. Dual protection is when you use one method that is very effective in reducing the risk of STIs/HIV and AIDS, **and at the same time**, you use **another** method that is very effective in preventing pregnancy.

Look at the different methods and how they protect against pregnancy and STIs including HIV.

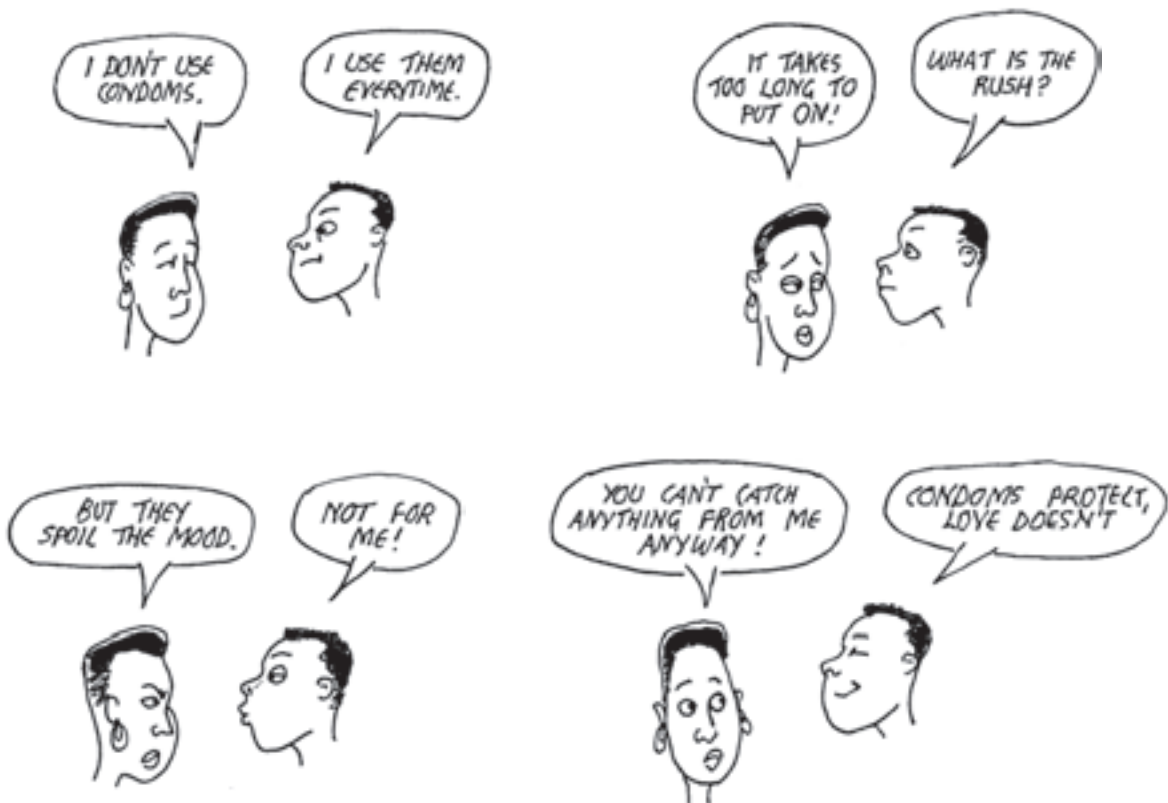


Implants, injectables, and pills provide very good protection against pregnancy, but no protection against STIs/HIV. Condoms, if properly used, provide good protection against pregnancy and provide very good protection against STIs/HIV. Foaming tablets and spermicides, provide some protection against pregnancy and provide some protection against STIs/HIV.

Of course, the best protection of all is abstinence—not having sex. But, for someone who is sexually active, the best protection would be to use the pills, implants or injectables *with* latex condoms.



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.



## Summary of Chapter 11

**Pregnancy and Contraception**

Whenever a male and a female have unprotected vaginal sex or 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 attaches 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 makes adolescent girls particularly vulnerable since it seriously curtails their opportunities for development. It is also 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 necessary to manage any complication.

Many adolescents get pregnant by accident. They may be 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 Caribbean countries, medical abortion (the ending of a pregnancy through a medical procedure) is illegal and very unsafe. **Unsafe medical abortion can cause serious health problems**, ranging from infection, damage to the reproductive organs, severe bleeding, infertility, and death.

**There are several methods to prevent pregnancy.** One that is 100% safe is abstinence.

If you are sexually active, you and your partner should always protect yourselves against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV and AIDS. Most contraceptive methods are safe for adolescents.

If you engage in unprotected sex, go immediately to a clinic and ask for **emergency contraception**. It can prevent pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex.

Because pregnancy takes two people, both men and women bear equal responsibility for preventing a pregnancy and also for caring for a baby if a pregnancy occurs.

**Remember you have a right to information and contraception services. If you are sexually active, you should visit a health centre and demand these services.**



# Pressured Sex and Sex Against Your Will

Sometimes, people—men and women, boys and girls—engage in sexual activity when they don't actually want to do it. They may feel pressured by a boyfriend or girlfriend to engage in sexual practices. They may feel pressured to have sex to “pay back” for gifts or money they have received, or in return for affection. Or, they may simply be forced to engage in sexual activity by someone who is bigger and stronger.

Unwanted sex shouldn't happen; it is a violation of your body, your intimacy and of your rights. It also puts you at great risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV. Also, it puts you at risk of emotional problems. It can be very painful and traumatic to engage in sexual activity against your will.

It is very difficult sometimes to escape from this kind of relationship when you are afraid of, or depend emotionally or economically on the person putting pressure on you. The best way to protect yourself is to learn how to recognise and avoid situations where you may be pressured or forced to engage in sexual activity against your will.

## PRESSURE FROM BOYFRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS

Sometimes people tell their partners that they should prove their love by engaging in sexual practices. Some people will even threaten to break off the relationship if their partner will not engage in sexual activity.

It can be very difficult when someone you care for tells you that you should engage in sexual activity with him or her, whether you like it or not. You might feel as though you should do it just because you want the relationship to continue or because you care about the person and you want him or her to be happy.

In this type of situation, you may have trouble understanding 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, ask yourself these questions:

- What are **your** values? Do you wish to engage in sexual activity at this point in your life and with this person? Do you feel comfortable about this? Are you ready or do you believe it is better to wait?



Sex should never be a proof of love.

- Do you think your partner will still love you and respect you if you refuse? Are you scared of the consequences if you refuse?
- Can you protect yourself? What would happen if you found out you had contracted an STI or if you or your partner had become pregnant?

Your answers to these questions can tell you a lot about your feelings and will show if you are capable of handling the responsibility that comes with having a sexual relationship. 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. Sex should be pleasurable for you.

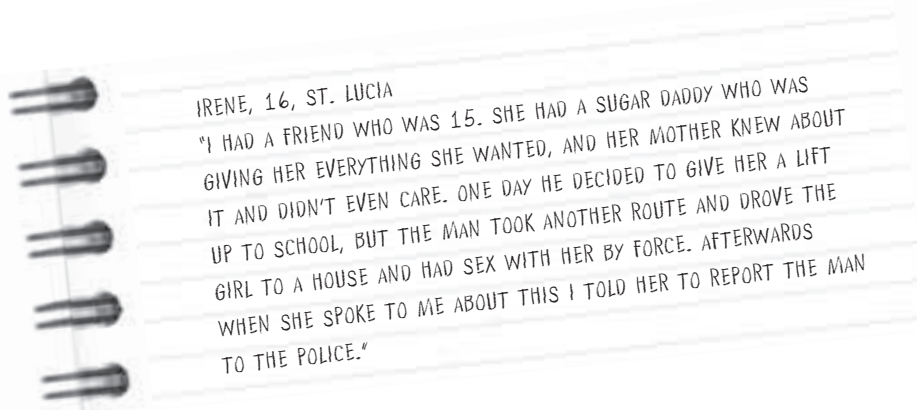
Most importantly, **no one who cares about you would pressure you to do something that you feel is wrong for you.**

If you are not sure whether or not your girlfriend or boyfriend will stay with you if you refuse sex, you should talk to them about it. Tell your partner that you care for him or her, but that you have decided that you do not want to engage in sexual activity yet and state your reasons. If he or she says that's okay, then you can relax and 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 and you may feel very sad and lonely. You may think that you made the wrong decision, but you did what was right for you. Of course, it is very sad to have a relationship end, but it would have been worse to do something with which you did not feel comfortable.

### PRESSURE FROM ADULTS

Sometimes older adults, including people who are married, pressure young people for sex. 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 or she might promise to give good marks or to give free rides.



Even though it can seem exciting to have an older (or rich) person interested in you, and it might make you feel attractive and important, these kinds of relationships are dangerous.

- They can create a relationship in which you may eventually feel uncomfortable, as the older, richer, or more experienced adult usually has more power in the relationship.
- They can disrupt your studies and your future because this type of relationship demands a great deal of attention. They can put you at risk for STIs including HIV, and pregnancy since it may be difficult to negotiate safer sex.

If an older man or woman is trying to give you gifts or money, and is pressuring you to engage in sexual activity, 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. You don’t have to deal with it alone.

Some young people are pushed into these types of sexual relationships with other people by their own parents. This can happen if the parents are poor and cannot afford to pay for school fees, food, or clothes for their children. This is a very difficult situation for any young person. Even if you are an adolescent, parents are not entitled to ask you to perform sexual favours for other people. 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 principal at school? 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 after school to earn some money?

In other cases young people are sexually abused or even raped by close members of the family. It could be an aunt or uncle, an older cousin, a stepmother or stepfather, or even one of their parents.

This is a very difficult and painful situation. The person abused may feel threatened, guilty, and unable to react. He or she may feel very sad or depressed and think there is no one to turn to. Abuse by a close relative can be devastating for your emotions, but it is also a very serious crime. If you are ever in this situation you should seek help immediately.

There are many people around you who may be able to help you if they know your problem, so ask for help! You don’t have 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, genitals, or any other part of your body. It could also be sexual intercourse. Any kind of sexual contact that is not wanted can be considered sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is often committed by a person that has some power over the victim, often an adult, but it can also be a peer. This person might be a neighbour, family friend, teacher, religious leader or a community leader, or a relative, even part of the immediate family.

Sexual abuse usually involves threats, bribes, humiliation, tricks, and violence. The abuser might threaten you, or give you gifts in order to make you cooperate. The abuser might try to trick you or trap you into doing something, or even say they will threaten to hurt you or your family if you tell anyone about the sexual abuse. He or she may also try to confuse you by saying that the relationship should be kept a secret.



Adults might offer you money or gifts for sex.  
These relationships are dangerous for you.

But sexual abuse can also be disguised under pretence of affection and tenderness, making it even more confusing for the victim. This is a very difficult situation too. The person can be someone you really love, a boyfriend, a friend, a cousin, a brother, or even a parent. It is really hard to understand how something as wrong as sexual abuse can also be caring and loving. But sexual abuse is always very wrong, even if it is “caring”, and you should never feel guilty or that you deserve it.

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 body 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 is touching you in a way you don't like or is forcing you to engage in sexual activity, 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, the mother of a friend, or call a hotline such as a rape crisis hotline (if one is available). Get help.



Any unwanted sexual contact is sexual abuse.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Any kind of unwanted sexual attention, like unpleasant sexual comments and physical gestures that make you feel uncomfortable, is called **sexual harassment**. Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Whistling or commenting on a person's appearance as she or he walks past.
- Making sexual jokes, such as jokes about people's bodies and genitals.
- Stalking—following a person around incessantly.
- Flashing—public exposure of genitals.
- Sending notes, text messages, e-mails, and making crank phone calls of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment can occur almost anywhere: at school, at work, 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 or work. Sexual harassers can be complete strangers or they can be people you know, like a teacher, peer, neighbour, relative, or someone at work.

Sexual harassment is a serious matter. Words alone can damage your self-esteem and 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 don't care about your feelings and probably don't mind if they hurt you. Sexual comments can be a warning about a person's character.

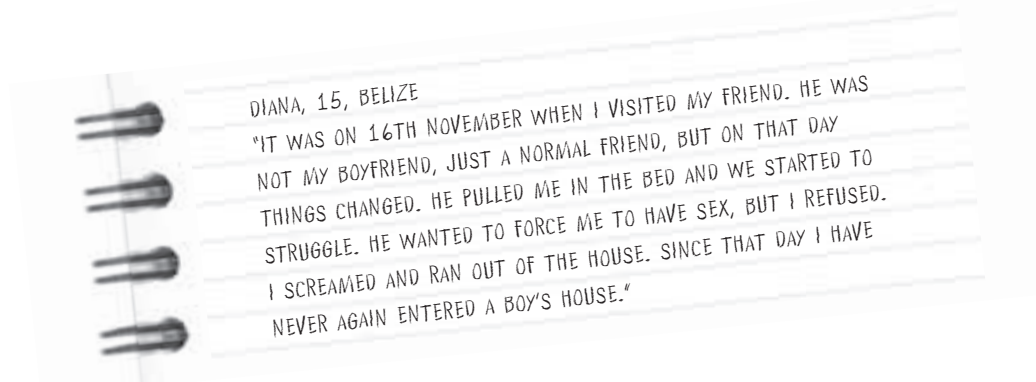
The best way to cope with sexual harassment is to avoid people who make unpleasant sexual remarks or gestures. Don't look scared. Look calm and confident, and move away. Try to avoid similar situations in the future. For example, if there is someone bothering on your way to school, try to change your 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 an act of force, violence, brutality, and humiliation in which a person is forced to have intimate sexual contact. Many people think that rapists are strangers, however, this is actually quite unusual, and rapes by random strangers are very rare. Most people who experience rape know their attacker. The attacker is often a friend or acquaintance, a neighbour, a relative, or a family friend.



Many rapes of young people are **date rapes** and **acquaintance rapes**. Date rape is when a person forces his or her partner in a date, including a boyfriend or girlfriend, to have sexual intercourse or contact against a partner's will. Perhaps they were cuddling and kissing, but then the person tries to force their partner to engage in sexual intercourse. In recent years a new kind of rape threat has emerged: the "date rape drugs".

### What exactly are "date rape drugs"?

Technically speaking, they include any substances that make you incapable of saying "No", or, asserting yourself, or refusing unwanted sexual advances. Any substance that renders you incapable of saying no or asserting yourself and your needs and that can be used to commit rape is a "date rape drug".

This can include things like alcohol, marijuana or other street drugs, over-the-counter sleeping pills and antihistamines, even cold medications. However, the term date rape drug usually applies to drugs that are virtually undetectable; they are tasteless, odorless and colorless. All traces of the drugs will leave the body within 72 hours of ingestion.

Date rape drugs are easily slipped into drinks and food and are very fast acting. They make the victim go unconscious but still responsive with little or no memory of what happens while the drug is active in their system. The drugs also make the victim act without inhibition, often in a sexual or physically affectionate way.

This is one important reason for **never** accepting a drink from a stranger and **never** leaving your drink unattended in a bar or disco.



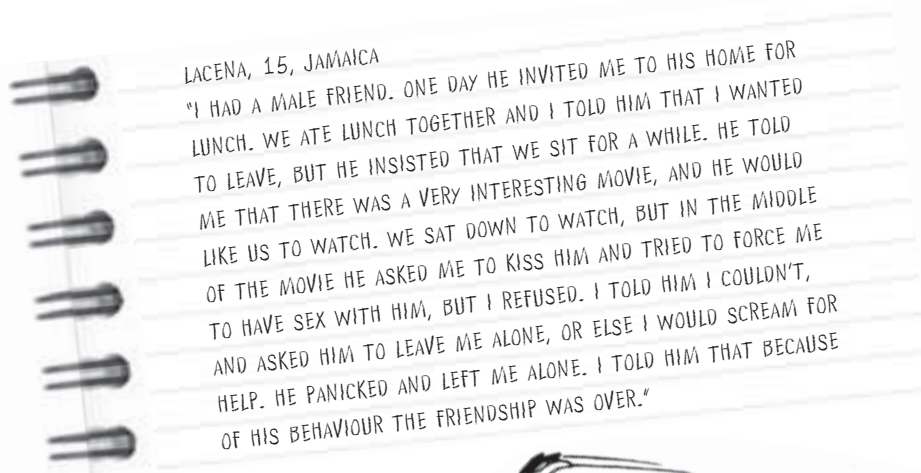
Acquaintance rape is when the rapist is someone who is known, such as a friend, neighbour, or family friend. Marital rape occurs when a spouse forces his or her partner to engage in sexual activity without his or her consent.

Date rape, acquaintance rape, and marital rape are still rape. They are violent, painful, upsetting, and wrong. Even if a couple was getting physically intimate, a person has no right to force their partner to go further than he or she wants. Even if the two have had sex before, but the partner does not want to engage in sexual activity now, nobody has the right to force him or her to do so.

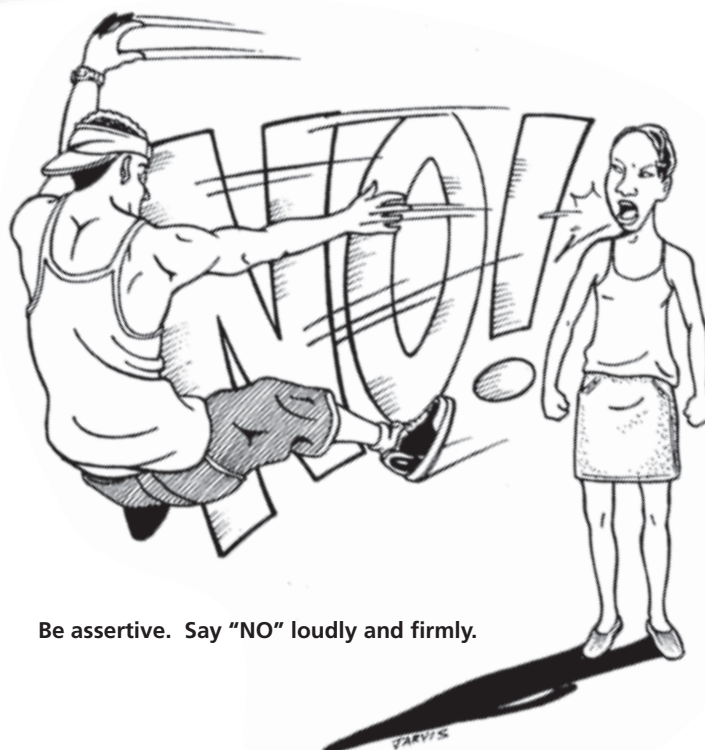
Even if a person was wearing revealing clothes, no one has the right to force him or her into sexual contact. In all these situations, forcing someone to be sexually intimate is still rape. It is very wrong.

If you are physically involved with someone, be sure to give clear signals. Sometimes people look as though they are enjoying what is happening, so their partner does not understand when he or she doesn't want to go further. Still, even when a person does not give clear signals, nobody has a right to rape him or her. Rape is never a "fair punishment" for a person who was giving unclear messages.

A good partner is caring and considerate. He or she listens to what his or her partner says and takes it seriously. When a person says "No", it means "No", and when a person says "Stop", their partner should stop.



Everyone can learn how to reduce his or her risk of being raped. 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.



Be assertive. Say "NO" loudly and firmly.



Other ways to protect yourself against rape include:

- Avoid being alone in the house with someone whom you do not trust, even if it is a friend or relative. Trust your gut feelings. Do not go to someone's house if there is nobody else there.
- Do not go to isolated places where there are no other people around. Go out with groups of friends and stay with the group.
- 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. 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 date are already cuddling and kissing.
- Be clear about your limits. Explain your limits clearly to your date 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 accept car rides from strangers; for girls especially be careful when in a taxi alone or alone with men.
- 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, leave your drink unattended, or drink out of an opened bottle because someone could put a drug into your drink.
- If you are out on a date, and your date 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.



**Use your strength to push away and fight back.**

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.

## 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 the attacker 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.

- **Report the rape to the police 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, 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 or you may be fearful of revenge. But try to summon your courage and ask help to report the rapist. If you don't, he or she will probably go free and may hurt someone else.
- **Get medical care as soon as possible.** You must have a medical check-up within 48 hours to make sure that you are okay and to take care of any injuries or cuts you have. Even if you feel hurt and depressed, it is important to get medical help. Remember you only have a month to take medicine to prevent HIV infection.
- **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, shower, or douche 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, be sure to have a thorough examination.** The health worker should check you for cuts, tears and bruises, and may take a semen sample from the point of entry.
- **If you are a girl, 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 three to six 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 he or she finds.** This information can be used to help your case if you decide to go to the police or to court.
- **Get counselling.** It is a good idea to 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 work through them.

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 and most importantly, do not blame yourself or assume that you were responsible for the rape. Rape and other unwanted sexual contact are never your fault.

## Summary of Chapter 12

# Pressured Sex and Sex Against Your Will

Unwanted sex is physically dangerous and emotionally difficult. It also puts you at great risk for unwanted pregnancy and for STIs/HIV and AIDS. It is very painful and traumatic to engage in sexual activity 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 or gestures. 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 friend, acquaintance, neighbour, or 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 older adults.** 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 sexual contact 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.** It is better to 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 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.

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**. If you are a girl, the health worker may also be able to give you **emergency contraception** to prevent pregnancy. Do not bathe before receiving medical care so you can have evidence in case you choose to go to the police.

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 to feel more sociable, smarter, cooler, braver, and more exciting to be around. They can also make people 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, almost disastrous! Using drugs this way is called drug abuse.

Drug abuse is a serious 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 harmful to your mind, your body, and your relationships with other people. They can make you ill, and can turn you into someone who will have difficulties in life, including difficulties with the law. They can make you do poorly in school, lose friends, and fight with your parents. They can also consume large amounts of your money.

Drugs can also make it very difficult for you to practice safer sex as they make it hard to be clear-headed. You need to be able to say things like: "I only want to kiss. I don't want intercourse." or "Only with a condom." Drugs can make you take risks, such as having unprotected sex. As a result, you could end up with a sexually transmitted infection including HIV and AIDS. You could also end up pregnant or making a girl pregnant without wanting it. In some extreme cases, drug use and dependence can lead to young people selling their bodies for sex in order to have money to continue buying drugs.

## TYPES OF DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES THAT ARE ABUSED

There are many different drugs (including medications) and substances that are abused by people and 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, hash, herb, sensei, ganja, pot, grass, or weed) comes from a plant. Usually people smoke the leaves, but there is a stronger version made from the stems of the plant.

Cannabis usually makes people feel relaxed and happy, but it can also 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 while 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 cancer. It also affects your memory and your ability to concentrate and understand things. It can become more difficult to study or hold a job because your memory and ability to pay attention are reduced. Cannabis may also decrease sperm production in men. Long-term use of cannabis may also lead to the temptation to try harder drugs.

**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.

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.



Deeply breathing in these substances can cause unconsciousness (passing out or fainting), suffocation (inability to breathe enough air), and death. Repeated use of these substances over time can permanently damage the lungs, brain, and other organs in the body.

**Tranquilizers** (medication), including **Valium** and **Mandrax** are drugs that make you feel sleepy, relaxed, and calm. They reduce your heart rate and slow down your breathing. Overdose from tranquilizers can quickly and easily lead to death.

**Hallucinogens**, such as **angel dust**, **LSD** (also called acid, sugar cubes, or 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 increased 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 or others. 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, or smack) and **cocaine** (called coke, crack, or snow). People often use needles to inject these drugs straight into their bloodstream. These drugs are very addictive, and once you start taking them, it is usually very difficult to stop. People who are addicted feel as though they cannot go without the drug.

These “hard drugs” are expensive, so some people who take them may begin stealing to get enough money to buy the drug, or start to deal drugs themselves, becoming trapped in a network of illegal, vicious, and quite dangerous activities. Drug addicts often share needles for injecting the drugs, which 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 or butts) and **cigars** contain the active ingredient nicotine. 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.



Nicotine is extremely addictive. People who smoke and try to quit may become very depressed, have trouble sleeping or concentrating, and they become irritable, angry, and anxious. Yet, it is important to be supportive of people trying to quit and these factors should not discourage you from quitting if you currently smoke.

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, stomach, and the large intestine. It damages the heart and blood vessels and puts you at risk for high blood pressure, strokes, and heart attacks.



**Alcohol affects your ability to make good, safe decisions.**

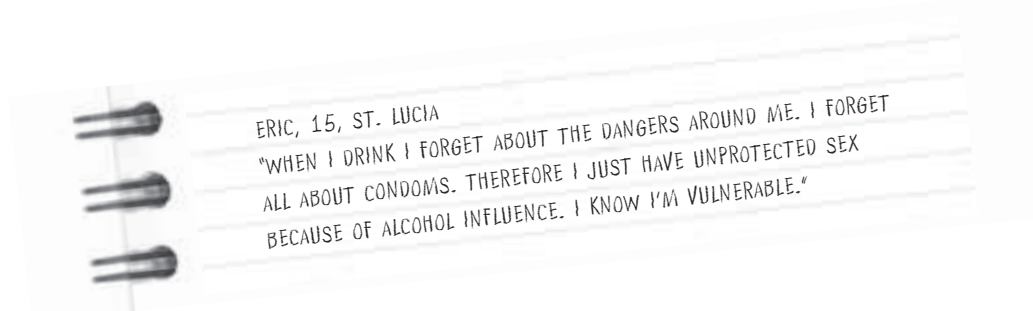
Smoking has also been found to cause impotence in men. This is because smoking damages the blood vessels in the penis, just as it damages other blood vessels in the body. Smoking is also especially dangerous for women who are taking contraceptive pills, since there may be risk of heart problems. Furthermore, smoking has also been found to have very harmful effects on people surrounding smokers (passive smokers).

**Alcohol** is the most common drug all over the world. Unlike most other drugs, alcohol is generally legal. In addition, it is available in very cheap forms. Therefore, alcohol is the drug you are most likely to come into contact with, as it is often in the home. One or both of your parents or relatives may drink alcohol, and you may have easy access to it.

Alcohol is a very popular drug because it makes people feel relaxed and self-confident. 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 saying things or doing things that you will seriously regret later.

When you drink alcohol, the rules that govern your normal behaviour get loosened. Your reactions may be slower, and it can be difficult to think clearly. Your ability to make good decisions is impaired, so you lose your good judgement. If you are unused to alcohol or drink too much, you may vomit or become unconscious. Alcohol is also usually associated with very violent behaviour. A person under the influence of alcohol may easily start shouting or abusing people around him or her, occasionally hurting others, even the people they care for.

Here is what one teenager says about alcohol:



Alcohol is also very addictive and it is hard for alcoholics to stop or diminish their alcohol intake. The long-term impact of heavy alcohol use is very serious. You may know people in your community who are heavy drinkers and you may have seen how it destroys families, wrecks careers, and makes a lot of people's lives miserable. Abuse of alcohol may also lead to health problems, such as brain damage and liver disease.

If a common drug like alcohol can cause such problems, think what can happen if you take a harder drug like cocaine!

## **DID YOU KNOW that drug use can harm reproductive health?**

While all drugs are harmful to your mind and body, many can also damage your reproductive health.

For example, smoking can:

- Cause health problems with contraceptive pills.
- Induce earlier menopause.
- Increase a woman's risk of cancer of the cervix and uterus.
- Make it difficult for a pregnancy to occur in a woman, and produce impotence in men.
- Increase the risk of miscarriage during pregnancy.
- Cause babies 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 addicted to drugs.

If you take drugs during pregnancy, the baby is taking them too, and in larger doses. The effect on the baby will be stronger than the effect on the pregnant woman.

## ADDICTION

The earlier a person begins to use drugs, the greater his or her chances of developing serious drug-related problems later on in life. 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 that reveal when drug use has become a serious drug problem. They are:

- Lying to others or yourself about how much drugs or alcohol you are taking.
- Hiding the drug so no one will know.
- Having money problems because everything is spent on drugs.
- Getting into trouble or stealing to raise money to buy drugs.

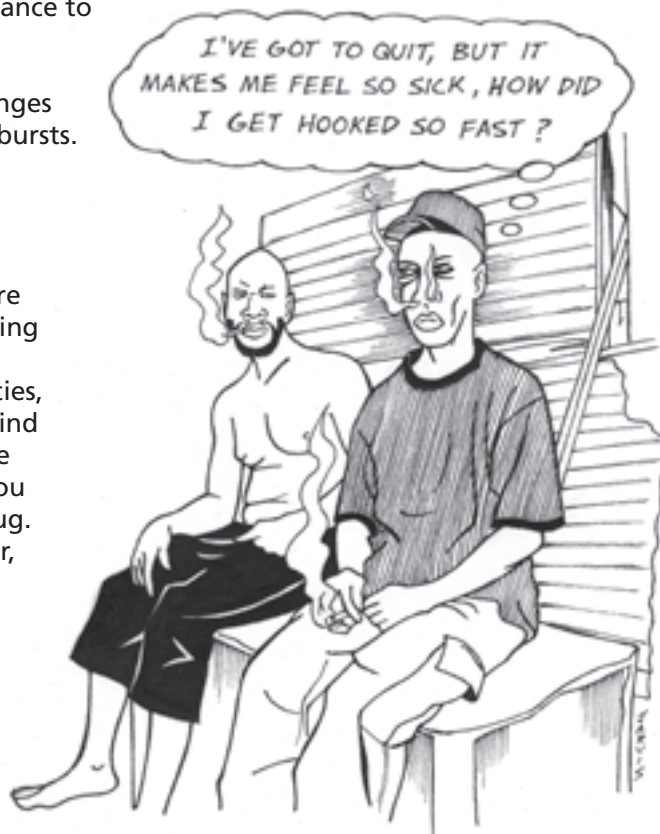
In addition, if you or someone you know starts giving up hobbies, spending less time on homework, avoiding responsibility, and getting into fights while drunk or high, then substance use has turned into a serious problem. You (or the person you know) need to get help in order to control and stop this addiction.

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:

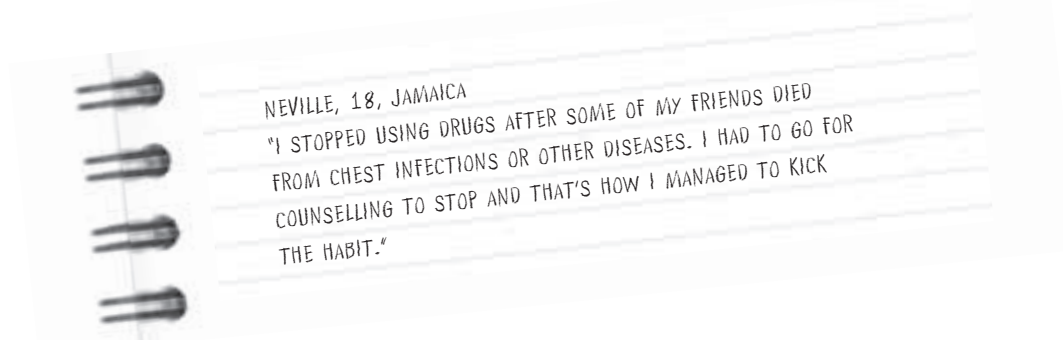
- Feeling as though the drug is necessary to get through the day.
- Needing more and more of the substance to get the desired feeling.
- Experiencing extreme behaviour changes like anger, depression, or violent outbursts.
- Blacking out (fainting or becoming unconscious) after use.

Once you become addicted, you need more and more of the substance to get the feeling that you desire. Your addiction becomes expensive as you consume greater quantities, and more importantly, it damages your mind and 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 withdrawal symptoms, such as shivering, sweating, nausea, vomiting, aches and pains, and difficulty sleeping and eating. 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.



Many substances are very addictive, and you can easily become hooked.

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.



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. There are effective programmes in place in most countries to help people with drug or alcohol problems. Trained counsellors can help you deal with the physical and emotional effects of withdrawal. Most importantly, avoid people who are going to pull you back into drugs. It is important to not hang around with people who aren't going to help you kick your habit.

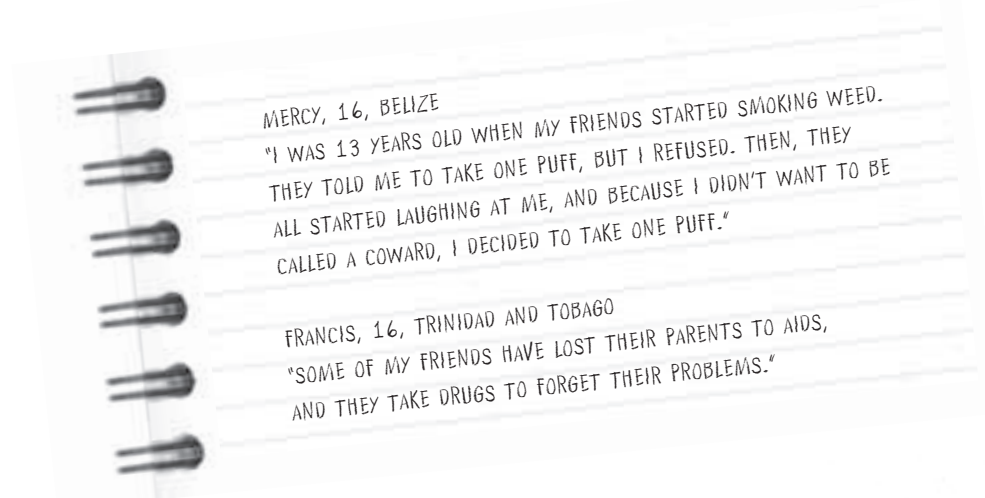
#### WHY PEOPLE START TAKING DRUGS

Of course the best way to avoid having a problem with addiction is to never start using drugs at all. 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:

**Some 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 that other people in the group use. The group may ask 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.



**Some people 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.



**Some young people take drugs because they want to change who they are.** Many adolescents don't like the way they are. They would like to be bolder, funnier, louder, cooler and more mature. Drugs can seem like an easy way to be someone different.

**Some young 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. Some people take drugs to get courage to do something highly risky or illegal. Drugs can seem like an easy way to get over these fears.

**Some adolescents believe drugs will make them smarter.** They think that drugs will help them stay awake so that they can review their studies longer and better.

**Some young people take drugs because of boredom.** They want to have fun and they don't know how else to entertain themselves.

**Some adolescents take drugs because they feel hopeless.** They don't feel as though they have a future to plan or live for. They take drugs because they feel as though it doesn't matter what happens to them.

These are some of the reasons young people take drugs, though none of them justify drug use. Taking drugs is a bad way to cope with any situation. Drugs will only make your problems worse.

Adolescence is a great time in your life, and there is a lot you need to achieve as an adolescent, both in 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. There are many things you can conquer or "get on top of" as an adolescent.

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:

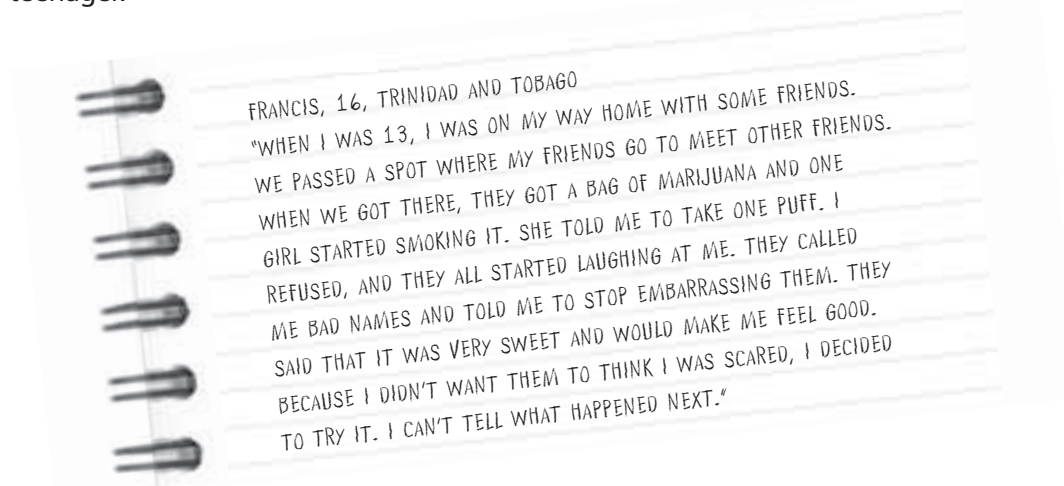
- You don't need drugs to be liked and accepted by other people.
- You don't need drugs to feel brave and courageous.
- You don't need drugs to cope with sorrow or disappointment.

You can always cope without alcohol and drugs. You have the strength and inner resources to deal with any situation and any problem.

Whatever problem you are facing, there are places and people to go to for help. 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 and there are people around you who love you and would like to help.

### HOW TO HANDLE PRESSURE TO TAKE DRUGS

Coping with pressure from peers who want you to take drugs can be very hard. Here is the story of one teenager.



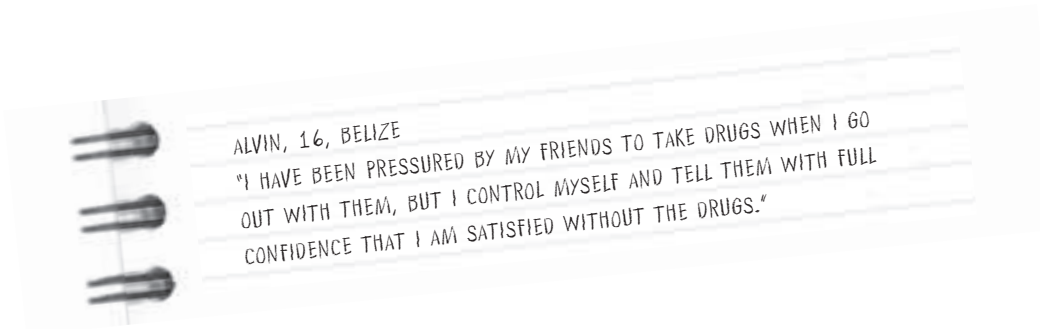
Does this remind you of situations you've been in with peers? These friends were really desperate for Francis to smoke. Why the pressure?

Some people want company when they are doing something they know is not quite right, they want complicity. 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 may pressure you.

Here are some tips for handling such situations:

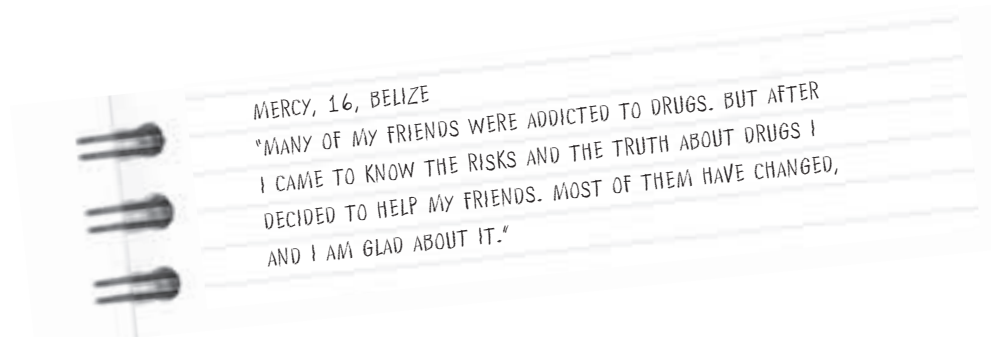
- Remember that you do not have to make a friend feel better by joining him or her in doing something that is not good for you.
- You can tell your friend that what he or she is doing is risky.
- Be clear to your friend that you do not want to take the drug or substance. Show your friend that you know your own mind and that no amount of persuading will 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.





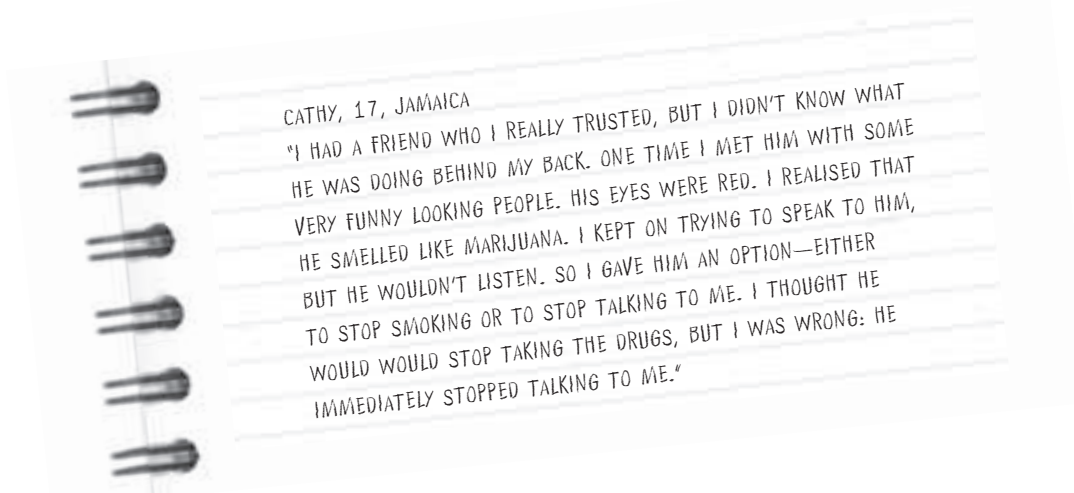
Sometimes, the problem is bigger than resisting pressure from a friend. Instead you might realise that your friend has a serious drug or alcohol problem, one that you feel is ruining your friend's life. This is also very difficult to cope with. Here are some things you can try:

- 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.
- Help your friend find help, and try to get him or her to avoid situations where there is pressure to take drugs or alcohol.

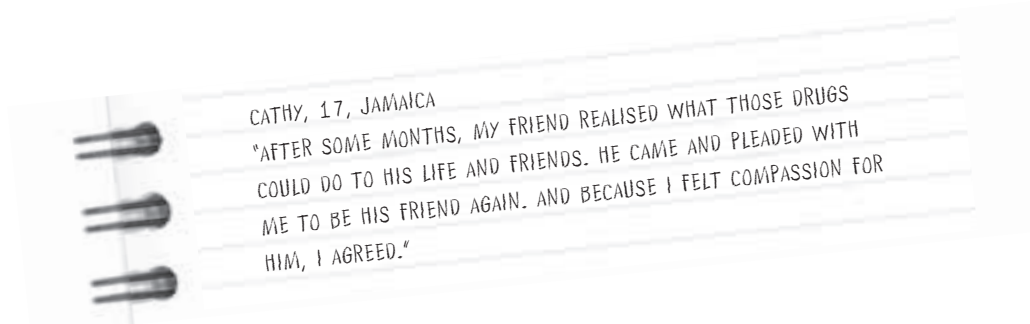


Sometimes, however, people with drug problems are not ready to hear your concern and advice. They may resent your efforts to help, and they may get angry with you. You may end up having a big argument with your friend.

There is always the possibility that your friendship cannot withstand your disagreeing with your friend's behaviour.



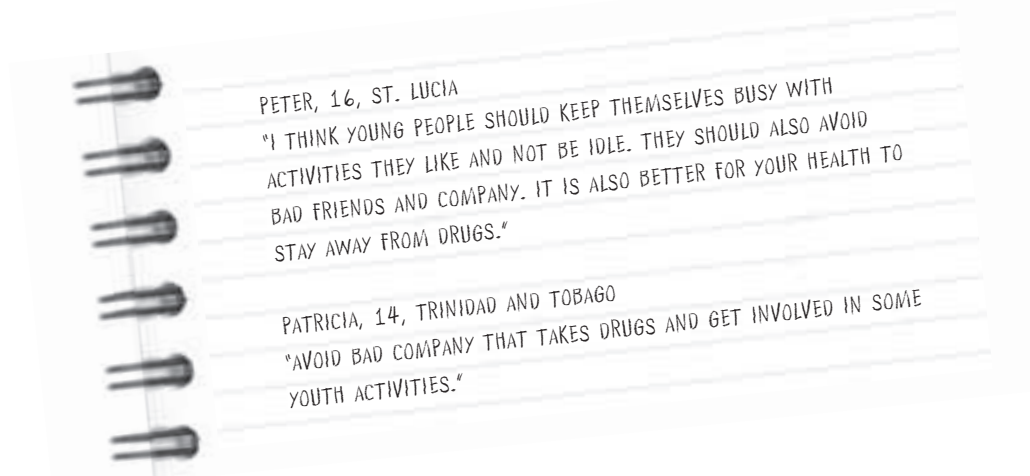
It can be very hard to lose a friend, but at least you stood by your principles, tried to help the friend, and didn't get involved in anything risky yourself. Occasionally, with time, the friend may turn around:



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 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 understand 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.



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, a church group, or an environmental 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 cool, 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.
- **Know and stand up for your own values:** Look at yourself. What are your values? What's right for you? Stand up for yourself and your values.
- **Set your goals and dreams:** 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.
- **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 counsellor. 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 to find it.

## Summary of Chapter 13

**Drug Abuse**

**Taking drugs regularly 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: ganja (cannabis), petrol, glue, and hard drugs, like cocaine and heroin. Alcohol and cigarettes are also drugs, although they are socially accepted and very often abused.

Taking drugs can lead to addiction, which is when you cannot stop using them and cannot function without the drug. Drugs can have many harmful effects. **They can destroy your brain, your heart, your blood vessels and your lungs.** Drug use during pregnancy can cause serious problems for the baby.

Drugs have a harmful effect on your emotions too. They can make you anxious, panicky, or depressed. You can become withdrawn or aggressive and destroy your family and social life. Also, drugs are illegal in most countries and using them can result in problems with the law.

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 and 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 the strength inside of you to deal with any situation or problem.**

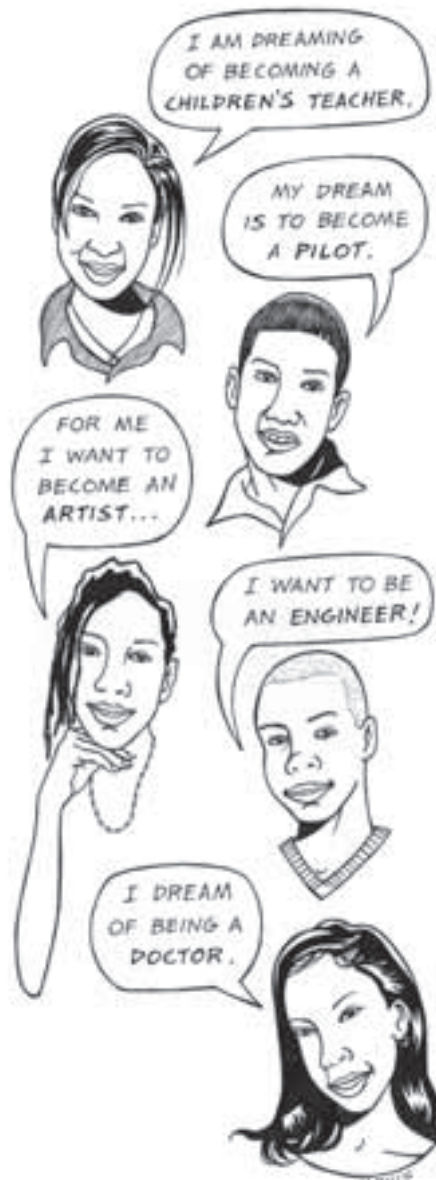
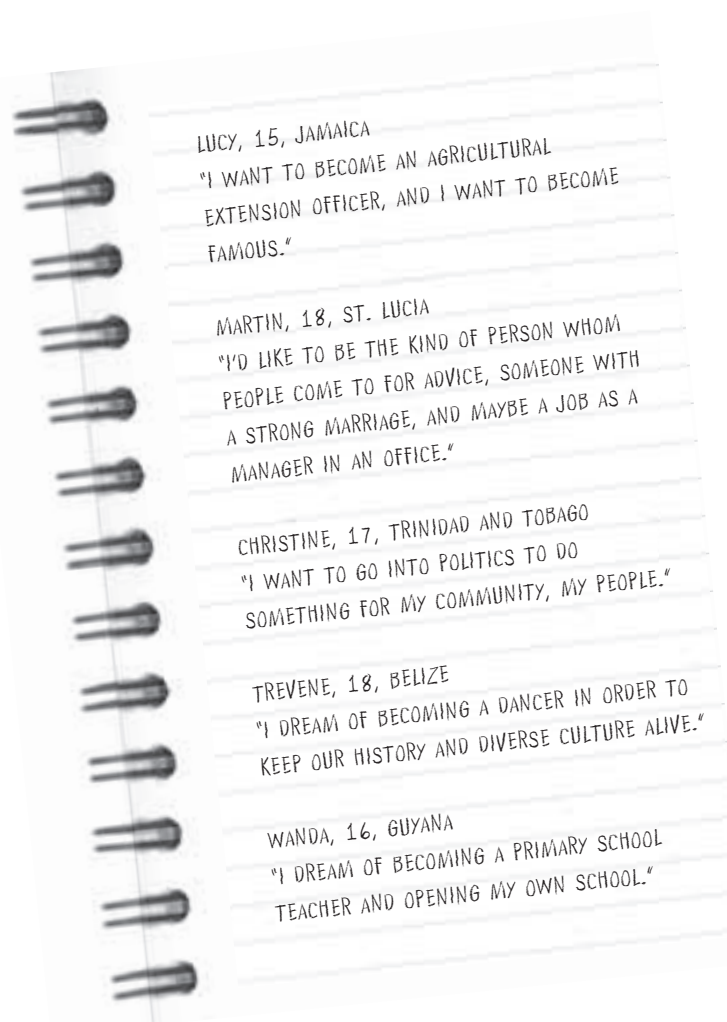
Drugs can ruin your future. **Stay free of drugs by getting active.** Get involved in sports and other activities in your community. You won't need to look to drugs for happiness or entertainment. **Be different.** Don't do something that is risky for you to fit in with peers. Be yourself and do what's 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 and ask for it.**

# Reaching Our Dreams

Everyone has dreams for the future, dreams of being happy, doing something great, or 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:



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? What people do you want involved in your life?

This chapter is about reaching our dreams. It's about figuring out what our dreams are, and how to achieve them. It's about making good decisions that will bring us closer to our dreams, and about coping with setbacks along the way. It's also about helping others and working with peers to bring about positive changes in the world around us.

It's not easy to achieve a dream. It takes a lot of hard work and determination, so the most important thing is to do something! Figure out what your dreams are and 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 OUR DREAMS

As people grow older, their dreams may change. Take Laura from Belize, for example:

- At age 6, she wanted to be a police officer.
- At age 8, she wanted to be a jazz dancer.
- At age 10, she wanted to be a veterinarian.
- 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! You can weave together different dreams and make new things happen. Dreams motivate us, and they make us want to work hard. They help us look to the future and plan for it.

Some of the people around you may not seem to have many dreams or know what they want to be as adults. They may have a hard time imagining themselves five 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 family and community. Whom do you admire? Whom do you greatly respect and aspire to be like? You might be thinking of a teacher who is always willing to help his students, regardless of whether they are at the top of their class or not. It might be a long distance runner who is running marathons to help raise money for an organization working to combat racism. Maybe it's a neighbour who is working on a campaign to help prevent discrimination against youth who are HIV positive. It might be your own parents.



Spend time thinking about your dreams for the future.

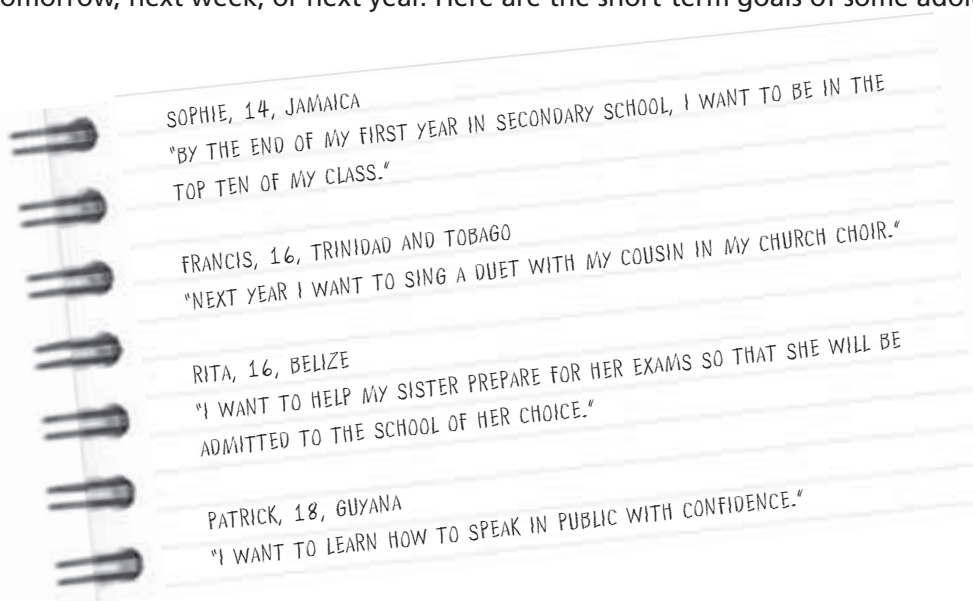


Still, don't let your dreams be limited by what you see around you. Look beyond your community. Is there someone whom you've read about in the newspaper or you've seen on the television who did something that amazes you? Maybe it is a scientist who is learning how elephants communicate with each other. 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 help you start dreaming about your future.

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 or women can do. Things are changing, and women today can take on a range of roles that their own mothers never would have dreamed of. Today, women can become engineers, pilots, doctors, athletes, musicians, journalists, and many other professions.

## SETTING GOALS

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:



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? What are the goals of those people whom you are closest to? How can you help yourself and others reach these goals?

When we reach a goal, or help others reach their goals, we feel a sense of achievement and accomplishment. It makes us feel good about ourselves and serves as proof we can succeed and help others to do the same!

Goals should be realistic and possible. They should be something we **can** achieve. Sometimes people set unrealistic goals for themselves. For instance, a young man who has just graduated from high school wants to buy a brand new car immediately after graduating, but he doesn't have savings or a job. Before setting the goal of purchasing a brand new car, he should probably set more specific short-term goals, such as putting aside a thousand dollars every three months to save up for this big purchase.

Sometimes people set negative goals. These are not beneficial goals, and achieving them probably won't make the persons involved feel good about themselves. Think about it: Have you or has one of your friends simply set a goal because you felt pressured to keep up with peers? For instance, have you ever felt that all your friends are having sex and worry that you will be left behind if you don't? These aren't good reasons for setting out to achieve something.

Think about what you really want to achieve, and keep in mind the following guidelines on goal setting. Make sure that:

- Your goals are your own, and not somebody else's.
- Your goals are positive and constructive.
- Your goals are realistic and possible.
- By reaching your goals you will not be putting yourself or anyone else at risk.
- You plan on working with other people to reach your goals and help others reach theirs.

After you've identified your goals, think about how you are going to achieve them. Make a good plan for yourself. Ask yourself five 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?
- **With whom?** Who can you count on to help you reach these goals?

For example, suppose your goal is to become more involved in community service. **Why** do you want to do this? Maybe there are some changes or improvements that you would like to see take place in your community. Or maybe you find yourself wishing that you could participate in a social cause like a campaign to fight racism or a local radio show to increase awareness about HIV among adolescents.

**How** are you going to get involved in community service? Maybe you are going to find out about volunteer opportunities through your school or through church. Or you might ask your friends about how they are helping out in their communities.

**When** are you going to start taking these steps? Maybe you are going to decide that you're going to spend two hours a week in a community service project or dedicate a weekend a month to it.

**What** will you need to get involved in helping give back to your community? Maybe you need suggestions on what to do or how to get involved. Perhaps you could sign up for a club at school or find out about a public service project that you heard about on the radio. Don't hesitate to ask your friends, parents, teachers, or religious leader for ideas.

**With whom** do you want to work to reach these goals? Do you know people who are particularly involved in community activities that you could join up with, or ask about places to volunteer?

If you think through these steps, plan well, and work hard, you can accomplish your goals.



Achieving a goal makes you feel good about yourself.

## MAKING GOOD DECISIONS

Good decision making can help you accomplish your goals and achieve your dreams.

A decision is a choice between two or more possible courses of action. Making a decision is an everyday event. You'll have to make hundreds of decisions along 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 and understanding how the outcome of your actions may affect other people, the better you will be at making decisions that result in what you want.

### 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, and goals.
7. Evaluate the decision and how you feel about it—whether or not you feel comfortable with the choice you've made.

For example, suppose 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 friends to come over. You've wanted to be part of 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 and your parents that you would start studying 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.

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. 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.

Always evaluate the decisions you have already made 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? What would you do differently next time? For example, maybe you decided to start having sex with your partner, but you know this was the wrong decision for you. You are desperately worried about getting an STI and disappointing your parents. You know that you and your partner could use contraception, but what you'd most prefer is stop having sex.



**Make your own decisions. Don't let other people make them for you.**

You have the chance to make new decisions, so it's important to always evaluate your options and think about what the best choice is for you, and about how your decision will affect those around you. You can decide to stop having sex, if that's what you prefer. It's never too late to make a change.

## PLANNING CAREERS

A few adolescents are extraordinarily talented at one particular thing, like math or music or drawing. It may almost seem as if the talent has chosen them. They may become mathematicians, artists, choir masters, architects, or farmers, among many other possible professions.

Some people are very interested in one thing right from childhood, and that strong interest makes it easier for them to decide on what profession to pursue. You might hear a parent saying: "I always knew that John was going to be a veterinarian. He started caring for baby animals when he was just four years old."

But many of us are not like this. We may belong to the large group of people who perform well in a number of different areas. The person we eventually become is a mixture of our likes and dislikes, our abilities, our willingness to work hard, and the opportunities we have. In fact, more than anything else, you can reach your professional goals through determination, will power, and hard work.

Most people will follow a long and winding path to reach their goals, which will include some trial and error. The steps you need to take to reach your goals are not always obvious, and many unexpected obstacles are likely to appear in your path that must be dealt with creatively.

Try to understand what you like to do and what most interests you, and explore opportunities that enable you to learn more about these areas. If you're not sure what areas interest you, try working in a number of different jobs to see which ones you like the most. 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 vacation periods. Often they work as unpaid volunteers or receive only a small stipend to do this work, enough to cover their transport to and from home. Experience as a volunteer can help you grow personally and professionally, and might help you get a job later in life.



**Come up with a reasonable plan.**

Don't think that just because a project is not related to school or a paid job that it's not worth doing. If you can organise a volunteer job for yourself, you will probably find the experience very useful and rewarding. For example, if you volunteer in the office of a friend or a family member, you will learn about the office work environment and get a good sense of the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities of people working there. You might learn if this type of career interests you. Along the way, you may learn new skills, develop new interests, and gain confidence in yourself. You may also make friends and build new supportive relationships.

As you think about the possible careers you would like to have, think about the steps that you will need to take along the way. Consider the interesting role models in your life. What do you think they had to do to get where they are? 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 who they are is to ask them about their pasts. 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, it's a good idea to 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 when someone is interested in their accomplishments and asks them for advice. People will usually 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 kind and helpful. They can also give you some good advice about how to work towards building your own career.

You may want to ask these people about what personal and professional values they have carried with them that have helped them become who they are. These values might include being willing to stay after work to help a colleague working in another department, being available to listen and support a co-worker who is going through a hard time or being made fun of, or volunteering to organize a picnic for co-workers on an important day, like International AIDS Awareness Day.

## 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. It 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, exercise, and friends and family.
- Eat well and get enough sleep so that you don't start dozing in class.
- 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 people who are afraid to speak in class, and they let other people get all the attention.





Girls, speak up in class! Don't just sit there quietly, letting the boys get all the teacher's attention.

### BEING OUT OF SCHOOL

Many adolescents are forced to leave school before they finish their studies. This is a difficult situation, but it doesn'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 parents 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, someone respected in your community, 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 looking to work at the same place, you may need to think of working elsewhere or undertaking 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 hard to go forward, 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 your control, such as a change in the economic status of your family. Perhaps your family'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 there were family difficulties 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 town. 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. 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, and seek help from your friends and family to do so. 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 things.

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 facts, even when you study constantly. You do poorly on all your tests in these subjects, even though you perform well in your other classes.

## 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. She was flexible. She didn't give up on herself. Instead, she made the most of her strengths and the opportunities around her.

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 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 or that you are not smart 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.

### Looking at your strengths: Test your ability to overcome challenges!

We all have inner resources and skills that help us cope with challenges in every day life. Take a look at your strengths and also identify what you need to work more on.

<b>Humour</b>	Do you laugh every day? Can you find the humour in challenging times? Do people say you have a sense of humour? Can you make others laugh?
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	Can you read emotions in others? Are you aware of your feelings? Is it easy for you to express your intimate feelings? Do you have compassion for others?
<b>Optimism</b>	Are you a positive person? Do you have a sense of hope? Do you look forward to new events?
<b>Spirituality</b>	Do you feel connected to others and to the world around you? Do you occasionally feel a strong sense of inner peace? Does your faith orient you, helping you handle challenges and to accept what you cannot control?
<b>True-meaning</b>	Do you find meaning in challenging times? Do you wake up with a sense of purpose? When you think about your life, do you see a reason for being here?
<b>Resilience</b>	Are you capable of bouncing back from adverse situations? Do you learn from past experiences? Do you trust yourself during tough times? Do you feel you have the resources to deal with a crisis?
<b>Others</b>	Do you <b>really</b> feel better when you help others? Do you know how to seek support from and offer support to others? Can you communicate with others when you feel stressed or confused?

How well did you do? Remember, you have the inner resources to overcome challenges and adversity, and to live a happy and healthy life if you believe in yourself!

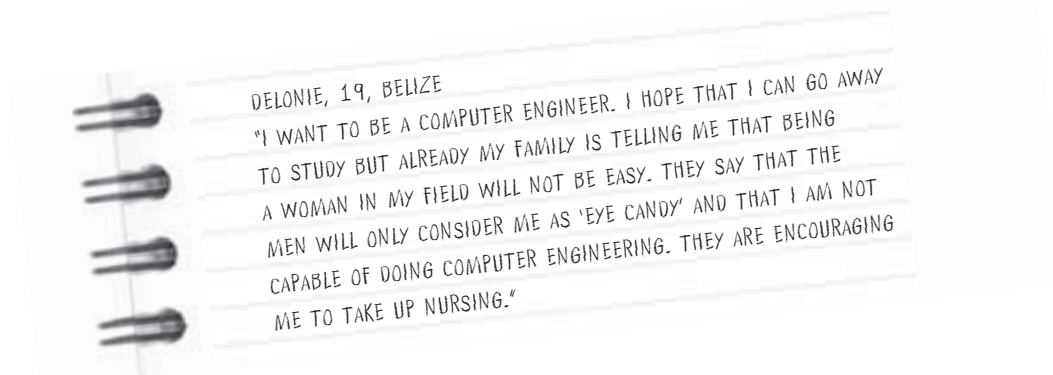
You determine your own success. Don't wait for other people to make you successful. Your success will be determined by your happiness, your spiritual richness, your wisdom, your flexibility, your creativity, your determination, and your attitudes toward other people. You hold the keys to your future and your dreams!

## STAYING FOCUSED ON OUR GOALS AND DREAMS

Sometimes it's hard to stay focused on a goal or a dream. Sometimes the result we want seems so far off in the distant future that it seems unreachable. We might feel tempted to enjoy the present and let the future take care of itself. For example, you may want to stop studying so hard and simply enjoy your friends.

At other times, people may discourage us from staying focused. They may make us feel as though we will never be able to reach our dream. For example, some young people face a lot of pressure to get married, settle down, and start having children at an age when they may not feel ready to take on these responsibilities.

It can also be hard if we are trying to follow an unusual path, pursuing a dream that is different than those of our peers.



It can be hard to stay focused when other people are discouraging us and telling us that we cannot do something. It's just as hard to stay focused when other people are telling us to lighten up and have some fun.

No matter what other people say, stay true to your dream and to helping others reach their own dreams. 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 to. 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 respected person in your community, or someone at your church or mosque. 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 harder to pursue them when you are taking care of a family.



**Stay focused on your dream.  
Don't let other people distract you.**

## LEADERSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP

Since we are social beings and live in communities, one important part of being a worthy person has to do with our involvement in the world around us.

We live in a changing world, and many issues that affect young people, or the world they will inherit, need your attention now. As a young person you can participate in different activities and be part of the changes to make your community, and the world, a better and fairer place to live in. This is a good time to start getting involved in social, cultural, religious and political activities that you care about. You can get involved in community work and participate in all sorts of activities, many of which will have a positive impact on your life and on the lives of others.

Nowadays many political and social groups recognise that young people have an important contribution to make and have opened up new opportunities for youth participation. Developing your understanding of community service and citizenship should be an important part of your growing up. Seize the opportunities around you to make this happen!

What do you consider to be the most important issues facing young people in your community or your country?

If you could make one recommendation to a local policy maker that would have a positive impact on the well-being and health of young people, what would it be?

What are young people doing around you to make a difference? What are the opportunities for participation around you? Do you know them? Wouldn't you like to join them?

**Here are a few suggestions on getting involved:**

- **In your school:** Tutor a younger student or help a teacher prepare for a lesson.
- **In your environment:** Organize a trash pick-up with a group of friends at a nearby park.
- **In the media:** Help out your local newspaper to organize a public awareness campaign.
- **In politics:** Volunteer in the mayor's office or help prepare for a civic awareness day.
- **In your house of worship:** Volunteer at your religious centre or spend some time learning from a spiritual leader you admire.
- **With your role model:** Ask someone you admire to observe them at work for a day.
- **With your peers:** Join a local youth group or form one with your peers—get together weekly to help each other out with homework. Afterward reward yourselves by playing games.

**Are you ready to take action? Go ahead then!**

## Summary of Chapter 14

# Reaching Our Dreams

**Reaching our 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!

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 are. 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 straightforward 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 don't let yourself get discouraged or 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.
- Get support and be supportive of others. They can help you reach your dreams.

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

## A

<b>Abdomen</b>	The trunk of the body below the ribs, containing the stomach, liver, guts, and reproductive organs. Also called the belly.
<b>Abortion</b>	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).
<b>Abscess</b>	Accumulation of pus in internal or external organic tissues.
<b>Abstain</b>	To avoid doing something. For example, you can decide to abstain from sex or from drugs or alcohol.
<b>Abstinence</b>	Method of pregnancy / STI prevention that consists of not having sexual relations of any kind.
<b>Acne</b>	A skin condition found chiefly in adolescents and marked by a lot of pimples (spots), especially on the face.
<b>Acquaintance rape</b>	A rape committed by someone who is known by the victim, such as a neighbour, friend, relative, etc.
<b>Addiction</b>	A dependency on a drug or chemical. A person with a drug addiction cannot function without taking the drug.
<b>Aggressive</b>	Being forceful, unkind, and hostile towards other people.
<b>Alcohol</b>	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.
<b>Allergy</b>	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, difficulty breathing, or shock.
<b>Anaemia</b>	A health condition in which the blood is weak and thin, and has fewer red cells. It is often caused by lack of iron in the diet. Signs of anaemia include tiredness, pale gums, tongue, eyelids, or palms, and lack of energy.

<b>Anaesthetics/ Anaesthesia</b>	A medicine used to ease pain and discomfort during an operation. Anaesthesia can be “local” (in a specific part of the body) or “general” in which case you are usually unconscious.
<b>Antenatal</b>	The period before birth. For example, antenatal care is the care needed by a woman throughout pregnancy and before the birth of the baby.
<b>Anti-fungal cream</b>	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.
<b>Antiseptic</b>	A medical substance (soap, cream, or lotion) that prevents the growth of bacteria. Antiseptics are used to prevent infections.
<b>Anus</b>	The opening of the body where waste (faeces) comes out.
<b>Areola</b>	The ring of darker-coloured skin around the nipple of the breast (male and female).
<b>Aspirations</b>	Dreams and hopes for the future.
<b>Assert (assertive)</b>	To state your opinions or feelings clearly, confidently, and strongly without being hostile, rude or nasty. To assert oneself is to stand up for oneself, to defend one’s rights.
<b>Assumption</b>	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.
<b>Awkward</b>	A feeling of being uncomfortable, ill-at-ease, embarrassed, clumsy, or self-conscious.

## **B**

<b>Bladder</b>	The organ in which urine is stored before leaving the body.
<b>Buttocks</b>	The round, fleshy part of the body, at the base of the spine that a person sits on.

## **C**

<b>Caesarean section (or C-section)</b>	A medical operation to take the baby out of the uterus by making a cut in the woman’s abdomen (belly). This operation is carried out when delivery through the vagina is not possible or recommended.
<b>Calorie</b>	A unit that measures the amount of energy in foods.

<b>Candidiasis</b>	A yeast infection in the vagina. Symptoms of candidiasis include increased discharge from the vagina and itching.
<b>Cannabis (also called marijuana, ganja, hash, or weed)</b>	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.
<b>Cavity</b>	A hole in the tooth caused by decay or rot.
<b>Cervix</b>	The opening or neck of the womb.
<b>Circumcision</b>	A medical procedure in which the loose fold of skin at the end of a man's penis (foreskin) is removed.
<b>Clitoris</b>	The 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.
<b>Cocaine</b>	An illegal drug that makes a person high. It is extremely addictive.
<b>Condom (rubber or protector)</b>	A soft tube, made of rubber or latex, that is put on a man's penis before sexual intercourse. Condoms provide protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
<b>Criticise</b>	To find fault with; to say negative things about something or someone.
<b>Crush</b>	A feeling of intense admiration and liking for someone.
<b>D</b>	
<b>Dandruff</b>	Flakes of dry skin on the head.
<b>Date rape</b>	Rape committed by a partner or date. For example, when a person forces his or her partner to have sex against his or her will.
<b>Deodorant</b>	A product that hides under-arm odour.
<b>Depression</b>	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).
<b>Detergent</b>	A strong cleansing soap, usually used for cleaning laundry.

## E

<b>Ejaculation</b>	The release of semen from a penis.
<b>Embryo</b>	The term used between the second and eighth week of pregnancy to refer to the mass of cells that will become a foetus.
<b>Emergency contraception (EC)</b>	A contraceptive method that can be used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, such as if the condom breaks or slips. To be effective in preventing pregnancy, emergency contraception must be taken within five days of unprotected intercourse. Emergency contraception does not induce abortion.
<b>Empathy</b>	The ability to understand someone else's concerns, worries, fears, and needs. Being empathetic means that you can imagine yourself in the position of someone else and understand how he or she feels.
<b>Erection</b>	When a penis becomes hard and stiff as a result of feelings of sexual excitement.
<b>Exploit</b>	To use someone or something (usually negative). To take advantage of someone.

## F

<b>Fallopian tubes</b>	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.
<b>Fluid</b>	A liquid. Sexual fluids include vaginal discharge and male semen.
<b>Foaming tablets</b>	A method of contraception that is placed in the vagina just before sexual intercourse. The foaming tablets contain a substance that kills sperm (spermicide).
<b>Foetus</b>	The term used to refer to a baby in the uterus (womb) from the ninth week of pregnancy until birth.
<b>Follicles</b>	Tiny holes in the skin from which hair grows.
<b>Foreskin</b>	A fold of delicate skin that covers the tip of the penis of an uncircumcised man.

## G

<b>Genitals / Genitalia</b>	External sexual organs of males and females.
<b>Genital warts</b>	Fleshy bumps that grow in the genital area that are caused by a sexually transmitted infection.

<b>Glands</b>	Cells in the skin that perform a specific function. For example, sweat glands produce sweat or perspiration, which helps cool the body.
<b>Gonorrhoea</b>	A sexually transmitted infection that causes discharge from the vagina or penis.
<b>Growth spurt</b>	A period during which an adolescent's body grows quickly.
<b>H</b>	
<b>Haemorrhage</b>	Heavy bleeding.
<b>Hallucinations</b>	Visions of strange things and hearing voices that others do not see or hear. Hallucinations can be caused by taking drugs.
<b>Heroin</b>	An illegal drug that causes hallucinations and is extremely addictive.
<b>Herpes</b>	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.
<b>Heterosexuality</b>	Sexual attraction toward members of the opposite sex (men being attracted to women, and women being attracted to men).
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	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.
<b>Homosexuality</b>	Sexual attraction to people of the same sex (women being attracted to women, and men being attracted to men).
<b>Hormones</b>	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.
<b>Hygiene</b>	The practice of keeping clean.
<b>Hymen</b>	A delicate piece of tissue inside the vagina.

## I

<b>Implants (Norplant®)</b>	A female contraceptive method in which six small tubes containing hormones are placed under the skin in a woman'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.
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<b>Implantation</b>	When a fertilised egg attaches itself to the lining or wall of the uterus (womb). Implantation is the beginning of pregnancy.
<b>Incest</b>	Sexual contact between members of a family.
<b>Inflammation</b>	Swelling caused by injury or infection.
<b>Inhibitions</b> <b>IUD (or Coil)</b>	Feelings of shyness or embarrassment. The IUD (intrauterine device) or coil is a method of contraception. It is inserted into the uterus by a health worker to prevent pregnancy, and can be removed when the woman wants to become pregnant.

## **L**

<b>Labia</b>	The inner and outer folds of skin that protect the vagina. Also called the vaginal lips.
<b>Labour</b>	The work that a woman's body does during childbirth to push the baby out of the body.
<b>Lubricant</b>	A cream or substance used to make dry surfaces wet and slippery. Lubricants are often used on condoms during sex.

## **M**

<b>Masturbation</b>	Touching one's own body for sexual pleasure.
<b>Menarche</b>	The beginning of menstruation; the first menstrual period.
<b>Menopause</b>	The time a woman stops having monthly periods, usually between the ages of 45 and 55.
<b>Menstruation, menstrual period, or monthly period</b>	The flow of blood and tissue from the uterus (womb) out of a woman's body, that takes place around every 28 days. Menstruation starts during adolescence and ends between the ages of 45 and 55.
<b>Monogamous</b>	The state of being in a committed relationship, emotionally and/or sexually, to only one person at a time.
<b>Mucus</b>	A thick, slippery fluid that the body makes to protect the inside of the vagina, nose, throat, stomach, and intestines.

## **N**

<b>Nausea</b>	A feeling of being sick to one's stomach and wanting to vomit.
<b>Nervous</b>	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 their appetite. Nicotine is highly addictive. It causes many cancers, and it damages the heart and blood vessels.

**O**

**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 genitals.

**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, plural: Ova**

A female egg, which when released from an ovary, may be fertilised by sperm.

**P**

**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.

**Paranoia**

Extreme and unreasonable worries and fears; may be 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.

**Perspire**

To sweat or release water through the skin.

**Petrol, glue, industrial products**

Substances that can be inhaled for drug-like effects. These substances in spray cans can cause nausea, vomiting, disorientation, and confusion; they can also damage the brain.

**Physical**

Of or relating to the body.

**Pills (contraceptive pills, family planning pills, or 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.

<b>Postnatal/postpartum</b>	The time after childbirth or delivery.
<b>Pre-ejaculate</b>	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.
<b>Premature</b>	Happening too early or before the proper or usual time. For example, a premature baby is one born too early.
<b>Promiscuous</b>	To be relaxed or free, especially in relation to sexual activity. Someone who is promiscuous has many sexual partners.
<b>Protein</b>	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.
<b>Psychological</b>	Related to the mind or brain.
<b>Puberty</b>	The period of life when a person changes physically from a child into an adult. Most girls and boys enter puberty between the ages of 10 and 16 years.
<b>Pubic hair</b>	The hair that grow in the genital area.
<b>Pus</b>	White or yellow fluid that is the result of infection.

## **R**

<b>Rape</b>	Forced sexual intercourse that takes place against a person's will.
<b>Rhythm method</b>	Method of pregnancy prevention that consists in not having sexual relations during the days in which the woman thinks she is fertile. This method is not foolproof and is not recommended for young people.

## **S**

<b>Saliva</b>	A person's spit; the fluid in one's mouth.
<b>Scar</b>	A mark left on the skin after a deep cut, wound, or burn has healed.
<b>Sceptical</b>	Feeling doubt and disbelief.
<b>Scrotum</b>	The bag or sac of skin that contains a man's testicles.
<b>Sebum</b>	An oily substance that is produced by the skin. Too much sebum can cause pimples.
<b>Self-awareness</b>	An awareness and understanding of one's own feelings and emotions.

<b>Self-confidence</b>	A feeling of trust in oneself and in one's own skills and abilities.
<b>Self-esteem</b>	Feeling good about and respecting oneself.
<b>Semen</b>	A sticky, whitish liquid that comes out of a man's penis during ejaculation.
<b>Seminal vesicles</b>	Two glands in the male reproductive system where semen is made.
<b>Sexual abuse</b>	Any type of unwanted sexual contact, touching, or fondling.
<b>Sexual harassment</b>	Any type of unwanted sexual attention, such as unpleasant sexual comments or physical gestures.
<b>Sexual intercourse</b>	Usually refers to the act in which an erect penis is placed inside a vagina.
<b>Smegma</b>	The white lubricating substance under the foreskin of the penis. Smegma helps the foreskin slide back smoothly over the glans (the head of the penis).
<b>Sperm</b>	Tiny cells that are released from the man's penis and can fertilise a woman's egg, leading to pregnancy.
<b>Spermicide</b>	A slippery cream or gel that kills sperm. Spermicides are used as a method of contraception.
<b>Sterilisation</b>	A permanent method of contraception for either males or females. Sterilisations are carried out through an operation with a trained medical provider.
<b>Sterilised instruments</b>	Medical instruments that are clean and free of bacteria.
<b>Stimulate</b>	To excite and/or arouse.
<b>STIs</b>	Sexually transmitted infections. Infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. Also called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
<b>Stunt</b>	To hinder or block normal growth or development.
<b>Syphilis</b>	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.

## T

<b>Tampons</b>	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.
<b>Tendency</b>	A habit or common practice.

<b>Testes, testicles</b>	Part of the male reproductive organs inside the scrotum where sperm and male hormones are produced.
<b>Testosterone</b>	A hormone produced in a male's body by the testes and in smaller amounts by the female ovaries.
<b>Trait</b>	A recognisable feature; an inherited characteristic.
<b>Tranquilizers</b>	Types of drugs that make a person feel very calm, relaxed, and sleepy.

## U

<b>Unprotected sex</b>	Sexual intercourse without any protection against pregnancy or STIs.
<b>Urethra</b>	A tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body.
<b>Uterus (womb)</b>	The muscular organ inside a woman's belly in which a foetus grows.

## V

<b>Vagina</b>	The passage that goes from a woman's womb to the outside of the body. It is also called the birth canal.
<b>Vaginal fluid</b>	The discharge or fluid that comes out of a woman's vagina.
<b>Vas deferens</b>	The tube through which sperm travels from the testicles to the urethra.
<b>Vessels</b>	Small tubes through which a body fluid (such as blood) travels around the body.
<b>Vulnerable</b>	At risk of being physically or emotionally wounded; easy to hurt; easily damaged.
<b>Vulva</b>	The external female genitals.

## W

<b>Wet dream</b>	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.
<b>Window period</b>	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 can be infected with HIV and can infect others.

**Withdrawal** When the man pulls his penis out of the vagina before ejaculation.

**Withdrawal symptoms** The body's bad reaction when a drug to which one is addicted is taken away.

**Womb** See *Uterus*.

## **Z**

**Zygote** An egg that has been fertilised by a sperm.

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