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Powering the FUTURE
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Young South Africans are making their move all across Mzansi. They know they’ve got what it takes to succeed, to make something big of their lives — even if it sometimes feels like there’s an obstacle around every corner. To make a move, young people must first believe they can. And to know which moves to make, they must first know who they are.

They know that education is the key to success and are working hard to develop their potential to the max! They support their friends who have dropped out of school for any reason, like pregnancy or looking after a sick family member — and they work to try get them back into school. After Grade 12, they look for educational opportunities everywhere they can, from bursaries advertised on MYMsta to calling up youth funds. And if nothing comes up, they keep making their move, like volunteering, ‘cause they know they’ve got a lot to give; they know this also gives them experience for their CVs and helps them network so they can keep on making their move.

They know companies aren’t interested in CVs with spelling mistakes, but are looking for passionate people who can motivate why they’re the best person for the job. They find ways to get trained as entrepreneurs and start their own businesses, from spaza shops to record labels — they’re doing it all. They are making themselves stand out not with their possessions, but with their natural talent and skills. They’re reminding themselves — and the world — that they’re somebodies. They’re making their move. Are you?
Always making their move…

Young people are determining their futures every step of the way — they’re not letting other people do it for them; they’re not letting other people tell them who they are or what they can do. They’ve made a clear break from the past, when men thought they could tell women what to do, and woman went along with it. That’s because they are confident individuals with the self-esteem to stand up for their rights — and others’ rights, too. They are determined to rid South African society of gender inequality — in the workplace, community and in the bedroom.

They decide when they want to be parents because they’re in touch with themselves and all the things they want to do before becoming a mom or dad. Having a baby doesn’t ‘just happen’. Young people — both men and women — decide the terms of sexual relationships: how far to go, what’s ok and what’s not, and most importantly, what honours their self-worth. They respect themselves to stick to their own terms. They’re not into pressured relationships, and they understand and accept that an HIV test is the true test of commitment to a relationship — and to themselves. That’s why they won’t have sex until they’ve both been tested — and use a condom every time they have sex. But they’re not afraid to wait for the right time either, even if their crew or boo is begging them to go all the way. The only direction they’re going is forward… They’re a generation of habitual movers.

Face it.

HIV is an infection that nobody wants. For people living with HIV, it’s a harsh reality that requires a positive attitude and a determination to still reach their potential and make the most of life. With anti-retroviral treatment, life with HIV is easier and longer — but it’s still tough. There is no cure for HIV/AIDS. Life on treatment can be difficult and AIDS will likely shorten your lifespan.

No one wants HIV.

Most people who are not infected with HIV have the power to decide their future. We know rape is an unacceptable reality that may lead to HIV infection. It’s a risk for women (and for men who may be raped by penetrating the anus). We have to stand up against sexual violence in South Africa. As individuals, we may not be able to overcome every risk we face, but we have to control those we can. First step is to make a conscious decision to avoid becoming infected — and if you already live with HIV, avoid new and repeated infection.

The love life generation knows where they stand with HIV. They’re body-wise! They test regularly for HIV and keep their bodies fit and healthy through exercise, healthy eating and either abstain or have only protected sex. They’re making their move to stay HIV-free… What about you?
Do I have one boyfriend or girlfriend?

Do I feel protected and have equal control in my relationship?

Does my partner know I won’t be pressured into sex?

Do I abstain from full-on sex, or if I have sex, do I use a condom every time?

Do I eat healthy foods?

Is smoking not for me?

If I drink alcohol, is getting drunk not for me?

Do I play sports or take a brisk walk at least three times a week?

SCORE:
10/10 Superfit to take on the world.
7-9 Healthy, but got to work on those areas of weakness.
4-6 You’re letting yourself down. Time to focus on where you want to go.
0-3 Time for a major attitude change if you’re going to reach the big league.
If we teenagers all start out HIV-negative how do we end up HIV+?

By the age of 17 most teenagers in South Africa have had penetrative sex (penis in the vagina or anus). If all HIV-negative teenagers only had sex with other HIV-negative teenagers there wouldn’t be a problem. BUT: generally HIV is spread through teenage girls having sex with older men. And don’t think these girls are all out there selling their bodies… that generally ain’t so. No way – males forcing girls to have sex against their will and sexual violence play a big role in the spread of HIV among teenage girls. And so does sex for better school marks, or the latest brand name in fashion, or sometimes even just a meal.

The number of people you have sex with is another big factor in the spread of HIV. Younger people have more sex partners because their relationships are generally shorter term. Sometimes they just play the field and have sex whenever they can. If you have more than one sex partner your risk of HIV goes right up and you also have more chance of infecting others.

PREVENTION IS THE ONLY WAY TO STOP HIV/AIDS.
You can easily avoid getting HIV/AIDS

It does not have to be this way! But only you can make it better! HIV is preventable, but if you get HIV, there is no cure. Living with HIV is a real struggle, even with Aids treatment.

So, why are we telling you all this? The point is YOU have the power to take control of your life and avoid getting HIV. And if you already have HIV, you have the responsibility to avoid infecting anybody else, and to avoid making yourself even sicker by getting re-infected.

How, you ask? Well, it all comes down to SEX.

Where do you lie on the risk meter?

No Risk
- No sex
- Masturbation
- Kissing
- Hugging

Low Risk
- Mutual Masturbation

Medium Risk
- Oral sex
- Vaginal sex with a condom
- Anal sex with a condom

High Risk
- Vaginal sex without a condom
- Anal sex without a condom
- Sharing needles, razor blade or sharp tools
- Sex with multiple partners

Very high risk
- Unprotected sex when you’re pregnant
- Unprotected sex with a partner with genital ulcers of herpes
- Unprotected sex with sores, abrasions or vaginal dryness
HIV is spread through the mixing of blood, semen or vaginal secretions (the fluids that come out of the penis or vagina when you have sex). HIV is most commonly spread through sexual intercourse – putting your penis in the vagina or anus of your partner. Oral sex (licking the penis or vulva or putting it in your mouth) also has a small but real risk.

A woman who is HIV infected can pass HIV to her baby through breast milk or through her blood at the time of birth. HIV can also be transmitted through dirty needles used by people injecting drugs and, very rarely, by blood transfusion. PREVENTION is the only way to stop Aids. And prevention is really quite simple. It means waiting till you’re older to have sex, and when you do have sex, using protection EVERY TIME and ALWAYS... no matter how well you know, trust and love your partner! The best PROTECTION is no sex... but it is probably not realistic to assume we’re all going to stop having sex.

Starting to have sex at an early age puts you in greater danger of getting HIV than if you wait until you’re physically and mentally more mature and in a long-term loving relationship – and even then you always need to use a condom. One of the reasons girls in particular are at more risk when you’re young is that your body membranes are thinner, and so the HIV-virus gets through more easily. During sex, you get small abrasions and cuts that might only be visible under the microscope but are big enough to let the virus through.

Sleeping around with more than one sex partner substantially increases your risk of getting HIV/Aids, because you can never be sure whether your partner has HIV or has had sex with somebody who is HIV+. The danger with HIV is that somebody who gets HIV can feel fine for a long time and not be aware they have the virus — sometimes for many years. Most people who have HIV don’t know it — and you wouldn’t necessarily know it either. Remember, everyone your partner has slept with is sleeping with you.

If you’re having sex, condoms are the best protection.

Women who are pregnant seem to be at even greater risk for HIV infection. The physiological (body) changes associated with pregnancy seem to make it easier for the HIV-virus to pass through the membrane of the vagina and cervix. Some people stop using a condom when the woman is pregnant — but it’s actually even more important to use condoms during pregnancy.
How the Human Immunodeficiency Virus works
The HI-virus works by ‘tricking’ your body’s normal white blood cells into producing more copies of the virus. This is how the trick works:

All of your body (bones, muscle, blood etc.) is made of cells. Genetic codes inside the nucleus of each cell determine whether the cell is bone, or muscle or blood cells. These codes are embedded in genes made of DNA which together form 23 pairs of chromosomes normally present in each cell in your body.

When a virus or bacterium comes into your bloodstream, white blood cells fight off infection by killing the germ. One type of white blood cell is called a “helper T-lymphocyte”. That’s the main cell the HI-virus attacks by binding to the CD4 receptor on the surface of the T-lymphocyte.

VIRUS
T-LYMPHOCITE

First trick:
As it binds, it is recognised (incorrectly) as a ‘friend’ – a molecule that’s allowed inside the T-lymphocyte. The surface of the virus (viral envelope) then fuses with the cell membrane and viral genetic material and enzymes enter the cell cytoplasm.

Second trick:
Once inside, one of the virus’ enzymes (reverse transcriptase) allows the virus’ genetic material (RNA) to be copied and attach to your cell’s own genetic material. In this way, the virus produces ‘fake copies’ of your own DNA.

Third trick:
The fake DNA enters the nucleus where another viral enzyme (HIV integrase) allows it to become part of the body’s chromosome. In this way, the fake DNA can stay undetected by the body’s normal defence mechanisms.

In time, the fake copies generate new RNA and package new viruses that then bud out of the cell and infect other cells. One HI-virus can make 10 000 copies of itself!
At first, the body can cope by stepping up its immune response and producing new lymphocytes. But over time, the immune system starts to burn out and cannot replace the lymphocytes as they become infected and die. As a result, people living with HIV become increasingly susceptible to infections and less able to mount a proper immune response to them.

Without anti-retroviral treatment [ART] (which kills many but not all the viruses), people living with HIV typically become sick and die within 6 – 10 years. With ART, people can live healthily for many more years, but the virus is still constantly trying to gain control.
Is it true that girls get HIV more easily than guys?

Girls are at greater risk because after sex the infected sperm stays inside the vagina and there’s plenty of time for the virus to pass through the membrane into the blood (it’s the same with anal sex).

Rough sex, dry sex and forced sex are very risky for both guys and girls because the penis and anal or vaginal walls get torn and bleed. The blood and sex juices are absorbed more easily during sex through small cuts and sores. (STIs also make sores that give the virus a chance to get into your blood.) Willing, wet sex means you’re doing it right!

KEEPING TABS ON THE VIRUS

You may have heard of the “CD4 count” which is used to monitor how much of the helper T-lymphocyte is left in the blood of people with HIV. That’s because the CD4 receptor sits on the surface of the T-lymphocyte and binds to the HIV-virus. The CD4 receptor is easily recognised in laboratory tests. Lab tests can also measure the number of viruses in the blood, called the “viral load”.

What are the signs of HIV that I can look out for?

There are no clear signs and you can’t tell just by looking at someone that they have the virus. However, if you get some of the symptoms listed below repeatedly over a long period, you should see a doctor:

- Losing lots of weight
- Regular coughing and chest infections
- Diarrhoea (runny tummy) all the time
- Heavy sweating or high fevers
- Swollen glands
- Sores in your mouth
- Vaginal infections that keep coming back

But all these things could be caused by something else. Only a blood test can show that you have HIV.
So you:

1. Have more control over your own life. You won’t have the fear of not knowing. If you are HIV-negative, you have the power to stay negative. If you are HIV-positive, you will have greater power to protect your health and keep the virus under control with good health care.

2. Can protect you and your partner. We should all take steps to protect ourselves from HIV infection by being as sure as possible that it’s just you — and no one else — in the relationship with your partner and by using a condom every time you have sex.

   But people who are HIV-positive need to take extra precautions — such as using protection during oral sex, using a condom even if you are both absolutely sure there is no one else in the relationship, and avoiding contact with sores and open wounds.

3. Can make the best decisions for you and your family, if you are HIV-positive.

4. You can decide whether to have more children — and if you do, you can take steps to keep them safe from infection in pregnancy or soon after birth. You can establish a good relationship with a health care provider to keep you fit, to treat infections early and monitor your need for anti-retroviral treatment.

Why should I know where I stand?

How can I know where I stand with HIV?

- Get tested for HIV if you have had sex and before you have a sexual relationship.
- Go with your partner to get tested. That’s one way of proving your love. If your partner refuses to get tested, that’s a red flag warning you that he or she maybe doesn’t care for you as much as you think they do.
- Then make testing a regular part of your life — just as you’d have a dental or fitness check-up, get tested every year or more often if you think you may have been exposed to HIV.
Where can I test for HIV?

- All clinics do HIV testing. The first time may be a bit scary, but health workers are now trained to make the test as easy as possible. In most places, you'll get friendly, helpful service.
- You can also go to your local doctor.
- You can get a do-it-yourself kit at a pharmacy. If you plan the do-it-yourself route, we suggest you test with someone you trust. Testing positive by yourself can be really hard – so it’s best done with your partner or a friend.
- Many workplace health programmes also offer testing.

What does the test involve?

- Once you’ve psyched yourself up, the test itself is not a big deal.
- It’s a small finger-prick to let a drop of blood fall on the testing paper strip.
- If you test positive, the nurse or doctor will take some more blood to confirm the finding and will ensure that you get follow-up medical support and counselling.
- If you are HIV-positive, you’ll find that joining a support group really helps.
- And if you’re HIV-positive this is the opportunity to ensure that you get the appropriate medical attention and access to Aids treatment when it becomes necessary.

What does the result of the test mean for me?

If you test negative: you need to take every precaution to stay that way – the most important being to use a condom every time you have sex. And get re-tested regularly.

If you test positive: and the result is confirmed by a doctor or nurse – you obviously don’t need to test again and you will stay HIV-positive for life. (Some people with very advanced Aids illnesses do not react any more to the test – their immune system is even too weak for a positive test reaction – but they still have the virus).

It does not mean never having sex again, but it does mean a special responsibility to use a condom each and every time you have sex to protect your partner from infection and to protect yourself from being re-infected which could make you sicker a lot sooner. Exercise regularly, eat as healthily as you can, and get regular follow-up medical care.

If both you and your partner test positive you still need to protect each other by using a condom as you can still transmit the virus in unprotected sex, leading to a spike in infection in your partner and that, over time, could speed up progression from HIV infection to full-blown Aids.
Nobody is telling you that HIV/Aids is the end of SEX. But you do need to explore new, safer ways of fulfilling your sexuality while protecting your health.

Waiting until you are in a loving long-term relationship before contemplating sex is priority number one. If you’re sweet seventeen and having sex, you’re just like half of your classmates. But the other half is not having sex. Guess who’s less likely to get HIV?

There are ways of attaining sexual pleasure with your partner (or even just by yourself) without having penetrative sex. As they say in the classics ‘(self) masturbation is the safest sex you can have’. No worries about making babies or getting diseases.

Okay, I’ve got it now, but what about my partner?

The best time to talk to your partner about HIV/Aids is BEFORE you start having sex. If you are already in a sexual relationship then... better late than never!

Agree that you both need to work to ensure you always use protection – that means no condom, no sex – and agree on that before you get heavy.

Agree to both getting tested for HIV. Talk about how you will handle the results, before you get tested. Go to get tested together – it could bring you closer and help you both through the experience.

If one or both of you test HIV+, get professional counselling from a doctor or trained health professional on how to live your life with HIV. This should include guidance on when you should begin taking Aids drugs.
Living with HIV and Aids is very, very difficult. Seeing your mother or father or brother or sister get sick or die is hard to live with — and often your life is even harder once they have died.

As South Africans, we all have to accept that we are in this together. No other disease has devastated our country in this way. But remember, you are not alone.

“Whatever your family circumstance, you can still be a mover and shaker; you can still be ambitious and Make YOUR Move to live up to your potential. You can do everything you can to avoid HIV infection, like using a condom when you have sex — or not having sex at all if that’s what your gut is telling you... Only you really know what you feel inside. Yah, you’ll sometimes need strength and determination to stand up for yourself, but don’t forget that you can ask for a helping hand, too. It takes courage to make the move to ask for support when you need it most. But don’t forget that helping or supporting others can also make you feel better about yourself when you’re having a tough time.

How can I protect myself from HIV?

It’s easy when you know how and believe in what you’re doing. Know the basics and stay negative!

- Know the facts about HIV/AIDS.
- Treat any STIs immediately.
- Talk to your partner(s) about HIV/AIDS.
- Use condoms every time you have sex.
- Be faithful to one faithful partner.
- Explore other ways to have safe sex, like thigh sex or masturbating with your partner.
- Wait for full-on sex! This can be a good short-term solution (especially if you’re young) — there’s no rush.
- Use gloves or plastic bags before touching any blood.
- Don’t share needles, razors or any other instrument that can cause bleeding.
If you decide to have a baby, you can reduce the risk of HIV for your baby by taking special medicines around the time of delivery.

In recent years, new drugs have helped people living with HIV/Aids to live longer and healthier lives. If you are HIV+ and on Aids drugs, even though you may feel healthier than ever, you are still HIV+. This means that you can infect your sex partners with HIV, and it means you can get re-infected with HIV. If you get re-infected you will likely get sicker sooner.

Without Aids drugs an HIV-positive person can expect to live about 5 to 10 years before developing Aids and dying. Aids drugs, known as anti-retroviral therapy (ART), can extend life for about ten years or more. But these Aids drugs are NOT A CURE.

People with HIV can live a reasonably long time (5-10 years) without getting sick if they take care of their health by eating nutritious foods; abstaining from alcohol, cigarettes and any other harmful substances; getting regular exercise; and ALWAYS using a condom to avoid getting re-infected with HIV.

Without Aids drugs, you will get sicker and are likely die a lot sooner. With Aids drugs you can lead a fairly normal and healthy life — that way you can keep working longer and take care of your children and family longer.

You can get treatment for HIV/Aids – you’ll stay healthier and live longer, but there’s still no cure. People with HIV can live a reasonably long time (5-10 years) without getting sick if they take care of their health by eating nutritious foods; abstaining from alcohol, cigarettes and any other harmful substances; getting regular exercise; and ALWAYS using a condom to avoid getting re-infected with HIV.

Treatment is improving all the time, so your long-term prospects are good. Unfortunately, some people living with HIV react badly to Aids drugs and the side effects from taking these drugs can be very debilitating including diarrhoea, nausea and fatigue.

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If these drugs won’t save my life and don’t cure Aids, why should I take them?

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If these drugs won’t save my life and don’t cure Aids, why should I take them?
I’m HIV+... I may as well commit suicide

It is difficult, especially if you are scared to tell your friends and family. Many people have wrong ideas about Aids and you can feel very lonely. Luckily, there are people who will understand and help you. If you don’t have anyone to talk to, speak to a counsellor, join a support group or call the loveLife contact centre (0800 121 900) or send Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023 or the Aids Helpline 0800 012 322.

Being HIV+ is not a death sentence. There are many HIV+ people who do exciting things and are making the most of their lives. There are people who care and can offer you support and info. Don’t give up on yourself!

What does it mean to live positively?
You can live with HIV for a long time without getting sick. This is called Living Positively. Here are some ideas:

- Eat a balanced diet – protein (meat, fish, eggs, nuts); carbohydrates (pap, potatoes, rice, bread); vegetables and fruit.
- Care for your feelings – when you feel scared or depressed, talk to someone. Don’t keep it inside and turn it into stress. Stress will make you sick.
- Support your immune system – avoid alcohol, smoking, stress and people who are sick with flu, colds and other infectious diseases, including STIs.
- Get medical care – go for regular check-ups and stay in touch with your health. Treat any illness immediately.
- Practise safe sex – don’t weaken your body by getting more infections, including HIV, from your sex partners. You’ll get sick more quickly. Use condoms.
- Love your life – make the most of it (whether you are HIV+ or not). Find out what makes you happy, joyful and peaceful inside – truly love your life.

Whether you’re HIV– or HIV+, here’s the main message: You may not be in control of every situation, but the choices you do have and make can shape your life. The future is in your hands.
Loving life is an attitude – not an absence of infection! In fact, if you’re living with HIV, nobody needs to tell you what it’s like. You may even be doubly determined to make sure that your brothers and sisters don’t get HIV.

Yes! Let’s recap who’s part of the love life generation: Young South Africans who know who they want to be – ambitious & innovative, proud that men and women are treated equally, committed to changing society for the better, and body-wise!

Got ambition? Got the power to decide your future? Don’t want HIV to infect others? Then you’re part of the love life generation!

I’m HIV-positive: Can I still be part of it?
A family member has died

You are not alone. Roughly half of all young South Africans know someone who has died of Aids. About a million children and teenagers have lost one or more parents from Aids.

When someone you love dies

It’s normal to feel very sad and lost when someone you love dies. You may also feel angry with them or someone else and blame them for what has happened. Blaming people won’t bring your family member back, but your family needs to talk about what has happened to make sure it doesn’t happen to anyone else.

Find a friend or family member to talk to and keep talking to them. You may have a grandparent who is also feeling sad, but who would like to talk to you. Take the first step and speak to them.

It’s normal to feel really depressed for up to six months after the death of your parent or brother or sister. But time will heal your sadness and you will start taking an interest in life again. If you’re still badly depressed after six months, or if you ever feel that your own life is not worth living, tell someone you trust about it. You should then go see a social worker or counsellor to help you get over your sorrow.

Talk as a family about how to feed and protect yourselves – and stay in school

People living with Aids are often the family’s breadwinner and when they die, their family may be left without income or may feel unprotected. Unfortunately, there are also men who use the opportunity to try and have sex with children or teenagers whose parents have died.

Find someone you trust to talk to. It may be your granny or grandfather, or another friend or community leader. They will look for ways to support you.

- If you are under 14 years, your caregiver can apply for a Child Care Grant (this grant is available to all caregivers of people 14 years of age who earn small salaries and not only those affected by Aids).
- Your caregiver could apply for a Foster Care Grant (this process takes a lot more time).
- Social workers at social development offices may also assist by providing food parcels.
- Often there are churches (or other religious groups and community organisations that provide care & support). Go speak to them.

If you are chased away from school – or your principal refuses to give you your exam results until you have paid – tell someone you trust. No school is allowed to hold back results from children who cannot pay or send them away from school.
Part 2

Make Your Move in life

Balancing life...

Making your move takes commitment and perseverance – ‘cause remember it takes one small step at a time to make big moves. You may even have to change your plans when life throws you hurdles and you have to start over. It also means making the right choices along the way to help you reach your goals, which can be pretty tough when you’re still trying to figure out who you are and where you belong.

The Balancing Act

As a teen, dealing with physical, emotional and mental challenges isn’t easy. There’s school, relationships, parents, teachers and all kinds of other drama that life throws your way and can be pretty tough to handle; sometimes it may even feel like it’s all too much so you’ll never be able to Make YOUR Move. Here are a few tips on how to strike just the right balance from the inside out, so you don’t stop dead in your tracks – but keep on going every day.

Physical

Any kind of physical imbalance can affect your entire life. If you are not in top form physically, then you can’t function at school, work, or even while you’re taking part in hobbies or extramural activities. The best way to make sure you stay on top of your game is to eat right and exercise regularly. Eating healthily means making sure your meals are balanced – getting enough veggies, protein and carbohydrates. Even if your family has a hard time affording three square meals a day, choose to eat healthy foods like fruit and veg whenever you can. Exercising regularly is also crucial and can include any type of physical activity. It’s easier to follow an exercise programme if it’s something you love. For example, if you love basketball or dancing, then those are the perfect choices for you. Just make sure that you do at least 40 minutes of whatever exercise you choose three to five times a week – and do it with a friend or group of friends to make it more fun. By doing this, you’ll keep the physical side of your life in check.

Mental

Mental balance is also essential to your quality of life and your ability to Make YOUR Move. People who are in control of their mindsets can change their lives in amazing ways. The most important thing however is a positive attitude. If you think positively about yourself and challenges in your life, you’ll be able to overcome anything. By getting in touch with yourself, it’ll become so much easier to navigate all of life’s dilemmas. The trick is to stay mentally-focused on your goals and surround yourself with like-minded positive people.

Emotional

It’s important to keep your emotions in check and that you know how to deal with them when they start jumping all over the place. One of the main reasons that teenagers engage in risky behaviour, hang out with dodgy crews and forget where they want to go in life is because they lose control of the emotional side of their lives. When your emotions come into play, you’re more likely to do things that you wouldn’t usually do. The best way to prevent this is to be clear in your head about what you want and who you are. What do you like? What won’t you put up with? To keep yourself emotionally balanced, do things that help you keep a clear head, whether it’s playing sport, writing in a diary or whatever else you enjoy doing to help you keep calm. Most of all, spend time thinking about what you’re feeling and learn how to separate your head from your heart – just by doing this, you’re already making your move...
Balance checks

Academics and Sports
Concentrate on school work and achieve good marks, but don’t let all work and no play take the fun out of life! Academics and sports complement each other, so strike a good balance of both.

Academics and Relationships
You’re a teen, you’re young, life is fun and you look forward to seeing that someone special every day. As soon as your grades drop ‘cause you’re obsessing about your guy or gal, stop and rectify the situation. Remind yourself that you don’t need someone else to make you whole. Relationships come and go, but you can always be there for yourself — and education is yours, for life!!

Friends and Sports
Are you involved in sports but hanging out with friends who aren’t — they prefer staying at home, getting high or skipping school. This can be a very tricky situation. Your crew can bring you down or they can lift you up. If yours are doing the latter, keep ‘em; but if they’re bugging you and are getting in the way of you making your move, time to drop ‘em.

He or she is the love of your life and they’ve put you on cloud nine. But you’ve got a major sports tournament coming up and need to practice every day, but that means there’s no time to spend with your boo. If he or she truly loves you, they will support and encourage you every step of the way. Anything less than that just ain’t worth it.

Hanging out with the “in” crowd versus the real YOU
Here’s the real clincher — your happiness and success in life will depend fundamentally on you being your own person. Know yourself. Know what you want in life and the moves you need to make to get there. Don’t give in to pressure from ‘friends’ and others just to feel like you belong to the cool crew. Drugs, alcohol, teenage sex and crime can ruin your life. If you want to succeed, you have to define your own future and seek out your own opportunities — the ‘in’ crowd won’t do that for you; they’ll just land you in trouble. Be yourself, Make Your Move.
What love is...

Respect

Being in love is having absolute respect for your partner. This means that under no circumstances should your partner EVER treat you in a way that makes you feel less than you are and vice versa. If your partner belittles you or forces you to do something that you are not comfortable with, they do not have respect for you, and by extension can’t possibly really love you!

Trust

If you can’t trust your partner you can’t really love them. If you’re always stressing about who he or she’s with and where they are, you have a problem! A relationship should not involve military-style interrogation either. If your partner’s messing around with other girls or guys they are putting your life at risk for HIV/AIDS. If they really love you they will never ever put you in the line of fire like that. There is NO excuse for cheating or sleeping around – HIV is not selective, and won’t skip you just because you’re his ‘real’ girlfriend or boyfriend. Spreading ‘love’ around means that they don’t deserve yours, so take a step back and tell him or her to walk!

Communication

You should be able to say anything you want at any time to the person you love. This means that if you really love someone you should be able to negotiate crucial parts of your relationship with them. You should be able to demand the use of a condom without being afraid of the backlash you’re going to get from your man or gal. Getting tested for HIV is also something that you should be able to negotiate with your partner; you can only make informed decisions about your relationship if you know your status!
What love is not...

Angry and Abusive

Yes, you will have moments of frustration and anger in any relationship. But, if your partner gets so angry that they abuse or force you to do things with threats of violence then they don’t love you. You should NEVER be afraid to say NO or to speak your mind. A relationship involves two people; if one of them is living in constant fear of the other then it is an abusive relationship. Is your life worth this kind of ‘love’?

Pressuring

If your partner is forcing you to do anything that you are uncomfortable with then he is not in love with you. Asking you to have unprotected sex for clothes, food or money is not OK and displays a real lack of love! Anyone who truly loves you will do things for you out of the goodness of their heart with no expectations. Your life is not worth the things that he is offering you! Your partner or friends might try tell you that having sex proves love. You’ve got to live with the consequences of what you do – not them.

So pressuring is actually a sign that it’s not real love!

Unfaithful

Having unprotected sex with someone who is having unprotected sex with any number of other people considerably increases your risk of contracting HIV. So, someone who is not completely faithful to you does not love you! Not only that, they are a loaded weapon spreading HIV without regard or respect for anyone else!

Being in love does not mean compromising yourself for your partner, and if they really love you they will not expect you to do so. Guys and girls, don’t take advantage of someone because they are quick to fall in love, respect yourself enough to fall in love and stick with one partner – and if you’re both faithful you’ll remain HIV free!

My boyfriend has said the “L” word. This means he loves me. Think again:

- I have to kiss him to prove to him that I love him.
- He doesn’t want to use a condom and I do, but I don’t mind giving in because I love him.
- My girlfriend won’t have sex with me period! This means she doesn’t love me.
- My boyfriend likes to rough me up; it’s his way of showing me love.
- My boyfriend loves me because he buys me stuff. I have sex with him to show him I love him.

I’m a top achiever and very competitive in sports. But I love my boyfriend and want to spend all my time with him.

If I have sex with him I expect things in return.

I want to fall pregnant to show my boyfriend that I love him.

If you recognise yourself in any of the above scenarios, you need to take a chill pill and decide whether you’re really in love and whether you’re really loved. If you come up with excuses, that means something is not quite right with your relationship. Rather wait than worry.
Entering a sexual relationship is no child’s play. You’ve got to know all the facts about what makes or breaks a healthy partnership – and keep yourself safe from heartache and Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Love honestly...

I don’t feel guilty cheating on my partner.

Not only do you not respect your partner, you have very little respect for yourself too. The only way to maintain a healthy relationship filled with trust is to remain totally honest with your partner. There’s no excuse to lie to your loved one about anything. And you don’t need to cross the lines of privacy in order to be honest. Just make sure that anything that affects or could affect your relationship is dealt with openly and honestly.

My one lover satisfies my materialistic needs, the other one is marriage material.

The cornerstone of faithfulness is ONE PARTNER ONLY. Having more than one partner is definitely dangerous in this day and age. Things like HIV/AIDS and other STIs make it extremely dangerous to have many sexual partners. Every new person you sleep with heightens your chances of getting infected with HIV. If infected, you will in turn infect your other partners, who will in turn infect current and future partners. This cycle of infection can be controlled and stopped if you stay true to the one you’re with.

I think my boo’s cheating on me but I’m not quite sure. I don’t want to cause friction so I’ll just keep it to myself.

In any faithful relationship there are open channels of communication. You need to make sure that you can talk to your partner about anything and vice versa. Not only should you open up, you should try and talk to your partner in a way that will get them to open up. An angry tone of voice and unfounded accusations may just cause unnecessary tension. Speak your mind very clearly about your fears and concerns; even suggesting an HIV test for the both of you if possible. Remember: ‘If it’s not just me, you’re not for me!’
Every time I see Jason I get all warm and fuzzy, even when my partner is next to me...

Having strong sexual feelings towards someone other than your partner is not necessarily cheating. But, if you let the feelings go further you’re tempting fate and cheating on your partner. Being in love with someone else and not being honest enough to break up with your partner is cheating! If you love someone you shouldn’t want anyone else and if you do, you need to move away from your current relationship rather than lie about your feelings.

I’m young and I want to play the field, why would I want to bog myself down with commitment drama...

Feeling that you have time on your side to mess around with more than one partner means you’re in the wrong space at the wrong time. If you’re not ready for a relationship — especially of the sexual nature — don’t dabble with trouble. Respect yourself and your body enough to wait ‘til you’re ready. Sticking to one partner is no longer an option, it’s a must, and if you’re not ready to do so, stay away from relationships until the time is right.

It was only an innocent kiss, nothing more...

Anything physical that goes beyond a friendly hug is cheating! Anything that might be seen as slightly sexual can lead to other things and is therefore cheating. So, if you get into a situation where touching, kissing or hugging go beyond innocent friendliness then stop immediately! Rather don’t take any chances. Anything up to and including sex is cheating, that includes oral sex and intimate touching. Those are things that should only be done if you’re ready for them and within a stable relationship. And, remember that getting tested as a couple is the only way to guarantee that you’re not getting or spreading HIV during intimate contact!
My feelings change all the time. I’m sure people think I’m strange...

Well hormones help. Testosterone in boys and oestrogen in girls excite our passions – this can mean happy-happy-happy one moment and about-to-cry the next. We’re getting to know ourselves better – what makes us feel what. It’s a bit of a wild ride, but these are good lessons to learn! The thing to remember is, even if you are different, you’re also a brave soul making your way in a strange and fantastic world. Go for it, china, keep on living.

Change of face?

Did you know?

Holding a telephone too tightly to your ear can give you acne above your ear or along your chin.

Tell your sweetheart you’d rather talk face-to-face.

These pimples! I’ve even got some on my back and shoulders!

Hey, well that’s also normal and won’t last forever. Pimples can be caused by emotional stress, some medicines, allergies, and of course, good old hormones – which is why you may have more now! You could try taking Zinc tablets, but if you tie your hands behind your back so that you can’t pop them, ignore your mirror for a while and think soothing thoughts, the pimples will eventually disappear. If your acne is really bad, there are medicines to treat it. You don’t have to get scars.
Why do we get pimples?

Hormones make the glands produce too much oil (sebum), then they get blocked and we get huge zits.

DANGER ZONE

I get very angry with my parents. Can I blame it on hormones too?

Hormones can cause weird feelings, but it’s more likely about learning to be your own person. We have to start proving that we’re capable of this adult thing. Unfortunately, most parents are not going to let their beloved teenagers just jump into adulthood. They usually like us to go slow. But us? We’re young and we’re free, we want to zoom into life. No wonder there’s a bit of tension – finding the balance is sure to take some struggle.

Ag, it’s a challenge — a chance to test-drive our new adult self. Let’s not turn it into a war.
Does it really matter if your beard isn’t growing yet or your thighs aren’t round enough? Taking care of yourself is respect, but going crazy with hating your body parts? That’s a waste of good living times! Accept who you are and polish yourself bright, baby.

I worry about whether my body is right. I’m scared that my penis is too small.

Hips, chests, biceps, noses, feet and penises – they’re all different. Penises can be huge or tiny, but they grow to just the right size when excited. Some are thick, some are thin, some have foreskins, some have helmets – they’re ALL great to have around and deserve some tender care. Treat your penis with respect. Don’t criticise, pull at it (unless you want to have some fun), have sex with people you don’t like, expose it to infections or otherwise generally dis your manhood.

I feel quite good about my body sometimes, but mostly I worry about it.

Yeah. You want to look good and you want to be liked. You’d think the ONLY way guys and girls fall in love, get rich and find the perfect job is to look stylish and have the perfect body. Good-looking people are a pleasure to see, but so are people with happy eyes, a naughty smile, a lekker laugh, a friendly wave, a jiggly bum, a quirky face. There’s a lot that can be yummy. Thinking about your body all the time is boring.

Body image
Okay! But what do I do about these sexy feelings?

Enjoy! Make love to yourself — masturbation is the safest sex you can have! Touching yourself for pleasure is perfectly normal and fantasising is fun. You can enjoy and explore sex without doing it with someone else. Also, get physical. Dance, run and jump for joy — make the most of this powerful energy and get off on the great feelings of your body.

We girls also worry. We want great hips and lips. We want to be normal!!

Female bodies are precious, wonderful, magical creations in all their shapes and sizes. Do the world and yourself a favour. Turn your back on stuff that makes you feel ugly and enjoy Girl Power! Celebrate that your body can feel pleasure and pride. Leave behind those old ways of looking at yourself and other girls. Tell yourself: I like my hips. I like my breasts. I like my vagina. I like my nose. I like my thighs.

Ban mirror misery. Your body and face are not your enemies! It truly is okay to have a different shape, different hair, different skin or a different look. Like yourself and if you do, so will others.

Dieting all the time makes you:

- Gain weight
- Sick and unhealthy
- Depressed
- Obsessed with food i.e. boring
- Stupid (you lose concentration, focus and brain power!)

Is it normal to feel sad or bored all the time? I even think about dying.

This, my friend, can mean depression. Pressure, exams, heartbreaks, hormones, and family dramas — with all these adult responsibilities we can get seriously depressed. Give the loveLife contact centre on 0800 121 900 or send a Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023. It’s normal to feel sad and pissed-off as part of growing up, but NOT if that is all you feel. If you don’t care, think about suicide or have no energy, you need support. Go for a check up, moan to a friend — but don’t just leave it. You can pretend that your problem is too silly to talk about, or that nobody cares. You can pretend that you have no choice. But why not find the help you need and get back on the love train of life? Suicides are a waste of beautiful people and depression can be cured.

The right time for sex is wonderful, the wrong time is depressing and sad. Know yourself, know your body and then get to know someone else’s.

Sometimes I feel like I’m growing up and coping well and other times I just lose it.

Yes, well, if you were perfect you probably wouldn’t be here. If you want to love life, you have to experience it. This includes making mistakes and having off-days. Enjoy the ride, one day you’ll probably look back on this and think: “Ah, now those were pretty good days!”

Is it normal to think about sex so much?

Yes, yes, yes, sex is on our minds and in the air. Sex is going to be part of the rest of our lives. Thank your body, thank your hormones — this can be such fun! You are not sex-mad — well you probably are, but that’s one of the joys of life. One day you’ll have to grow up and think about paying bills, feeding children and earning a living. Think about sex — stretch it out while you have the time!
Be True to you

Let’s get straight to the point: You are more likely to achieve your ambitions – and be happy – if you are true to YOU!

Who YOU are

Puberty is a time when you want to BREAK OUT! and define your own destiny.
It’s a time of strong emotions – infatuation, desire, frustration, anger and love for life!
Sometimes puberty can be a really troubling time. It’s not unusual for people who’ve gone through life experiences like sexual abuse to feel anxious or guilty about what happened to them – even though it’s not their fault.

You’ve got to work it out. Your past won’t go away, but it doesn’t have to ruin your future!
Dealing with your past will make you a stronger person. Talk to someone you trust or call the loveLife youthline on 0800 121 900.

Puberty is also the time when your sexual hormones start surging. You will also have strong emotions — of love, infatuation and desire. Often you feel strong sexual feelings for friends or classmates — sometimes even of the same sex as you.

Don’t rush to label yourself gay or straight or somewhere in-between. In time, your body will settle down and you’ll know who you are — what turns you on and what you desire. Most of us are ‘straight’ — that is, we are attracted to people of the opposite sex.
Some of us — maybe 1 in 10 — are attracted to people of the same sex. A few of us swing both ways.

Be true to who YOU are. That’s our best advice for people with ambition!

Is it true that gay people are responsible for the HIV epidemic?
No. In South Africa, almost 95% of HIV transmission is between men and women. 5% of transmission occurs during pregnancy and birth from mother-to-baby.

In some parts of the world (not Africa) in the early stages of the epidemic gay men were at highest risk of HIV infection. HIV is transmitted through unsafe sex between men and women, or men who have sex with men (MSM). The issue is sexual protection — not sexual preference!
I’m gay and I’m in a sexual relationship. How do I protect myself?

Basically, the same principles apply to gay and straight sexual relationships:

1. Talk to one another about love and protecting each other!
2. The safest sex is no sex, but if you do have sex, you can reduce your risk of HIV transmission to close to zero.
3. Know where you stand with HIV. Get tested together.
4. Use a condom every time you have sex. It’s just as important to use a condom when your penis goes inside your partner’s anus or vagina.
5. Remember that you can still get genital herpes even if you use a condom. If your partner has open blisters or ulcers, find other ways to pleasure each other!
6. If you have oral sex, there is a small chance of HIV transmission. There’s a bigger chance of transmitting herpes infection or other Sexually Transmitted Infections. If your partner is living with HIV, or if you want to be close to 100% safe from HIV or other infections, you can use cling-wrap plastic! Sounds a bit weird, but if you work together, it could be a real turn-on!

My family rejects me because I’m gay or lesbian. What can I do?

Many families are scared to talk about sex and feel threatened by the idea that a family member is different! Tell them that you can only find happiness by being true to YOU, and don’t plan to live your life a lie.

Talk to someone you trust. You may find that even they don’t know how to deal with what you tell them. Many respected leaders still find it hard to talk about sex and sexuality. But there are lots who are willing to talk.

Be true to YOU!
Know your worth

Speak your mind

Knowledge is power. So is the ability to stand up for yourself because you know you’re a somebody. Those people who talk openly about their relationships – the pressures an fears they face and how they deal with them – have greater power to make moves that honour who they really are (not who their boyfriend or girlfriend want them to be).

Getting down, all the way, none of the way, bonking, jika-jika, doing it, shagging, making love, screwing, getting some, getting none, getting it all, getting jiggy with it – have a ball, but keep it safe and always be true to you! Research shows the more we talk about it, the better informed we are. And this doesn’t mean we go and have more sex, but that we make better choices for ourselves. This way there’s less risk of getting STIs, HIV or falling pregnant.
Talking sexy

You’re very sure, you have information about sex, and you know what you will and won’t do, but when do you say so? One steamy session you and your baby are getting down, and just as it gets heavy you... What do you do or say? “Sweetie, let’s take a shower, okay? I need some air.” or “Here’s the condom.” Say it! Now is the time. Later will be too late. You’ll feel guilty and won’t be able to face yourself. Eish! It’s hard.
The more honest you are about sex from the beginning, the easier it is. If you meet someone and just mention your rules casually, you’ll both know the line from the start. If you wait until you’re both turned on and hot, you’re probably going to find it very difficult to talk. Get your stuff out in the open – let your tongue do the talking before your fingers do the walking!

Read my lips

How far should you go?

Right, there are two things to think about here – how far do you want to go and how far does the person you’re with want to go? It’s all complicated when we play games with confusing rules. Sometimes we say ‘no’ when we mean ‘yes’ and ‘yes’ when we mean ‘no’. We let boys behave one way and girls another way – eish! This stuff is old fashioned and too confusing! Get with the times, talk about stuff, listen and debate, have fun – but respect the people you get down with and be a cool sistah or brother. There is niks, noit or nuttin cool about confusion.

You know that sex talk helps you make healthy decisions and you wanna talk with your parents, but you’re scared they’ll think you’re up to something. Well, most parents do find it very difficult to talk to their kids about sex so it’s up to you to help them. Remember, things were different for them – there was no HIV when they were young! Watch a sex talkshow with them or show them an article. Ask their opinion about a sexual subject – they may have interesting ideas. Show respect and admiration that they’re talking because we know it’s not easy.

Sex talk

You can talk about sex.

“Talk about it” says the billboard. You know you can joke about it, whisper with your friends and watch it on TV, but talk about it openly? No way! “It’s not our culture”, “it should stay in the bedroom”, blah, blah, blah... We’re too young, we’re different and if we want to survive, things have got to change. We are the generation that needs to talk about sex – we must decide if we want to do it, what we want and don’t want, who with, how, where and when we want to do it. It’s in our hands.

We’re talking about sharing responsibility and making informed choices. It’s the only way we can save ourselves from abuse, HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections and stuff that’s really spoiling the joy of sex. Get with the programme, find out everything you need to know and then get talking – leave the giggling, the silly jokes and the ignorance to children.

What part of NO don’t you understand?

You’ve talked nicely and it’s not getting through. It’s time for a simple ‘no’. No, I don’t want you to touch me there. No, I will not have sex without a condom. No, I do not want to go with you into a dark corner. No, I don’t want another drink. No! No! No! If you mean it, say it like you do. Don’t smile all cute and sexy, don’t feel unmanly, don’t argue the details and don’t hang around if you’re not being heard. We are the new generation and we know that ‘no’ really means ‘no’. And for those doffies who say ‘no’, when they mean ‘yes’ – why don’t you get real and say ‘maybe’?
Asserting your power and independence

When I want it I’ll let you know
You will know when you are ready to have sex. It’s a feeling inside that’s good and sure – any time of the day or night. Think about it! It’s not when you’re partying, had a bit to drink, your friends think you should and you say, “Ag, why not?”. Sex can be stimulating, fun and an exciting adventure for you and your lover when you know that it’s what you want. But going there when you’re not ready can be confusing, embarrassing and depressing. If you’re not in the mood, or the vibes aren’t right, you have a choice. You don’t have to be anyone but you and it’s nobody’s business why, when or what. Put the power in your own hands and take control. Love it up, but live real (and carry on reading for fun ways to explore desire without sex).

You can trust me
Imagine a world where people say what they mean; where you can trust someone to listen to you and where the other person can also speak from the heart. Both guys and girls want to feel safe and respected. It’s a myth to think that boys just have to have sex and girls have to say no. If we want to have good sex, good relationships and a good time, we have to trust ourselves and communicate clearly, without confusion. We have to know what we want and stick to it. If we don’t listen to our feelings, how can we ask someone else to do it?

Sometimes we do things we don’t want to and sometimes things are done to us that we don’t choose for ourselves like violence and abuse. This is not your fault. Remember that nobody can take away from you who you are inside. Get support so that you can heal how you feel. There are people you can talk to.

What you waiting for? Don’t wait to get a life. Decide what’s best for you and then stick to your guns. Honesty, communication and safe sex are not just for when you find your true love. Now is the time.

Be sharp, be prepared. Both guys and girls need to stay away from situations that could get out of hand. If you’re not sure, don’t go there. Hang out with a friend who understands your rules, go to places that aren’t dark and sexy, and listen to your heart. If you don’t feel right – move it. Get outta there!
You’re growing up, and the power balance between you and your parents is shifting. You still need them. They still want you, but often feel threatened by the changes in you and the new ideas you bring home. Give yourself more power by talking to your parents openly without making them feel inferior or threatened.

When is the right time to talk to my parents about sex?
If you have questions, uncertainties or are just plain curious you need to ask them. Be prepared for your folks being a tad bit embarrassed and lots of ‘ums’ and ‘aahs’ – talking about sex ain’t easy. They might jump to the conclusion that you’re doing it, so it’s important to put their mind at ease right up front. Remember that it’s definitely never too late to initiate conversation about sex and sexuality but the earlier the better. And be persistent.

What are the types of things we should talk about?
You should be talking about anything that you’re not sure of – there should be no uncertainties. Ask them what they would like to have been told by their parents and all the information they wish someone had told them; could they please tell you? Don’t use muddled language to convey your point, be straight up about it.

My folks talk to me about everything! Sometimes it gets too much!
It’s only because your parents want the best for you. If you feel they’re rehashing the same stuff that you’ve heard in school and elsewhere, sit them down and respectfully explain that you’re hooked up with info and if you need any more you will ask them. Be sure not to avoid the real issues which might save your life in the end.

I’ve never had sex; my parents don’t believe me!
Yeah, it’s not easy when your parents give mixed signals about trusting you. It’s crucial to establish communication lines and if parents chat to their children from very early on it does make it easier. You need to be clear about what you will accept or not accept from them and they should be clear about this too. Always be honest and upfront about your feelings and thoughts and be ready to listen and try not to lose your cool with them. Explain to them that you’re a virgin and ask them what you’ve done to make them feel they cannot believe you.

All this talk about “talking to me about sex” is uncomfortable.
For sure most parents are from the ‘old school’ and won’t find the idea of opening up to their child about sex easy. Unfortunately, with youth more at risk of infection, it’s no longer a game of choice – it’s life and death. It’s never too late for them to start talking to their children.
Equal relationships

The love life generation is built on equality of the sexes – equal power between men and women. Pressure on women by men just ain’t tolerated – not by women, not by real men. Hitting, bullying, pushing or pulling around, pinching, scratching and kicking is abuse. Being called ugly names, being ashamed, scared or pestered is no way to be treated. Jealousy is insecurity. Don’t call it love when it’s not. Don’t think that if he has bought you pretty things, you have to sleep with him (or her). If you love someone and are doing these things, or you’re in a relationship and feel hurt and helpless, get out and get help. Confide in a friend, speak to a counsellor or phone the loveLife contact centre on 0800 121 900 or send Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023.

The great thing about relationships

Relationships are like journeys. In them we change, move forward and discover more about ourselves. We can share, laugh, cry, learn, explore and challenge. We can give love and feel loved. The people in our lives help us to learn about ourselves. We have feel-good relationships and feel-bad relationships. We have some that force us to do things we don’t want to and some that help us build our own confidence. Life is about learning how to leave or change the feel-bad relationships and how to enjoy the rest.

If you decide to have sex, get informed first. Read the loveFacts on condoms, contraception and emergency contraception.

The relationships that we have with adults who take care of us can be difficult as we grow up and try to become independent. There will always be differences, but differences make life exciting. Be willing to learn and show that you feel respect for thoughts and feelings that are different from yours. Adults may not understand your world, but they may be able to share wisdom about the universal feelings of love.

Falling in love

Some of the most exciting relationships involve falling in love. At our age, it’s totally normal to fall in and out of love with people of both sexes, with people we know and people we don’t. We have secret crushes, idolise stars and yearn for someone we can’t have. It’s an up-and-down ride and it can be hard to think of anything else. Even though adults may not take us seriously and say: “Oh, it’s just a crush”, we know that the feelings are still intense and real.

Things change. The person we now love may not be the person we love next month or next year. Take it slowly and be open to change – jumping right in every time we fall in love can leave us feeling hurt, stupid and let down. We are still learning about love and learning to choose relationships with confidence and self-knowing. This is the pathway to the love of which we dream.
Playing games
Looking sexy, flirting with a friend, enjoying a kiss – all wonderful ways to explore your body and your relationships. Play with the power of sexy feelings, but know that it’s a game with rules. If you don’t want to have full sex, don’t pretend that you will. If you don’t want to have unsafe sex, always carry condoms. If you don’t want more than a kiss or a touch, say so.

You decide what you want from your life and you decide what you need to do to make it happen. Why let others decide how we should behave and how far we’ll go? The bad news is sometimes people use violence to make you do something you don’t want to do. This is not your choice nor your fault, but you can choose to be a survivor and get help afterwards. Go for counselling and get support.
Breaking up

When a relationship is just not right

If you’re honest with yourself, you will know when it’s time to end a relationship – if the person doesn’t like the real you and is always trying to change you; or if the person tells you what to do all the time. Maybe the person makes you feel ashamed, stupid or unimportant. Or maybe your feelings have changed and you just don’t want to be together anymore – all these are signs to say “time for change”.

Sometimes you can work through these things together, but sometimes you will need the courage to break up. Then you will need support or advice from a friend, adult or helpline (call the loveLife youthline on 0800 121 900). Try not to hurt the other person, but don’t stay in a relationship just because you are scared to change. This is your life and you are growing towards your dreams — don’t waste time in relationships that make you feel bored, betrayed, bad or used.

Friend, lover or partner? It makes no difference. When it comes to a relationship that involves sex — have only safe sex!
The ability to say no – and be respected for it – is at the heart of equal relationships.

Talking about sex with our friends is natural, easy... and fun. But what about when it comes to talking to your partner? There comes a time when you have to say what you want, don’t want or don’t know what you want. Don’t wait to get a life. If you can’t communicate openly with the person you want to get intimate with, you could be getting into a situation you can’t control and that will put your life at risk. The time is now, and here’s how.

My girlfriend just wants to talk all the time, and I just wanna do it!

Talking about sex and everything that goes with it is one of the most important ways we can protect ourselves from abuse, HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infection and stuff that’s really destroying the niceness of sex.

I know all the facts and what I’m ready for, but how do I say so?

Relationships should be built on love, respect, responsibility and dignity. Developing a meaningful relationship means talking with your partner and ensuring that you share these values. If you are not in a meaningful relationship, you should not even consider having sex. Casual sex puts you at high risk of HIV infection. If you have any doubts, you’re not ready to get down with sex.
**Can I talk to my parents about this?**

You may think your parents don’t understand, but not that long ago they were young and confused too. So even though your parents may find it hard to talk to you about sex and relationships, work on it, we all need somebody to lean on sometimes. Take the initiative. Watch a sex talkshow with them or show them an article. Ask their opinion about a sexual subject – they may have interesting ideas. Show respect and admiration that they’re talking, because we know it’s not easy. And keep talking, not just once and not just when you are in trouble.

**Can I lay down the law as soon as I meet someone?**

Be honest and straight talking from the beginning. This is not something you can deal with casually. If you want to avoid the risk of HIV infection and you want a meaningful relationship, open communication and understanding are essential. If you wait until you’re both turned on and hot, you’re probably going to find it very difficult to talk. Let your tongue do the talking before your fingers do the walking!

**I still don’t know how far I should go.**

There are two things to think about here. How far do you want to go and how far does your partner want to go? Don’t complicate things with silly games. Don’t say ‘no’ when you mean ‘yes’ and ‘yes’ when you mean ‘no’.

**I told my girlfriend I’m not ready yet, but she doesn’t seem to understand.**

It’s time for a simple ‘no’! If you mean it, say it like you do. Don’t smile all cute and sexy, don’t feel unmanly, don’t argue the details and don’t hang around if you’re not being heard. She should respect your choice. It’s one of those things that should go both ways.

**What if I say what I want, but I’m not heard?**

Sometimes things are done to us that we don’t choose for ourselves like violence and abuse. This is not your fault. Remember that nobody can take away who you are inside. Get support so that you can heal how you feel. There are people you can talk to.

Be sharp and be prepared. Both guys and girls need to stay away from situations that could get out of hand. If you’re not sure, don’t go there. Hang out with a friend who understands your rules and listen to your heart.
Loving your own body is key to self-confidence. Keep it in good physical shape. It is the only one you will ever have. Only you should have the power to decide what happens to it. Get to know your body – you can explore your sexuality without putting yourself at risk by learning how your body responds to your own touch and stimulation.

Masturbation is a healthy, natural way to have sex without getting heavy. It’s the safest sex you can have. When it’s just you loving you, you can’t get pregnant, infected with HIV/Aids or pass on a Sexually Transmitted Infection, and you don’t have to worry about a condom. Teenagers are bursting with hormones. Masturbation helps relieve the tension and delays going all the way, which means you avoid the risks that go with that.

I’ve heard about weird things that can happen to you if you masturbate!

Forget the myths – you won’t get hair on your hands, go blind, waste sperm or turn into a sex maniac. You may have some fun fantasies, learn all sorts of ways to make yourself feel good, and learn how to pace yourself for when YOU feel ready to share this pleasure with someone else.

Is there anything I should know or think about before I try masturbating?

Give yourself the kind of loving that you want for yourself, and be gentle. Be careful if you masturbate with ointments and objects that might hurt you. Remember, you’re not dirty. Your body belongs to you and sexy feelings are natural and healthy. As long as you’re not forcing yourself on others, you’re healthy and normal!

Can I masturbate with my partner?

Yes, but it means you’ve made the decision to be physical – and that’s a decision you must be comfortable with. If you don’t feel ready to be in a physical relationship, tell your partner to chill – there’s plenty of time for getting physical later.

If you decide to get physical, great sex performance is about knowing how to please your lover. The perfect way to learn how to be a hot lover is to spend time and energy on loving and playing, without going all the way. This means suspense, excitement and not-a-care-in-the-world about sex hassles. Touching, kissing, stroking, rubbing, holding, looking at... no sex, lots of sexy! It’s the art of safe and sexy.
What is outercourse?
Outercourse is about being sexy without full-on sex. Discover your lover’s body. Talk sexy and play games. Find out how many different parts of the body can feel sexy without touching the genitals. Play with each other, using your fingers and other parts of the body. There are many ways to reach orgasm. As long as your body fluids do not get close to the other person’s genitals, anus or mouth, you can have great fun without risk.

How do my lover and I know how far to go?
You can stop at any time, but this is hard to do. If you’re panting for more, you’re walking on thin ice. Know yourself. When things get hot and heavy, take a break or do something completely different (you can go back to thinking about the person later while you’re pleasing yourself). But how do you know when to stop? BEFORE you start, you and your partner should agree that you do not want penetrative sex. That way, when you start to wonder if you should slow down, your partner will help change the pace.

The safest sex is no sex.
Masturbation is a safe and healthy alternative to penetrative sex. Sex is not a game. If you mean no, say no, clearly and calmly. And don’t play games. Masturbating with your partner without making it clear beforehand that you do not want sex is playing with fire. Avoid arguing or discussing this when both of you are feeling hot and passionate — say it before you start, or at a calmer time.

And when you decide to have sex with that special loving partner… no matter how well you think you know each other, USE CONDOMS CONSISTENTLY… that means every time!

Choosing not to have sex, doesn’t mean you never feel horny. But delaying sex until you are older and more mentally and physically equipped to deal with the emotional responsibilities of a sexual relationship not only makes the sex better, but is likely to help ensure that your relationship lasts.
A boy’s penis does not have to go right inside a girl’s vagina for pregnancy to happen. If semen enters the vagina, it can move upwards and join with the egg! If the penis goes in, the risk is much higher. Even with no ejaculation some sperm can come out. So, make sure your sex play is safe play.

Sex is fun and babies are cute, your body may be ready, but isn’t there something you’d like to do before you become a father or a mother? Enjoy your own life first!

**I DON’T WANT A BABY YET**

*Sex makes babies*

If you don’t want to have a baby, the best thing is not to have sex! You are NOT safe if you do it standing up in the rain, if you wash with vinegar, use Coke or Flagyl, or if you pull out before orgasm. Those are all myths. Even contraception is not 100% safe. If a boy and girl have sex, something magical happens. Sperm from the boy goes up the vagina, into the tubes and swims like mad towards the ovary. If the ovary has released an egg, it will join together with the sperm and immediately start building a new life – and you have made a baby. So if you don’t want a baby, you had better know about male and female bodies and how to help them avoid pregnancy.

**It’s never too early**

Occasionally, pregnancy happens before a girl has had her first period or a boy, his first wet dream. If you have sex or share sex juices with someone, you are at risk of falling pregnant. Girls and boys are going through puberty younger than before, and you may not realise that your body is producing sperm or eggs. Don’t take risks – wait before you have sex, protect yourself against pregnancy.

Many young women who leave school suddenly feel at a loss and without much power over their lives. Often, they think having a baby will make them feel important again or accepted by society – only to find that having a baby too young limits their opportunities.
The creative cycle

Signs that your body can make babies
You wake up one morning and your sheets are wet. If you’re a girl, it may be blood (menstruation); if you’re a boy it’ll be semen. Both of these are signs that your baby-making cycle is in action. Our hormones start this amazing change called puberty. Hormones are exciting chemicals that rush through our bodies, changing us from kids into adults, and giving us new, wonderful feelings and bodies in the process. It usually happens between 11 and 13 years of age, but can start as early as seven or wait until you’re 17!

Cycles of change
It is important for both boys and girls to understand the menstrual cycle, because this is key to avoiding pregnancy. Each month, a girl’s body gets ready for her egg to be fertilised by sperm. The womb and ovary prepare themselves – the ovary releases an egg (ovulation). If the egg doesn’t join with a sperm, the egg and womb lining come away during menstruation and the girl bleeds. Then the body goes back to the beginning of the cycle and the whole process starts again. This happens every month and usually lasts five or so days.

Pregnancy can happen even if the girl has not yet menstruated.
Pregnancy can happen during ovulation, which lasts a few days each month. Unfortunately it’s hard to tell exactly when this happens. Sperm is fertile at any time of the month and can stay in the girl’s tubes for a while. So if you have sex before ovulation, the sperm can wait for the egg and still fertilise it. If the egg gets fertilised there will be no menstruation and the girl will be pregnant. Teenage cycles are often irregular, so it is very difficult to be sure of a safe time for sex. Take no chances; always use contraception if you have sex (see the loveFacts on Contraception page 47).

Teenage girls usually have irregular periods. Sometimes you may wait up to three months for your next period. This is normal. You may also have spotting that is a bit of blood that looks like a period. Stress, illness, medication and diets can affect your menstrual cycle. If you are pregnant, you will not menstruate. Sometimes we land ourselves in tricky situations, especially with someone we do not really know. Be careful when going out with someone you don’t know very well and trust your instincts. If you feel you’ve been forced into having sex with anyone (even with your boyfriend!), go to your local clinic for help or call the loveLife contact centre on 0800 121 900 or send a Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023. It’s not your fault, so tell someone, preferably an adult. Get more information about condoms, contraception and emergency contraception from the relevant loveFacts. Go to your local clinic or call the loveLife contact centre on 0800 121 900 or send a Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023 for details.

This is it, baby
If you are having sex, you might become a parent. Look at your mum and dad – do you want to be a parent now? Ask them about the responsibility of feeding, clothing, loving and worrying about you. Think about your future and then think — use contraception. And don’t think this is just for girls — this is the new generation and boys are responsible for preventing pregnancy or paying maintenance for their children. Say no to unprotected sex if you do not want to be a parent. Be in control of your life. Get real, get contraception!

I want the baby
If you’re pregnant or have made someone pregnant, your life is about to change forever! So here are a few tips:

- Know where you stand with HIV. If you are HIV+, there is medicine that can reduce the risk that your baby could become infected during birth. You may also be offered an elective Caesarian Section (C-section) – the operation to take your baby out of the womb without a normal birth. The risk of HIV transmission to the baby is reduced by C-section.

- As parents, the baby is yours, nobody else’s. Your baby is your joint responsibility to protect, look after, feed, clothe and educate. Men who are part of the love life generation take that responsibility seriously.

- A baby changes your life but does not mean the end of your dreams! If you’re still in school, make sure you complete your schooling. There are many teenage mothers who have managed to overcome the difficulties and achieve their goals.
Contraception

Contraceptives – the pill or injectables used together with condoms – protect against pregnancy and HIV. Pills and injectable contraception give women more power to decide when they want a baby, but must be used with condoms to prevent HIV transmission.

**MUST I USE CONTRACEPTION ALL THE TIME?**

*It depends on the method you use:*

- Use condoms whenever you have sex. If you want more sex, use a new one every time.
  Check out the loveFacts on condoms for more details.
- The Pill has to be taken every day at the same time.
  If you forget, it won’t work.
- The injection is given every two or three months at the clinic.
- The IUD is put in the womb and works for four to five years.

**You’re thinking of getting into some loving?**

You want sex, but you’re wondering about condoms, babies and HIV/AIDS? Let’s get the basic low-down on contraceptives. Firstly, guys and girls are responsible for this part of the fun. Most contraceptives are for girls, but guys have to protect themselves too. Read on.

**GETTING INTIMATE**

We want sex, but no babies. What can we do?

Don’t worry, guys and girls can prevent an unwanted pregnancy. The safest way is to get into sexy stuff together without the penis going into, or coming (ejaculating) near the vagina. If you want full sex, you need to find contraception that is healthy for you and your lifestyle. You have a choice of contraceptives suitable for young people.

**A barrier method:**

Male and female condoms.
The diaphragm or cap (only available from a private doctor).

**A hormonal method:**

- The Pill.
- The injection. Girls can also get an intrauterine device (IUD or loop) put into the womb, but these are not usually for young people.

**HOW DO CONTRACEPTIVES WORK?**

- Barrier methods stop the guy’s sperm from going into the girl’s vagina when they have sex.
- Hormonal methods suppress a girl’s ovaries from making an egg each month. This means that there is no egg, which means no chance of having a baby!
CONTRACEPTIVE CHOICES

Is the injection good for preventing pregnancy?

Yes, as long as you have it regularly. If not, you can get pregnant. You need to come back for a check-up every eight to 12 weeks. While on the injection most girls’ periods change or stop. Some bleed at odd times. Some girls have headaches, bad moods or weight gain. If you’re worried, speak to your health worker. The side effects are worse in the first few months.

(Guys be patient as her body gets used to it!)

What about the Pill?

The Pill is very good for preventing pregnancy. Some girls suffer from dizziness, nausea, headaches, mood swings, depression or weight gain. Others feel good, they lose their pimples and their periods become easier. Ask your health worker about one that’s right for you.

Remember: If you use the Pill or injection, you are not protected against STIs, HIV or Aids. Go for double protection and use a condom as well.

TIPS ON THE PILL

- When you begin, you will not be safe from pregnancy for seven days. Wait or use condoms.
- If you take your Pill up to 12 hours late, take one immediately and the next one at your usual time. This may mean taking two pills on the same day. Take the rest of the pack as usual, one a day.
- If you miss two pills in a month, avoid sex or use condoms until your next period.
- If you forget to take your Pill often, it is not the contraception for you.
- It may not work if you vomit, have diarrhoea or take antibiotics.
We’re talking passion! What is the best for everything?
The male and female condoms are the only contraceptives that will prevent pregnancy and protect you from STIs, including HIV/AIDS. They are 98% safe when used properly. The male condom is free at clinics and can be bought at pharmacies and other shops. The female condom is more difficult to get and is usually only available from some clinics.

The male condom is a guy’s best insurance.
Even if the girl is on other contraception, the condom gives you the power to choose fun without negatives!

We had sex without protection. What must I do?
Having unprotected sex is risky as it could lead to unplanned pregnancy or infection with HIV and other STIs. If you have unprotected sex because the condom broke or because you forgot to use contraception, you can take emergency contraception within three days (72 hours) after sexual intercourse to prevent pregnancy. Hurry — if three days have passed, it’s too late.
You may also have been infected with HIV. You need to take post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) up to 72 hours after having unprotected sex to prevent HIV infection.

When we do want a baby, will contraception make it difficult?
None of these methods permanently affect fertility, so go for it! You can get pregnant when you stop using condoms. Some girls may take a few months after the Pill or injection and some get pregnant immediately. Contraceptives have no side effects for guys.

You can get pregnant:
● the first time you have sex.
● if you have sex standing up.
● if the guy comes near to the girl’s vagina.
● if you wash with vinegar or Dettol after sex.
● if the girl has her period when you have sex.
● if you have sex just before a girl’s first menstruation.
● if you have sex once the boy’s body has started to produce sperm.
REAL SOLUTIONS

How do I use emergency contraception?
There are four emergency pills. Take the first two as soon as you can after unprotected sex. Take the next two twelve hours later.

Can we use emergency contraception every time we have sex?
No, definitely not. This can’t be used as a regular method of prevention. You need to find out about condoms if you’re a guy or the female condom, the injection or the Pill if you’re a girl. Emergency contraception is only for accidents, like when your condom splits, you forget or if you have been raped.

Will I feel different?
Sometimes. With the pills some girls feel like vomiting, or they feel dizzy and get cramps or headaches. This lasts about a day. It can help if you take the pills with food or milk. If you vomit up to two hours after the first dose of pills, take the second lot as soon as you can and go back to your clinic for extra pills. (Some clinics will give you extra pills in case you vomit.) It may be a bit sore when the IUD is put in and you may have heavier periods and cramps.

- Emergency contraception.
- Counselling about an unwanted pregnancy.
- Information about where you can get an abortion.
- A free, safe abortion.

Seven out of 10 times emergency contraception will stop an unwanted pregnancy.

It’s more than three days since we had unprotected sex. What do we do?
Emergency contraception will not work. You need to speak to a health worker. If you are pregnant, you need to make important choices about whether you want to end your pregnancy. A TOP (Termination of Pregnancy or Abortion) is safer and simpler if it’s carried out in the first three months (see loveFacts on abortion).
Emergency contraception

Emergency contraception taken in time may prevent pregnancy, but is too late to stop HIV infection. It gives you a bit of power to decide your reproduction, but should be used only as a last resort.

What is emergency contraception?
It can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex.

There are two methods a girl can use:
● Pills can be taken up to three days after sex.
● An Intrauterine Device (IUD) can be put in by a trained health worker at a clinic up to 5 days after unprotected sex.

What to do when you’re desperate!
Even when guys and girls take care to avoid a pregnancy, sometimes things happen — but you never thought it would happen to you:
● A night of passion that went too far?
● A condom that split?
● Forced to have unprotected sex?

What can you do to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, now?
You don’t need anybody’s permission. It’s up to you to choose emergency contraception after unprotected sex.

PANIC AT-TACK

We’re desperate! We had sex and didn’t use a condom or anything else — am I pregnant?
Maybe. It’s best not to take chances. Go to a clinic, pharmacy or trained health worker and get emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy. Go immediately. If you wait more than five days, it will be too late.

Is it like an abortion?
No. Emergency contraception only works if it is done during the first three days after sex. If you are too late, an abortion can be done in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. A legal abortion is free in some hospitals and clinics, and is done by a trained health worker. Emergency contraception pills are taken at home.

How does emergency contraception stop pregnancy?
The pills can:
● stop a girl’s ovary from making an egg,
● prevent the boy’s sperm from fertilising the egg,
● stop the fertilised egg from attaching itself to the wall of the womb.
How long will it work? Can we have unprotected sex again?

It depends on the method you used:

- If you took the pills, it is very risky to have unprotected sex again. It won’t be safe. Girls can become pregnant, even during the time of taking the pills. Use a condom until your first period and then get regular contraceptives from your clinic.

- The IUD will prevent pregnancy for up to 5 years. If you have an IUD fitted, you will be protected from pregnancy whenever you have sex. Neither of these will protect you from HIV or STIs, though!

Also remember that emergency contraception cannot prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections or HIV/AIDS.

Get condoms, guys!
Abortion

In South Africa, you have the right to keep your baby or terminate your pregnancy if you go to the clinic early enough. You have the power to decide, but don’t expect the decision to be easy... Whatever you choose will be with you for the rest of your life.

- It is your right to get counselling.
- It is your right to get an abortion in a public health facility.
- It is your choice.

Deciding what’s right
You’re pregnant, or you’ve heard that your girlfriend is. You didn’t plan it, you don’t want it. You’re thinking about abortion, but you’re worried about it and you’re scared to talk to anyone. You’re making major life decisions here and ultimately nobody, but you, can know what’s right for you in your circumstances. This loveFact answers some of the questions you have about ending a pregnancy.

Help, I’m pregnant! I can’t tell anyone. What can I do?
Talk to someone – a health worker, a counsellor, someone you can trust. Listen to them and to others. There are difficult decisions to make and you need support and information about your choices. It is very hard to do this alone. You may want to continue the pregnancy. Your family could help you raise your child, or you could give the baby up for foster care or adoption. You may want to end your pregnancy by having an abortion (TOP – Termination of Pregnancy). This is the option that we’ll discuss here.

We’re underage and our parents don’t know that we are a couple. Can we end the pregnancy without our parents’ permission?
Yes, a young woman or girl of any age can decide to have a TOP. It seems as if the two of you are supporting each other, but it’s still a good idea to talk to an adult. You are both very young to deal with an unplanned pregnancy. It will bring up many feelings and if you talk about things, you can avoid regrets and feel peaceful about your choice.

What can a guy do?
I don’t want my girlfriend to have an abortion. What can I do?
The law says that it is her decision. Explain how you feel and why. Talk about how you can support her if she keeps the child. Show her that you care, but in the end you have to let her make a choice. Speak to a health worker or counsellor so that you get support and understanding too.

How can I best support my girlfriend?
- Let her talk about how she feels. Be kind and understand that she may feel a sense of loss.
- Talk to her about your feelings.
- Help her feel special – even a cup of tea can help.
- Cry together if you want.
- Celebrate together if you want.
- Wait before you suggest sex and take it easy and gently.
- Use contraception.

It’s normal to feel scared or unsure about important decisions, but you don’t have to do this alone. Talk to someone until you feel sure about your choices. Get counselling at a clinic, or the loveLife contact centre on 0800 121 900 or send a Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023. If you decide to have a TOP, find someone to go with you to the clinic.
When can I have a TOP?
Termination of Pregnancy (TOP) means ending an unwanted pregnancy. It is also called Abortion. Abortion is legal and free. It is safe when done by a professional health worker at a hospital or clinic. Back-street abortions are very dangerous. The sooner the better! If you decide to have a TOP, the sooner you have one the better.

It’s safest and easiest to have an abortion in the first three months (12 weeks) of pregnancy.
- From 13 to 20 weeks, you can only have an abortion if it’s dangerous for you, if the foetus has abnormalities, or if you’re pregnant from rape or incest (sex with a member of your family).
- From 20 weeks, you can only end the pregnancy if it is putting your life at risk or if the foetus is not developing properly.

What do I have to do?
Make an appointment now because it can take time. Not all clinics or hospitals do them. If yours doesn’t, ask to be referred to another doctor, clinic or hospital. You can also free-phone Marie Stopes Clinics 0800 117 785 or the loveLife contact centre on 0800 121 900 or send a Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023.

What happens in an abortion?
Firstly the girl will need to sign a form that allows the abortion to be done. Then if it’s during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, it’s simple and can be done while awake. An injection is given at the opening of the womb and, using a tube, a gentle suction clears out the womb. It can be quite sore and tablets are usually given to help with the pain. If it’s done after three months, it is more difficult. You may need an operation and a few days in hospital.

How much does it cost?
Abortion is free at some Government clinics and hospitals. Private clinics charge for it. You can get an abortion done at Marie Stopes Clinics 0800 117 785 if you are happy to pay for the service.

What will happen afterwards?
Most girls go home after an hour or two. Be gentle! There will be bleeding for a few days (up to 10 days). This is a bit heavier than a normal period, but avoid tampons and sex in case of infection. Take it easy, don’t exercise and get some rest. Go back to the clinic if you vomit or bleed heavily, if you have a discharge or if you get a fever. It is important to go to the clinic after about two weeks, so that they can check that you have healed. You can also talk to them if you are worried about anything.
P.S. Don’t forget to get contraceptives.

How will I feel?
After an abortion, it is common to want to be alone, feel tearful and be unable to make decisions for a while. You will also feel a sense of relief. Some people like to do a ritual to end the process — light a candle, plant a flower, write a poem or go for a long walk. If you get depressed, talk to a counsellor or health worker.

Who will know that I’ve had an abortion?
No one needs to know. The clinic will keep the information confidential. You won’t look different, or put on weight. You can choose who you want to tell.

After a TOP, can I get pregnant again?
Yes, definitely! A TOP done by a trained health worker, does not make you infertile. (Take note guys, make sure you dress up in condoms.) You don’t need permission from anybody to have an abortion and nobody can force you to have one either. Whatever you decide, deal with any feelings of guilt and distress whenever they arise — even if years later. You’ve nothing to hide or be ashamed of. Talk to a friend and seek professional help if you need it.
Testing positive for HIV is devastating and can make you feel helpless and despondent. You have to take care of your life and your future. As you’ll see, you still have a lot of power to decide your future.

The younger you are, the less chance you’ll test HIV positive. One in thirty 15 year olds is HIV positive, but by the time they turn 21, one in four women is infected. By age 25 one in men are positive. Test soon, test often and make life choices that protect yourself as much as possible. If you test HIV positive, you need knowledge to live a long and healthy life. So here goes:

**BASICS OF HIV**

*Where did HIV come from?*

A virus causing similar symptoms to Aids appeared in the 1950s in central and southern Africa. A recent study has found the strongest evidence shows that HIV-1 probably originated in chimpanzees. Researchers are not sure when HIV was spread from chimpanzees to humans, and how it happened – but if it did, it was somewhere between 1920 and 1945. It’s not unusual for animal viruses to mutate into human forms; an example is the common ‘flu’ bug.

*What’s the difference between HIV and Aids?*

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes Aids (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). If you’re HIV+, this means that you have tested positive for HIV, but that does not mean that you automatically have Aids. People can live healthily for years with HIV. However, if you are HIV+ you can transmit HIV to someone even when you feel healthy. A diagnosis of Aids happens when an HIV+ person’s immune system becomes very weak and shows a very low CD4 count (the receptor on the T-cells that help to keep your immune system strong) or comes down with an opportunistic infection (a disease that may occur if the body has a low T-cell [CD4] count).
Is there a cure?
No, there is no cure for HIV or Aids. However, HIV is not an immediate “death sentence”, nor does it mean that you have Aids. There is more research being done every day, and there are many medications that help HIV+ people to live healthy and long lives.

When will I get Aids?
There is no way to tell. With the help of recent treatments, HIV+ people have been living increasingly healthy lives, and some HIV+ people have lived for years without developing Aids. But you need to take care of yourself!

What’s the deal with the Aids vaccine?
Unfortunately, there is no Aids vaccine at this time. Researchers are working on developing a vaccine that would prevent people from getting HIV and on other vaccines to prevent or slow onset of Aids in HIV+ people. They wouldn’t be a cure; but a way of preventing new HIV infection.

What types of people get HIV?
HIV does not discriminate. Everyone is susceptible, and there is no “type” of person who becomes infected. It is important to remember that it’s not who you are, but what you do that puts you at risk for HIV infection.

What can I do to stay healthy?
Eating a balanced diet, not abusing alcohol or taking drugs, keeping in shape, getting enough rest, creating a low-stress environment, and taking your prescribed medications regularly will help you stay as healthy as possible.

Where do I go for help after I test positive?
It will probably be difficult to think after you get your test results, but try asking yourself “What’s next?” Based on your answer, you’ll probably end up considering talking to a friend or family member and figuring out where to go for good medical information in order to treat symptoms and/or stay healthy.
Am I a bad person because I got HIV?
No way! HIV is not and should not be a moral issue — the fact that you are living with and fighting this virus does not change who you are. You should not feel guilty that you are positive, and it definitely does not mean that you are a bad person.

Am I going to die young?
How long HIV+ people live varies a lot — some even live without treatment for many years. But on average, HIV/AIDS reduces your lifespan, even if you are on treatment. People are living longer and longer with HIV with better medications and healthier living. Also, medical researchers are working everyday on finding a cure for AIDS.

Are there people in my community who will accept me?
Yes, definitely. We know that people are reluctant to talk about their status, yet communities are generally very supportive of people living with HIV! Talk with a trusted person at the clinic, or leader within your religious community or at a local HIV/AIDS organisation. Ask what their thoughts are on HIV/AIDS in general and then, if you’re comfortable, consider sharing your status. Many people find that involvement with supportive groups within their community can be very helpful in their fight to stay healthy.

How can I be an activist?
If you’re interested in being an HIV/AIDS activist, you can look into being a peer educator or an HIV+ spokesperson. Talk with the Clinic Manager, Youth Friendly Services Team Leader or other local HIV/AIDS organisations and see if they are looking for volunteers, or if they have any opportunities for positive young people to speak in the community. You may also want to think about joining or starting an activist group of your own.
What do healthcare providers check for at my appointments?

To gauge your health and how HIV is progressing in your body, doctors or nurses mainly check for two things: They can run a viral load test to find out the amount of virus in your body. In general, a high viral load will help determine that your T-cell count may start dropping soon. A T-cell (CD4) count is also taken and tells you how your immune system is doing at that time. The more T-cells you have, the healthier you are overall. If your T-cell count is going up, that's always a good thing. Health care practitioners mainly determine your overall health after considering both your current viral load and your T-cell (CD4) count.

Why does it seem like men transmit HIV more easily to women?

In general, the ‘insertive partner’ (who puts the penis in) is more likely to transmit HIV to the ‘receptive partner’ (who receives the penis) than the other way around. This goes for vaginal or anal sex between a man and a woman and for anal sex between two men. This is true for a few reasons. First, the likelihood of the ‘receptive partner’ getting tears in either the vagina or anus is far greater than the risk of transmission for the ‘insertive partner’. An additional reason that it is more likely for men to transmit HIV to women, rather than the other way around, is that, after blood, semen is the bodily fluid that has the highest concentration of virus in it. This helps explain why it is less likely for sexual partners of HIV+ women to be infected from vaginal fluid or breast milk (the fluid with the lowest viral load) than for sexual partners of HIV+ men, even though it is still possible to be infected through unprotected contact with vaginal fluids or breast milk.

Will my family act differently around me?

It is hard to predict the attitudes and reactions of your family members when you disclose your HIV status to them. Before you even get tested for the virus, try to have some sort of support system in place, so that you are certain to have the support of at least a few friends or family members. Hopefully, your family is knowledgeable about HIV and knows that there is no way for others to be infected through casual contact with you. Most people find that their families and friends treat them no differently than they always have. Your family may have the same concerns you have: your health and well-being, your future relationships, whether you are going to live or die. If your family and friends have not been well educated about HIV/AIDS, then the only way that they will start to feel comfortable with these issues is by learning about HIV/AIDS. Sometimes people get scared of things that they know nothing about, and once they know all the facts, it will be a lot easier for them to understand.
Can I still have children?

Yes. You should be able to make your own decisions about childbirth and parenting now that you have HIV. If you are considering becoming pregnant, you may encounter some people who believe that it is not right for you to give birth as a positive woman, or father a child as a positive man. The reality of this situation is that the choice whether or not to have children is yours. It is right for a woman to make her own reproductive decisions, and this is true for every woman, whether or not you are HIV+. Having a child obviously requires much time, energy, support, and resources, and these are all factors that need to be considered, regardless of your HIV status. It is important, if and when you decide to become a parent, that you are aware of the treatment and risk reduction options available for you and your child. You have the right to be informed of all risks and benefits in order to make the best decisions for you and your child.

Will my child have HIV?

If you do not take any medication during your pregnancy, there is roughly a 20 -30% chance that your child will be infected with HIV. Look into the different options available to you to decrease the chance of your child being infected. Doses of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) to the mother during pregnancy and to the baby for the first six weeks after birth can significantly reduce the baby’s risk of HIV infection. Generally, having a C-section birth, as opposed to a natural birth, also reduces the risk of passing HIV on to your child.

If you are pregnant or are considering becoming pregnant, talk to a nurse or PMTCT counsellor to learn about all the options available to you and your child so that you can make an informed decision. Decide whether you plan to breastfeed or bottlefeed. If you can’t afford bottle milk all the time or don’t have easy access to clean water to wash the bottle, breastfeeding is best. But if you decide to breastfeed, stick with it for six months. Don’t mix breastfeeding and bottlefeeding.
When should I tell people that I’m positive?
Whenever you feel comfortable. It may take you a long time to disclose your status, or you may want to tell some people right after you find out. Most likely, there will be some people you will choose to tell and others you won’t. Tell a trusted friend or family member soon after you find out. Finding out you’re positive can be overwhelming to deal with on your own, so having someone to talk to and trust is really important.

How do I tell my partner, family, and/or friends?
There is no one right way to tell the people that you care about. You may want to talk to people individually or you might prefer to talk to people in a group. There are also other ways of disclosure, like writing a letter. When you decide to tell people, think about doing so in a comfortable and comforting environment.

Do I have to tell my partner or anyone I’m in a sexual relationship with in the future?
Although it may be difficult, tell anyone you plan on having a sexual relationship with that you’re HIV+. Because this person will be put at risk, you’ll both need to take precautions during every sexual encounter.

Do I have to tell the people at school?
No, you don’t have to tell anyone at school. However, you may want to consider informing your teacher if you have to deal with medications or other issues during school hours. However, if you’re considering telling someone at your school, you may want to consider talking to a family member or trusted adult first in order to figure out how best to inform your school.
How do I talk to the person I think I got HIV from?
You may want to talk to the person who you think infected you with HIV, if you feel it is safe for you to do so. First, you’ll probably want to get some of your emotions off your chest. More importantly, it’s necessary because the person who transmitted the virus to you may not even know that he or she is infected. When you talk to this person, as upset as you may be, remember that staying calm is important. Although you have every right to be angry, your news may be a shock to the person that you’re telling, and being aggressive can cause problems for both of you. Talking to the person is important because you’ll want to express how you feel, but it’s also important to remember that it won’t change your status. No matter what the person’s reaction is, think about what you need and what the next step for you is.

What should I do if the people I tell react badly?
Unfortunately, this is a real possibility, although most people are surprised at how supportive their families are. It’s important to anticipate any type of response you may receive. If you’re fearful of a negative reaction, be prepared ahead of time with what you’ll say or how you’ll react. For example, if there is a possibility that you won’t want to stay in your house that night, ask a friend ahead of time if you could stay with him or her. Think of one trusted person you can depend on and talk to, if the other people in your life are not supportive. However, also remember that sometimes people need time to deal with life-changing news. The people you tell will most likely be shocked and upset because they care about you, so they may need some time before they can respond in a supportive way.

I don’t feel like I can tell anyone and I’m really depressed. Where can I go for help?
If you want to talk to someone about your status but just don’t know where to go to, look into joining a local support group or talk to someone at a local HIV/Aids organisation, like Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). Also, if you just want to talk to someone for support and advice, you can call loveLife’s thethajunction at 0800 121 900, the National Aids Helpline at 0800 012 322.
Dealing with Medication

What are the types of medications I might have to take? What do they do?

Although there are effective treatments that slow the progression of HIV (by reducing your viral load) and other medications that reduce the risk of many opportunistic diseases, it is still complicated for doctors to prescribe medications to teenagers, because it is sometimes hard to know whether medical professionals should treat youth as adults or children in terms of which treatment combinations will work. Your doctors may prescribe different combinations of medications for you, and it is hard to know which types of treatment they will try first. Still, we look at the varying categories of HIV medications, so that you will be aware of the basics of each type.

The first type of drug used to treat HIV infection is NRTI (Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors). This drug class, which can be abbreviated as “nukes,” prevent the first step the virus takes in copying itself by interfering with an enzyme called reverse transcriptase.

The second category of HIV medications is the NNRTI (Non-Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors) or “non-nukes” that also work to prevent HIV from copying itself.

Protease Inhibitors (PIs) are the final category of HIV drugs. PIs work at a different point in the cycle of the virus, and they block an enzyme called protease that HIV also uses in copying itself.

What is a “cocktail”?

A “cocktail,” also known as combination therapy, means taking two or more anti-retroviral drugs together to fight HIV. Before the past decade or so, most people were just given prescriptions of a single drug to fight the virus, such as AZT (the most common ‘nuke’). With these commonly prescribed dosages of a single drug, the amount of HIV (the viral load) in the blood generally lowered by about seventy percent.

With the combined effort of one or more of these older drugs with newer ones, such as some of the protease inhibitors, people’s viral loads have lowered by as much as ninety-nine percent or more. Most HIV treatments now involve several different drugs, and these combination therapies have helped many people live much longer and healthier lives.

At this time, there are two combination regimens or “cocktails” recommended by the Department of Health ARV Guidelines for adults. These are:

- **Regimen 1a** d4T, 3TC and Efavirenz
- **Regimen 1b** d4T, 3TC and Nevirapine
- **Regimen 2** AZT, ddI / lopinavir / ritonavir

A medical assessment will determine which regime is most suitable for you.

What are the side effects of HIV treatments?

As in the case of any powerful drugs, HIV medications can cause a variety of side effects. Some common side effects are fatigue, nausea, and diarrhea. Depending on a variety of factors, you may see weight gain or loss in particular areas of your body, which is known as “lipodystrophy syndrome.” Usually, this fat gain or loss is more apparent if you are either overweight or underweight at the start of treatment.
What can I do to decrease side effects of my medications?

The good thing is there are many small changes in your lifestyle that can help decrease the severity of the medication’s effects. It’s especially important when taking medications to live a healthy lifestyle, which means not smoking or drinking more than one glass of wine or beer, eating nutritional and low-fat foods, and getting the right amount of exercise.

Can I get medication without telling my parents?

Legally, you have full responsibility over your treatment decisions. This means that no law explicitly requires parental consent for testing or treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

Where do I go to get medication?

If you’re not comfortable going to your doctor, you may want to check out the health clinics in your area and find another doctor that you like to monitor your health and to prescribe medications for you. If you got tested at a local clinic, you may want to ask them about treatment options. You can always call an HIV/AIDS helpline such as the National Aids Hotline at 0800 072 322 for the hospitals or clinics that have good services for HIV-positive youth in your area.

Do I have to take medication even if I look and feel healthy?

You cannot be forced to take any medication, but most doctors recommend trying some HIV drugs once your immune system shows signs of depletion, since medication can do so much to control the HIV in your body and to keep the virus from replicating itself and making you feel worse. It may be really hard at first to understand why you should keep taking medications whose side effects make you feel worse than you did before you took any. The drugs need to be powerful to slow down the HIV in your body, so that’s why they might make you feel sick sometimes. In so many cases, though, it’s worth it because starting medications early will help you stay much healthier and keep your T-cells up longer.
Will people still want to go out with me now that I have HIV?

Being HIV+ will not prevent other people from caring about you, although dating/relationships may be difficult in ways you aren’t used to. Many HIV+ people are in long-term relationships, both with HIV+ and HIV- people. What’s important is finding someone who accepts you as you are. HIV will probably just be another factor to consider in your relationship.

When should I tell someone I like that I’m positive?

It’s important to be honest with the person you care about; however, that does not mean that you have to tell someone immediately. Informing someone you’re interested in that you’re HIV+ is a difficult issue and should be done when you feel most comfortable and at the time you think is best. It should definitely be before you have sex with your partner.

Can I still have sex?

Yes, you can still have sex; however, it’s important to discuss your status with your partner or potential partner and always use condoms during any and every sexual act.
What are some lower risk things I can do to feel good?
Abstinence from sex is the surest way to avoid unwanted pregnancy, re-infection with other strains of HIV, and other STIs. Many HIV+ young people choose activities other than full-on sex such as hugging, kissing, talking, massage and intimate touching and stimulation. If you do choose to have sex, be responsible and protect yourself and your partner. The basic rule is that you should use a latex (or polyurethane, if you’re allergic to latex) barrier EVERY TIME there is a potential exchange of body fluids.

How do I maintain a healthy relationship?
A healthy relationship basically means that both partners feel supported and feel good about the emotional and physical aspects of the relationship. Communication is key to keeping a good relationship, not only in terms of physical health and negotiating protection if the relationship is sexual, but also in terms of knowing how your partner is feeling about everything that’s going on in your relationship. Depending on your partner for certain things is okay, but it’s probably not a good sign if you feel like she or he is all you have and everything in your life is dependent upon what they say, do or think. It’s also so important that, if you don’t feel like you are in a safe or healthy relationship, you have a support system of friends and/or family so that you can get out of that situation and not have to deal with everything on your own.

Why do I still need to use latex condoms if my partner is HIV+ too?
Always use latex condoms to protect yourself and your partner during sex (vaginal, oral, or anal), even if you have both tested positive for HIV. There are different strains of the virus and one of you could end up getting sicker if you are infected with a strain that was not already in your body. That complicates the body’s fight against HIV. Repeated infections can speed up progression from HIV infection to full-blown AIDS.

If your partner has become resistant to certain medications (meaning there are drugs that his/her body doesn’t respond to) s/he can pass that resistant strain of HIV on to you. If this happens, then your medications may not work for you anymore and there may be fewer possible drug combinations for you to try. In addition to these HIV-related issues, there are so many other STIs out there that hopefully you don’t have. You need to keep using protection, especially now that you have HIV, because with your immune system weakened, you are even more susceptible to other infections, including STIs. Having to fight another unnecessary infection is definitely not what your body needs, and it would impair your health in general. Basically, whether you are positive or not, it’s always a better idea to be safe and protect yourself.
HIV testing tools

Don’t want HIV? Make YOUR Move to know where you stand by getting tested – and then test regularly to be extra sure.

Why you should take an HIV test...
It’s best to take an HIV test to know your status, so if you’re negative you’re encouraged to protect yourself to keep it that way by using a condom every time you have sex. If you’re positive, you know to get onto the right treatment, care and support as soon as possible – and of course to use a condom each and every time to protect yourself from being re-infected which could make you sick a lot quicker – and to avoid infecting your partner.

Where to take an HIV test...
Hospitals, health centres, clinics, mobile units and non-medical sites, like some corporations, all offer HIV testing. Only doctors, nurses, laboratory technologist or technicians are allowed to do HIV tests. Testing policy requires that all people be offered pre and post-test counselling for HIV testing. No one can force you to take an HIV test against your will.

The “HIV test” actually tests for…
HIV tests can either just detect HIV antibodies (proteins produced by the body to help fight HIV) or detect both the HIV antibody and HIV antigen (virus). People who test HIV positive, can either have the HIV 1 or HIV 2 strain. HIV 1 is the most common strain in South Africa, while HIV 2 is more widespread in Central and West Africa. The HI-virus attacks the immune system making people vulnerable to so-called secondary infections like pneumonia and TB. Over time the immune system will weaken so much that you become terminally ill if not provided with antiretroviral treatment (ARTs) – Aids drugs that can prolong your life. If you wait until you are too sick to begin ARTs they may not be effective, so the sooner you know your status the better chance you have of ensuring your health.
Understanding results...
An HIV positive (Reactive) result means you are infected with the HI virus while a non-reactive result means the opposite, you are not infected (HIV negative).

Testing three months after your first test…
If you test negative after your first test, you must go for another test after three months. People only produce measurable HIV antibodies after three to six weeks of infection. The period before antibodies are developed is called the ‘window period’. So if you take a test during the window period, you may test negative – even though you may be positive – as antibodies have not yet formed. Coming back after three months means enough HIV antibodies have been made to ensure whether or not you have HIV. You should take a HIV test if you have put yourself at risk of HIV infection.

Regular testing should be a routine part of your life. If you are sexually active, even if you have one partner and/or always use protection, getting tested every year is the sensible thing to do. It gives you absolute control of your life to know where you stand with HIV. Don’t live in fear, knowing is beautiful.

HIV tests available…
The most common types of HIV tests:
- Rapid (detects HIV antibodies; 15 minutes results turnaround; blood tested on site but should be confirmed by a lab test to be absolutely sure).
- ELISA (detects HIV antibodies; 1 hour to 48 hours results turnaround; blood tested in laboratory).
- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) (detects both HIV antibodies and antigens; prevention of mother-to-child transmission; blood tested in laboratory).
- Western Blot (detects both HIV antibodies and antigens; blood tested in laboratory).

All public clinics offer HIV testing. For more information, call loveLife call centre at 0800 121 900 or send a Plz Cal Me to 083 323 1023 or the Aids Helpline 0800 012 322
Condoms for him and her

If you have full-on sex, condoms are the best way to prevent HIV transmission. Used properly, they’re over 99% effective. Don’t want HIV? Use a condom.

- They’re cheap, or free at clinics
- You can get them from many places – garages, cafes, supermarkets, pharmacies, taxi ranks, etc.
- You don’t need a prescription from a doctor
- They’re easy to use
- They can be great fun
- They have no side effects or health risks
- You can relax totally – lots of good feelings and no unwanted pregnancies

Why are condoms so popular?
Condoms are the only contraceptives that give you the best protection from HIV/AIDS infection, STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and pregnancy. Condoms stop body fluids from being shared between lovers during sex. This means safe – no HIV, STIs, and no pregnancy!

THE PERFECT FIT
Male condoms can feel loose on some guys and tight on others, but they stretch to fit any erect teenage or adult penis. Make sure your penis is hard before you try pulling on the condom – better still, have your partner slide it on. Leave a little space in the condom at the head of your penis to catch your semen when you come.

“Condoms are too small or too tight for me to wear”
Well, how big are you, buddy? You can pull a condom over your fist and down onto your arm, you can also stretch one over your head – if you’re bigger than this, it’s a record. Go on guys, find the perfect condoms for you and use them like a pro!
CONDOM SEX

HIV is spread mainly through penetrative sex (in the vagina, anus or mouth). For all kinds of sex, the condom is the only way to protect yourself and your lover from HIV/AIDS, an unplanned pregnancy and STIs.

HOT CONDOM TIPS

- Carry condoms with you (you never know when you’ll get the chance for some loving).
- Check the expiry date on the packet.
- Don’t carry condoms in a pocket or somewhere warm. They could melt or split.
- Never re-use a condom. If you’ve just had sex and you want more immediately, you need a new condom. Always have more condoms than you think you’ll use, just in case!
- The male condom could slip off if a guy loses his erection inside the girl. If this happens, hold the bottom of the condom and pull it out.
- You may need some help to slip inside your partner, but only use spit or KY Jelly. Oils can cause the condoms to split. This means no Vaseline, baby oil, massage oils, or anything you are not sure of!
- A long nail or your zip could tear the condom.
- If your condom does split, you can use Emergency Contraception within five days, but you may still have been infected with HIV or an STI.

HOW TO USE A COMDOM

I feel shy about using a condom for the first time

Practise to give you confidence (alone or in sexy games with your partner). It’s important to use condoms properly to be safe. Follow our illustrated guide on this page but before that, read the tips below:
Do condoms stop the sexy feelings?
Sex with a condom could feel different, but you can still really enjoy sexy feelings. And most men can go longer before ejaculating (coming) when they wear a condom — stretch the pleasure! Some people prefer a condom feeling (of course, if you know you’re safe from pregnancy and disease, you can relax and have more fun). Condoms got a bad name in the past when they were made from thick material. Today, they are really thin (you can even feel a tickle with a feather). Try them!

What if a condom gets stuck inside?
People often worry about this, but there is no need to worry. A girl has a cervix at the top of her vagina, which blocks the entrance to the womb. If a condom slips off it can’t go far — so relax! Use your fingers and pull it out (same for anal sex).

Because of the risk of pregnancy and HIV, you should go to the clinic the next day for emergency contraception and get tested for HIV then and in 3 months time.
Don’t re-use condoms — use a new one every time!

I’m scared that my partner will think I’ve been unfaithful
Using condoms shows care for you and your partner. Remember, even if only one of you has had only one lover, you are both still at risk of HIV/AIDS or an STI. You could also become parents. Talk to your partner about this. Also, if your partner doesn’t trust you, it could mean that he or she doesn’t truly care for you or has something to hide.

Free condoms from the clinic are as good as the ones for which you pay.
Did you know?
Many people who complain about condoms have never even tried them.

You are young, healthy, sexy and full of life – no reason you can possibly think of is enough reason to throw your life away for the sake of SEX.
Sex is great, but it is not worth your life. Imagine your life. Imagine your future. Take control. Now!
Staying clear of STIs

STI stands for Sexually Transmitted Infection (also known as STD). There are different types of infections that you can get from having sex with someone who has one. Sometimes you can get a STI without having sex — like thrush. You can also get crabs (pubic lice) from sharing a washcloth or towel with an infected person.

Healthy discharges like wet dreams or secretions are normal when we are excited. Girls will have a creamy discharge when they are ovulating too. But if it turns to cream cheese, is green or yellow, or has a funny smell, then it is a high priority that you get it checked out at the clinic. Our bodies tell us if something is wrong, so listen!

What’s happening to me?
Your private parts are itching, smelly or sore. The burning is intense when you urinate, or you have blisters, warts or sores inside your vagina or on your penis. You may have pus, swelling or a weird discharge, or you may feel pain during sex — maybe you’re not even sure if you have any symptoms, you’re just getting bad vibes. Warning! You could have a STI. Move it, baby, this is your beautiful body we’re rapping about. Keeping healthy is number one on the list.

What’s the big deal about STIs?
Sometimes you can’t even feel them!
The longer you have a STI, the more dangerous it is. It is very important to get treatment as soon as you have a hint that you may be infected. If untreated, STIs can make you infertile (even if you have no symptoms). Many can be cured, but some, like HIV and herpes, cannot. Also, if you have a STI, you are more likely to get infected with HIV. If you are pregnant when you have a STI, you can infect your baby. So get real, STIs are a big deal.

Avoid the itch
So, how do I protect myself?
Protection is at your fingertips. Condoms. Condoms give you excellent protection, even against STIs that you cannot see (such as HIV/Aids). If you are having sex regularly, go to the clinic for check-ups. Ask questions and get all the info you need. Look after your sexy body parts, baby, and they’ll look after you!

But it’s not all plain sailing. There’s a nasty dude called the herpes virus that can still be transmitted — even if you use a condom. (It doesn’t get through the condom; it gets around it because it’s found on the skin. And it seems that having herpes makes it easier to get HIV next time round. If your partner has genital herpes, consider ways to touch each other that don’t involve genital-to-genital contact. You can’t get herpes by touching her with your fingers.

The drop, the itch, gonorrhoea, bad blood, syphilis, HIV, Aids, the big A, crabs, morning drip, herpes, fever kiss, the clap, cystitis, VD – whatever you wanna call it, make sure you’re not gonna get it! And, if you think you’ve got it, get it treated!
Here are some tips:

- Some clinics take pride in being youth-friendly. Look for one in your area.
- Take a friend along.
- Remember it is your right to get treatment.
- It’s your life, it’s your sex and it’s your health. A bit of stress can be worth it.
- Do whatever it takes to get treatment – deal with the crap, be polite, hang your head and be silent, if that’s what it takes. Later you can laugh with relief.
- Remind yourself that a hard time at the clinic is bad, but a STI is worse.
- Practise safe sex – then you won’t have to go back again!

Yeah, but how do I make it right?
Most STIs can be cured if you get treatment early. Don’t delay or wait until you have swelling the size of pool balls, sores that look like hot coals, or smell like a fish and chips shop – get to the clinic, like now, if you suspect there’s a problem. You’ll be given pills or injections, usually antibiotics like penicillin (warn them if you’re allergic) – remember, you must finish your treatment! If you stop the pills when your symptoms go away, you can still have the virus and will not be cured.

But now we have to get to the nitty gritty. It’s way bad getting an STI – now you still have to tell your kind! If you have chosen to sleep with a playa, there’s a good chance you will be blamed or accused of being unfaithful and have to put up with anger or abuse (another good reason to use condoms always and choose lovers with care!). Telling your lover is very important. If your partner is infected and does not go for treatment, you will be re-infected. So they have to go for treatment. You also want to prevent it from spreading to others.

How do you do it?
Ask a friend for support, phone thethajunction 0800 121 900 for advice or ask your lover to go with you to the clinic. If you feel angry, dirty or are told you’re to blame, know that you did the right thing. Walk proud and dis the gossips – tell them to get a life!

Sometimes you can have a STI without any signs or symptoms. If your partner has symptoms, get yourself checked. Sometimes – for example with syphilis – the signs go away, but the infection stays. Don’t ignore any signs, even if they stop.

Keep yourself healthy and get regular check-ups. Make sure you get tested for HIV at the same time. Best to know where you stand.

Condoms, my friend, that’s the only way to go! See loveFacts on condoms for hot tips on how to wear them with style. Stay on top of what’s happening, keep yourself informed and your sexy body in form!

What if the person at the clinic judges me?
Okay, so sometimes the person at the clinic can be unfriendly or doesn’t seem to care. Maybe they think you’re too young for sex, maybe you’re embarrassed to expose yourself to an older person. Whatever, clinic visits can be stressful.

COURAGE AT THE CLINIC

TOUGH TALK
Some boys are circumcised at birth or soon after birth for traditional or religious reasons. A few boys need to be circumcised for medical reasons (such as a foreskin that is too tight). For some boys (Xhosa, Ndebele, Venda, Shangaan and Pedi), circumcision is part of the initiation process into manhood.
Is it true that circumcised men have a lower risk of HIV infection?
Yes, a number of recent studies show that men who have been circumcised (i.e. had the foreskin of their penis cut off by a medical doctor or traditional healer) have lower rates of HIV infection.

However, there are many, many circumcised men who have HIV infection. It’s no guarantee.

Does that mean that circumcised men don’t have to use condoms?
No it does not. The risk is lower, but unprotected sex is still high risk sex – whether you are circumcised or not. It’s like playing Russian roulette with 3 bullets instead of five: putting three bullets in a gun chamber, spinning the chamber, putting the gun to your head and pulling the trigger. You still have a big risk of killing yourself.

Circumcised men who think that they are protected and so can sleep around and not use condoms end up at greater risk than uncircumcised men who have one partner and always use a condom.

Should I be circumcised to prevent HIV?
That’s up to you. If you decide that you want to be as safe as possible by getting circumcised, that’s fine.

BUT:
Some boys who attend traditional circumcision schools end up with serious infections (septicaemia) and some die. This happens when the knife used for circumcision is not properly sterilized. So if you are planning to go to the mountain, get your family to check out the initiation school and ensure that no initiate had got sick or died there before.

The risk of infection (septicaemia) is much smaller in a hospital, although cultural traditions may prevent you from being circumcised there. Circumcision in hospitals is done in an operating theatre under sterile conditions. The healing time from medical circumcision is shorter too. Talk to your family. Decide what’s most important for you and your family. Weigh up the risks and take all precautions to avoid them.

You can avoid HIV!
Whether you’re circumcised or not, you can avoid HIV by:
- Waiting till you’re older to have sex
- Having one sexual partner only
- Using a condom every time you have sex
- Knowing where you stand with HIV
Powering the FUTURE
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