



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME... FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Sexuality Throughout the Lifespan: Sexuality and Aging

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If you would like any further information on any items contained in this newsletter, please contact our Resource Center at 317-927-3644 ext. 142 or at betsy@ppcsi.org, or visit us on the web at www.ppin.org.

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Planned Parenthood strives to ensure that sexuality is understood as an essential lifelong aspect of being human, and that it is celebrated with respect, openness, and mutuality.

*This edition of **There's No Place Like Home...** concludes the topic of Sexuality Throughout the Lifespan by focusing on sexuality and older adults.*

Sexual feelings and desire occur throughout life. While many people believe that the elderly are no longer interested in being sexual, recent studies suggests that this is not true.

According to an AARP/*Modern Maturity* poll conducted in 1999, the majority of older adults (67% of men and 57% of women) say that a satisfying sexual relationship is important to their quality of life. Even more important than sexual activity is a loving relationship. Most older adults (92% of men and 87% of women) reported that a good relationship with a spouse or partner was important.

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ity Education*



Adults can help their aging parents realize that their sexual needs and desires are perfectly normal. Especially if their parents are institutionalized, they may need to help them find private places and advocate for the placement of locks on their bedroom doors.

Declining health affects both sexual activity and sexual satisfaction. The AARP/*Modern Maturity* survey found that a substantial number of older adults may not be receiving treatment for health problems that can affect sexual activity. Their adult children need to ensure that their parents are *continued on page 2*

**Sexuality is an
important part of life.**

**Help your kids
understand it.**

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receiving adequate and appropriate health care, and that physicians are taking sexuality into account when they treat them.

In women, the decline in estrogen at menopause causes the vagina to shrink and the amount of vaginal lubrication to decrease. Both of these changes may make intercourse more difficult and painful. There are a number of ways to deal successfully with these problems, including hormone replacement and the use of lubricants. Menopausal women should be encouraged to discuss any sex-related problems with their health care providers.

Men experience a gradual decline in testosterone production. Arousal times lengthen and erections occur more slowly. While these changes may be seen as problems, they may also be seen positively, as a way men can gain more control over orgasm.

Communication can go a long way in improving the sex lives of older adults. It is important that they be open and discuss sex-related issues with their partners. Otherwise misunderstandings and hurt feelings are likely to occur.

Another factor affecting sexual activity among older adults is that women tend to live longer than men. Among those 75 and older, 58% of men have partners, while only 21% of women do.

Older people, especially those without partners, need plenty of opportunities to socialize with others. Meeting new people with similar interests may also be a good way to find a new partner.

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Do You Know What Is Being Taught about Sexuality in Your Children's Schools?

Now that school has begun, this would be an ideal time to find out what your children learn about sexuality in school. Planned Parenthood encourages you to contact your children's teachers or principals and let them know that you support comprehensive sexuality education. Find out what their schools are doing in this area. Stay involved!

From a Professional's Perspective

Contrary to popular belief, we don't retire from sexual activity as we do from a lifelong career. Just because men and women experience physical changes as they age, they can still respond sexually long into later life. Many older adults consider a satisfying love life important to their physical and emotional well-being and quality of life.

According to a survey by the National Council on Aging, almost half of Americans over the age of sixty are still sexually active. Mature individuals define sex a lot more broadly. They consider a variety of activities to be sexually arousing, stimulating and pleasurable, with cuddling topping the list above intercourse.

It's normal for sexual desire and activity to continue into later life. The sexual problems that begin later on often have physical causes that can be addressed by a health care provider. Older adults need to initiate discussions about their sexual concerns during their medical visits.

~Judy Harris is a Sexuality Educator with Planned Parenthood of Greater Indiana working out of the Fort Wayne office. She specializes in sexuality and older adults.

National Sexuality Education Month Workshops

Raising Sexually Healthy Young People: A Workshop for Parents Thursday, October 6, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Bartholomew County Public Library, 536 5th St., Columbus. Free program.

Raising Sexually Healthy Young People: Parents Are Important Thursday, October 10, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. YWCA Fauber Room, 605 N. 6th St., Lafayette. Fee: \$30/participant.

Salud y sexualidad: Health, Sexuality, and the Latino Community Tuesday, October 15, 9 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Planned Parenthood Conference Room, 3219 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Fee: \$35/participant

Parent and Teen Communication: Healthy Relationships, Healthy Lives Saturday, October 19, 1:00-5:00 p.m. Planned Parenthood Conference Center, 421 S. College, Bloomington. Fee: \$35/parent-teen group, \$18/individual.

Parent Communication Workshop Thursday, October 24, 6:00-7:30 p.m. Girl's Inc., 9722 Parkway Dr., Highland. Free program.

Breaking the Silence: Parenting Issues and Sexuality: Talking about Sex to Your Children, Teenagers, and Grandchildren Sunday, November 3, 9:30-11:00 a.m. Congregation Beth-El Zedeck, 600 W. 70th St., Indianapolis. Free program.

For more information about any of these workshops or to register, please call Summer Wood at 317-927-3644 ext. 148.

Sexuality & Aging continued

Seniors are not immune to sexually transmitted infections and do need to practice safer sex. As they find new partners, they need to be open about discussing their sexual history. Condoms, correctly used, provide excellent protection from many sexually transmitted infections.

Many older adults were taught as children that masturbation is not an acceptable sexual behavior. Help them understand that, especially as partners become unavailable due to illness and death, that masturbation can be a healthy and satisfying outlet for their sexual desires.

Grandparents and parents can help children have a healthier, more realistic view of sexuality in older adults by doing the following:

- * Show affection to each other by hugging, holding hands, etc.
- * Let children know that grandparents also need private times to be alone together.
- * Find appropriate messages about sexuality among older people in the media or begin a discussion about negative messages you find in the media.

*Sources: AARP/Modern Maturity Sexuality Study. NFO Research. 1999.
SeniorSex.org. Ageism and Its Effects on Older Adult Sexuality. 2000.
John DeLamater. Human Sexual Development. 2002.*

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Be An Askable Parent

Just Say Know



**OCTOBER IS NATIONAL
FAMILY SEXUALITY
EDUCATION MONTH**



During October parents can pick up a free *Let's Talk* parent packet at any of PPGI's 41 locations throughout Indiana, or access the *Let's Talk* packet at www.ppin.org.



**Selected Items from our
Resource Center on Sexuality and Aging
Available for Loan**

Growing Older Together: A Couple's Guide to Understanding and Coping with the Challenges of Later Life. Barbara Silverstone and Helen Kandel Hyman. Pantheon Books. 1992.

Mature Sexuality: Patient Realities and Provider Challenges. Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. 2000.

The New Sex Over 40. Saul H. Rosenthal. Putnam 1999.

Perspectives on Human Sexuality. Anne Bolin and Patricia Whelehan. 1999.

Sexuality Across the Life Course. Alice S. Rossi. University of Chicago Press. 1999.

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