

Take Care: Understanding & Supporting Healthy Sexuality for Older Adults

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Objectives

- Learn about healthy sexuality throughout the lifespan.
- Understand the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Identify three common issues older adults face in regard to sexuality.
- Identify three ways that we can support healthy sexuality for older adults.

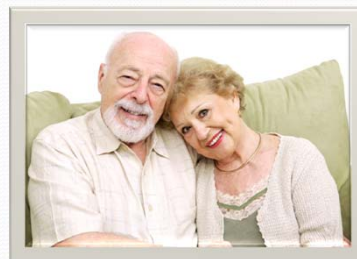


Audience Poll: Who's Here?



Why Older Adult Sexuality?

Humans are sexual beings throughout our lives. Sexuality does not have an expiration date.



Sexual Health Matters

- A part of our physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Contributes to our overall sense of well-being.
- Can be a source of love, affection, intimacy and happiness.



A Long Ignored Topic

Older adult sexuality has long been ignored. Why?

- We live in an ageist society that often assumes sex is for the young.
- We are uncomfortable discussing sexuality in general.
- We don't have the information or tools to have these discussions.
- We don't view sexual health as a primary concern for older adults.



Possible Concerns

Some of the concerns we face if we don't address older adult sexuality include:

- Untreated pain or discomfort.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Sexual abuse and/or sexual violence.
- Negative impact on the happiness and self-esteem of older adults.



Myths about Older Adults

MYTH:

Most older adults are not sexually active.

FACT:

A 2007 study found that sex with a partner in the previous year was reported by 73 percent of people ages 57 to 64; 53 percent of those ages 64 to 75, and 26 percent of people 75 to 85. Of those who were active, most said they had sex 2-3 times a month or more (Lindau, et al., 2007).

Myths about Older Adults

MYTH:

Sexually transmitted infections are not something older adults need to be concerned about.

FACT:

While number of infections overall are relatively low for those 65 and older, STIs remain a concern. According to the CDC, between 2007 and 2011, chlamydia infections among Americans 65 and over increased by 31 percent and syphilis infections by 52 percent.

Myths about Older Adults

MYTH:

Young people are the ones who need to learn about safer sex.

FACT:

College-age individuals are actually better at regular condom use than older adults. The 2010 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior found that college-age participants used condoms during 40% of sexual encounters, but those 61 and older only used condoms during 6% of sexual encounters.

Myths about Older Adults

MYTH:

Most older adults are heterosexual and cisgender.

FACT:

According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, there are 1.5 million LGBT elders — 65 and older — in the U.S., and that number is expected to nearly double by 2030.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is the term used to describe whether a person feels attraction and/or desire for people of another gender, same gender, or both genders.



Who we are attracted to?



Identities Related to Orientation

BISEXUAL
Ally
Queer
Lesbian
ASEXUAL
Gay
Pansexual
Heterosexual
Questioning

Gender Identity

One's psychological sense of self. A person's sense of being male, female or other gendered. The gender to which one feels they belong.



How do we feel about our gender?



Identities Related to Gender

Gender Nonconforming
Female
Gender Queer
Trans Man
Cisgender
Transgender
Male
Trans Woman

What is Healthy Sexuality?

Healthy sexuality means having the **knowledge** and **power** to express sexuality in ways that enrich one's life.

It includes approaching sexual interactions and relationships from a perspective that is **consensual**, **respectful** and **informed** (NSVRC, 2012).

Healthy sexuality is free from coercion and violence.

The Characteristics

- The following behaviors, adapted from the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States' *Life Behaviors of a Sexually Healthy Adult* (SIECUS, 2004) demonstrate healthy sexuality.
- Remember, not having all of these doesn't necessarily make one unhealthy. These are an intended to be an ideal.



The Characteristics

A sexually healthy adult will ...

- Be comfortable with their body.
- Know that human development includes sexual development, which may or may not include reproduction or sexual experience.
- Have access to information and resources to protect and enhance their own sexual health.



The Characteristics

A sexually healthy adult will ...

- Engage in sexual relationships that are consensual, non-exploitative, honest, pleasurable, and safe.
- Express their sexuality while respecting the rights of others.
- Interact with all genders in respectful and appropriate ways.



The Characteristics

A sexually healthy adult will ...

- Communicate well with family, peers and romantic partners.
- Express their sexuality in ways that are in line with their values.
- Know the difference between life-enhancing sexual behaviors and those that are harmful to self and/or others.



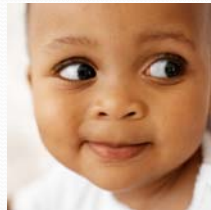
The Characteristics

A sexually healthy adult will ...

- Enjoy sexual feelings without necessarily acting on them.
- Be aware of the impact of family, cultural, media, and societal messages on thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors related to sexuality.
- Accept one's own sexual orientation and gender identity. Respect the sexual orientations and gender identities of others.



Healthy Sexuality Across the Lifespan



Lifespan Overview

A **quick** look at key developmental tasks/needs for :

- Early Childhood
- Middle Childhood
- Late Childhood
- Adolescence
- Young Adulthood
- Adulthood
- Older Adulthood

Adapted from NSVRC, 2013. & DeLameter & Friedrich, 2002.



Early Childhood (Ages 2-5)

- Consensual and playful exploration with children of the same age. Ex- “playing house”
- May ask questions about sexuality or reproduction, such as, “Where do babies come from?”
- Curiosity in regard to adult bodies (e.g., wanting to go to into the bathroom with parents, touching women’s breasts, etc.).
- May have little concern for privacy or inhibition.



Middle Childhood (Ages 5-8)

- Use of slang words, “potty humor” or jokes to describe body parts and functions.
- Develops a deeper understanding of gender & gender roles. May act in a more “gendered” manner.
- Sex play or activities that explore sexuality and bodies.
- Some children may touch their genitals for the purpose of pleasure.



Late Childhood (Ages 9-12)

- Puberty causes physical changes.
- Increased need for privacy and independence.
- Interested in relationships. May want to have a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- Curiosity about adult bodies. *“What will I look like?”*
- As social norms around masturbation become clearer, masturbation will likely occur in private.



Adolescence (Ages 13-19)

- Physical changes of puberty continue.
- Increased interest in dating and relationships.
- Emerging sex drive.
- Seek independence and begin to form their own identity separate from their parents.
- Often the onset of partnered sexual activity.



Young Adulthood

- Enter into intimate sexual and emotional relationships.
- Understand sexuality as connected to commitment and planning for the future.
- Learning to make decisions about reproduction, safer sex and STIs.
- Shift their emphasis from self to others.



Adulthood

- Continue having intimate sexual and emotional relationships.
- Learning to better understand themselves and their needs as well as communicate these to partners.
- Deciding how to structure life and relationships.
 - Cohabitation
 - Marriage
 - Divorce
- Decisions about reproduction, safer sex and STIs continue.



Older Adulthood

- A time of life changes that may impact sexuality.
 - Empty nest
 - Retirement
 - Society's views on aging.
- Dealing with physical changes that can impact sexual drive and functioning.
 - Menopause
 - Andropause
 - Chronic Pain and/or illness.



Common Issues Older Adults Face

- Normal changes to the body that occur with aging can impact sexual functioning (McNicoll, 2008).
 - Vaginal dryness
 - Erectile difficulties
 - Decreased libido
- Chronic illness or pain can impact sexual functioning.
- Medications can reduce sex drive and/or impact sexual functioning.



Common Issues Older Adults Face

- The false belief that once risk of pregnancy ends, there are no risks when engaging in sexual behavior.
- Many older adults never received any sex ed. Lack of accurate information about sexual health and safer sex can lead to sexually transmitted infections.
- Older adults may feel uncomfortable asking questions about sexual health (Lindau, et al., 2007). This can limit access to information and care.



Common Issues Older Adults Face

- Limited privacy can create barriers to healthy sexual expression.
- Dementia and other capacity issues can create concerns around consent.
- Reduced mobility can create a vulnerability to sexual abuse or sexual violence.



Common Issues Older Adults Face

LGBTQ identified individuals can also face (MAP, 2010):

- Lack of familial support.
- A sense of isolation. May “return” to the closet.
- Discrimination and harassment.
- Issues with medical care, benefits and visitation.



What can we do to support healthy sexuality among older adults?



Individuals

- Talk to older adults about healthy sexuality.
- Let it be known that you are an “askable” individual.
- Be respectful and supportive of older adults’ sexuality.
- Provide easy access to information, resources and care.
- Be an advocate for older adults.



Providers

Create an environment that is supportive of healthy sexuality.

- Provide opportunities for healthy expressions of sexuality.
- Respect the rights of older adults to engage in relationships and sexual behaviors.
- Look at policies to ensure respect and fairness.
- Provide access to condoms and other safer sex supplies.



Providers

Create an environment that is supportive of healthy sexuality.

- Don't assume sexual orientation. Don't assume gender or gender roles.
- Use terms such as "partner" rather than "boyfriend" or "girlfriend."
- Advocate for training on sexuality and LGBTQ issues.
- Examine agency policies and advocate for inclusivity. Ex-Forms, visitation, etc.



Providers

Educate about healthy sexuality.

- Provide education on topics related to sexuality and relationships to residents, clients and their families.
 - ✓ Invite guest speakers.
 - ✓ Hold “Lunch & Learn” events.
 - ✓ Keep books on sexuality in your library/office.
- Provide professional training on topics related to sexuality and relationships to staff.



Pennsylvania Resources

Planned Parenthood Keystone

www.planitpa.org

Pennsylvania Department of Health

http://www.portal.health.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/department_of_health_home/17457

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape

www.pcar.org

The Sexuality & Aging Consortium at Widener University

- Annual Conference in September
- Speakers & Trainers
- Blog - <http://www.sexualityandaging.com/>

National Resources

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors & Therapists

www.aasect.org

American Psychological Association's Aging & Human Sexuality Resource Guide

<https://www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/guides/sexuality.aspx>

Older, Wiser, Sexually Smarter- Curriculum

http://www.sexedstore.com/service_item/older-wiser-sexually-smarter

The National Institute on Aging

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/sexuality-later-life>

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center

http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_Sexuality-in-later-life.pdf

What's Next?

After today's call, think about what you or your organization can do to support healthy older adult sexuality. Set a goal for an action to be accomplished within:

- 7 days
- 7 weeks
- 7 months



Questions?

Thank you!

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