Healthy sexual relationships and consent

Whether you are in a longer or shorter term sexual relationship, it is worth taking some time to consider how you can keep this aspect of the relationship healthy and enjoyable. This will involve thinking about emotional as well as physical aspects of sex.

**What is a healthy sexual relationship?**

Ideas about what constitutes a healthy sexual relationship will vary enormously, as people have such differing personal and cultural perspectives on sex. However, there are some basic principles that can help to keep sexual interactions/relationships healthy. These include:

* An ability to communicate with one another about what you want/don’t want and enjoy/don’t enjoy
* Mutual respect for one another, which will involve full consent being given for any sexual contact.
* Taking steps to protect yourself and your sexual partner(s) (e.g. from STIs (sexually transmitted diseases) and/or unwanted pregnancies)

**What is consent?**

Consent in this context is about anyone involved in sex making a conscious, positive decision to engage in sexual activity every time. In order to give this consent the person needs to be able to make an informed decision, without any pressure being put on them. Being intoxicated with drugs or alcohol can inhibit a person’s ability to make such a decision and therefore to give their consent to engage in sexual activity. This is a mutual decision and therefore nobody is obliged to perform any sexual acts with another person at any time.

Any sexual contact without consent is illegal. If someone carries out a sexual act on another person without consent, they can be charged with a sexual offence (like rape or sexual assault). This covers sexual touching, oral, anal and vaginal sex with a penis or with any other type of object.

**Keeping sexual relationships healthy and consensual**

* Think about what you want and why you want it, to be sure you’re happy with your decisions. Remember that your sexuality is individual and personal. It is your body and your choice alone what you do with it.
* Be clear with one another about what you want or don’t want sexually and respect each other’s decisions. Feel free to change your mind!
* Try to give pleasure to each other, as well as yourself
* Read each other’s body language as well as listening to what each other says to be sure that each sexual act is consensual
* Don’t put pressure on anybody to engage in sexual contact with you as this is abusive behaviour
* Educate yourself on the legal aspects of sex and consent
* Educate yourself on sexual health/STIs, pregnancy and contraceptive options
* Make plans for where to go and what to do if things don’t go according to plan e.g. a condom splits

**Support and further information**

Bedford College Group Wellbeing Zone can be accessed by all students at each campus more details can be found at <https://moodle.bedford.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=26601&section=8>

Students’ Union resources on Consent and sexual violence prevention can be found in the ‘Its’ not OK’ section of Moodle <https://moodle.bedford.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=26601&section=12>

**Other organisations and sites**

<http://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/category/relationships>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexualhealthtopics/Pages/Sexual-health-hub.aspx>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/bwytJQcDBXDfLGlVb0vHCk/category-sex-relationships>

<https://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk/>

<http://pauseplaystop.org.uk/pause/>

<http://www.relate.org.uk/>