

Sexuality and Decision Making

HEALTH TERMS

sexuality
self-concept
goal-setting

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- Your sexuality includes the way you act, your personality, and your feelings about yourself as a male or female.
- Everyone has a need for love and personal value.
- Goal-setting helps you make responsible decisions that promote your health.
- Your self-concept relates to your ability to make healthy choices.

Sex—just saying the word can bring laughter to some and images to others. A lot of people think about it. Some people talk about it. A lot of information has been written about it. Advertisers often try to use it to their advantage. Think of the ads you have seen in magazines or on television. Sex is a common theme used to help sell products. Consider these messages in ads:

- “Wearing this perfume will drive them crazy.”
- “Using this mouthwash will guarantee you that date.”
- “You’ll be irresistible after using this shampoo.”
- “Wearing our jeans will make you stand out in the crowd.”

Millions of dollars are spent on such advertising. Companies want you to buy their products, and they know how to get your attention. The media glamorizes physical appearance and stresses that to be sexy a person needs to be popular, beautiful, and successful. Promoting sex sells products.

Even though information or promotion of sex seems to be everywhere, some people may not feel comfortable talking about it. To them, sex is a private matter. Some people may not know much about sex or may not like to ask questions about it. Other people may have information only from friends. Some of this information may not be correct.

It’s important to have factual information about sex. Factual information will not only help you understand your growth and development but will also help you make decisions that promote your health and prevent some diseases and even premature death.

Your Sexuality and Health

Your **sexuality** refers to *everything about you as a male or female person*. It includes the way you act, your personality, and your feelings about yourself because you are male or female. Learning about sexuality is an ongoing process. The messages you received while growing up and your observations of those around you make up part of that learning. Your personal experiences and feelings also play a part in the development of your sexuality.

Your sexuality has an impact on your total health. Your total health includes the physical, mental/emotional, and social aspects of health.

Physical Health

Physical health means that all parts and systems of the body work well together. It means that your body has the ability to withstand the stresses of normal daily life. It means having strength and energy to pursue physical, mental, emotional, and social challenges and changes. As




Healthy Ways to Meet Emotional Needs

Keeping fit does not mean only taking care of your physical health. Here are some healthy ways to meet your emotional needs.

- Focus on your strengths rather than on your weaknesses.
- Spend some time volunteering for people who need help—children with disabilities, older adults, or shut-ins. Doing something for someone in need can help you feel good about yourself.
- Take courses outside of school on subjects of interest to you such as local history, drawing, or computers. This is a great way to meet others with similar interests.

THINKING SKILLS. Have students discuss ways they try to meet emotional needs. Discuss positive ways these needs can be met.

 **Mental health includes how you relate to others and meet the demands of life.**

you enter adolescence, your body will change. It takes time to adjust to these changes, both physically and mentally. To help you adjust, you should exercise regularly, eat a nutritious diet, and get enough sleep.

Physical health, as related to your sexuality, includes practicing good health care of your reproductive system. It also includes having regular physical exams and making decisions that protect your reproductive system. This means preventing unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including the virus known to cause AIDS.

Mental and Emotional Health

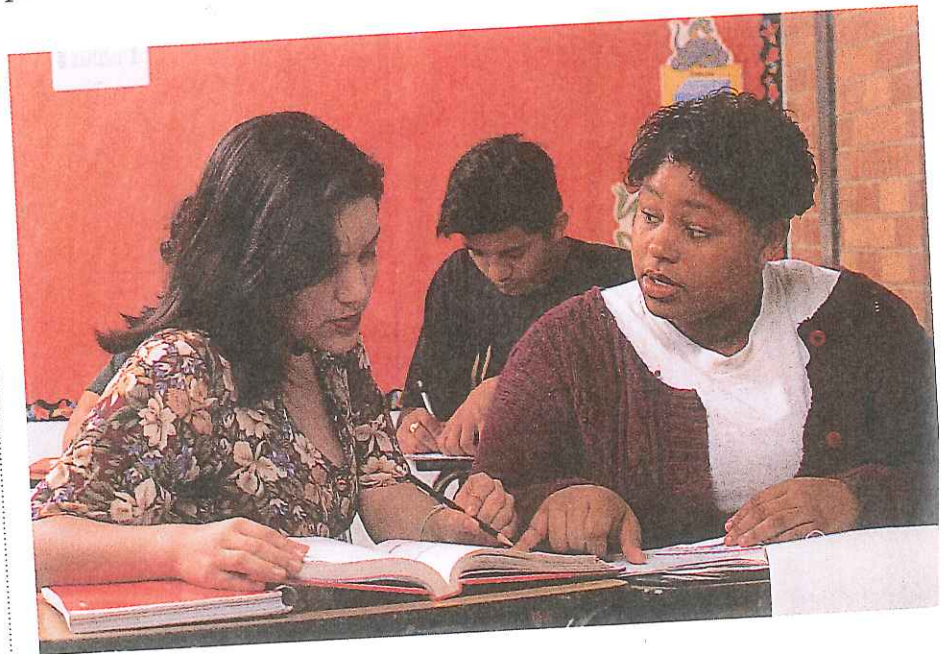
Mental health includes how you accept and feel about yourself, how well you relate to others, and how you meet the demands of daily life. A person with good mental and emotional health is in touch with his or her emotions and expresses them in acceptable, healthful ways. Such an individual can usually deal with the problems and frustrations of life without being overwhelmed by them.

Mental health also requires a person to use his or her mind to develop thinking skills. People with good mental health enjoy learning and know that striving for information and understanding can be an exciting, life-long process.


Handling emotions in positive ways is a part of mental health. As human beings, we all have two basic emotional needs. First, each of us has a need for love and belonging. We are social beings, so we need other people. We need to feel that we belong to, and are a valued member of, a group. Each of us has a need to love and be loved.

The second emotional need we all have is to feel that we have personal value or worth. We have a need to achieve, to make a contribution, and to be recognized. This is such a strong need that some people will seek even negative attention for recognition.

Self-concept is the mental image you have about yourself. It is your unique set of perceptions, ideas, and attitudes you hold about yourself. Your self-concept began to form as soon as you were born. You received messages from people around you. These messages—especially from people who are important to you—helped form your self-concept. Your





 *The messages you receive from others help form your self-concept.*

self-concept is probably the single most important factor influencing what you do.

For example, your self-concept influences your ability to make healthy choices. People who like themselves are more likely to take better care of themselves than are people with low self-concepts. Poor self-concept seems to relate directly to unhealthy choices.

People with high self-concepts find healthy ways to meet their emotional needs. However, consider a young person who is struggling to understand his or her emerging sexuality and does not feel loved by anyone. Such a person might try to meet the need to be loved by getting involved in unhealthy, often sexual, relationships. As you learn more about sexuality and making responsible decisions, you will learn healthy ways to meet your emotional needs and promote your general health and sexuality.

Mental health, as related to your sexuality, includes learning to communicate effectively and to express, understand, and handle sexual feelings. A healthy sexuality also means learning more about yourself and improving your self-concept.

Social Health

Social health involves the way you get along with others. It includes your ability to make and keep friends and to work and play in cooperative ways. Developing this ability means that you may need to seek and lend support when necessary. It involves communicating well and sharing your feelings with others. Social health, as related to your sexuality, includes meeting new people, dating, and developing a variety of relationships.

NOTE. Self-concept begins in early childhood. The first sign of self-awareness occurs between 15 and 18 months of age when a child is able to recognize his or her image in a mirror.

Did You Know?

Everyone makes mistakes. As you begin making more decisions on your own, it is likely that some of the results of your decisions will not turn out as you planned. Or maybe you made a decision before completely thinking it through and are now suffering the consequences. Maybe you are grounded, or perhaps someone is angry with you. Take some time to learn from this mistake. Ask yourself:

- What could I have done differently?
- What might have happened if . . . (consider other alternatives)?

NOTE. Take the time here to practice the decision-making process. Use a sample student problem and have the class work through each step. It is critical that students practice identifying all possible alternatives and evaluating the consequences of each.

A Decision-Making Model

As an adolescent, you are continually faced with choices that can have either positive or negative effects on your total health. The decisions you make in some of these situations can effect your life for years to come. Decisions, especially about your health and sexuality, can be difficult to make. When you are confronted with a tough decision, it helps to break down the decision into smaller, more manageable steps. This decision-making model can help you act in ways that promote your health, self-esteem, and respect for others. There are six basic steps in making an important decision:

- 1. State the situation.** Be sure you have a firm grasp on the problem. This sounds easy, but in fact many people find this to be the most difficult step. Ask yourself how the problem developed, who besides you is involved, and how much time remains before a decision must be made.
- 2. List the possible options.** Think of as many different ways of solving the problem as you can. In listing your alternatives, seek the help of a parent or other responsible family member, teachers, friends, or others who might be a source of helpful ideas.
- 3. Weigh the possible outcomes.** Consider the positive and negative outcomes, or consequences, of each option. Ask yourself questions such as: Is this solution safe? Are the risks involved reasonable? How will it affect my physical, mental, emotional, and social health? How will it affect others? Is this option legal? Could it lead to other problems?
- 4. Consider your values.** Ask yourself whether each course of action is in keeping with your values and the values of your family and community. Decide how comfortable you will be with the possible outcome now and in the future. Think of how your family might react to your decision. Keep in mind that making a decision that goes against your personal values can be a source of unhappiness or emotional distress. Again, seek the help of trusted adults if you need support.
- 5. Make a decision and act.** Use everything you know at this point to make a decision. Remember that you are not perfect. There are no guaranteed results. No matter what outcomes you have anticipated, you cannot control how someone else may react or feel. However, you can take pride in having prepared so carefully. Once you have made the decision, you need to take action. Timing may be critical. You may want to set a deadline by which to take action. If new information becomes available, you may want to start the process over at Step One.
- 6. Evaluate your decision.** Once action is taken, reflect on your decision. Ask yourself: What was the outcome? How did it differ from what I expected? How did it affect my health and self-concept? How did it affect others? What have I learned that I can apply to future decisions? Would I make a different decision next time?

Of course, you may not have to use such a detailed process every time you need to make a decision or are faced with a choice. However, you might find it helpful to practice this process on easier problems. The when faced with a more difficult decision, you will be better prepared.

Goal-Setting and Healthy Decisions

Goal-setting is part of making decisions. **Goal-setting** involves *making decisions that will help you meet a goal you have in mind*. The following steps will help you reach your goal.

1. **Select a goal to work on.** Make the goal specific and realistic—something you can attain.
2. **List what you will do to reach your goal.** Break your goal into smaller, more manageable tasks.
3. **Identify sources of help and support.** Look for people who can help you and support your efforts. Identify those who might keep you from reaching your goal.
4. **Give yourself a specific period of time to reach your goal.** Again, be reasonable when setting a time limit, and put it in writing.
5. **Establish checkpoints to evaluate your progress.** Build in several checkpoints by which to evaluate your progress. Be honest with yourself about your progress.
6. **Reward yourself after achieving your goal.** Be sure the reward is also something attainable and healthy.

Having a good self-concept promotes goal-setting. If you feel good about yourself, you are not afraid to set goals or try to reach those goals.

As a teenager you will be faced with decisions that deal not only with your health but also dating, relationships, and sexuality. Your decisions will affect you, your family, and your future. Making good decisions is a skill that can be practiced and learned. Having a good self-concept and setting goals can help you make responsible decisions. Making responsible decisions is a key to maintaining a high level of health.

THINKING SKILLS. Ask students to give examples of situations in which they've set goals for themselves (i.e., going to college, completing a difficult course, doing well on a sports team). Ask what they have done to achieve that goal. Have the students attempt to find common elements in the ways they have tried to meet their goals.

LESSON

1

Review

LESSON 1 REVIEW ANSWERS ARE FOUND ON PAGE TM12.

Reviewing Facts and Vocabulary

1. Define *sexuality*, and discuss how it is developed.
2. What three aspects make up total health?
3. Name the two basic emotional needs that are important to all.
4. Define *self-concept* and explain how it relates to your decisions about health.
5. What is the first step in making a decision?

Thinking Critically

6. **Analyzing.** How can a poor self-concept affect decision making? Give two examples, one for a high self-concept and one for a poor self-concept.

7. **Synthesizing.** What are some of the negative consequences of having too much sexually explicit material in advertisements?
8. **Evaluating.** Why do you think it is difficult for teenagers to discuss sex with adults?

Applying Health Skills

9. **In Your School.** Design one magazine advertisement and write an outline for a television commercial to sell each of the following products without using sexual images: jeans, perfume, and a sporting event.