

CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUALLY HEALTHY ADULTS

From a wholistic perspective, sexual health includes emotional, psychological, physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The following are characteristics of sexually healthy adults however sexual health is developed over a life-span, from cradle to grave. Integrating sexuality into one's life in a balanced way is a life-time endeavor.

Communication

- Interact with all genders in appropriate and respectful ways
- Communicate effectively with family and friends
- Ask questions of other adults about sexual issues, when necessary
- Are able to communicate and negotiate sexual limits
- Communicate respectfully their desires to have sex and not to have sex
- Accept refusals of sex without hostility or feeling insulted
- Can physically express feelings of attraction and desire in ways that do not focus on the genitals (ex: holding, caressing, kissing, etc.)
- Talk with a partner about sexual activity before it occurs, including limits, contraceptive and condom use, and meaning in the relationship
- Communicate with partners their intentions for the relationship (ex: only dating, want marriage)
- Listen to and respect others' boundaries and limits
- Are sensitive to non-verbal cues of others' boundaries and limits

Relationships

- Develop friendships that do not have a sexual agenda
- Avoid exploitative relationships
- Choose partners who are responsible, trustworthy, safe and giving
- Can be sexually intimate without being physical (ex: talk about sexual feelings, verbally express attraction, do things that awaken desire in partner)
- Can express themselves in ways other than genitally (ex: holding, caressing, kissing, etc.)
- Take personal responsibility for their own boundaries

Self-Esteem, Self-Worth

- Appreciate their own bodies
- Are sensually aware and able to stay conscious in their bodies
- Can touch their own bodies without feeling shame or disgust
- Allow themselves to experience pleasurable sensual and sexual feelings
- Have the capacity to nurture themselves and others, and accept nurturing from others
- Feel joy in sexual experiences of their choosing
- Know when they need touch rather than sex and try to get their needs for touch met appropriately
- Have a developed sense of self, an understanding of who they are
- Enjoy sexual feelings without necessarily acting upon them
- Accept refusals of sex without hostility or feeling personally insulted
- Allow themselves to be vulnerable
- Are comfortable with their sexual identity and orientation
- Are becoming aware of the impact of negative sexual experiences such as sexual abuse, and the impact of negative cultural messages on their sexual development
- Are taking steps to address issues that have arisen as a result of past experiences
- Feel confident in their ability to set appropriate boundaries
- Realize that, by working through sexual issues, individuals may heal psychological and emotional wounding from past experiences and damaging beliefs.

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Education

- Realize the consequences of sexual activity
- Comprehend the impact of media messages on thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors related to sexuality
- Understand that the drive for sex is powerful and can be integrated into one's life in positive and healthy ways
- Respect the right of all people to enjoy and engage in the full range of consensual, non-exploitive sexual behaviors

Contraception, Protection, Body Integrity

- Take responsibility for their own bodies and their own orgasms
- If sexually active, use contraception effectively to avoid pregnancy and use condoms and safer sex to avoid contracting or spreading a sexually transmitted disease
- Practice health-promoting behaviors, such as regular checkups, breast or testicular self-exams, regular and routine testing for STDs

Values

- Decide on what is personally "right" and act on these values
- Demonstrate tolerance for people with different values
- Are not threatened by others with sexual orientation different from theirs
- Show respect to others whose cultural values, ethnic heritage, age, socio-economic status, religion, and gender are different from theirs

Spirituality

- Honor the sacred aspect of sexual union
- Understand that sexual energy is not separate from being human
- Understand that sexual union is one way human beings connect body and soul