

A LINE ON LIFE

1/25/89

Deciding about Sex *

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With the hormonal changes of adolescence, sexual urges seem to be rampant. How does anyone – adolescent or adult – know they are ready for sex?

Many people – parents, teachers, preachers, friends and potential partners – will tell you what to do (or not to do), and this can be very confusing. Teenagers are physically capable of having sex, but there is more to sex than just the physical aspects. Sex is used by many people for many different purposes. Most people desire the pleasure of sex. However, sex is often used for other reasons, many of which lead to pain. Sex can be one of life's most pleasurable experiences, or it can be equally destructive. Because sex is such a strong force, deciding to have sex is *not* a decision to be made in a moment of passion. It is a decision that can only be made by you. Remember, in the end, *it's up to you*.

Honestly answering the following questions should help you in making decisions about your sexual activity. These questions cover four major areas.

You

1. Will having sex make you feel more grown up – like being a mature man or woman?
2. Are you prepared to make sure that an effective form of contraception is used?
3. If you don't use contraceptives, are you prepared to cope with an unexpected pregnancy?
4. There are many types of sexual activity – which will you choose?
5. How will you handle it, if your sexual experience is unpleasant?
6. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are a definite risk. Can you deal with that?
7. If the activity you choose is illegal (e.g., prostitution), are you willing to deal with the consequences?
8. Do you use sex to shock people?
9. How will you feel about yourself the next day?

Your Relationship

1. Is there mutual consent to have sex?
2. Is sex being used as a weapon or bribe?
3. Do you or your partner feel like a sex object or feel exploited?
4. Is sex the last resort to hold the relationship together?
5. Are you willing to make a commitment to one another?

6. Can you have a good relationship without sex?
7. Do you feel comfortable talking about sex with one another?
8. Will sex enhance or detract from your relationship?

Your Parents

(This category is not as important for adults.)

1. How will your parents react if they know?
2. Have you even discussed sex with your parents? What are their values related to sex?
3. Will you have to lie to your parents? Can you cope with that?
4. Are you using sex as a way to hurt your parents?
5. How have your parents' attitudes toward sex influenced you?

Your Friends

1. Do you feel pressured to have sex?
2. Would you be considered "*out of it*" if you didn't have sex?
3. Do you need to be sexually active to be popular?
4. Are you more tempted to have sex when and if you get high or drunk?
5. Does it really matter what you friends think about your sexual activities – or lack of them?

Back to You

Most of these questions can be answered only by you. To answer them, it helps to understand your own personal values, needs and desires, as well as the possible consequences of your actions. If any of these questions is difficult to answer, perhaps you need more time to think before you make a decision – or take an action.

As in all areas of your life, you are *responsible* for your sexual activities. Ultimately, the final decision is *yours*. Answering these questions can help you in making the best decisions for yourself and those close to you.

* Adapted from Byer, Shainberg and Jones' *Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1988, page 386.