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## For Teens Making Decisions About Sex and Intimacy

If you're a teen who's dating, even casually, the time is going to come when you need to make choices about the physical part of your relationship. This topic can be tricky, confusing, and hard to talk about, but if you don't give it some thought early on, you may regret it. Feelings and emotions on this subject can be really powerful.

So, what do you need to think about? A lot of things. There are personal and value-based decisions you need to consider. There are relationship questions you'll want to ask yourself. And, if you are considering becoming sexually active, there are major practical considerations to keep in mind. Only you can answer these questions, and your feelings may change over time. But to be prepared, you'll want to think it over. Let's take it piece by piece.

### Personal Values

These are questions relating to your personal values regarding sexual relationships.

- What are my inner feelings about sexual relationships for me, now?

Ask yourself honestly: what do I really feel ready for at my age? Am I doing what I'm doing because I truly want to? Does it feel right to me in my heart and mind?

Remember, decisions about the physical side of relationships are up to you. It's your body. Don't accept pressure from others.

- At the same time: What do my parents, cultural tradition, and religious heritage tell me, and how do I feel about that?

You are a product of your upbringing, your culture, and your moral and religious beliefs. These factors may be very important to you, and you may have negative feelings about going against what you've been taught or believe. Consider them carefully as you make decisions.

- How will I feel if other people know I'm engaging in sex or sexual activity?

Although it's not at all cool to judge other people for their actions, be aware that some people might. Then there's the question of parents. How will your parents feel about your physical relationship with your boyfriend or girlfriend? And how do you feel about that?

- Do I want to accept the risks of sexual intimacy?

Sexual intimacy is a wonderful gift, but many people feel that the teen years are too early, due to potential emotional, physical, and health consequences. This is a time for trying to figure yourself out first and how you can be happy. Getting intimate with someone else before you learn how to meet your own needs can make it really difficult to have a mutually giving and caring relationship, both of which are prerequisites for intimacy. Your choices in this area could also affect you for a long time (for instance, if you became pregnant or contracted an infection).

### Relationship Questions

These are questions having to do with this particular relationship.

- Do I feel truly safe in this relationship? How much do I trust this person?

Are you at ease and comfortable with him or her, or still feeling nervous, awkward, and unsure? Of course, having some butterflies is natural, but if you're going to get serious physically, you need to be sure you fully trust this person and feel at ease with him or her.

- Can I talk honestly about this subject with my partner—and have I?

If you're considering getting involved in sexual activity that has any risk of pregnancy or STIs (note: STIs can be spread through many activities), you need to be able to talk with him or her about staying safe. Is this a conversation you can have? And have you had it?

- Why do I want to do what I'm doing with this partner?

If the answer has anything to do with "To hold on to the relationship," "Because he/she really wants me to," "Because I'm worried I'll lose him/her," "Because everyone else is," or "Because it will make him/her love me more"—hold up! Those aren't good reasons. The healthy answer is, "Because I've thought about it, I feel good about it, and I want to."

- Do I understand how getting physical or having sex with this person might affect me emotionally?

Research tells us that when people have sex, emotions about the relationship tend to get bigger and more complex. Is this something you're ready for at this age and point in time? Is it something this particular relationship is suited for?

- Do I feel true desire or am I "going along with it" for one reason or another?

structure.

Healthy physical relationships are all about consent. You should really WANT to do anything you are involved in. This includes everything from hugging and kissing all the way to intercourse. Remember, consent can be withdrawn at any time.

### Practical Stuff

These are questions about the “nitty gritty.”

- Do I have a strong understanding of “sex ed”?

Do you know how pregnancy occurs, and how it doesn’t? Are you familiar with common STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and how they are transmitted? Do you know what you need to protect yourself, and where you will obtain it? If not, you’re not ready for sexual activity.

- Do I know what I would do if someone did get pregnant or contract an STI? Where would I go? Who would I turn to?

Contraception and STI protection can and do fail. Do you know what you would do if this were to happen to you or your partner? Have you talked about it? What resources are available to you locally and how would you safely access them? How would your family react?

### The Decision

The decision to become physically intimate with a partner is a big one, and there’s a lot to think about. Don’t let the heat of the moment or an emotional situation sweep you off your feet. Instead, take time to think and talk about your feelings and beliefs ahead of time. Talking to your parents or another trusted adult can really help, too. For more on sex, safer sex, abstinence, birth control, and healthy relationships, visit the links below in Further Reading.

### Further Reading

[Sex and Healthy Relationships \(http://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/sex-and-healthy-relationships/\)](http://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/sex-and-healthy-relationships/)—from Love is Respect

[What is Consent? \(http://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/what-consent/\)](http://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/what-consent/)—from Love is Respect

[Birth Control \(http://girlshealth.gov/body/sexuality/birthcontrol.html\)](http://girlshealth.gov/body/sexuality/birthcontrol.html)—from Girls’ Health

[Birth Control Explorer \(http://stayteen.org/sex-ed/birth-control-explorer\)](http://stayteen.org/sex-ed/birth-control-explorer)—from Stay Teen

[STIs \(http://stayteen.org/sex-ed/stis\)](http://stayteen.org/sex-ed/stis)—from Stay Teen

[Virginity: A Very Personal Decision](http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/virginity.html)

(<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/virginity.html>)—from TeensHealth

[How Pregnancy Happens \(http://teenhealthsource.com/pregnancy/pregnancy-happen/\)](http://teenhealthsource.com/pregnancy/pregnancy-happen/)—from Teen Health Source

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([http://www.scarleteen.com/article/relationships/ready\\_or\\_not\\_the\\_scarleteen\\_sex\\_readiness\\_checklist](http://www.scarleteen.com/article/relationships/ready_or_not_the_scarleteen_sex_readiness_checklist))

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