



**SEX**



**IDENTITY**

**THE**  
**RATIONAL**  
**ENQUIRER**

**2016**

**LOVE**



**LIFE**



**FREE!**

# The Rational Enquirer youth sexual health magazine, 21st edition:

## *By and for youth*

Parents, adults and youth – as you read through the Rational Enquirer, use these articles to start a conversation with each other.

The Rational Enquirer is a youth sexual health magazine that covers a wide variety of topics meant to inform and connect people in conversation. This year's 21st edition highlights the experiences and knowledge shared by youth authors. All youth have a voice, are knowledgeable and have experiences others can learn from.

We are pleased to have youth authors highlighted in this publication.

***So go ahead – start talking!***

Sexual health overlaps many aspects of a person's life. Rational Enquirer articles are listed under Sex, Identity, Love and Life.



# Youth and young adult authors

## Manish Arora

Manish, 17, is a Sex, Etc. staff writer. Manish's articles were reprinted with permission from Sex, Etc., a teen-written, sexual health magazine and website published by Answer.

## Dante

Dante is a young author whose article was reprinted with permission from [reachout.com](http://reachout.com).



## Juliette Fain

Juliette, 16, is a student at Siuslaw High School and previously attended North Eugene High School. She is planning to enroll at Hawaii Pacific University and become a journalist. Juliette enjoys hanging out with her friends, exploring and photography.

## Natalya Gast

Natalya is an Oregon high school student and the author of "Talking to your parents about sex" in this year's Rational Enquirer.



## Abi Griego

Abi is a junior at North Eugene High School. She loves music, plays the flute and has been involved in two honor band

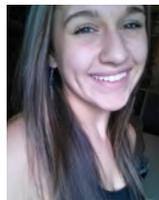
programs – one of her biggest passions. Abi likes to write and read in her spare time. She has been on the honor roll during most of high school and loves learning. Abi also loves Mexico's culture, language and freedom.

## Leslie Hassnein

Leslie, 18, is a Sex, Etc. staff writer. Leslie's article was reprinted with permission from Sex, Etc., a teen-written, sexual health magazine and website published by Answer.

## Rodney Jackson

Rodney is an Oregon high school student and the author of "Have you ever" in this year's Rational Enquirer.



## Haylee Miles

Haylee, 16, attends North Eugene High School. She enjoys baking and has ice skated for three years. Haylee loves to go on walks and watch the sun set. She is interested in being a nanny for children with disabilities or a counselor. Haylee said, "Seeing others work through their hardest times inspires me to do good in life. I hope one day to be the best I can be for others."

## Suneela Mubayi

Suneela is a young author whose article was reprinted with permission from Our Bodies Ourselves at [ourbodiesourselves.org](http://ourbodiesourselves.org).



## Taylor Roghair

Taylor, 20, is a college student at the University of Puget Sound working toward a double major in medieval history and Spanish language and culture. She loves to travel, write, teach, read, play the tuba and act as a catalyst for social change ... among other things. She is a Portland native and is proud of the fact that she is an open adoptee. She and her parents have always had a strong relationship with her birth mother and her birth mother's family.

## Alfonso Trujillo

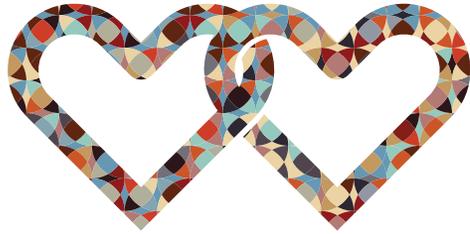
Alfonso is a senior at North Eugene High School and the captain of his school's highly competitive culinary team. He plans to attend Oregon State University and study BioHealth Sciences.

## SEX



Exploring the safer sex buffet .....	2
A fairy-tale first time .....	4
Being drunk is not consent .....	8
Masturbation at a glance.....	10
Plan ahead: Prevent unintended pregnancy.....	12

## LOVE



Have you ever .....	20
Knowing your relationship .....	21
Relationships.....	22
Abuse and love.....	26

## IDENTITY



I claim the right to choose my ultimate gender .....	15
Out in the open .....	16
Realization .....	18

## LIFE



Cody .....	29
Talking to your parents about sex .....	30
Romance and communication .....	32
What's it like to grow up in an open adoption? .....	34

Credits .....	38
Resources .....	39



# Exploring the safer sex buffet

## *Who doesn't love a buffet?*

So many choices! You can take as much or as little of something as you like. It may sound funny, but protecting yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy is kind of like going to a buffet too. There are many options, and you get to choose which methods you'd like. So step right up to the safer sex buffet!

By Josh Ferrar and Dano Beck

*Josh Ferrar and Dano Beck work for the Oregon Health Authority, where they help plan and evaluate sexual health services.*

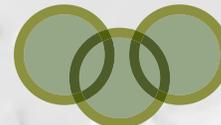
## Testing

If you're having sex or have had sex in the past, you'll want to make sure to put this on your plate. Regular testing for HIV and STIs is not only a great way to protect yourself, it's a great way to protect your partners too! Find out where to get tested at <https://gettested.cdc.gov/>.



## Condoms

So many choices! These come in a variety of sizes, textures, and even flavors! Female condoms are available too. No matter what type you pick, be sure it's made of latex, polyurethane (plastic) or polyisoprene (synthetic rubber).



## Abstinence

A buffet option that is always available and never goes out of style.



## PrEP

Have you heard about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)? It's the latest addition to the buffet.

PrEP is a daily pill that people at very high risk for HIV can take to prevent them from getting HIV. You have to take it every day and it's not meant for everyone. While it protects you from HIV, it won't protect you from other STIs, which means you need to take it with a side of condoms and lube!

Want to learn more? Go to [www.pleaseprepme.org/resources/](http://www.pleaseprepme.org/resources/).



## Lube

We recommend silicone-based lubricant. Most silicone-based lubricants are safe for use with latex, polyurethane and polyisoprene condoms. Oil-based lubricants can damage latex, causing condoms to break, and research suggests most water-based lubricants can damage vaginal and anal tissue, which can increase a person's risk for getting an STI. So stick with silicone.





# A fairy-tale first time

Everyone knows that classic teen movie scene: the fairy-tale first time with the candles, romance and perfect sex. But sex isn't always what it is in the movies. In fact, it almost never is. Put two people together with little to no sexual experience, and you're in for a much different experience than the glamorous and effortless sex scenes of many teen movies. Not to mention many of these films neglect real-life issues: sexually transmitted infections (STIs), consent and discussions about birth control and possible pregnancy. The players are always heterosexual; rarely do the fairy-tale first times delve into the queer realm and same-sex relationships. Oh, and the assumption is you live happily ever after with your first partner, which almost never happens. Your first time may be awkward, funny or uncomfortable, but it likely won't be a pretty movie. Sorry to break the rose-colored glasses, but it's time for some real first times.



Fairy  
Tale

1

## The first time will be soooooo romantic.

There's no one home. The candles are lit. Rose petals are all over the bed. Your significant other is staring deep into your eyes and telling you s/he loves you. According to the teens we spoke with, this is not common at all.

Eighteen-year-old Matt of New Jersey had this to say about the first time. "Everyone thinks that sex is the best thing ever or that their first time is the best thing ever, but it isn't." Matt goes on to say, "There is this facade that you will end up loving the first person you

have sex with. I haven't talked to him in forever. The whole fairy tale of the rainbows and sunshine is all a lie."

Sex can be romantic, don't get us wrong. But regardless of how much you prepared by discussing safer sex and using condoms and/or using hormonal birth control, sex can still be weird the first time, and that's OK. It can take some time and lots of communication to get the romance you may be looking for.



Fairy  
Tale

2

## Sex will fix a broken relationship.

The last conversation the two of you had was filled with harsh words, and you swore you'd never talk to each other again. But you still think he's totally hot! You think maybe if you have sex, all of your relationship problems will be resolved. But this is not the case.

If you're having sex to maintain a relationship or cure a broken one, it can be even more awkward.

"My first time was so awkward," explains Erica, 17, of Nebraska. "It was with my ex-boyfriend the morning after prom in the back seat of his car. I thought the sex would make things better between us.

The passion and emotions were there, temporarily, I guess. Afterwards, I hated him more than ever, and he didn't even speak to me until months later. I lost my boy and my virginity. It's sad."

Sex cannot cure a friendship or relationship, but communication can! Talking to your significant other about your problems will do more to improve your relationship than just having sex.

Madison, 15, of New Jersey, tells us, "Sex is really just an action that isn't meant to make people like each other more, but to allow two people who already like each other to enjoy themselves more."



Fairy  
Tale

3

## It will last for at least an hour.

The hours spent eating chips and watching old movies have given you the stamina of a marathon runner. You can delay orgasm for hours. Chafing and loss of erection? Nonsense! Oh wait, this was all just a dream ...

Lots of guys boast about lasting forever, but do they really? A 2005 *Journal of Sexual Medicine* study surveyed 500 adult heterosexual couples and found that the median length of time it takes men to ejaculate during sexual intercourse to be about five minutes. This means there were as many men who lasted more than five minutes as there were men who lasted fewer than five minutes.

Michael, 16, of Ohio, spoke with us about expectations for how long sex will last. "I told my

girlfriend I'd last 20 minutes our first time," he explains. "I ended up cumming after three minutes and got a little embarrassed."

Michael's experience isn't unusual. Matt had a similar experience with his partner. "It hurt! And it also didn't help that he only lasted 10 seconds."

Reaching climax within minutes is nothing to be ashamed about, especially if it's your first time. You don't automatically know how to parallel park the first time you get behind the wheel, do you? Sex is more than intercourse, and you have to take your time to figure out what feels right for each person. Sex can include lots of different behaviors and isn't only over when the guy ejaculates.



Fairy  
Tale

4

## You'll both reach climax simultaneously.

After hours of sex, you're finally reaching the big O. Your mind shifts in your happy daze; the picture of the two of you riding off into the sunset together tickles your imagination. Suddenly, you're alone on that horse, and your partner exhales, "That was amazinggggg. Did you cum, too?" Not at all.

Not only is it unlikely that you and your partner will orgasm simultaneously, but many people don't orgasm from penile-vaginal sex, especially the first time. A survey of 4,000 women in the United Kingdom found that 32 percent of the women never or seldom orgasmed through sexual intercourse. Guys seem

to have an easier time reaching orgasm, but they can also sometimes have a difficult time orgasming during intercourse.

Diego, 17, of New York, didn't reach orgasm his first time. "We were going at it, and I was starting to get soft," he explains. "Her parents got home after about

eight minutes, so I pulled up my pants and ran. I wasn't going to cum anyway, but her parents getting home was a great excuse."

Lots of factors, such as nervousness, can keep guys and girls from having an orgasm.



Just as there's no guarantee your first time will be a fairy tale, there's no guarantee it won't be great. Discussing the first time before it happens can really help to make it a positive experience, even if it isn't a fairy-tale experience. Talk about birth control, STI prevention and what you're comfortable with. More importantly, make sure you're ready and understand consent. Sex is a big step, and no one should pressure you into it prematurely.

Michael, 17, of New Jersey, enjoyed his first time. "I didn't want my first time to be purely physical. When I found the right girl, we talked about it for the week leading up. My parents were out of town for the night, and I picked up a few condoms earlier that day. It only lasted four minutes, but I've never felt more connected to a person. No regrets whatsoever."

Eighteen-year-old Blythe of New Jersey shares what her first time was like.

"I waited to have sex until I was ready and made sure my girlfriend was also ready and consenting. We loved each other at the time, so it was a very average experience, felt amazing. It wasn't too quick or awkward at all. I think once you know you're ready, you don't have to rush into anything."

Sex isn't a movie scene. Your parents won't always be out of town and the experience might be awkward. Fireworks aren't what matters. Enjoying something intimately with the person you care for is.

By Manish Arora, 17 and Leslie Hassnein, 18

*Reprinted with permission from Sex, Etc., a teen-written, sexual health magazine and website published by Answer.*

# Being drunk is not consent

I run upstairs and open the doors to various rooms, looking for my close friend at a party. Finally, I open a bedroom door, and there she is, almost fully naked in bed with a sober athlete forcing his tongue down her throat. My eyes lock with his, but he looks away and continues what he's doing. My friend looks vulnerable, as if she has no control of what's happening. At first, I close the door and think. *Should I stop them? Should I let them continue? No. One of my closest friends is drunk; she can't consent to what's happening.* Quickly, I grab my other good friend at the party, and we both barge into the room and stop things from going any further.

## Rape is rape

Although we know you have to be over the age of 21 to consume alcohol in the United States, the reality is some teens drink at social events and parties. Sometimes people try to take advantage of those under the influence, since they know people who have had too much to drink cannot make coherent decisions. Through aggression, persistence and persuasion, someone who is drunk can be coerced or forced to engage in sexual behaviors. This is rape.

Often, people argue that it is someone's choice to drink and they should be fully aware of the effects alcohol has on the mind; therefore, it is their fault if they wake up the next morning and realize they were raped. But it is never the fault of the person who was raped. In fact, a person cannot legally consent when he or she is under the influence. Period. So if someone says yes while drunk or high, it is legally a no. If that person who was intoxicated were to press charges for rape, legally it is rape because someone cannot consent to any type of sex, including hooking up, fingering and oral sex, when under the influence. It's not the person who was drinking's fault, but it is the fault of whoever takes advantage of someone who is drunk.

## See it? Stop it.

People shouldn't rape. It's the rapist who is responsible and needs to take full blame for the crime. The blame is often placed on the person raped, especially if alcohol or other substances are involved. This mindset needs to change, and anyone can help change it. If you witness an encounter where you think someone may be raped, you should intervene and stop it.

For example, like I did, you could ask a friend to help you intervene. Or you can help your friend out by creating a diversion or making an excuse. Say you both have to go home since your ride is here, then grab your friend and go. Of course, you can always pull the typical "the cops are coming – everyone get out" diversion to get rid of the potential rapist. Regardless of how you intervene, you should be there for the potential victim – make sure that person is being taken care of and gets home safely.

I'll never forget the long and elaborate "thank you" text I got the day after the party. At first, my friend blamed herself for what almost occurred, but I assured her that it's always the rapist's fault – and only the rapist's fault. I'm not sure what would have happened if I did not stop him. Although unlikely, maybe he would have realized he was wrong and stopped. But that's a chance that isn't worth the risk. All I know is that I made the right decision. An intoxicated "yes" is a "no" and always will be.

By Manish Arora, 17

*Reprinted with permission from Sex, Etc., a teen-written, sexual health magazine and website published by Answer.*



# Masturbation at a glance

For many of us, masturbation is a taboo topic. Masturbation is a common and safe way to get sexual pleasure. There are many myths about masturbation that may cause us to feel uncomfortable about it. These myths can cause guilt, shame and fear. Let's get the facts straight. Masturbation is a natural and common activity for both women and men. Here are some common questions people ask about masturbation.

## What is masturbation?

Masturbation is commonly defined as touching one's own body, including sex organs, for sexual pleasure. Masturbation often ends in orgasm, but not always.

There are many slang terms for masturbation, including

- jacking off
- jilling off
- jerking off
- spanking the monkey
- double clicking the mouse
- self-love

## How common is masturbation?

Masturbation is very common. Studies show that approximately seven of 10 adult men and more than five of 10 adult women masturbate. It's also common for children and teens to masturbate.

## Why do people masturbate?

The most common reasons adults give for masturbating are to relieve sexual tension, achieve sexual pleasure, have sex when partners are unavailable, and relax. Many people think that others masturbate only when they do not have a sex partner. But that is not true. In fact, people who have regular sex partners are more likely to masturbate than people without sex partners.

## What are the benefits of masturbation?

Masturbation can be good for mental and physical health. People who feel good about their bodies, sex and masturbation are more likely to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy.

Masturbation is also one of the best ways we can learn about our sexuality. It can help us explore the types of touch we like the most and help us learn how to get excited and how to reach orgasm.

## ☉ Mutual masturbation

Masturbation is often thought of as a solo act. However, many people also enjoy mutual masturbation. Mutual masturbation is two or more people masturbating in one another's presence. In addition to the potential benefits of masturbation listed above, mutual masturbation may:

- Be a safe way to explore sexual activity with another person with no risk for pregnancy or STIs. Because partners are not touching each other, there is no risk of infection – and no risk of pregnancy unless semen gets on the vulva.
- Provide sexual pleasure and intimacy before partners are ready for sex.
- Teach people what kind of touch their sex partners like.

## ☉ Are there any risks with masturbation?

There are no health risks with masturbation. Skin irritation is possible, but using plenty of lubrication will keep that from happening. If you worry that you masturbate too much, ask yourself this question: Does masturbation interfere with my daily functioning? If it interrupts or gets in the way of your job, your responsibilities or your social life, you may want to talk with a therapist.

## ☉ Masturbation and shame

Many people feel shame or guilt about masturbating. People who receive negative messages about masturbation when they are young often carry feelings of shame into adulthood. Approximately 50 percent of women and 50 percent of men who masturbate feel guilty about it. Negative feelings about masturbation can threaten our health and well-being. Only you can decide what is healthy and right for you. But if you feel ashamed or guilty about masturbating, talking with a trusted friend, sexuality educator, counselor and/or clergy member may help.

## ☉ What are some common myths about masturbation?

There are many myths about masturbation. You might have heard it is harmful or leads to strange behavior. The myths are just not true. Here are the facts: Masturbation does not cause hair to grow on the palms of hands or other strange places; does not lead to blindness; does not make sex organs shrink or grow or change color, texture or appearance; does not stunt growth; does not cause infertility – men and boys will not run out of sperm; does not cause injury or harm; does not lead to mental illness or instability; does not make you gay.

*Adapted and reprinted with permission from [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org).*



## Not having sex (abstinence)



## Implant



## Intrauterine device IUD



## Shot

	HOW	WHEN	ADVANTAGES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You choose not to have sex.</li> <li>Choose a partner who has made the same choice.</li> <li>Talk about other activities you want and those you don't want.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may decide not to have sex at any time in your life.</li> <li>If you change your mind, you can choose another birth control method.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abstinence is free and always available.</li> <li>It also protects you from pregnancy and HIV/STIs.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The implant is a small rod inserted by a health care provider.</li> <li>It is put under the skin of the inner upper arm.</li> <li>Tiny amounts of the hormone are released for three years.</li> <li>Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The implant is put in with numbing medicine. It takes only a few minutes. The implant can be removed any time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The implant is effective long-term birth control.</li> <li>It can make periods lighter and less painful.</li> <li>It is a private method not noticed by others.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IUDs are small implants made of plastic or copper.</li> <li>IUDs are put inside your uterus by a health care provider.</li> <li>One IUD has copper that kills sperm and the other IUDs have hormones.</li> <li>IUDs with hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An IUD can be put in the uterus at any time as long as you are not pregnant.</li> <li>You can get one even if you have never had a baby or if you are a teen.</li> <li>The IUD can be removed any time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IUDs are effective long-term birth control.</li> <li>IUDs last between three and 12 years.</li> <li>Some IUDs can make periods lighter and less painful.</li> <li>It is a private method not noticed by others.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A health care provider gives you the Depo-Provera® (or Depo) shot.</li> <li>Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing for three months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depo can be started any time as long as you are not pregnant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The shot works very well and lasts three months.</li> <li>It is a private method not noticed by others.</li> </ul>

Talk with your health care provider to find the method that works best for you.

To find a clinic, visit [www.ccare.oregon.gov](http://www.ccare.oregon.gov). For more information on choosing a method, visit [www.bedsider.org](http://www.bedsider.org).

**Don't forget!**

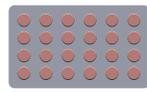




## Ring



## Patch



## Birth control pills



## Condoms



## Emergency Contraceptive Pills

- The vaginal ring is a soft, flexible ring that has hormones.
- You place the vaginal ring in your vagina.
- Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing for as long as you use the vaginal ring.

- The birth control patch has hormones that enter your body through your skin.
- You can wear the patch on your buttocks, stomach or back.
- Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing for as long as you use the patch.

- Take a birth control pill by mouth daily.
- Hormones prevent pregnancy by stopping an egg from releasing for as long as you take birth control pills.

- There are two types of condoms: One is put over an erect penis before the penis touches the vagina, anus or mouth. The other type, an internal condom, is placed inside the vagina or anus.
- Latex, polyurethane or polyisoprene condoms create a barrier that provides protection against HIV/STIs.
- Sperm are trapped inside the condom.

- Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECPs) are used to prevent pregnancy after sex if birth control wasn't used or wasn't used in the right way.

- You leave the ring in place for three weeks.
- You remove it for one week before reinserting a new one.

- Put on a new patch each week on the same weekday for three weeks.
- You do not wear a patch during the fourth week.

- You must take a birth control pill at the same time of day every day.

- Follow package instructions for using a condom before sex.
- Use a new condom each time you have sex.

- ECPs works better the sooner you take them, but they can work up to five days after sex.
- ECPs will not work if you are already pregnant.

- The ring is easy to use and works very well if used the right way.
- Periods may be more regular, lighter and less painful.
- It can help clear up acne.

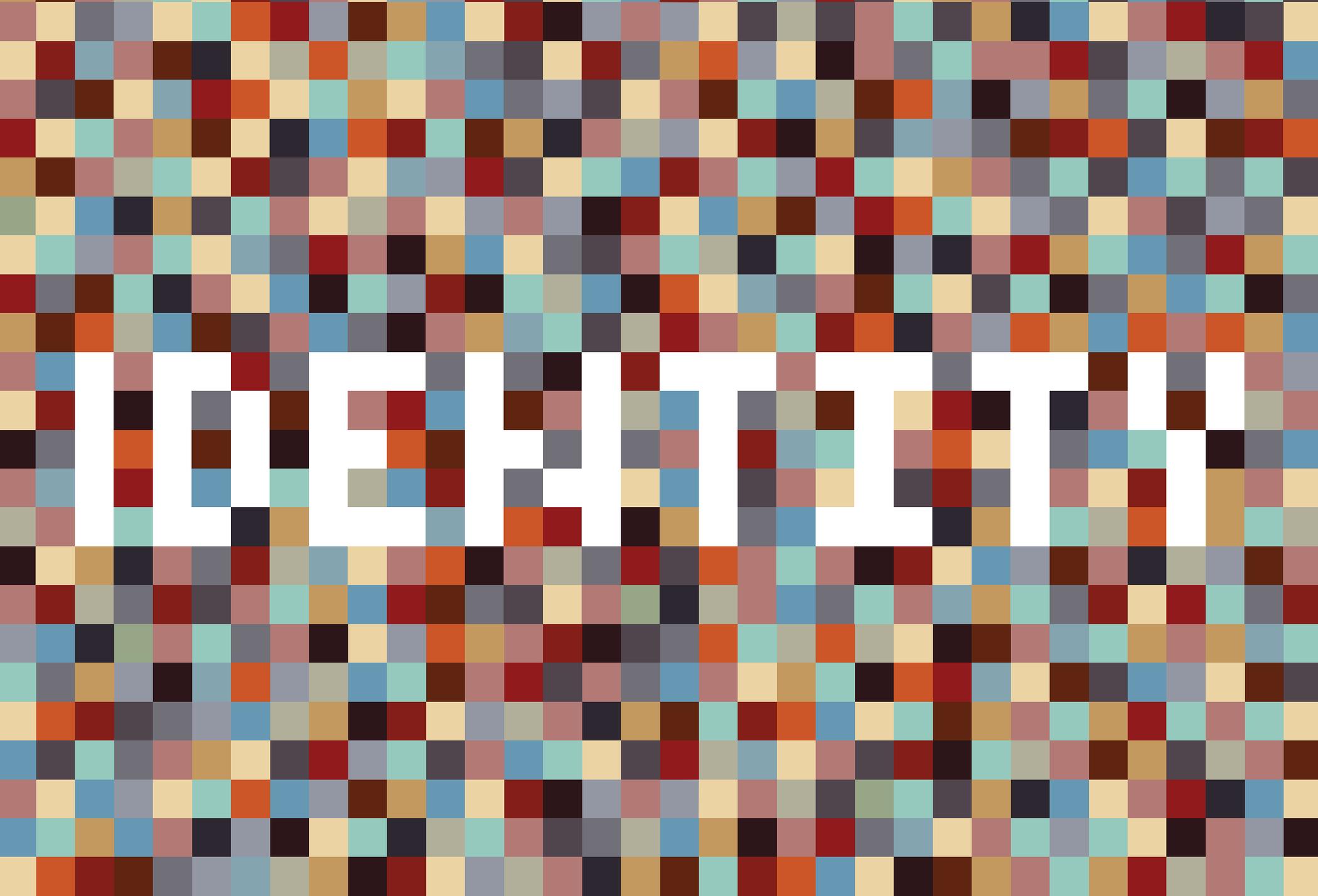
- The patch is small and thin and can be worn under your clothes. It sticks to your skin when you shower, swim or exercise.
- Periods may be more regular, lighter and less painful.
- It can help clear up acne.

- Birth control pills are easy to use and effective if used consistently.
- Periods may be more regular, lighter and less painful.
- It can help clear up acne.

- Using a condom with another contraceptive method gives the best protection against unintended pregnancy.
- Condoms are the only method that provides protection against HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Condoms do not cost a lot or can be free.

- ECPs are the only pills to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or if another contraceptive method was not used in the right way.
- ECPs are very safe, do not cause abortion or lower your chance of getting pregnant in the future.

Condoms can be used as dual protection with any of these methods to provide protection against HIV and STIs.



# I claim the right to choose my ultimate gender

I identify as a male-to-female (or male-to-feminine androgynous) transgender or genderqueer person in a male body. I was born and raised as a straight male but started questioning both my gender and sexuality around the age of 16 for many complex reasons.

When I was little, kids in school would make fun of me by calling me “Suneela” to characterize a perceived weak and effeminate nature. I decided to reclaim this, but in a way that would make people think and not assume my gender when they look at my name (Suneel is a boy’s name in Hindi). It gives me an androgynous quality, which I like.

Often I’m plagued by self-doubt – am I doing this just to attract attention? I answered it myself when I expressed these doubts to my friend Erica (thank god for her), and she asked me the most fundamental question of all: What does being a woman mean to you?

To me, being a woman means having an identity that is feminine but without any preconceived notions, ideas or mind-sets about what a woman is or what a woman should be – in any sense, be it in terms of looks, actions, habits, social roles or anything else.

Everybody feels like there is some kind of “ideal” man and “ideal” woman. Well, I reject that. I am a woman with no conditions and no strings attached. And no presumptions, either. You may find me rather androgynous, deviant and gender-bending. I like to dress up, be pierced, and be effeminate or girly.

Yes, I am all those things or, rather, I possess all those qualities. But I claim the right to choose my ultimate gender beyond my traits, looks, qualities and features, even if it is different from the sexual organs I possess. And whether that’s feminine or hermaphrodite or my desired blend of masculine and feminine is my choice.

You can love it, be OK with it, be uncomfortable with it, be revolted by it or leave it. But it’s my choice. Being a woman means being a woman.

**By Suneela Mubayi**

*Reprinted with permission from Our Bodies Ourselves,  
[www.ourbodiesourselves.org](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org).*

# Out in the open

*relationships, status and social media*



Throughout the media of today, we find teens revolving around books, movies and TV shows that are centered around a young loving couple who overcome all obstacles in order to be together. No matter how much we ignore it, society teaches us that we should never be alone.



Relationships are key to a person's life, but teens continue to see love relationships as a part of growing up. Being in love is in a way an initiation into the adult life. In high school, we vote for the cutest couple and, if you are in a relationship with someone, you try and make your relationship a "goal" as something to have. This is the norm in high school, and in fact it is the norm anywhere else.

If you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend you post it and, thanks to social media, we see couples doing things with one another. I'm not criticizing young couples, I'm simply stating that relationships are being glorified to the point where, in a way, people treat them as competitions for status and not as love.



Being in a relationship should not revolve around how many retweets you get or how many favorites you get. Relationships should not be promoted on the screen but rather promoted through the love two people share with one another.

People should be happy with their partner and not wish to have something that they don't have. It's like wishing you were taller or skinnier or smarter. You don't need to be all those things, you just need to be you.



By Alfonso Trujillo

# Realization

Recently, I began to feel ... different. I didn't really know how until just a few months ago. I started to realize that I'm not fully straight.

I do like women, but then again, I feel attracted to the male end of the spectrum. At first I was very afraid, thinking I was an oddity, stacked upon the fact that I have Asperger's syndrome (high-functioning autism). I didn't know who to turn to or what to say. I don't have very many friends, and my family is split apart by a divorce.

It's been hard to figure out how to tell my family. It's not like I can call and say, "Dad, I'm bisexual." I've been setting dates for myself to tell them, but my courage falls through shortly before I try to tell them. It's been tough for a while, keeping my feelings bottled up this long – a force of habit that usually ends up with me exploding. Even so, I know that my parents and brother will always love me and treat me no differently.

I've finally come to realize that I'm not alone. I've accepted myself without reservation, and I keep my hopes up in knowing that my family, shattered as it is, will support me when I tell them.

**By Dante**

*Adapted and reprinted with permission from [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com).*

LEAVE

# *Have you ever?*

Have you ever loved someone (or, as we say today, have you ever “like liked” someone)? You know, when you get that warm feeling whenever you’re around them, and you get butterflies whenever you talk to them, maybe sometimes stutter and act odd? Don’t worry, we all are like that at some point or another. It’s completely natural. But it’s also difficult to express your feelings to that person, so they may never know that you’re interested in them. That’s why you gotta step up and let them know how you feel. If you get rejected, trust me, it’s not the end of the world.

You can trust me, a random stranger, because I’ve been there, quite a few times in fact. It makes you stronger in the end and makes finding “the one” all the more sweeter. I think. I dunno yet. We’ll just say it does for the sake of sounding optimistic. Love is an odd thing, right? You’re pretty much pouring your heart out to this one person who you have decided that you care about a ton. That’s probably why it “hurts” so bad to get rejected, to not have the feeling returned. I personally find it’s hard to stay friends with someone after you’ve poured your heart out to them and they’re like “Neat. Go away.” (Yes, that actually happened.)

However, if you’re in the opposite shoes, take a moment to think about what the person who just professed their love to you has actually done. They’ve taken the courage and bravery to open up to you and tell you how they feel. For some, explaining how they feel is nearly impossible. Before you turn them down (or accept them), think about how the situation must feel for them. I’m not saying you **HAVE** to like them back, just let them down in a nice way if you have to.

*By Rodney Jackson*

# Knowing your relationship

When you know whether your relationship is abusive, unhealthy or healthy, you can keep yourself safe and protected. It's important to know what kind of relationship you are in so you can decide if you want to be in that relationship. The goal is to be in a healthy relationship so you can be happier and feel more loved. There are many signs that can indicate if you are in a mentally or emotionally abusive relationship. Does your partner yell and scream at you, intentionally disregard the way you feel about something or control/isolate you? These are signs you might be in an abusive relationship.

All of these signs point to mental/emotional abuse. In some relationships the mental abuse can get so bad that the partner can be manipulative and make the other partner feel obligated to be with them.

Besides an abusive relationship there is also an unhealthy relationship. An unhealthy relationship can include being dishonest or not trustworthy, trying to take control of the decisions in the relationship, and not communicating about problems. These all contribute to an unhealthy relationship. A partner who is dishonest or untrustworthy can break a relationship because there is not a trust foundation. Without a trust foundation the partner can feel like they're being lied to or cheated on. When a partner is trying

to take control of all the decisions being made and not including the other partner, the relationship is one-sided. When partners have a disagreement and don't communicate about it, the problems can build up and destroy the whole relationship. It is important to be honest, make decisions together and communicate problems so the relationship is healthy.

In a healthy relationship partners communicate in respectful ways, trust each other and make decisions as a whole. Communicating in respectful ways can show that each partner is trying to understand both sides. Both partners working together to be trusting can build a stronger bond between them. In a trusting relationship, you can feel safe when the partner goes out with other friends and does things alone. Both partners should contribute to decisions so the relationship isn't one-sided. When you're in a relationship, it is important to understand what kind of relationship you are in to keep yourself safe and in happy situations. By looking at the signs and being aware of each different relationship, you can save yourself from heartbreak and disappointment.

*By Haylee Miles*

# Relationships

*We all have a responsibility to make good choices when entering into a relationship with another person. It's important to be aware of when a relationship is abusive or unhealthy. Plus, we can all use ideas for how to help friends going through hard times. Here are some ways to help ourselves and our friends have healthy and safe relationships.*

## How to practice having a healthy relationship

### Respect:

A partner honors our expectations for how we want to be treated. Boundaries are both emotional and physical and it is everyone's right to maintain both in a relationship. Respect means different things to different people. Consider what respect means to you and what it means to be respected. When you're in a relationship with a person, it's important to consider what respect means to that person. Ask what they want, need and like from you and their expectations for how they want to be treated.

**?** *What does respect mean to you? What questions would you ask your partner to find out what respect means to them?*

### Trust:

Everyone has the right to be with a person who is trustworthy – meaning we believe that person has our best interest in mind and will not do anything to intentionally hurt or betray us. Trust means that we believe the person we are in a relationship with cares enough about us to not intentionally hurt us.

**?** *Who do you trust and why? How did you build this relationship on trust?*

## Communication:

A way of developing trust and respect in a relationship is by discussing our needs with our partner; that includes our boundaries and expectations. We have the right to feel comfortable and safe communicating with our partner, assured that he or she listens to and tries to understand us. Healthy communication is reciprocal.

**?** *What does it look like when you know someone is really listening to you? Do you know what your boundaries and expectations are for yourself and for your partner?*

## Equality:

Maintaining our rights is an important part of developing a healthy relationship. Equality means there is a balance of power within any relationship. Both partners should have the right to make decisions and speak out about concerns within the relationship. The only person we have the right to control is ourselves.

**?** *Do you feel like you have equality in your relationships?*

## Consent:

Consent is a “yes” when “no” is a possible answer. It’s a way for people to let each other know what’s OK and not OK in their relationship; it can happen with words, looks or actions. Consent works best when each person has an equal voice and pays attention to the other.

**?** *How can you start a conversation before sexual contact?*

# When bad things happen in relationships

## Unhealthy relationships:

Making choices in a relationship that might hurt our partner can be a sign of an unhealthy relationship. Whether it be because we're afraid of being hurt ourselves, jealous of their relationships with other people, or insecure about how that relationship feels to us, it's our choice to respond in healthy or unhealthy ways. How do we practice the qualities of a healthy relationship, even when it feels easier to do something unhealthy? How do we apologize and take responsibility if we do something unhealthy?

## Teen dating violence:

This is a pattern of behaviors used to hold and maintain power and control in a dating relationship. Abusive behavior is when one person feels entitled to power within a relationship and uses that power to control their partner by hurting them emotionally, controlling their access to other people or sometimes even physically hurting them. The line between abuse and an unhealthy relationship is often drawn at how a person is willing to take responsibility for their actions – do they feel justified in hurting their partner or are they willing to hold themselves responsible for doing something unhealthy and interested in working to practice the qualities of a healthy relationship?

## Sexual violence:

Any sexual act or contact that someone commits without the other person's consent is considered sexual violence. Sexual violence happens when someone feels like they deserve or are entitled to have sex or sexual contact with another person without concern for what the other person wants, likes or is interested in doing. How do we make sure we are taking responsibility in our relationships to get consent? Is this easy?

## Victim-blaming:

This occurs when friends or their community makes a person feel like teen dating or sexual violence is that person's fault. People are telling the person who was hurt that they are somehow responsible for what happened. It is unfair and harmful when this happens. Often victim-blaming happens because friends or the community are having a hard time believing dating or sexual violence could happen to someone they know or someone like them. The only person responsible for dating or sexual violence is the person who chooses to use violence or control in the relationship. What are some good ways to make sure we're not victim-blaming if someone tells us they have experienced dating or sexual violence?

## How to support a friend

- **Believe them:** Provide support because you care about them, and understand how difficult it is to tell another person when you have experienced something as scary and difficult as an unhealthy or abusive relationship.
- **Listen to them:** There is a lot of healing potential when a friend actively and compassionately listens to a person's story.
- **Tell them it's not their fault:** No one chooses to experience violence, but a lot of survivors of violence feel shame and blame themselves. One of the most powerful ways we can support our friends is to tell them it's not their fault this happened.

- **Give resources, but not advice:** Think about how it feels when someone tells you what to do. It's not great, right? This is an opportunity to give our friends some power back to make choices that are going to work best for them. Offer different options for support, like:

### Love is Respect:

[loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

Call: 1-866-331-9474

Text: "loveis" to 77054

Online peer chat program: [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

### Northwest Network:

[NWnetwork.org](http://NWnetwork.org)

206-568-7777

By Megan Kovacs

*Megan is an education coordinator at Raphael House of Portland.*

# *Abuse and love*

As a teenager you think you feel love more powerfully than anyone else. Adults always say they understand, but you think they don't. You don't think they have gone through the abuse, neglect or pain you are going through right now. They have. They have had longer and sometimes more painful experiences.

The love that you are feeling right now is so intense that you forget that others have gone through this. They may have not felt the same abuse or neglect. They may have not been emotionally wrecked like you. But everyone deals with things differently. You are your own person and you have had different experiences.

But please, if only for a second, look through someone else's eyes and see the damage you are creating not only for yourself but for the people that care about you.

When he first hit you, it was just an emotional shock. You told yourself it would never happen again, and now look where you are. Bleeding and with bruises marking your body. Yet you forgave him.

When he came home drunk the very first time and he had cheated on you, you cried for weeks. But you forgave him and told yourself it would never happen again. But it did. When he didn't come home you spent hours driving and looking for him. You cried for him. He came in late like nothing happened, yet you forgave him.



But now he is gone and you keep looking for him. He raped you, physically abused you, said you were worthless and made you feel like you were trash. Yet you forgave him.

When you got pregnant and you told him, he smiled. He was happy, but only for a short while. He told you he didn't love you anymore and hit you. You lost the baby and he came back.

He has destroyed you, yet you are in love with him and you feel that life was worth it when you were by his side. Now he's not here and your life is not worth living. He hurt you, but you still look for him. Why?

I know you are in love with him. And you know he is not worth the tears. Yet you forgive him and search for him. See his face in every crowd, smell his scent in every stranger. You can't let go. You want him back. Why, because you already forgave him.

Can you not see that the people around you want to help you? No more cuts. Even though it hurts, put that fake smile on. No more tears — wait until you are home alone and drowning into your pillow. But please stay strong. You need to move on. And I won't lie to you and tell you it will ever go away. And I won't lie to you and tell you one day it will get better. But with support from yourself and others, that fake smile will not be fake any more.

By Abi Griego



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## Cody

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*The last memory I have with you is simple and I will cherish it forever.*

We entered your parents' house. The same house you grew up in. We sat and talked about how our lives were going and laughed at old memories we shared. You were doing so well. You had your own apartment and a job that you loved. You had been clean for over a year. I was so happy for you and your bright smile gave me the impression that you were happy too.

I hadn't seen you for months when, one day, the sun was setting and I had just gotten out of practice. I was calling my mom to get a ride home. When my mom answered the phone sounding distressed and quiet, I knew something was wrong. Before I could ask her she spurted out words that brought me to my feet crying. In that moment I couldn't breathe. You were so special to all of us, how could you be gone?

When we arrived at your house I couldn't believe the story. I couldn't believe that you took your life and left us here like this. You relapsed that night and no longer thought you could continue. Your parents were sobbing and I was silent, numb.

Past all the crying and confusion, I found myself sitting in a church with a picture of you staring at me. Your service was one of the hardest things I had ever gone through. People I didn't know stood up and told stories about you. You were so alive and inspiring to so many of us. People you didn't even know very well had been greatly affected by you. I wish you knew that, Cody. I wish you knew how special you were to me and so many others.

Ever since you took your life I have realized that everyone is dealing with something hard in their life. This experience changed the way I view everything. Being supportive and listening to someone just for one day could affect them greatly. I wish I could have been there that night for you Cody. I wish I could've listened and supported you. I can't change the past but I can affect someone's future.

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*By Juliette Fain*

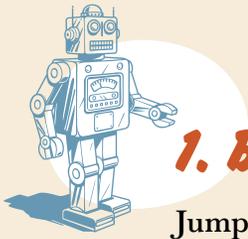


# Talking to your parents about **SEX**

*By Natalya Gast*

*Do you feel like you're ready for sex but don't know whether or not to talk to your parent(s)?*

When in a serious and/or sexual relationship, it may seem like a daunting task to approach your parents about your sex life. Even if some teens share a comfortable and open relationship with their parents, sex may not always be the topic of shared dialogue. While it can be nerve-racking at first, opening up and introducing a new level of honesty and trust between you and your parent(s) concerning sex can be an enlightening experience; your parent(s) may provide you with information regarding birth control, condoms, STIs, and even the emotional impact of sex that you'd never known before. Here are four simple tips to start the conversation.



### **1. Begin indirectly.**

Jumping straight into a conversation about sex seems near impossible for those already dreading parental involvement. First approaching parents with something that is related to sexuality (but not your sex life specifically), such as a new fact you learned about birth control or teen pregnancies, can help the conversation naturally progress. This familiarizes the topic of sex between the parents and the teen.



### **2. Remind yourself of the purpose of the discussion.**

Having trouble remembering why exactly you got yourself into this somewhat distress-inducing mess? No worries! Try and keep in mind that you facilitated this discussion because you are interested in being a healthy, responsible, sexually active teen. Remind yourself that your safety is of utmost importance, and you want to be as knowledgeable and honest about sex as you can.



### **3. Ask your parent(s) about their teen/young adult sex lives.**

If it's not too intrusive, ask about your parents' sex lives when they were your age (or perhaps a bit older). Doing so can allude to the fact that you are curious about sex. Additionally, bringing up your parents' pasts may make it easier for them to relate to or identify with you, transforming the dynamic of the conversation. Hearing stories from their past also carries the possibility of swaying or changing your opinion on being sexually active.



### **4. Cut to the chase.**

Be blunt, be honest, be open. Let your parents know that you've decided you want to become sexually active but also want to maintain a sense of trust and integrity between both parties. Communicate with your parents that safety is incredibly crucial to your decision, that the choice is ultimately yours, and you care about their input and help. This conversation demonstrates the maturity and responsibility most parents hope their teen embodies.



*If you cannot talk to your parents about birth control but want to prevent pregnancy and STIs if you are sexually active, never hesitate to take advantage of the abundance of resources available to you, such as Planned Parenthood, your doctor or even a school nurse.*

# Romance and communication

*How do I know if my partner and I are ready to have sex?  
How do we talk about it?*

Being “ready” is different for everyone and things can get complicated when partners aren’t on the same page. However, **both** partners need to feel completely ready before having sex.

How do you know when the two of you are ready? Being in a healthy relationship that makes you happy, safe and comfortable is a good place to start! Also, be sure you’re both comfortable talking about sex – if you aren’t comfortable just talking about sex, it probably means that you aren’t quite ready to start having sex. Your first time can be awkward, embarrassing, beautiful and terrible ... all at once! So, it’s important to have an open conversation with your partner so you don’t have to deal with all those feelings alone.

Here are some ways to help you and your partner begin the sex conversation:

- Talk about what scares you, what excites you and what you expect. Listen to your partner’s thoughts and feelings about sex as well.
- Discuss how you’re going to protect yourself from STIs and pregnancy.
- Go to a clinic and get tested for STIs, especially if one or both of you have had previous partners.

Even if you have sex, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you were ready. If you feel uncomfortable at all, it’s OK to say no and have your partner respect your decision. On the other hand, if your partner puts up the stop sign, make sure you respect their decision. Regardless, talk it out! Very few people get sex right on the first try, and it can take years for a person to figure out what they like. Whether you continue on or not, the most important thing is for both you and your partner to feel safe and comfortable.

## How do I discuss birth control with my partner?

If you're having sex or thinking about having sex, knowing what birth control options are available and how to properly use them is incredibly important. Teens get a lot of misinformation regarding different kinds of contraceptive methods, so it's important to be clear about both of your expectations.

For instance, many guys assume that condoms are uncomfortable, without realizing that condoms come in many different sizes and materials. And girls might be afraid that the pill will make them gain weight, which isn't always the case. Get information on available options or speak with a health care professional at a clinic near you.

After gathering all necessary information, discuss what methods you're interested in trying and whether or not you and your partner should "double up" on two separate kinds of birth control, like using an IUD and a condom.

Regardless of which birth control methods you ultimately pick, always use a condom to protect yourself from STIs, especially if neither of you have been tested in a while. Partners that care for each other will put safety first.

In the end, sex is a huge step and using some form of birth control is extremely important. If your partner isn't willing to talk about safety and birth control, take that as a sign that they aren't ready to have sex and wait until you're both ready.

## How do I show love and affection without having sex?

So maybe you aren't ready for sex just yet – and that's OK! Having sex can be defined in different ways but, no matter which definition you use, you and your partner don't need to get hot and heavy in order to know each other better.

Here are some ways to bond without going "all the way," whatever that means to you:

- Plan fun dates where you try new food or activities. Or spend time alone exploring your ideas about love, the world and your favorite sports teams – whatever! When you're bonding emotionally, the physical stuff won't seem to matter so much.
- Hugging, holding hands, cuddling and kissing are all fun – and PDA-friendly – ways to show your affection.
- Try mutual masturbation ("handjobs" or "fingering") as a way to satisfy sexual urges without some of the risks associated with different forms of penetration.

If both you and your partner are comfortable and ready, you can consider oral sex. However, always practice safer sex and lower your risk of getting STIs by using condoms and dental dams. When you think you might be ready to have intercourse, initiate a conversation to discuss how you can take your relationship to the next level.

*Reprinted with permission from [www.teensource.org](http://www.teensource.org).*



# What's it like to grow up in an open adoption?

## *Step into Taylor's world.*

There are two words most teenage girls fear. Two words that have the potential of changing a teen's life forever. What are these two words? Simple. "You're pregnant."

These are words that are often whispered tearfully in a best friend's bathroom, at school or even at home while holding a pregnancy stick or — you know ... maybe five, just to be safe. Maybe you only had unprotected sex once. Maybe you were drunk, high, not thinking or — in some cases — maybe you were sexually assaulted. Whatever the reason might be, it's safe to say that those two words hold many implications for you, your future, the baby ... the list goes on and on.

## So what do you do now?

Well there are three choices available to you: parenting, abortion and adoption, a choice many teens overlook.

## What exactly is adoption?

At Open Adoption & Family Services, adoption is the process of a birthparent entrusting her child to an adoptive family she's handpicked, met and formed a close relationship with. Though no longer new, adoption is still a mysterious experience to those who aren't adopted, especially open adoption. Unfortunately, adoption is still regarded in a negative light by many people. So let me, as an adoptee, clarify a few things about open adoption.

## How do I know?

I know, because 20 years ago my birth mother placed me for adoption with my family through Open Adoption & Family Services.



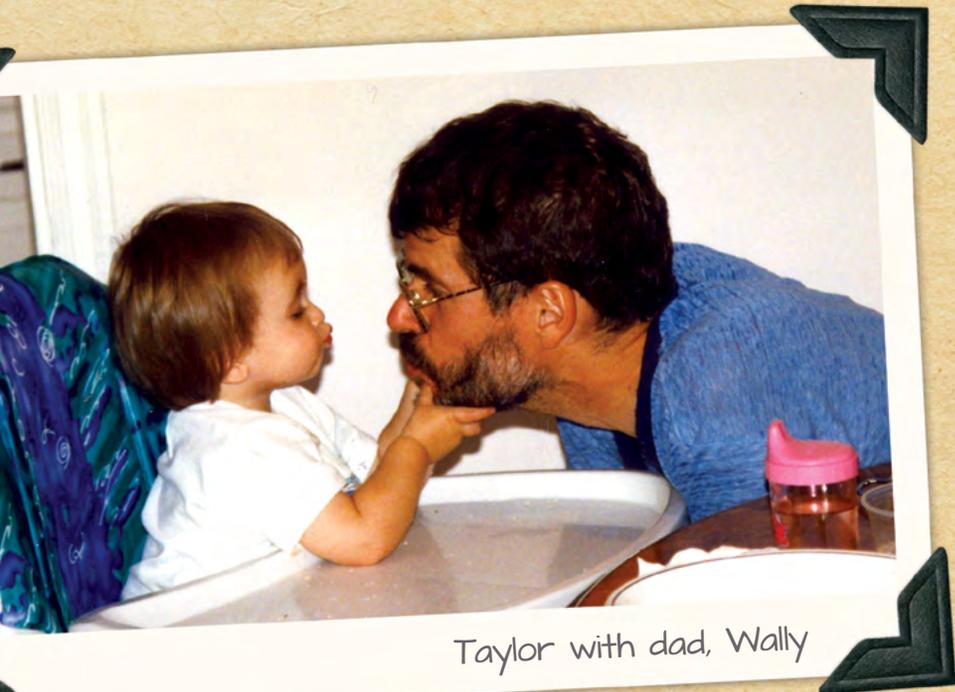
Taylor with mom, Jeri

## Have I always known?

I've always known I was adopted. If you talk to me, it's one of the first things I will tell you about myself. I know how lucky I am that Rebecca chose my parents, and I know that I've been afforded so many more opportunities to succeed because of it. I grew up knowing that Rebecca was intrinsically a part of my family. She's like my big sister.

## How significant is adoption in my life?

Adoption is incredibly significant to me. Without it I wouldn't be who I am today. Knowing that my birth mother wanted something better for me is hugely important in my life. She was 14 when she was sexually assaulted, 15 when she had me. At that time she wasn't ready to have a child, and she knew that.



Taylor with dad, Wally



Taylor with birth mother, Rebecca

### **What is the nature of the relationship between my parents and birth parents?**

My parents and Rebecca have a very strong bond. They started to get to know her before I was born and they made sure to include her regularly in my life. Because of that I have a close relationship with my two aunts and their children.

### **How would I describe my relationship with my birth mother?**

I love my birth mother. She's like my big sister but more. She's open with me about anything really. I know I can talk to her and she'll be there for me.

### **What does it mean to have visits with Rebecca?**

I don't have to guess, I don't have to assume anything. Because, if I need her, she's there. I don't have to guess the reason she chose adoption for me. I don't have to wonder if it was my fault because she can tell me that is was for me, so I would have a better life. It means I know my three little half-brothers and they know me as their sister, because Rebecca has always told them.

### **Open adoption vs. closed adoption**

I have been on both sides of the supposed fence. I know my birth mom, but know next to nothing about my birth father.



Now that's not always the case, but with me it is. I love that I know her because there are no questions. She's there for me. On the other hand, I wonder about my birth father. I don't know anything about who he is, his family . . . nothing. Having an open adoption means there's nothing missing. You know who you are and where you're from. You have all your pieces. I can't even begin to imagine life without Rebecca in it.

Open adoption is different; it is a way for birth mothers to not have to choose between themselves and their future or their child. It is a way for them to have a relationship with their child and ensure that child has a good family.

### **Still don't understand?**

For those of you who read this and still don't understand, think of it like this: How would you respond if someone asked you what it's like to be a twin? To have a sister or brother? To have red hair? To have a gap between your front teeth? The questions go on and on.

Most likely your answer would be to shrug and respond: "I don't know, I've never known it any other way. This is who I am." It's the same with adoption and me. It's just another part of what makes me, me.



*Taylor with parents, Wally and Jeri*

All in all, adoption is a wonderful thing. Knowing that Rebecca loved me enough to place me with my parents only makes me see how strong she was to, at 15, make the choice to entrust me to my parents in order to give me the stability and attention she knew she didn't have the resources to provide herself. Looking at her choice only makes me love her that much more. When it comes down to it, I know that I belong to more than one place. After all, open adoption provides birth mothers the opportunity to take an incredibly difficult situation and turn it into a positive experience.

By Taylor Roghair

# Resources

*Connect with these resources for assistance, information and referral:*

**211info** is the toll-free, health and social service helpline for Oregon. It provides referrals for most health care needs, including reproductive health services, vaccine information and STI testing. Call 1-800-723-3638 or go to [211info.org](http://211info.org).

**Love is Respect** provides resources for teens, parents, friends and family. All communication is confidential and anonymous. Call 1-866-331-9474, Text LOVEIS to 22522 or go to [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org).

**National Sexual Assault Hotline** provides victims of sexual assault free, confidential services around the clock. Call 1-800-656-4673 or go to [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org).

**National AIDS/STI Hotline** provides information and referral on sexually transmitted infections. Call 1-800-232-4636.

**Insights Teen Parent Services** is one of the few organizations in the country devoted exclusively to the needs of young parents. Call 503-239-6996 or go to [www.insightstpp.org](http://www.insightstpp.org).

**Open Adoption & Family Services** offers pregnancy options counseling and open adoption services. Call 1-800-772-1115 or go to [www.openadopt.org](http://www.openadopt.org).

**Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Resource Center (SMYRC)** creates safety and support for Oregon's LGBTQQ youth through youth empowerment, community building, education and direct services. Call 503-234-7837 or go to [www.pdxqcenter.org/programs/youth-programs/smyrc/](http://www.pdxqcenter.org/programs/youth-programs/smyrc/).

**The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** is available 24/7. It is free and confidential. A counselor can talk to you about everything from substance abuse and relationship problems to depression and mental health resources. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or 1-888-628-9454 en Español, or go to [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Your Life Your Voice** is available 24/7. It is a free anonymous helpline where you can call, online chat, email or text trained counselors. Spanish-speaking counselors and translation services for more than 140 languages are available. Call 1-800-448-3000 or (TDD for speech-impaired and deaf callers) 1-800-448-1833, or text VOICE to 20121 or go to [www.yourlifeyourvoice.org](http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org).

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# RATIONAL ENQUIRER



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