


**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.



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**Audience Poll: Who's Here?**



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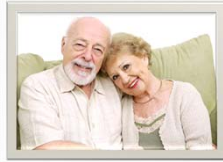
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## Why Older Adult Sexuality?

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



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## 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.



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## 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.



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### 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.



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### Myths about Older Adults

<b>MYTH:</b>	<b>FACT:</b>
<b>Most older adults are not sexually active.</b>	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).

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### Myths about Older Adults

<b>MYTH:</b>	<b>FACT:</b>
<b>Sexually transmitted infections are not something older adults need to be concerned about.</b>	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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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?*




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### Identities Related to Orientation

BISEXUAL Ally  
Queer Lesbian  
Gay Pansexual Heterosexual  
Questioning ASEXUAL

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### 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?*



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### Identities Related to Gender

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

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### 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.**

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### 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 intended to be an ideal.



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### 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.



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### 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.



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### 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.



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### 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.



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## Healthy Sexuality Across the Lifespan



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## 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.



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## 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.



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**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.



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**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.



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**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.



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## 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.



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## 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.



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## 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.



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**Common Issues Older Adults Face**

- Normal changes to the body that occur with aging can impact sexual functioning (McNicol, 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.



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**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.



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**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.



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## 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.



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



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## 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.



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## 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.



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## 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.



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## 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.



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## Pennsylvania Resources

**Planned Parenthood Keystone**  
[www.planitpa.org](http://www.planitpa.org)

**Pennsylvania Department of Health**  
[http://www.portal.health.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/department\\_of\\_health\\_home/17457](http://www.portal.health.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/department_of_health_home/17457)

**Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape**  
[www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org)

**The Sexuality & Aging Consortium at Widener University**

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

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## National Resources

**American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors & Therapists**  
[www.aasect.org](http://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](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](http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_Sexuality-in-later-life.pdf)

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## 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



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# Questions?

**Thank you!**  
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