



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

## It's time ... to talk about sexuality in later life.

**S**exuality is a part of every stage of life. Older adults are sexually active too and need information and resources to be healthy and safe. This fact sheet will provide information, tips and resources about sexuality in later life.

### What is sexuality in later life?

Sexuality in later life is a continuation of healthy sexuality across the life span. Throughout life, human beings seek out relationships, love, and companionship. Often sexuality in later life is minimized or ignored. Despite this fact, it is an important aspect of many older adults' lives.

**Sexuality does not have an expiration date.** It is healthy and common for people to remain sexual throughout their lives.

**Sexual violence is also a concern for older adults.** Information about consent, sexual assault and sexual abuse is important for older adults.

**Sexual health is also a concern for older adults.** Information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and safer sex is important for older adults. Sexual health exams remain important as well.

**Older adults need information.** Older adults may have not received sexuality education. Today, there are resources specifically designed for older adults, such as books, websites and sexuality education classes.

### Statistics on sexuality in later life

**Many older adults are sexually active. A 2007 study found that among participants (Lindau, et al.) :**

- 73 percent of the 57-64 age group reported they were sexually active.
- 53 percent of the 65-74 age group reported they were sexually active.
- 26 percent of the 75-85 age group reported they were sexually active.
- The same study found that most adults ages 57 to 85 said sexuality is an important part of life.
- In 2005, 15 percent of all newly-diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases were among people over 50 years old (CDC, 2007).
- In 2006, the CDC changed their recommendations for HIV testing to include routine testing up to the age of 64.



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## Support healthy sexuality in later life

**Respect privacy.** Older adults deserve privacy around their sexuality. This can be hard for those who live at home with their adult children or in senior communities.

**Be willing to talk about it.** It is important to be open to talking about sexuality. Don't avoid a conversation because it may be difficult. Always listen and provide support.

**Provide resources.** There are pamphlets, books and web resources about sexuality for older adults. If you know or work with older adults, let them know about these resources.

## Resources

- **Sexuality and Aging Today Blog**  
[www.sexualityandaging.com](http://www.sexualityandaging.com)
- **American Psychological Association's *Aging and human sexuality resource guide***  
[www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/guides/sexuality.aspx](http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/guides/sexuality.aspx)
- **National Sexuality Resource Center**  
<http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/issues/sex-and-aging>

## References

Lindau, S., Schumm, L., Laumann, E., Levinson, W., O'Muircheartaigh, C., & Waite, L. (2007). A study of sexuality and health among older adults in the United States. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 357, 762-774. doi:10.1056/NEJMoa067423

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2007). *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 2005* (Vol. 17, rev. ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2005report/pdf/2005surveillancereport.pdf>



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## Scenario and discussion points: Focusing on families and adults in later life

Healthy sexuality is important at all stages of life. Here are discussion questions and important points to consider.

**Luz (41) and Maria (70)**

Luz and her mother, Maria, look forward to having lunch together every Saturday. Luz's father passed away several years ago and she worries about Maria getting lonely. Today, when Luz meets Maria at their favorite restaurant, Maria is all smiles. Luz asks her what is making her so happy. She tells Luz that she met someone at a bowling league event and they are dating. Maria mentions that he spent the night at her house several times last week. Luz is taken aback. She always thought her mom wouldn't be interested in dating, and Luz doesn't know how to react to the news.

### Discussion questions

1. How do you think Luz feels? What are some concerns she might have about the situation?
2. How might Maria feel? What kind of reaction do you think she would like to get from her daughter?
3. What could be helpful for Maria as an older adult starting a new relationship?

### Discussion points

- Luz may feel surprised or uncomfortable. Thinking about our parents as sexual beings can be difficult, as there are not many positive representations of older adult sexuality.
- Luz is likely to be worried about her mother's safety, sexual health and feelings. Many older adults are unlikely to have received sexuality education. Maria may have little or no information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or how to avoid them.
- Maria may feel happy, excited, or anxious about telling her daughter that she is dating. She may be worried about her daughter's reaction. It is likely that Maria wants her daughter's support, and she may need information and resources from her.
- Just as anyone who is dating or sexually active, older adults need information on relationships, STDs, and safer sex. Providing information and resources on these topics could be helpful.

### Moving forward

Interested in doing more? Here are some suggestions for what individuals can do to get involved:

- The scenario above focused on an interaction between a parent and adult offspring, yet society as a whole is often ageist when it comes to sexuality. Think about the ways in which cultural norms and the media ignore older adult sexuality, treating sexuality as important only to those who are young. When you hear someone being ageist or ignoring older adult sexuality, speak up.
- Educate others about healthy sexuality across the life span. Look for examples and use them as teachable moments to bring the topic up with others.
- Advocate for medical, elder care and educational facilities that support healthy sexuality for older adults. When healthy sexuality is supported across the life span, we acknowledge everyone's need for information, education and support.