



IT'S TIME ... TO TALK ABOUT IT! CONNECT. RESPECT. PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

## It's time ... to learn more. Healthy sexuality glossary

**W**hen talking about healthy sexuality, it is important to understand key terms and concepts. Words and language around sexuality can have different meanings for different people, these definitions and understandings are influenced by individual, relationship, community, and societal forces. This glossary outlines some commonly used terms and definitions for understanding healthy human sexuality.

Conversations about sex, sexuality, and the body can be challenging - this list is intended to provide some guidance and support to individuals having these dialogues. Because the study of healthy sexuality is so large, these terms are offered as an introduction to the core concepts and language around human sexuality.

**Abstinence:** The act of choosing to not engage in any sort of sexual activity or intercourse.

**Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually attracted to women and men.

**Body Image:** Body image is how we see, imagine, and feel about our physical bodies and abilities. Body image can be connected to physical strength, appearance, and/or texture or touch. It is common for many people to struggle with negative body image considering media portrayals of bodies and society's emphasis on attractiveness and ability (Advocates for Youth, 2007; Planned Parenthood, 2011a).

**Consent:** Within the context of healthy sexuality,

consent can be understood as an affirmative ("yes") agreement to engage in various sexual or non-sexual activities.

**Gay:** An individual who identifies as male and has emotional, physical, spiritual and/or sexual attraction or romantic feelings for other men.

**Gender:** A societal construct, defined by expectations of the ways men and women should dress, talk, or act. Our culture strongly promotes the idea of two genders, male or female, also known as a gender binary. This discourages people from crossing or blurring prescribed gender lines, or from creating another form of gender expression altogether. In reality, many people identify on a gender spectrum or in gender spheres outside of the male and female binary genders.

**Heterosexual/Straight:** An individual who has emotional, physical, spiritual and/or sexual attraction or romantic feelings for people of the sex opposite their own. For example, a biological and self-identifying woman who is attracted to biological self-identified man.



---

IT'S TIME ... TO TALK ABOUT IT! CONNECT. RESPECT. PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

**Intimacy:** The ability to be emotionally close to another human being and to accept closeness in return. Examples of intimacy would be sharing feelings and thoughts with another person, being emotionally vulnerable, and liking or loving someone else (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

**Lesbian:** An individual who identifies as female and has emotional, physical, spiritual and/or sexual attraction or romantic feelings for other women.

**Safer sex practices:** Among individuals who are sexually-active, the practice of reducing the risk of pregnancy and/or getting a sexually-transmitted infection. This could include consistent and correct use of condoms (both male and female) or other barrier methods, as well as masturbation and mutual masturbation (Planned Parenthood, 2011a).

**Sensuality:** Awareness and feelings about your own body and other people's bodies, especially the body of a sexual partner. Sensuality enables us to feel good about how our bodies look and feel and what they can do. Sensuality also allows us to enjoy the pleasure our bodies can give us and others. Sensuality is made up of many different components: body image, feeling pleasure, touch, and attraction to others (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

**Sex:** A biological term referring to the genitalia and/or reproductive anatomy a person has at birth. Society generally considers two sexes, male and female, however some people are born with anatomy that is neither exclusively male nor female or combines aspects of both.

**Sexual intercourse:** Refers to the behaviors that may - or may not - bring about orgasm in individuals involved in the behavior. It can consist of vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse. Sexual intercourse can result in pregnancy (during penile-vaginal intercourse), as well as sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and AIDS (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

**Sexualization:** Is that aspect of sexuality in which people behave sexually to influence, manipulate, or control other people. Sexualization spans behaviors that range from the relatively harmless to the sadistically violent, cruel, and criminal. For example, both flirting consensually with another person or acts of sexual violence could be considered sexualization (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

**Sexually-transmitted infection (STI):** Also known as a sexually-transmitted disease (STD), common either viral or bacterial infection, that is spread through sexual activity or sexual intercourse. There are over 25 different types of STIs (Planned Parenthood, 2011b; SexEd Library, n.d.; SIECUS, n.d.).

**Sexual orientation:** Refers to a person's emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual attraction to individuals of the same gender (lesbian or gay), another gender (heterosexual, straight) or both genders (bisexual) and how people organize their lives around these desires. For example, an individual who identifies as a lesbian has affectional attraction or romantic feelings for individuals who identify as women. For more information and resources on sexual orientation and gender identity, see *The language of gender & sexuality: Concepts for discussions* (NSVRC, 2011).

---



IT'S TIME ... TO TALK ABOUT IT! CONNECT. RESPECT. PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

**Sexual response cycle:** The physical and emotional process that occurs during sexual arousal. This can be while engaging in consensual sexual activity, or during nonconsensual sexual activity such as sexual assault. There are a number of proposed cycles for this process ranging from three to five stages. In 1966, William Masters and Virginia Johnson proposed a four-stage process: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution (Haines, 1999; Masters & Johnson, 1981/1966).

**Sexual violence:** Occurs whenever a person is forced or coerced into any unwanted sexual activity, including when the person is unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Sexual violence includes but is not limited to rape, incest, child sexual assault, ritual abuse, sexual exploitation and trafficking, sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism. Sexual violence is a crime typically motivated by the desire to control, humiliate, dominate and/or harm. It is often interconnected with other forms of violence and oppression (PCAR, n.d.).

**Skin hunger:** The need to be touched, caressed, or held in a loving or caring way (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

**Transgender:** A broad term that refers to a wide range of people whose gender identity, expression or behavior may not match the category our society has placed them in based on their assigned sex at birth. "Transgender" is sometimes used to include people who identify as transsexual, intersex, two-spirit, gender-queer, drag queens, cross dressers, and others. Gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation. People who are transgender may be lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual.

**Victim/survivor:** Refers to those who have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Some people prefer the word survivor, others prefer the word victim. Some prefer to use person-first language, "a person who was sexually assaulted."

## References

- Advocates for Youth. (2007). *Lesson plans: An explanation of the Circles of Sexuality*. Retrieved from <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/for-professionals/lesson-plans-professionals/200?task=view>
- Haines, S. (1999). *The survivor's guide to sex: How to have an empowered sex life after childhood sexual abuse*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press.
- Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. F. (1966). *Human sexual response*. Boston, MA: Little Brown
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC). (2011). *The language of gender & sexuality: Concepts for discussions*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR). (n.d.). *About sexual violence*. Retrieved from <http://www.pcar.org/about-sexual-violence>
- Planned Parenthood. (2011a). *Body image*. Retrieved from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/body-image-23374.htm>
- Planned Parenthood. (2011b). *Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)*. Retrieved from <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex-101.htm>
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). (n.d.). *Questions and answers - STDs and HIV*. Retrieved from <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&ageid=606&grandparentID=477&parentID=598>