

THE QUESTIONS ADOLESCENTS ASK MOST FREQUENTLY ABOUT

Male-Female Relationships

AND THEIR ANSWERS

Vol. 2



This booklet was developed together with adolescents
by REPRO **gtz**

Recent studies in Tanzania show that a large percentage of adolescents are sexually active. At the same time they lack basic knowledge about the functioning of their bodies and the risks involved in becoming sexually active at an early age. This ignorance often puts them at risk. Unwanted pregnancies, hazardous abortions, as well as sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS are a real threat to uninformed youth.

This booklet has been developed in response to this situation. It is meant to provide youths with information on the most crucial facts and to guide them in becoming responsible decision-makers for their own lives. Without sufficient knowledge adolescents cannot make informed choices, and experience has shown that informed youth often choose the safer option!

All of the questions in this booklet have been collected in recent years by counsellors and researchers working with adolescents. The youth originate from different regions of Tanzania and their ages range from 11 to 20 years. Please note that none of the questions are made up by adults!

The booklet has been developed by a multi-disciplinary team of social scientists, medical doctors and education specialists. The adolescents were involved in all stages of the process. With the publication of this booklet, we hope to contribute to the prevention of avoidable hardship for adolescents, caused by their ignorance.

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Regina Goergen, MSc, MPH, PHD
Teamleader REPRO/GTZ

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People say it is good to know the person one will marry, but how can I get to know her or him, if we live far away from each other?

Even if you live far away from each other you can make a thorough investigation into the behaviour of the other person. You can ask him or her questions about the place he or she lives and about his or her family life. Try to communicate intensely with the person and to ask questions which make him or her explain himself or herself well. Also, you can ask questions to people who live close to him or her. If you are doing such an investigation, it is important that you know the desired characteristics you are looking for in that person.

Such investigations can help you to get to know the characteristics of your friend, however, they are not a total replacement for you meeting the person. You still need to spend time with your friend, in order to get to know him or her and in order to build up your relationship.

However, it is important to remember that behaviour is not very easy to disclose and to explain openly,

especially if you are in love it sometimes gets difficult. In addition, the behaviour of a person can change when he or she is growing older.

What qualities should I look for when looking for a person to get married to?

Choosing the right person to get married to is one of the decisions of an adolescent, which must be made very carefully. Ideally, your partner is someone you choose for your entire life. Whilst choosing, each person has his or her own ideas of what is important to look for. And often emotions are stronger than rational decision-making. Nevertheless, there are certain helpful guidelines for choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Try to choose a person who respects you and his or her elders, and a person whom you can trust. Select a person you can talk to, with whom you can debate and discuss without getting into arguments. Look for someone approximately the same age as you. Try to find a person who likes to do similar things to you. Choose a



person who can understand your problems and who is ready to help you to find solutions. Also consider the health of the person.

Inform your parents whom you have chosen as your boyfriend or girlfriend and introduce the person to your parents. At the same time try to get to know his or her parents. Don't rush things, take your time to get to know and understand your boyfriend or girlfriend well.

What can you do to make sure that you and your parents choose the same boyfriend or girlfriend?

Understanding your parents well is very important. This is true for the choice of your partner, but also for all other fundamental questions of life. Therefore, the first step is to try to understand each other.

Often adolescents think that parents cannot understand the life of young people these days. Sometimes adolescents think that traditions hinder young people from making the decisions they would like to make. Others think that the parents' goals in life are in conflict with the young people's goals.

If such a situation arises, it is most important to try to communicate with your parents, in order to understand why your ideas and the ideas of your parents conflict. Do not forget that parents normally want the best for their children. When you talk to your parents, try to explain to them, with respect and gracefulness, why you do not agree with them and why you think your decision is better than theirs. It is very well possible that by doing so you may get the consent of you parents.



If you have never talked closely to your parents before, it is often not so easy to know how to start. Try to start with an easy subject. Choose a good time to talk, when your parents are not too tired or busy. Try to be open with your parents and show your parents that you care about their opinion. Show that you respect them. By doing so you will probably earn their trust and their willingness to agree with you on more difficult issues might increase. It takes time to practise communicating well with your parents, don't expect everything to be

easy, the first time you try. But the earlier you start, the earlier you will reach your goal of good communication.

What can I do to make sure that my partner does not have another girlfriend or boyfriend?

The most important thing is to communicate closely, in order to understand the ideas and the problems of your boyfriend or girlfriend. Make sure that you are open and do not hide the truth. If you understand each other well, you can enjoy fruitful discussions. Also, you will be ready to help each other to find a solution in case one or both of you is in trouble. Together you will keep your spirits up.

In order to make your relationship long-lasting, show your boyfriend or girlfriend with all your heart how much you love him or her. You yourself must abstain from having other partners and make sure your partner is aware of your fidelity.

You will get to know your partner well, if you often discuss about your life. For example, you may talk about how to continue your relationship, about things you would like to

do after work or after studying, or about people who are close to you. If you communicate well and if you observe the behaviour of your partner towards other people, you will be able to sense whether you fully trust each other.



However, if you do not manage to fully trust your friend and if you have the feeling he or she does not trust you, you should ask yourself why this is so. Could it be that the person is not the right person? Or could it be that your love is not strong enough to withstand other temptations?

How can I make sure that a relationship is long lasting?

The first step towards creating a long lasting relationship between a boy and a girl is to build a good foundation for the relationship.

Therefore, when you choose a boyfriend or girlfriend, try to find a person with whom you can talk and discuss openly without getting into arguments. Look for someone approximately the same age as you. Try to find a person who likes to do similar things as you do. Choose a person who can understand your problems and who is ready to help you to find solutions. Find a person who respects you, as well as his or her elders, and a person whom you really trust.

The relationship between you and your partner has to be cared for again and again. It is not enough to choose the right person in the beginning, you also have to continue talking to each other, discussing important issues and working together to find solutions for whatever problems arise. Like this, you may create a long-lasting relationship.

What is the best age to get married?

Getting married means taking full responsibility for your life, and being a caring spouse. In most cases, getting married also means having children. It is very difficult to indicate the appropriate age for marriage,



because different people are ready to take this responsibility at different times. Some are ready at the age of 20, while others become ready only when they get much older.

Because marriage is often linked to becoming a parent, there are certain medical aspects. A girl below age 18-20 should not bear children, because her body is not ready for childbearing. Her pelvic bones are still too narrow and the sexual organs are not strong enough. The girl's vagina may be permanently injured at delivery, as it is still too small and not strong enough.

Therefore, you are advised to wait to get married until the girl reaches the age, which is safe for bearing children, and until you have built a solid foundation for your future life. Before you are ready to get married, you can still have a boyfriend or a girlfriend. You can slowly get to know each other's behaviour, likes and dislikes and build a solid foundation for your relationship.

Is there any problem if a young girl has a sexual relationship with a much older man (e.g. aged 40 or 45)?

It is not impossible for a young girl to have a good sexual relationship with a much older man. However, experience has shown that it is often very difficult. First of all it is a question of maturity and ways of enjoying life. If for example two people of similar age (twenty years or above) get married, they can easily discuss current issues and events of life. But if their ages are very different, their interests will also be very different. In addition, their peers will be of a completely different age and there will be very few activities, which bring equal enjoyment to both. Quite

often, this leads to a superficial relationship between the woman and her older husband.



Secondly, there are certain reservations concerning childbearing. Raising children until they become adults capable of taking care of themselves requires a lot of energy. If at the same time the husband has already grown old, he will also need special care. It will be very difficult for the woman to take care of both the children and the husband, in order to assure the entire family's well being.

In addition, the husband's desire for a sexual relationship may already be decreasing while the woman's desire is still very high. Such a situation may lead to quarrels between the two.

If you consider a relationship with a much older man, consider the above arguments and have a look at your own situation. In many cases, relationships are easier to maintain, if you get married to a person of the same or a similar age.

People have sex to have children. What is the purpose of having sex if you do not want children?

It is true that one of the purposes of having sex is to have children. But that is not the only reason. Other reasons are enjoyment, excitement, getting your mind off other things, as well as building a lasting relationship and getting the feeling that you both need and love each other.

Nevertheless, it is important for a couple to keep family planning in mind. In order for sexual intercourse to be really enjoyable and in order to avoid having a child you

will not be able to take care of, you must practise family planning. Use contraceptive methods, if you want to avoid pregnancy!

Why are adolescents told not to have sex?

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. During that time your body, your aspirations and your ideas change a lot. Adolescence is the time your body matures and it is the time you lay a foundation for your future life.

Adolescents are told not to have sex, because of the many problems, which can eventually arise. Firstly, young people who spend all the time thinking about their love life use time and energy, which they could use for things that improve their future life, such as studying, working, collaborating in youth groups or doing physical exercise.



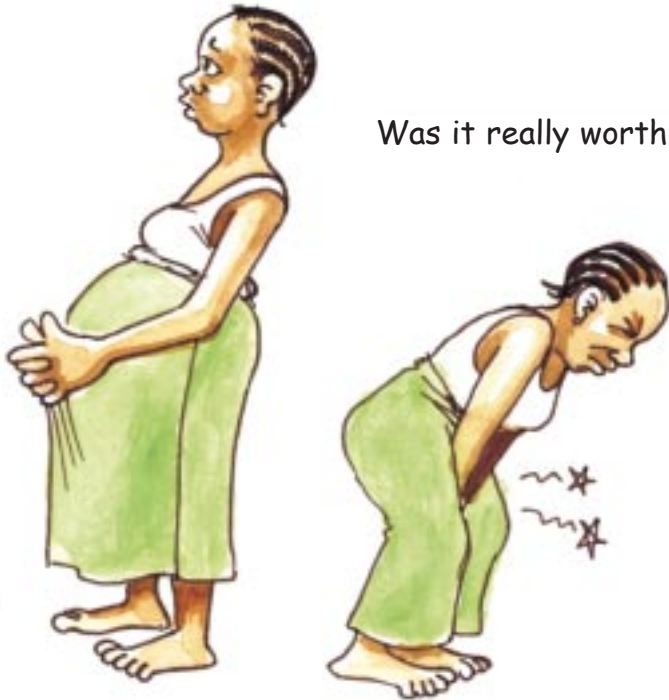
Secondly, getting pregnant at a young age involves a lot of problems, one of which is being expelled from school or being outcast by society. In addition, it is dangerous for the health of the girl, because her body is not yet ready to bear children.

Thirdly, adolescents have neither built the foundation for life, nor are they ready to be fully responsible for their own life. Another reason for adolescents not to have sex is the danger of getting infected with a sexually transmitted disease or even HIV/AIDS. These diseases can cause a lot of pain, infertility or even death.

If you think about all these reasons, you will realise that having sex at a young age may endanger your well being and interfere with the goals of your life. If adolescents are asked not to have sex, it is because society wants to protect them from running into trouble. However, if in any case you can not abstain from having sex, make sure that you protect yourself by using a condom!

If one does not have sexual intercourse for a long time, does it lead to any damage or sickness?

The truth is that there are no health problems at all if you abstain from sex for a long time. No harm will be done to either your private parts or any other part of your body. And, if a man or a woman starts having sex again after a long time, he or she will feel enjoyment and excitement.



There is a rumour that if you abstain from sex for a long time you will get pimples on your face or on your private parts, or that you will have psychological problems. It is not true that pimples or psychological problems are caused by not having enough sex, the causes of these conditions have their roots somewhere else.

You can be sure that not having sex is totally safe for you. But as we mentioned above, having sex can lead to many problems such as unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

What should I as an adolescent do, once I feel sexual desires?

As an adolescent you develop feelings for peers of the opposite sex and you become aware of those sexual feelings. This is perfectly normal and a natural part of approaching adulthood.

But what should you do about your sexual feelings? You can try to distract yourself and get involved in other activities, such as physical exercise, studying, helping at

home or joining a community youth group. Some young people say that they take a cold shower to cool their sexual feelings down.

Having sexual feelings or an erection does not mean that you must have sex. Sexual intercourse is only one



way of expressing sexual feelings. There are many other ways. for example talking to each other, holding hands, cuddling, kissing and touching each other.

Another way of coping with those sexual feelings is to masturbate. Masturbation is when a girl softly rubs her

own clitoris until she feels sexual excitement or when a boy rubs his own penis until he ejaculates. Most people who masturbate prefer to do so, when they are alone. Masturbation has no negative consequences for your health or mind at all and it is one way of having "safe sex".

How can I withhold temptations from others to have sex, especially from older people?

Many young people get caught up in serious problems, such as teenage pregnancies, abortions, sexually transmitted diseases or even HIV/AIDS because they accept presents from others without understanding the reason for these presents.

Some men use money in order to seduce girls and some girls get used to getting money to satisfy their daily needs. These days some women have even started to seduce boys. Therefore it is very



important for both boys and girls to be careful and to always ask themselves why a present is being offered.

Also think about the benefits and the dangers of having sex, whenever you are tempted to go for it. Remembering the dangers involved in having sex will give you the strength to say "no" and to avoid the temptation.

If you want to wait to have sex until you are married, how can you avoid being humiliated by those who pressurise you not to wait?

If you have decided not to have sex before you get married, that is a very good decision. It is your own personal right to take this decision, like all other people are also allowed to make decisions about their own lives.

There is no reason to feel humiliated if your friends talk about having had sex and about how much they enjoyed it. You deserve recognition that you have managed to resist. Be aware that many adolescents who talk about sex, are just exaggerating. If your friends continue to harass you, try to explain to them why you



have decided not to have sex before marriage. Explain the hazards of having sex at a young age to them. If they still continue, maybe the only solution is to choose other friends with whom you will get along better.

What can I do if I want to make sure I have sex without any risk?

Safe sex is sex, which does not involve any risk of unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases or HIV/AIDS. Safer sex on the one hand includes physical contacts, which do not involve the penetration of the

penis in the vagina. On the other hand it includes penetrative sex, if the required safety precautions are taken.

Some means of satisfying sexual desire without the penetration of the penis into the vagina include kissing, cuddling, holding hands and masturbation. All those things are perfectly safe.

If you have sexual intercourse (penetration of the penis into vagina), you must make sure that you take the necessary safety precautions. One precaution may be that you are totally faithful to each other. This however requires that you both were not infected with any disease the first time you had sex. Another



Femina-HIP Magazine/ Petra Sutilla

precaution is to use a condom. Condoms can prevent pregnancies, as well as sexually transmitted diseases.

Do old people aged 60 still have sex?

Yes, it is possible for people aged sixty to still have sex, however it depends on the couple. Some still have the desire and the energy to have sex, others are already exhausted or have no sexual desire any more. Every individual has his or her own time to stop having sex.



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Regina Goergen,
Teamleader REPRO/GTZ




Babette Pfander,
Consultant



This booklet is part of a series of six booklets with the following titles:

1. **Growing Up**
2. **Male-Female Relationships**
3. **Sexual Relationships**
4. **Pregnancy**
5. **Healthy Relationships**
6. **HIV/AIDS and the New Generation**

If you are interested in any of the booklets,

feel free to contact: REPRO 

P.O. Box 65350

Dar es Salaam

Tel.: ++255 22 215 1365

Fax: ++255 22 215 1337

e-mail: repro-gtz@africaonline.co.tz