

Being a good parent

A good parent has one-to-one time for their children.

If you want to help your children be fulfilled and lead a happy life, you have to know how to do that yourself. It's not enough just to lecture them on what they should be doing, no matter how well you mean it. You need to be passionate about something yourself, and lead by example. Learn to play an instrument, or take an evening class. Demonstrate to them that life is for enjoying but that you have to work at it.

A good parent is one who supports their son or daughter, but doesn't try to live through them.

A cornerstone of good emotional support is encouraging the young individual to see the role they are playing in their present situation, and to encourage them to generate ideas for how they can handle things positively. Resist the temptation to advise or prescribe because not only might they not take ownership of the solution, but they might not learn how to think for themselves in such situations. What's needed is a safety-net so that when mistakes are made the individual doesn't fall too far, but don't interfere with people making those mistakes, because that's how the best learning gets done.

Money is the very last thing that teenagers truly appreciate or need. If you really want to give your child the 'best things money can buy', help them learn how to earn their own money, and how to invest what they earn in making the most of their lives.

If you as a parent are passionate about something, your children will find something for themselves to take pleasure in.

Parents should trust schools more and support the teachers. It would be nice if they could try to spend some informal time with teachers, like visiting the school on a sports day or maybe offering some professional help with something. Parents too often seem to visit schools only in times of crisis or conflict.

Intrinsic motivation is everything. As a parent, you should encourage your children to find out for themselves what suits them, what thrills them, what brings them pride. If you push rather than support them, at some stage they will be forced to reject you and your 'sales-pitch,' just to establish their own independence. This might take the form of school failure, eating disorders, substance-abuse or a wrong career. Such self-sabotage doesn't reflect what they really want, only what they feel they need to do to counterbalance the pressure that you are putting on them. One of the fundamental desires of any individual is to establish him or herself as a separate entity.

Parents should be accountable for their views and actions just as much as the child, so that the child appreciates that everyone - and that means everyone - is responsible for how they behave, and can be held to account for that behaviour.

You mustn't go through your teenager's bin when you're pretending to tidy their room! You have to respect their independence or they will have to push you away.

Ask your children to teach you things from time to time: a hobby, a sport, how to use a computer or surf the web.

Competent adults should proactively volunteer themselves as a mentor to young people. You are needed, but you can't wait for the 14 or 18 or 21 year old to ask for your help. The ones that most need your help will more than likely be too shy, so you have to offer them your support, encouragement and a willingness to listen.

Teenagers can be very good at hiding even serious and long-term anguish and problems. Don't ignore the eager-to-please teenager who seems to be muddling through. They still need your encouragement and care.

If you found this section interesting, you might like to try these other sections:

- **Your values and priorities**
- **Training, teaching and coaching**
- **Communicating your emotions**

Love & friendship

Strong relationships bring great satisfaction.

People most often like us for our individuality and the original contribution we make to their lives.

The key test of a friendship is who can I call up and talk to and depend on when the chips are down, or in a crisis. Do they think I'm worth the hassle?

Respect is a fundamental ingredient. Respect other people when they deserve it. Work to have them respect you, and respect yourself.

It is helpful if a circle of friends can challenge and encourage each other.

True friends are open with their criticisms of you when you need it, and full of nothing but support when you need it.

Meeting the right person can inspire you to transform yourself - to strive to be a better sort so you deserve their love.

There's such pleasure in feeling responsible for individuals and things beyond oneself. Selfishness is one of the greatest mistakes tempting any young person today.

Being loved and loving is the essence of life. Finding that someone special who creates in you the desire to be a better person.

Being single can make you feel rejected and alone, but you have to remember how many other people out there are in the same singles boat. Don't worry, and don't think you're only any good if you're going out with someone.

Meeting new people will require you to take part in activities which are most likely to attract the sort of people you would like to get to know - be it for companionship, sexual relations, or love affairs. This may mean joining something like a drama group, sports team, band, choir, dance class or film club. While you are enjoying the activity in their company, you have a chance to get to know each other, to see how you each behave with other people, and to see what you're letting yourselves in for.

Chose your friends carefully. Test them out occasionally, and reward them whenever you can. So often, it seems, friendships are accidental, occurring only because you happen to be thrown together. Would you buy a pair of shoes by accident? So why rely on making friends that way?

Contact with friends who also have ambition is so important. It doesn't have to be ambition for the same things, but they need to have drive. Drifters are very distracting. They suck the energy out of you because you have direction and they don't. I think it's jealousy really, but it's always destructive.

It can really help to accept that change is a defining feature of life, and that to try to hang on to things as they are, particularly in terms of relationships, is self-destructive and painful.

Respect for the individual is the first and last of any relationship. Respecting their right to chose for themselves, to be treated by you as you would like to be treated.

Start a club for what you're interested in if there's not one already out there, and find like minds and soul-mates.

Learning to develop relationships is a skill you have to work on. Ask anyone whose been happily married the whole of their life, and they'll tell you you've got to really put the effort it to keep it progressing.

We want to feel different from others so we can make an indispensable contribution to our group, but not so different that the group rejects us.

Supporting someone emotionally is very widely regarded as the most important trait that someone can have; beyond humour, good looks, and impressiveness in other ways. Supporting someone emotionally means taking an interest and listening well, not being judgmental of that person when they confide in you, keeping their confidences rather than blabbing their secrets around, and then helping your friend to see new perspectives on their problems and helping them to develop the skills and strengths to pull through.

The circles you choose to move in and the company you decide to keep can make a lot of difference to your life. It's important to make these choices and decisions as consciously as possible.

What is always very attractive about someone's personality, is their being more interested in other people than themselves.

You can't directly control how the world treats you, but you can control how you treat the world. When it comes to personality, it seems most people are very admiring of the following qualities:

- **A kind and caring nature**
- **An interest in other people more than yourself**
- **Being prepared to give others your undivided time and attention**
- **Trustworthiness and reliability**
- **Being comfortable with yourself**
- **Positive attitude and confidence**
- **Ambition and focus**
- **An outgoing and daring nature**
- **Good humour, happiness and an ability to enjoy yourself.**

Your partner can be your adviser who you can consult on all the important decisions, and that's the mark of a good relationship - where everything you do is a partnership.

I think it's how you deal with other people that matters most in life.

Talking with good friends can be the best way to unwind.

Half the trick with life is moving in with the right-hearted crowd, because good friends should help and improve you. Hang around with people whom you respect.

If you can be the person with whom someone can share and discuss anything and everything - with whom there are no taboos, no secrets, nothing too shameful - you will be an invaluable friend to them.

When it comes to enjoying sex, never do anything you don't want to, and never ask anyone to do anything they don't want to do, either. Have their best interests at heart. If you haven't, then let them be and go and find someone whose well-being you can care about.

What's most important isn't money or beauty or success, it's whether you're a good friend and a real person with ups and downs who can relate to somebody. Your value is being real, being you.

Close relationships are without doubt the number one source of pleasure in 90% of lives.

A sense of humour is one of the best loved traits by just about everyone.

It can help if you put in some time with your parents: play sport with them, go walk with them, perhaps even teach them something - like how to use the web. They need your help and encouragement and feedback in being the really useful parent they would dearly like to be.

We do best when we treat each person we meet as an individual, and leave aside our prejudice and stereotypes. Do as you would be done by, and treat others well.

Assume that the person you are talking with is at least as interesting as you, and your job is to find out why. With that attitude, you've got the best chance of striking up a good relationship.

Really good friendships can only be forged in the crucible of really testing circumstances, otherwise you just won't know whether you're surrounded by fair-weather friends.

Cooking someone a good meal is a lovely way to show you care for them.

How you behave towards another person says ten times more about you than wearing one brand of clothing or another ever can.

None of us are wholly confident, but it can help to ask the other person about themselves so that you can begin to listen attentively and forget about yourself.

The more you understand someone, the easier it is to like them. Ask them about themselves and their life.

All the evidence from those studies that have followed people's lives over many years, suggest that what shapes our futures is the quality of sustained relationships with people who are important to us, and very rarely do particular incidents or traumas have nearly as much impact.

If you found this section interesting, you might like to try these other sections:

- **Overcoming shyness & building self-confidence**
- **Finding a balance**
- **Travelling & working abroad**

Considering sex

The entire content of this section on sexual relationships is based upon the evidence from specialist medical and counselling sources, and was not in any part taken from the interviews with any of our participants. Younglives.com is pleased to include the following information because of the overwhelming opinion expressed by our contributors that sexual relationships is an essential subject, but one that is very poorly dealt with by both the formal and informal educational systems in British society.

Considering Sex is divided into 4 main parts:

- 1) Important choices
- 2) Meeting a potential partner
- 3) Sex and safety, hand in hand
- 4) Giving and taking pleasure

Important choices

When it comes to considering sexual relationships, your attitudes and behaviour say a great deal about your values and priorities in life, and about your view of yourself and others.

Only you can decide at what time in your life you want a sexual relationship. No one has to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, and many people live very happily without one.

When you are thinking about having a sexual relationship for the first time, your same age friends may know little more than you do, so it can be a great help to discuss things openly with a few carefully chosen individuals who are older and generally more experienced in life. They will most likely respect you for trusting them and will prove helpful, but keep asking various people until you feel reassured. If you don't feel as if you can talk to your parents about sexual matters, perhaps you could ask a trusted teacher, a counsellor, youth-club leader, religious adviser, someone else's mum or dad or much older brother or sister who you get along well with. If not, there is almost certainly a young person's counselling phoneline that can put you in touch with someone to answer your questions. Ask the operator or look in the Yellow Pages. There are also some really helpful books in the major bookstores written by well qualified doctors and counsellors who specialise in giving straight-forward and understandable advice on the emotional and physical matters in sexual relationships. These books are specifically intended for a young person who wants to learn more, but if you feel shy about choosing and buying one yourself, why not ask someone older to get you a book that deals with sex and other important issues. Don't feel too embarrassed, because that person will have been in the same boat as you when they were your age, so they'll remember just how you feel.

If you have any worries connected to sex, whether it's a pregnancy scare, a genital pain or rash, disturbing sexual desires, or bad memories, do seek professional help and advice by making a call to a local hospital and asking for someone with whom you can discuss these matters: perhaps a 'relationship counsellor', or a member of staff in the STD Clinic (Sexually Transmitted Diseases clinic). Make that call - and confront your worries honestly and clearly, sensitively and sensibly, just as you would want to do with any other part of your life.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Your values and priorities**
- **Learning from others**
- **Love & friendship**
- **Overcoming shyness and building self-confidence**
- **Don't wait to be taught**

Meeting a potential partner

Try to make opportunities to meet the sorts of people with whom you're likely to have shared interests. A good place to start is by doing the sorts of activities and hobbies that you already think you'd be interested in, such as dance clubs, music societies, theatre groups, swim teams, and evening-time college courses. Be inventive and adventurous in thinking about how and where you will meet potential new friends.

Try to think ahead. If you invite someone to come see a movie, you aren't going to spend much time chatting with each other, so you'd do better to ask them to come to a party or an art gallery or some other event.

It might feel embarrassing being attracted to someone, but it certainly isn't shameful. Young men and women are very often interested in physical contact just as much as each other, and either person can make the first move.

If you're gay, lesbian, or bisexual - or you think you might be - and you haven't told anyone, don't feel pressure to 'come out'. It's an individual decision and it shouldn't be hurried. If you do feel ready, just telling one trustworthy person can feel like a huge relief; or phone the national gay and lesbian switchboard, or perhaps surf the web to find out whether there's a gay youth group in your home area. Essentially, you're looking for somewhere to meet other people who are experiencing the same feelings and asking the same questions as you. Reading biographies can also be a helpful way to learn about lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals who've faced many of the same challenges that you are, and who have led happy and accomplished lives.

Getting to know each other:

When flirting with someone, you can simply hold eye contact with them a moment or two longer than is necessary, but be sure to smile warmly so that they don't think you're just staring. Be aware that touching them in any way may be unwelcome unless you are very sure the other person is inviting a more physical relationship with you. Even so, bear in mind that physical doesn't necessarily mean sexual. If someone gives you a hug, or a shoulder rub, or a peck on the cheek, they are not necessarily being sexual, though they might still mean these to be very tender, caring and affectionate gestures.

You will probably have to spend a few occasions in each other's company before you are confident enough to kiss, mouth to mouth. It may be a matter of asking respectfully whether the other person wants to give things a go. "May I kiss you?" is as good a start as any, or it may just happen spontaneously between you, because kissing can be one of the most intimate and pleasurable things you can share.

From kissing, you can both decide whether or not to continue to more intimate physical relations, or whether to cool it and meet someone else. If you discover that your attentions to the other person are unwanted, be proud that you have tried at least, and take comfort in the hope that someone right for you is probably just around the corner - and all the more so if you get out and about and meet people.

If things go well between the two of you, take your time to build up some confidence and comfortable familiarity with each other. Just a few meetings might be enough, or it might take months, it all depends on the two individuals involved and how much good time you can spend in each other's company. Be patient because it will help enormously to have developed a really trusting and open relationship before you embark upon more personal physical relations.

Cuddling with your partner is probably one of the most important ways to share physical pleasure. Also, massaging your partner's head, neck, shoulders and back, as well as kissing and stroking their face and body, will all make such a difference to how comfortable and relaxed your partner feels with you.

Always be considerate of the other person and how they might be feeling. A good rule is to treat your partner with the caring, honesty and respect with which you yourself would like to be treated. And, of course, resist the urge to blab to all your friends about the physical and personal details of a relationship that is by its very nature private and between the two of you.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Love & friendship**
- **Feeling comfortable with your body**
- **Your attitude towards problems**
- **Communicating your emotions**

Sex & safety, hand in hand

Constant communication that is full and accurate, honest and clear, and goes both ways, is the key to a healthy and enjoyable sexual relationship: from making good eye-contact and smiling encouragingly on your very first meeting, to discussing contraception and protection before you take your clothes off, right through to asking for the sort of sex you want when you are finally lovers and developing your sexual skills.

Talking about sex can be tricky at first, because we've been taught that it's taboo in so many situations; but that's precisely why it will eventually feel so liberating to discuss sex openly with your partner. Perhaps, at first, you could break the ice by writing your thoughts down and reading each other's list out loud to one another.

Things you need to know about sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy:

With intimate physical contact comes the risk of pregnancy and disease, and both can have extremely serious consequences for you, your partner and many other people who care for you.

Whether you're a guy or a girl, you really need to be asking yourself, "why aren't I using a condom every single time I have intercourse."

Consider the risks you run if you don't use a condom:

Each year in the UK alone, well over 150,000 fifteen to nineteen year olds become pregnant, and about one third of these people choose to have an abortion.

Each year in the UK alone, 600,000 people contract a Sexually Transmitted Disease and these can lead to serious complications or infertility.

Such things could very easily happen to you and your partner. Three-quarters of a million people thought it couldn't happen to them.

You can have intercourse just once, your first time ever, and that's all it will take. For instance, tiny quantities of semen will always seep out long before ejaculation, so it's not a question of having unprotected intercourse and then putting on the condom at the last moment, or of pulling out before ejaculation. A condom has to be worn every time the penis enters the vagina.

A condom is absolutely necessary no matter that you feel sure that you are in a faithful one to one relationship, and that your partner cannot unknowingly be carrying any sexual disease because they have recently visited an STD clinic and got the all clear. Many STDs have no symptoms at all for many months so no matter how healthy someone looks or feels, you simply won't know that you're carrying one and infecting your partner. And just imagine all the reasons that even your long-term partner might have for not telling you about one particular incident or encounter; and then imagine the risk of infection that could put you in.

Two infectious diseases bear special mention:

AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, is a collection of extremely serious, life-threatening symptoms that are related to the same root cause. The lethal HIV virus that causes AIDS can be passed on by drug-users sharing a needle, or by tiny quantities of semen or blood getting into a tiny cut or sore in your partner's mouth or body. That could be all it takes. AIDS is fatal. There is no cure and there is no immunisation against the virus, so there can be no way around taking the necessary precautions, which means condoms and safe sex practice.

Chlamydia (pronounced clam-id-ear) is the most common sexually transmitted disease among young women between age 15 and 19. It's particularly dangerous because it can make you infertile, but its symptoms in the early stages are very hard to spot. Regular check-ups by your doctor every 6 months is the only way of knowing if you've a clean bill of health.

Once you've made up your mind to always use a condom, you've got to put that good intention in to effective practice. Here's some tips:

- i) Buy them and carry them with you: Sexually active men and women of whatever age should always carry condoms because sexual encounters can feel so urgent and immediate, you need to be prepared.
- ii) Use them correctly: The main reason a condom can fail is either because of rough treatment, or because it is used with oil-based lubricants (like petroleum jelly or massage oil), rather than water-based ones, and so they can literally fall apart within minutes. Nor do condoms like too much heat or sunlight. Open them carefully, minding your nails don't tear them. Don't stretch them out of shape when preparing to put them on, simply roll them down over your penis; condoms are much more fragile than you might imagine. During sex, regularly check to make sure that the base of the condom is still well over the shaft of the penis, and be sure to hold onto the base of the condom when you withdraw after ejaculation. Own up to the fact that you are much more likely to use condoms correctly every time, if you practice with them well beforehand.
- iii) Learn to enjoy using condoms, because they're a lifesaver: You and your partner could experiment using different sizes and thicknesses and type of materials, and you could check out the coloured and flavoured ones. Don't think you have to ejaculate just because you've put on a condom. You can take it off so as to try some other form of non-penetrative sexual activity before returning to intercourse with a brand new one. It will help a lot if you've mentally rehearsed including condoms in your sexual encounters and activities, so use condoms in your sexual fantasies and, with the help of your partner, masturbate wearing one so that using condoms becomes part of the pleasure. The more comfortable you both are using a condom every time, the safer you both will be.

As for pregnancy, if you miss a period, feel tired and occasionally sick, have to pee often and notice that your breasts and belly are beginning to swell, you may very well be pregnant. But there's no need to find out that way, because if there's any possibility at all that you might be pregnant (perhaps because of a split condom the previous night), either you should buy a home pregnancy testing kit from your local pharmaceutical store, or better still visit your doctor with a sample of urine that you've passed first thing in the morning. Don't delay. Best to know one way or the other as soon as possible. Which ever way the result goes, you will need lots of immediate advice and support from mature and trusted people to know how to deal with things.

For instance, if you think you may have become pregnant, there is the 'emergency pill' (also known as the 'morning after pill') that can be prescribed by your doctor but must be taken within 72 hours of your sexual intercourse. This is only an extremely rare emergency measure, whereas the ordinary low-dosage 'contraceptive pill' is used every single day by almost 60% of sexually active young women in the UK. It's only major shortcoming, of course, is that the pill provides no protection at all against STDs. Never the less, if you follow the instructions for use carefully, its 99% effective and safe in terms of preventing unwanted pregnancy. There may be some side-effects for some people, but your doctor can discuss with you the possibility of these so you can be on the look out, and can suggest alternative pills as well that might suit you better.

You may decide to have only one sexual partner, or you may prefer to have several sexual relationships operating almost simultaneously at any particular period in your life. Unless the laws of the society in which you live specifically dictate otherwise, only you can decide what you need and what you feel comfortable with, and you are only acting wrongly if you do not let your various partners know beforehand about your attitudes and your behaviour. It is only fair to let them know so that they can weigh up the emotional implications and their greatly increased risk of sexual infection.

The bottom line is - always use a condom, and consider going on the pill as well. Seek out professional help on any worries or problems you have as soon as possible. Better safe than sorry! Just make the call and make an appointment.

Sexual desires and sexual worries

Your sex life doesn't always have to involve another person. Masturbating to orgasm is not shameful, it's just personal and private. Most men and women do it frequently, in fact somewhere between daily and monthly. Unless you are masturbating at inappropriate times or places, or so often that it interferes in some way with other aspects of your life, masturbation is a completely harmless activity. Nor is it the least bit shameful or wrong to want some form of oral sex, anal sex, sex in candlelight, sex to music, or indeed a whole range of other desires. Most of these urges are universal and natural. If you are worried by anything that you want to do, call your local hospital and make an appointment with a sex counsellor at a clinic to discuss your worries. That's what they're there for five days a week, and they're on your side. Besides which, regular physical check-ups by your doctor every 6 months is a very good habit to get into once you begin sexual relationships of any sort, however occasional your sexual activity might be.

If considering pornography, ask yourself whether the pictures you're taking pleasure from might have come about by someone degrading or violently abusing those individuals you're looking at. By paying for or using those glossy pictures, you might be indirectly supporting that abuse. Consider whether your money and time would be better spent making a phonecall to someone you'd like to ask out for a date, or catching a bus to somewhere you might meet someone with whom to have a real two-way relationship. Resorting to pornography will take you not one step closer to a real love affair.

Standards of behaviour

When you do meet someone you like, it's best to be cautious and considerate. Your compliments and interest may not be wanted by that individual, and you are taking a great risk if you overstep the mark by making suggestive jokes or personal physical comments. He or she could feel embarrassed or humiliated or even scared by you, though they might not want to show it at the time. Such behaviour on your part is particularly awkward and inappropriate in any work situation, and flirting at work should be avoided altogether. Turn your energies to meeting someone in a social setting who might welcome your well-meant intentions; but if someone tells you to "cut it out", then don't wait to be told twice.

Mixing sex with too much alcohol or any other drug, is dangerous because it can lead to serious misjudgements about what you do and with whom. You wouldn't drive if you'd been drinking, so why would you have sex if you've had several glasses? Being drunk might remove the shyness, but it will also lessen the pleasure and will probably mean you'll wake up the following morning feeling horrible and very possibly regretting your actions the night before.

Sexual relations of any sort are only legal if the other person has agreed to it when they are sober enough, sensible enough, and old enough to do so. Taking advantage of someone because you're older, richer or more powerful than they are, or talking someone into sex that they don't want, will at the very least bring profound shame upon you, and may well land you in jail. Don't allow yourself to get into a situation, perhaps fuelled by drink or drugs, in which you might let yourself down, or could even be accused of doing so. Imagine for just 30 seconds how the other person will feel and how you will both look back on the event.

The law and society are very clear and very strict on the above issue, and they accept no excuses: if your partner hasn't freely and clearly agreed to the sexual activity, if they didn't feel able to say no, or if that person isn't old enough in the eyes of the law (age limits vary a lot from State to State, country to country), or if your partner isn't well enough to make a good decision for themselves for whatever reason (...for instance they were too drunk, or on drugs or felt scared of you...) then you are committing a 'sexual assault or rape' depending on the precise nature of the sexual act itself. The legal penalty is almost always a long term of imprisonment for the person or people responsible.

A woman's personal safety

A young woman can help increase her personal safety by planning and practising to deal with the worst situations, while still hoping for the best. For instance, consider carrying a rape alarm on you at all times, and not just in your bag. Practise using it in a hurry and using it in the dark. Have you participated on a women's self-defense course in the last six months? Perhaps you could even arrange one at your place of work or study. It should make you feel more confident if you feel as if you have practised some 'emergency drills' for use in a frightening or dangerous situation. It can be best to practice regularly with a friend or group of friends. Perhaps involve a well-trusted guy or two, to help the situation be as realistic as possible for your friends and you.

Bear in mind that sexual assaults and rapes are most often committed by someone the victim is at least acquainted with already, rather than by a complete stranger, and they are very often committed in someone's home. Expect the unexpected, and take adequate precautionary measures as a matter of habit.

When travelling, even commuting to and from your usual place of work or study, try to reduce the possibility of nasty situations ever occurring in the first place, by sensibly planning your journeys. Have a back-up plan along with the phone-numbers and extra money kept in a separate pocket so that you can put plans into action when necessary. If you are out in the street and feel threatened, never feel too embarrassed to knock on a stranger's front door and explain that you think you're being followed, or to ask a trustworthy-looking person if you can walk beside them. Your rule has got to be 'Better safe than sorry'. If in doubt, draw attention to yourself by whatever means necessary - set off your rape alarm, knock on a stranger's door, flag down a passing car, or kick a parked car to set-off its alarm. Acting immediately and unexpectedly can be useful self-defense weapons in such urgent circumstances.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Don't wait to be taught**
- **Overcoming shyness and building self-confidence**
- **Performing well under pressure**

Giving and taking pleasure

The following section contains detailed sexual descriptions, so consider whether or not you wish to read on.

An intimate physical relationship doesn't have to mean sex of any sort. You might choose to draw the line at kissing, hugging, back-rubs and caressing, and still feel you're having a great physical relationship with that someone you care for.

If you do choose to have sexual relations, sex doesn't have to mean intercourse or penetration of any sort. It can mean caressing your partner's sexual parts, and this may or may not go as far as orgasm for one or both of you. You choose what you're comfortable offering your partner, and what they are comfortable sharing with you.

Sex before you're ready, or sex with the wrong person, is no pleasure at all. It might help to ask yourself how safe, trusting and confident you feel with your partner, because all the principles that apply in your other relationships, also apply to your sexual ones. Enjoyable sex requires both individuals to have the courage to own up to what they want and also what they don't want. You can reject a request for a particular sort of sex, without having to hurt your partner's feelings. If the other person genuinely cares about you, he or she will be very pleased to respect your wishes even if you can't put quite the right words to them. Be patient with your partner and appreciate that they will need several weeks to build up confidence and practice in their love-making.

A woman can increase her sense of sexual pleasure by being as relaxed as possible beforehand. Ask yourselves what physical activities could you enjoy together, like sports or games that might enhance your physical confidence when you finally take your clothes off with each other. Psychology is by far the largest ingredient in sexual pleasure, and play-acting and teasing and flirting with your partner can all add to the enjoyment.

Despite popular myths, anything more than a little alcohol reduces sexual pleasure, and will mean that your orgasm will be considerably weaker and less pleasurable. Exactly the same goes for other drugs. You may feel less shy when you're drunk or high, but it will also mean that you'll be no closer to overcoming your shyness when you're sober. Why not stay wide-awake for the experience, and learn to deal with the feelings face on.

Mutual respect and sexual good-manners are essentials starting points. As often as possible, make sure you have a well-bathed body, brushed teeth, washed hair, and trimmed nails. Be considerate of the other person's sensitive parts, behave towards them as if their body were your own, and if in any doubt about something you would like to do, ask their permission.

Bodies and their genital parts come in all shapes and sizes. There's not really a norm, no matter what you might have heard. The more you can learn about sexual relationships, and the more you can learn specifically about your own and your partner's body, the better sex will be. Be sure to share your desires, and show your partner what you would like them to do. Use your hands to guide their mouth and fingers, and use approving words and appreciative noises to encourage them when they get it just right.

Guys too often don't pay their girlfriend's breasts enough physical attention. The nipple and dark skin around it are rich in nerve endings and so it can be very pleasurable for the nipple to be sucked, licked or held very gently between the teeth, and the pink area around it can be touched similarly. Erect nipples are one of the first signs of arousal, but breasts can vary in sensitivity depending on the time of the month for the woman's body, and it can often take perhaps ten minutes or more of care and attention for full pleasure to be reached. This means, as ever, that the rule is not to rush but to keep looking for advice and guidance from your partner, whether verbal or non verbal.

As a woman's body becomes sexually aroused, her vagina will probably begin to lubricate itself, and her chest, neck or cheeks may begin to flush. But everyone's body is different, and so none of these symptoms of arousal may show themselves, yet your partner may still be enjoying herself.

Your girlfriend's clitoris will very probably play an absolutely key role in her sexual pleasure. Located at the very top of her labia where her lips meet and her genitals begin, this tiny little mound of pink flesh, which your girlfriend will be very pleased to show you, needs constant care and attention of the most gentle nature. The clitoris can be tricky to find because it is very often hidden by a little fold of skin called the 'clitoral hood'. Place a finger or two an inch or so above this area, and pulling upwards very slightly you will be able to retract the hood to help expose the clitoris. This will allow you to lick or very gently caress the clitoris with a finger lubricated by your saliva or KY jelly - a colourless, tasteless, water-based light lubrication jelly - which can be used liberally on your finger or penis to prevent your girlfriend experiencing soreness. Use very soft fingertip or tongue-tip movements and ask for guidance from your partner. Get comfortable and take your time because your girlfriend might want you to go on like this for half an hour or more. The long plateau of pleasure that this may bring her, which may or may not lead to her orgasm, requires you to be patient and generous.

As always in sex, changing the details of your technique after a few minutes can help provide a slightly different physical sensation. Your massaging finger-tip can circle and then move up and down, and perhaps you can alter the speed and direction of movement from clockwise to anti-clockwise.

Only enter your girlfriend's vagina with your penis or your finger if she is sufficiently lubricated either by her own body's fluid, or by KY jelly, or your saliva. Every few minutes, you will need to make sure that she is still comfortably lubricated to prevent her becoming sore. Use gentle and shallow strokes in and out of her for the first minute or two, until her body adjusts to you, and then you can begin to go deeper. Ask her to tell you what feels best: what speeds and depths and angles she prefers your penis to enter her. Different positions can cause dramatically different feelings for your girlfriend because of the different parts of her vagina that the head of your penis will push against.

Very importantly, either you or she should try gently caressing her clitoris during actual intercourse so as to increase her pleasure, since it is very unlikely that the movement of your penis in and out of her body will be sufficient on its own. Changing sexual positions for intercourse will help in this clitoral caressing and will also allow both of you different views of your partner's face and body.

Intercourse provides a woman with a very different sort of satisfaction from you caressing and licking her clitoris, so be sure to offer both to your girlfriend.

When you want to handle your guy's penis, do so gently at first and ask him for lots of advice on what feels best in terms of pressure and speed and movement. If you decide to offer him oral sex, it can give pleasure if you lick or flick the tip and head of his penis with your tongue, or simply suck the head of it, being sure to keep your teeth from snagging the delicate skin. Never blow - despite the nickname 'blow job', it can be very dangerous. Frequently alter the pressure of sucking, the speed and target of your licking and flicking, and how deep in to your mouth and your cheek you allow his penis to go. The guy will almost always know when he's about to 'come' and you can have thought about and discussed before hand what you want to do when he does. It's your choice only, you're in charge, and you can always change your mind.

Orgasm for both genders is characterised by rhythmic contractions of your genitals and surrounding area which become especially sensitive. When your partner begins to orgasm, try not to stop whatever it is you're doing: continue all the way through the orgasm so that they receive the full effect right until they choose to pull away.

Don't be embarrassed by the natural fact that sex is very often messy, involving sweat, saliva, semen and vaginal fluid, perhaps even menstrual blood if your girlfriend is having her period; but be aware of the dangers of HIV transmission through body-fluids.

After orgasm or ejaculation, both the clitoris and the penis are extremely sensitive, and may be too sensitive to touch for a few minutes...and for some hours then after will still be delicate.

After sex, far more often than not, it is very comforting to spend one to one time with the other person, hugging, bathing, eating and going out together - all of which are reassuring statements of your affection for each other.

Variety is the spice of life, and no more so than in sex. Experiment with the place, the time, and the method, though do bear in mind that it's very probably illegal to practice any sort of sexual activity in a public place. Sex is inherently a private and discrete activity, so don't do it in public unless you're willing to deal with all the consequences of being caught.

Talk often and openly with your partner. Perhaps ask each other which three ways you would complete each of these four sentences:

- "I love it when you..."
- "I think it would feel great if you..."
- "I really feel the urge to..."
- "Do you think you'd like it if I..."

Have you ever tried dancing naked with each other? Or think how foods can be used sexily by spreading small amounts of chocolate, ice cream, fruit or honey on your partner's genitals before engaging in oral sex. You might also consider sharing in detail your most intimate fantasies, or using a blindfold so as to heighten the other physical senses, or using mirrors to view your love-making from a variety of angles.

How could you improve your emotional and physical relationship with your partner? How could you be more caring, and give and feel more pleasure? This willingness to learn will help ensure your safety and enjoyment.

Finally, only you can decide what your attitude is towards sexual intimacy at any particular point in your life. Perhaps you wish to observe celibacy or chastity. Or you might wish to reserve sexual relations exclusively for marriage and for the expression of love. On the other hand, you may come to enjoy sex as a daily recreational activity that satisfies you whether or not you have a significant emotional attachment to your partner. It's your choice to make of it whatever you want.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Don't wait to be taught**
- **Feeling comfortable with your body**
- **Developing through new experiences**