



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**  
Public and Aboriginal Health Division

# Relationships, sex & other stuff

A few important things for teenagers to  
know about relationships, sex and other stuff!

## Why do I need this book?

When you're a teenager, you may start to have more freedom than when you were a kid. You are on the road to becoming an adult. The adults around you may be beginning to trust you to look after yourself and to make your own way. More and more, you will make decisions for yourself about the things that are important to you.

With this freedom comes new kinds of responsibility. What happens to your body and how you look after it are only part of the ride. You may experience many different situations and new ideas: new kinds of relationships, love and sex. It is important to know how to feel good about yourself, and how to have respectful relationships.

In this booklet, we've put together a heap of information so that you can read up on the important stuff. It's really helpful to have an adult to talk to about this information too.

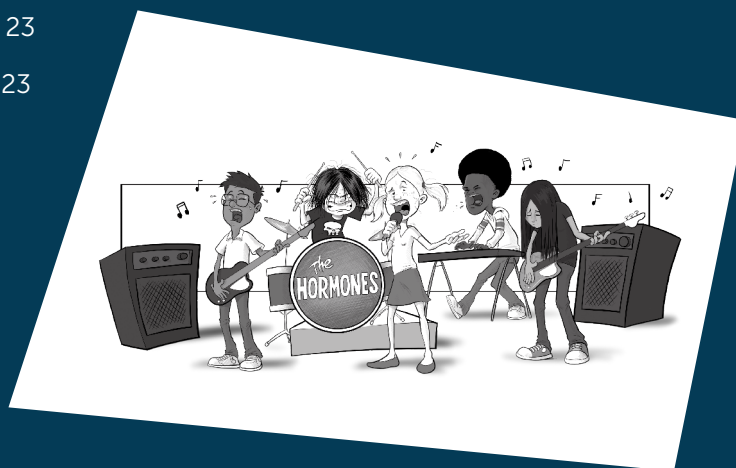
Think of some of the adults in your life that you can trust and feel comfortable with – this might be a parent, a family member, a teacher, a school nurse or your doctor.

They can help answer questions you might have, point you in the direction for reliable information and services, be a listening ear and support you along the way.

For more information and help, see the list at the end of this booklet.

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# RELATIONSHIPS

From the moment you are born, you have different kinds of relationships and connections with those around you: parents, siblings, friends, aunts, uncles, grandparents, teachers and role models to name a few. As you get older the kinds of relationships you have may include romantic and sexual partners.

The level of connection you have in all relationships is different and can change over time, but the one thing that remains constant is the need for respect – both giving respect and being respected. Respect is about showing that you value other people through your words and actions. You treat other people with care and you consider how your words or actions may affect them.

## **Respectful relationships are about:**

- feeling safe
- trust and honesty
- being valued and cared for
- being free to be yourself
- listening and being heard
- being able to disagree or say no without fear of being criticised or hurt
- being supported to make your own choices
- being encouraged to grow, learn and succeed
- being able to make mistakes
- working out arguments by talking openly and compromising

This booklet is mainly about romantic and sexual relationships.

“the one thing that remains constant is respect – both giving respect and being respected.”



## Friendships

During puberty, you experience lots of changes. Some of these are physical, some are social and some are emotional. Everyone travels at a different rate along the road to adulthood. For some people the physical changes happen more quickly – getting taller, developing breasts or getting a deeper voice. For others it takes a lot longer. Some people find that relationships change and sexual feelings begin at a younger age. For some these feelings don't happen until adulthood. All of these differences may make you worry about not fitting in, but all of these differences help to make you the wonderfully unique person that you are.

You may find that the interests of your friends start to vary too. Someone you have been close to for all your primary school life may become more of a distant friend. You may find that things that never used to interest you, now matter to you a lot! Everyone around you may start to have strong opinions about clothes, music, hobbies, who they like, what they're good at, what they think is cool and what's not. These opinions may not always match your own – and that is OK.

All these strong-minded, opinionated people are moving in different ways on the road to adulthood. Each of you will get there in your own way. In the end, the friends you stay close to will probably be those with whom you share the same values, interests and concerns, and the same ways of enjoying your time.

# Communication

With all the changes taking place in your life, you are bound to experience a full range of moods: confidence, excitement, loneliness, frustration, love, anger, appreciation, and more. This is a totally normal part of being a teenager. Although all of these changes and emotions can be challenging at times, there are usually wonderful freedoms that come with greater independence as you get older. There are many amazing things to discover and learn before having to take on all the responsibilities of adulthood.

As well as your friendships, you may find your relationships with different family members are changing too. People who you once got along with may no longer seem as close or as easy to be with as they once did. The best way to sort out these feelings is through communication.

Having a respectful conversation is one way of sorting out what is working and what is not. You don't always have to have all the answers, but talking helps people to process thoughts, communicate needs and work towards resolutions to problems.

Sometimes it can help to say things out loud to yourself, in private, or to write things down that you need to get off your mind. This allows time for you to sort your thoughts so that you can communicate them clearly.

Choosing a time to have tricky conversations when everyone is calm is also a good way to help keep communication respectful and helpful.

You may not find it easy to talk about some things. You may find that different people will be able to help you with different things.

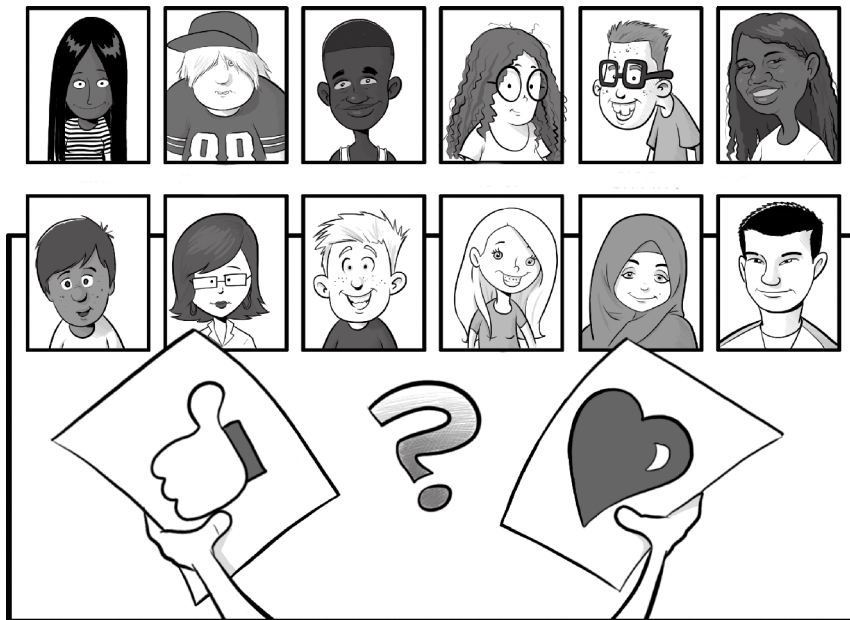
Try talking to someone who cares about you and who can support you to help you become the person you want to be. This might be a trusted Spaceand respected adult or friend, or your doctor, or a school counsellor.

You can always call the Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800, especially if you are having problems talking to your family.

# Romantic relationships

## Like? Like-like? Love?

Just as our bodies grow as we get older, so do our feelings. It is quite normal to suddenly experience strong feelings, or crushes, for a range of people. Crushes are a little bit like the romantic love adults may feel towards one another. Your crush might be a classmate, an older kid, a teacher, a coach or someone you don't know in real life, like an athlete or celebrity. In a way, crushes can help us understand the qualities we like in another person, and maybe a few we don't like. They can help us think about the kind of person we may want to love when we get older.



### **If I have a crush, what should I do?**

You may keep these feelings to yourself or you may choose to talk to a friend or someone you trust about them. If you have a crush on someone you know in real life, you might choose to tell the person that you have a crush on them. It is your choice to decide who you tell about any feelings you have.

If you need to talk to someone about a crush, a parent or trusted adult can be a good choice. They were kids once too and they will probably remember all the exciting, giddy, shy, wonderful or scary feelings that can come with having a crush.

### **What if they don't feel the same way?**

Getting rejected can hurt a lot! Try to remember that this doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you – there are lots of reasons that someone might not feel the same way towards you. It is really important to respect their feelings – you can't force someone to like you and everyone has the right to say 'no'. Lean on your friends or family for support if you need it – they will be great at reminding you how amazing you are.

You may find that someone feels strongly about you but that you don't return these feelings.

It always helps to think about how you would like to be treated if the roles were reversed. Be respectful and kind while being honest and clear about your own feelings.

### **What if it's more than a crush?**

As your feelings develop, you might be ready for your first boyfriend or girlfriend. If you have feelings for someone, you may want to know if they feel the same way. This can be a bit scary because there is a risk that they do not share your feelings... or it may be the start of an exciting new relationship. The best way to find out is to talk to them.

### **Will someone ever fall in love with me?**

You may feel as if everyone around you is falling in love, or finding someone special, except for you. It can be hard if this is something that you would like too. Try to be patient – there are many years ahead for these things to happen, even though you may want them to happen now.

In the meantime, explore the things that make you happy and enjoy your own company and time with your friends and family. Getting to know yourself and the things that are important to you can help you to figure out what kinds of qualities you may want in a partner.



## Is it love? How will I know?

Sometimes you may feel as if you like someone a lot. The feeling can be intense – more than the feeling of having a crush. The feeling of falling in love can be overwhelming. It can affect your sleep, your appetite, your desire to do, or not do, different things. It can take over your whole world.

Asking yourself these questions might help you to understand how you feel:

- Do you both care about each other to the same degree?
- Do you have things in common, and enjoy similar activities or interests?
- Do you respect each other's values and beliefs?
- Do you encourage each other to pursue your own interests?
- Do you encourage each other to have time with friends and family?
- Can you talk to each other about important things?
- Do you understand and listen to each other?

### What if my heart gets broken?

Just as you can fall in love, you or the other person can also fall out of love. Most people fall in love more than once before they find the kind of partner who is ready to fully experience and share the emotional journey of love and to make a commitment for the longer term.

If you are emotionally hurt, it is important to be kind to yourself, and to do things that make you feel good. Spend time with and talk to the people around you who care about you. You may find it helpful to speak to others who have had similar experiences and can offer comfort and advice on how to get through the hard times.



# TECHNOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

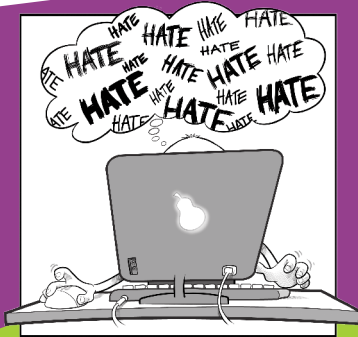
Technology plays a big part in how we communicate with each other and gives us lots of wonderful ways to connect with friends, family and loved ones. It is important that we are just as respectful online as we are in person. It's also important that you understand some of the laws around online behaviour.

## Cyberbullying

Most people use technology to communicate with each other in a respectful way. Unfortunately, there are some people who use technology to bully a person with the intention to embarrass, hurt or intimidate them. This is cyberbullying.

If you experience cyberbullying or know someone else who is, it is important to tell a trusted adult. It can help to make copies of the messages to show them. Use functions to report and block online bullying.

Remember that bullying behaviour is more about the person that is being hurtful, than a reflection of you. You are not at fault, and no one deserves to be bullied, online or anywhere else.



**“It is important that we are just as respectful online as we are in person.”**

Some examples of cyberbullying include:

- hurtful or abusive messages
- creating fake accounts in someone's name to trick or embarrass them
- spreading rumours or lies
- sharing images to make fun or humiliate someone.

# Sexting

## What is sexting?

Sharing sexual images, messages and videos are some ways the people explore being sexual with another person. This is sometimes called 'sexting' but may also be referred to as sharing 'nudes' or 'sexy selfies'. A sext may be a photo or video of someone who is nude, partially nude, or in a sexual pose.

People who are in trusting adult relationships sometimes send sexts as an expression of their feelings and desires and these usually remain private because they are respectful of one another's privacy. Things can go wrong when people are pressured into sending images or when images are shared without consent. There are also laws about sexting that are important to know.

## Sexting and the law

In Australia it is against the law to take, send, receive or store a sexual picture of a person who is under the age of 18, even if it was taken with the other person's consent or taken by the person themselves. These laws are designed to help protect young people from harm.

There can be serious consequences for a person if they break this law as these images are considered to be child abuse material (sometimes referred to as child pornography).

It is an offence to threaten to share a sexual image of a person of any age. Penalties include fines and imprisonment. Courts can also issue a 'take down' order to remove images online.

## Possible risks

Even if nudes are shared by two consenting adults, there are still some possible risks to consider. Images can accidentally be shared via the cloud or found on lost or hacked devices. Relationship break-ups (both friendship break-ups and intimate partner break-ups) can sometimes become very disrespectful.

This might result in someone you no longer trust, having images that they can share without consent. Some people try to reduce these risks by only sharing images that can't be identified by faces, tattoos/piercings or locations.

## Things to consider about sexting

- Remember the basics of respectful relationships – pressure from another person or pressuring someone to send an image, is not respectful!
- Always ask for consent when sharing any images or videos of people. Even if it is not a sexy selfie, it is still respectful to ask for consent. There are lots of reasons why it might not be OK or safe for a person to have their photo taken or shared.
- If you are worried because you have sent a nude picture, don't panic. Just delete the image from your devices. Ask the person who received it to do the same and to not share it with anyone else.
- If you have received an unwanted sexual image from someone, it's best to make sure it is deleted and tell the person to stop sending them.
- Use the 'report' function on apps or contact [esafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au) to help get images removed.
- Use the 'block' function to stop someone sending you unwanted messages or images.



**There is always something that can be done to help you. Speak to a trusted adult or call the Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 if you are concerned about any of these issues.**

# Pornography

Sexy images of people are used a lot to try to get our attention. They are often used in advertising to try to sell us something. Pornography (porn) is sexually explicit material that aims to arouse (turn on) people who are looking at it. In a similar way to advertising, porn also tries to get our attention – especially on the internet. It is very easy to come across porn accidentally online through pop-ups and links.

If you come across sexual images or videos that are surprising or shocking, you don't have to view them! Stop watching, close the page and tell an adult. Don't show others.

As people get older they may be interested in knowing what sex actually looks like and they may go looking for sexual images or videos online out of curiosity.

It is not unusual to be curious about porn and to watch it, but it is not a reliable or trustworthy source of information to base views and choices about sex. If you have questions about what real sex is like, it is best to ask a trusted adult or learn about it from reliable sources like [getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au](http://getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au).

There is nothing wrong with sexual interest and sexual feelings, but it is important to know a few things about sex and porn.

- Porn is meant for (some) adults. Some adults enjoy watching it. Some don't.
- Porn doesn't show you what real sex and relationships are like.
- Sex should be a mutually pleasurable and consensual experience – something shared together rather than a thing 'done to' someone.
- Just like all movies, porn is a performance with people who are paid to look and act in certain ways.
- Real and respectful sex involves consensual touching, kissing and other intimacies that partners can enjoy together.
- Porn is especially a problem if it encourages the mistreatment of people.
- Some porn is violent, and violence is never OK.
- Porn rarely shows what real bodies look like – they use lighting, filming techniques and surgery to enhance the actors' bodies.
- Some porn producers exploit and abuse the performers.

# SEXUALITY

Your sexuality is a central part of what makes you uniquely who you are. It influences your thoughts, feelings and actions. A large part of growing up is working out who you are and finding your place in the world. So, like all other parts of your life, understanding your sexuality can take time for you to figure out...and that's OK.

Sexuality is not just about sex. It's about personal values, relationships, culture, love, closeness, attraction, thoughts, lust, romantic feelings, sexual feelings, identity, expression and behaviours.

## Sexual identity

Sexual identity is about who you find attractive – physically, emotionally, romantically and sexually....and the way these feelings are expressed. It is not just about who you have sex with. It is about how you feel and how you choose to identify yourself. Everyone's sexuality is different. These differences are normal and form part of the broad range of human relationships and experiences.

You may be attracted to one gender, more than one gender, or not feel attraction at all. You may have an emotional attraction to someone but not want to have sex with them. You may have a physical attraction to someone but not want to have a relationship with them. How we are attracted to people and the strength of these attractions can change over time.

As you are growing up there are lots of changes happening to your body, brain, hormones and relationships. You may be exploring and managing lots of strong feelings. Learning to understand your sexuality can be exciting, confusing, intense, fun, scary, confronting, relieving, overwhelming, difficult or easy.

Some people know from a very young age who they want to have relationships with. For others it can take time to figure out. For some it can be more fluid or change over time. Sexuality is not a choice, it is a natural part of who you are and everyone has the right to feel comfortable and accepted for who they are.

## Homophobia

Homophobia is the fear, hatred or discomfort with people who are homosexual (gay, lesbian or bisexual). This can take many forms – hurtful ‘jokes’, stereotyping, name-calling, using the word ‘gay’ as an insult (e.g. ‘That’s so gay!’), isolating people, bullying, discrimination and abuse. Any kind of this behaviour is unacceptable.

In Australia, it is against the law to discriminate someone because of their sexual identity. Experiencing homophobia can make people feel alone and afraid. If you experience or witness homophobia, it is important to talk to a trusted adult about it.

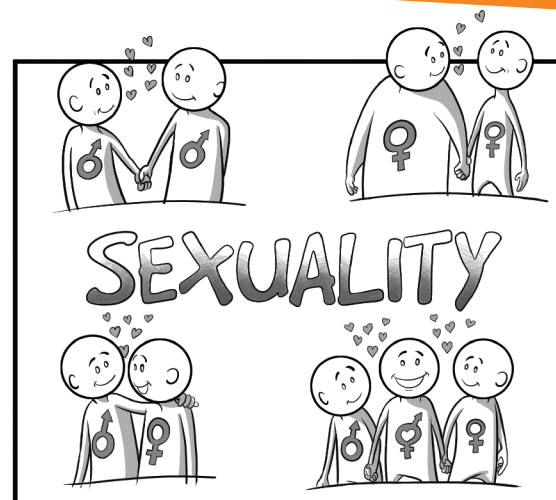
## Support

For some young people getting to know their sexuality is an exciting and celebrated part of growing up. For others it can be a lonely and confusing experience, especially if they experience bullying and discrimination or lack support from family, friends and school.

It may be helpful to know that there are other people going through the same thing and lots of people and places can offer information and support.

Many places offer peer support which means talking to someone who is of a similar age to you and has similar experiences to you. See page 40 for a list of places that can help.

See pages 16 and 17 for some of the common terms and definitions to help understand some aspects of sexual identity.



## Definitions

Sexual identity is not as simple as being 'gay' or 'straight'. There are many terms that people may choose to use to describe their sexuality. They might find the term they choose changes over time or they might not wish to put a label on their sexuality at all. These are some of the common terms and definitions to help understand some aspects of sexuality.

### **Heterosexuality**

Attracted mostly to people of another sex or gender (e.g. women who are attracted to men; or men who are attracted to women). This is sometimes referred to as being 'straight'.

**About 74%  
of WA teens  
identify as  
heterosexual**

**Between 5–10%  
of WA teens  
identify as  
gay or lesbian**

### **Homosexuality**

Attracted mostly to people of the same sex or gender (e.g. men who are attracted to men; or women who are attracted to women).

This is sometimes referred to as being gay or same-sex attracted. Lesbian is a common term for women who are same-sex attracted.



## **Bisexuality**

Attracted to more than one gender. This can include men, women, non-binary or other gender diverse people (see page 20 for information on gender diversity).

This does not mean that the attraction is even – a person can have stronger feelings for one sex or gender.

## **Queer**

Some people refer to themselves as 'queer' which can include a number of sexual identities. Some people find this term offensive as it has previously been used to hurt or insult people.

## **Asexual**

Not sexually attracted to anyone (or someone who has very little sexual attraction to others).

About 15%  
of WA teens  
identify as  
bisexual

## **Pansexual**

Attracted to a person regardless of their sex or gender.

## **Fluid**

Sexual attraction changes in different situations or over time.

“Differences in sexualities are normal and form part of the broad range of human relationships and experiences.”

# Sex and gender – what’s the difference?

It is common for people to confuse sex, gender, gender identity and sexual identity, but they are all very different things.

## Sex assigned at birth

When a baby is born they are usually assigned to be either male or female based whether the baby has a penis or a vulva. This is their sex assigned at birth and is usually listed on the baby’s birth certificate. Some people call this the ‘biological sex’ but biological sex has to do with a lot more than just the genitals on the outside. Biological sex also includes things like internal sex organs, chromosomes and hormones.

## Intersex variations

Just as people have natural variations in height, eye colour and hair type, people also have natural variations in sex organs, chromosomes and hormones. People who are intersex are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit the stereotypical and medical definitions for male and female bodies.

This is more common than some people realise with about 1.7% of the population having intersex variations (that means in a school of 1000 students, 17 may have intersex variations).

## Gender

There is a lot more to gender than the sex you were assigned at birth. The term gender describes a range of roles, characteristics and expectations that families, culture, society, religion and media give to men and women. These are usually very stereotyped and often don’t reflect how any individual truly feels.

**Gender identity** is about personal identity, how a person feels inside and how they express those feelings. It is not how other people describe or label them.

“Limiting what people can do based on gender stereotypes can stop them from achieving their full potential.”

## Gender stereotypes

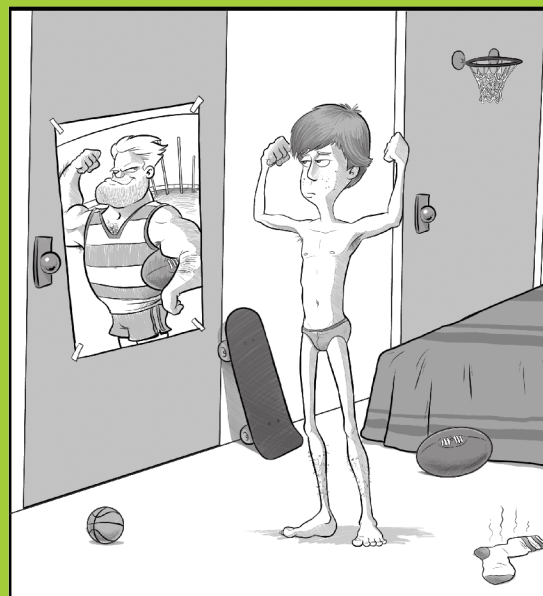
There are many gender stereotypes that we are taught right from birth that influence all of us – what we wear, how we behave, what interests we have, how we feel about ourselves, and how we relate to each other.

The media plays a big role in this – we are constantly shown messages that: firefighters are men, nurses are women, dads don't change nappies, mums like to bake, men have to be tough, women cry lots, boys will be boys, girls must be ladylike, boys shouldn't play with dolls, pink is for girls...the list goes on!

The fact is, people rarely fit into these narrow roles and expectations.

Limiting what people can and can't do based on gender stereotypes can stop them from achieving to their full potential.

One of the most wonderful things about humans is how different and diverse we are. It is important that we respect and celebrate these differences.



## Gender diversity

A person's gender identity can be the same as their sex assigned at birth (e.g. when you identify as a girl and your sex assigned at birth is female). This is called **cisgender**.

For some people their gender identity is different to their sex assigned at birth (e.g. when you identify as a girl and your sex assigned at birth is male). This is referred to as being **transgender**.

For some transgender people taking steps towards affirming their true gender is very important and they may do this through clothing, behaviour, appearance, name and pronouns (e.g. he/she/they), taking hormones and perhaps having surgery.

Some people don't feel like they identify as male or female and they may identify as **non-binary, gender diverse** or **agender**.

Some people's gender identity changes over time and they may identify as **gender fluid**.

Everyone expresses their gender identity in different ways and that is what makes us all wonderfully unique.

“Everyone expresses their gender identity in different ways and that is what makes us all wonderfully unique.”

## Support

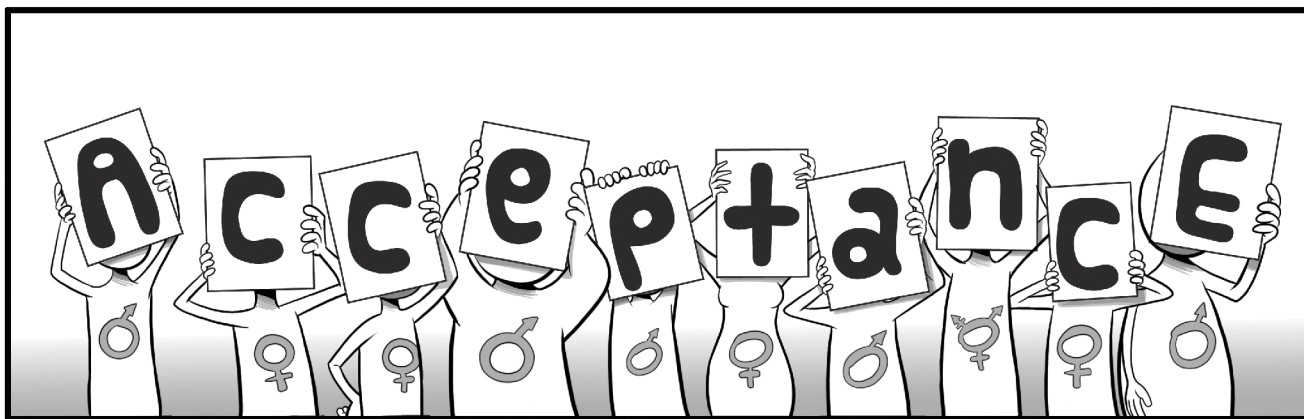
Puberty can be a particularly tricky time for someone who is transgender as their body is developing more characteristics that do not match their gender identity.

Transgender and non-binary people may also experience harassment or discrimination from people who are transphobic (people who fear, hate, dislike or mistrust people who are transgender). These things can have a big impact on a person's mental wellbeing – it can cause depression, fear, isolation, feelings of helplessness, self-harm and suicide.

It is important to know that there are places that can offer help (see page 40 for a list of agencies).

There are many ways to help support someone who is taking steps towards affirming their true gender (sometimes called 'transitioning') like using their correct name and pronouns (e.g. he/him, she/her, they/them) and letting them know that you are a friend and ally.

Speak up if other people are being transphobic (if you feel safe to do so) and tell a trusted adult if you see someone experiencing transphobia at school.



# SEX

Sex means different things to different people. It is more than just penises and vaginas – it is hugging, kissing and touching genitals and can include oral and anal sex too. When most people talk about ‘having sex’ they are usually referring to sexual intercourse or penetrative sex. Sexual intercourse involves an erect penis entering a vagina or anus (sometimes called penis-in-vagina or penis-in-anus sex).

As you become more sexually aware, it is natural that you will be curious about sex. You might learn about it by exploring your own body, then learn more within a relationship with a partner. As you experience and learn more, you will find what you are comfortable with, what feels safe, what feels pleasurable, what you like and don't like, what you would like to explore more.

Keep in mind that it's possible to be sexual without having intercourse. Things like kissing, touching, rubbing and stroking are all things that can feel good too. Knowing about all of these options can help you make informed choices that are best and safest for you and your partner. It is helpful to think about what you would like your first sexual experience to be like before any sexual situations may happen. There are lots of things to consider that can help you and your partner to prepare to have a pleasurable and safe experience.

## **Masturbation**

One way people express and explore sexual feelings is through masturbation. Masturbation may be someone's first sexual experience. Masturbation means touching your own body for sexual pleasure.

This usually involves touching, rubbing or stroking genitals (e.g. penis, vulva, clitoris, vagina, anus). Sexual pleasure is different for everyone, so what gives someone pleasure when masturbating may be different from person to person. Some people don't masturbate often, others more frequently and some people don't masturbate at all. It is a matter of personal choice and, so long as no one is hurt and it is done in private, masturbation is normal and healthy.

## Sexual arousal

Arousal is the feeling of being 'turned on' sexually. Someone can become aroused from physical touch like masturbating or sexual activities with a partner. They can also get turned on by sexual thoughts, reading, watching or listening to erotic (sexy) material.

When someone is turned on, the body experiences physical and emotional changes. The penis or clitoris may get erect (hard) from the blood flowing to the area. They may feel sensitive and wetness may be felt on the vulva, in the vagina or on the tip of the penis.

“Sex means different things to different people.”

## Orgasm

An orgasm is what may happen when someone reaches the height of sexual arousal. The sexual tension increases until it reaches a peak and all the pleasure in the body and genitals is released.

Every person's body is different, but people will usually feel a very intense, pleasurable feeling in their genitals and around their body. The muscles in the vagina, penis and anus contract and the heart rate and breathing levels go up.

The penis usually squirts a small amount (1-2 teaspoons) of semen (cum) – this is called ejaculation. After this the penis usually goes soft again. It's also common for the vagina to get really wet and it is possible for a different fluid to squirt or dribble out of the vagina (this is sometimes called 'female ejaculation'). Ejaculation from a vagina is less common than ejaculation from a penis.

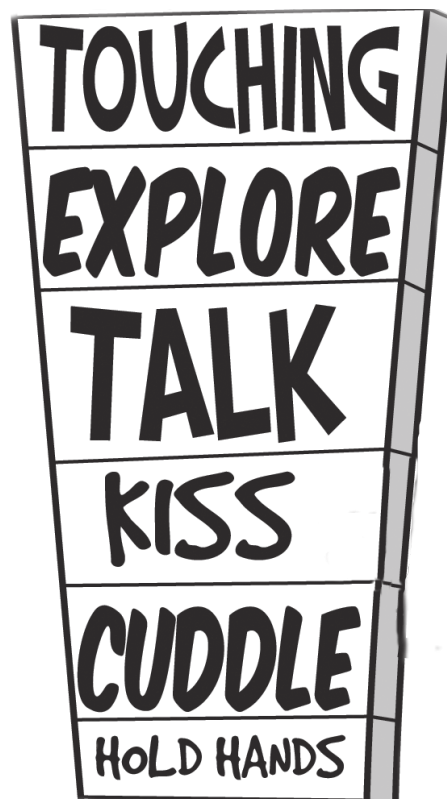
# SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

As people grow up their romantic and sexual feelings can get even stronger and sometimes they want to share those feelings with someone else. Spending quality time with someone, doing activities you both enjoy, talking about your experiences, sending romantic messages, discussing your likes and dislikes and sharing hopes and future dreams are all ways that you may like to get closer to someone that you are attracted to. When you are sexually attracted to someone and they are sexually attracted to you, you may reach a point when you want to express this physically.

## Kissing and touching

Kissing can be a fun and pleasurable way to share sexual feelings. You may wonder if you're going to know how to kiss, but usually people work it out together, and improve with practice. You may also like holding hands and cuddling, feeling the closeness of each other's bodies, or touching each other's genitals. It is quite normal for couples to enjoy this kind of closeness and affection long before they are ready for other sexual activities.

Just as every person likes different levels of non-sexual touch (e.g. hugs, tickles, personal space), they also like different levels of sexual touch. Exploring what you and your partner like is part of the enjoyment of exploring sexual feelings. Remember, it is important to always check that your partner has consented to any kind of kissing and touching.





## Decisions about sex

Some people call having sex 'making love' because it is a way you can share very strong feelings and private moments with another person. Sometimes people have sex to show love and affection. Sometimes people have sex to make babies. People also have sex because it feels pleasurable and is exciting or because they are curious about what it feels like or they want to feel closer to a person.

Sex and love are not the same thing. It's possible to have strong feelings of love and affection for someone and this not be sexual at all. The opposite is also true – it is possible to have sex with someone without love being a part of it.

Being sexually involved can change your feelings about your partner and yourself. It is important to talk about what you are doing together. Good communication means being able to share feelings about whether you are happy and comfortable with your physical involvement, or unhappy and uncomfortable. Sexual activity with others should always be mutually wanted, between equals, with no-one feeling pressured.

Sex under the right conditions can feel nice, good, exciting, great. You can feel beautiful, powerful, close, loved and loving. Sex can also be uncomfortable, disappointing, boring, a chore. At worst, it can make you feel lonely, sad, unloved and unvalued. People have sex for a range of reasons – sometimes the reasons are not ideal. If getting someone to love you is your goal, then ask yourself whether you think the person likes you and respects you. If you don't think they like and respect you, then they are unlikely to fall in love with you just because you have sex with them.

Sexual relationships can be a pleasurable and happy thing and it is worth waiting for the conditions that are right for you and your partner. It is helpful to have a strong, clear sense of what you want before you take any next steps. Don't be in a hurry to make a decision – there is nothing wrong with taking your time. You may find it helps to talk it over with a trusted adult.

# How do you know if you are ready for sex?

There are lots of things to consider when you are working out if you are ready to begin to have sex. Everyone is different and may be ready at different stages. Some people may be ready for some kinds of sexual activities and not others at various times of their lives. Some people may not want to have some kinds of sex or any sex at all. This can change at different times of life.

The following questions may help you to think about your values, wants and hopes around your first sexual experiences. These can be great questions to talk about with a trusted adult and your partner before you consider having sex.

Considerations:

- Am I over 16 years old? Is my partner over 16 years old?
- Do I want to have sex? Have I said so?
- Does my partner want to have sex with me? Have I asked them?
- Does this feel right?
- Have I pressured my partner? Has my partner pressured me?
- Do I feel pressured by anything else or anyone else?
- Am I doing this to gain acceptance from my friends?
- Is anyone forcing me?
- Am I doing this just to keep my partner?
- Am I doing this because everyone else is?
- Do we both want it for ourselves, not just to please the other person?
- Do we care for each other and agree that we want to take the next step?
- Do I respect my partner? Does my partner respect me?

- Do I understand how to get consent?  
Do I know how to communicate my consent?
- Do I feel comfortable with the person I want to have sex with?
- Do I feel I could say no at any point, and that would be OK?
- Are there some kinds of sex I don't want to do? Are there some kinds of sex my partner doesn't want to do?
- Do I have any anxieties or fears?
- How will I feel about his decision after I have had sex?
- Do I know how to prevent a pregnancy?
- Do I know how to get contraception and which one is best for me and my partner?
- Have I discussed contraception with my partner?
- What would I do if my partner and I got pregnant? What would my partner do? Have we discussed this?
- Am I ready to be a parent if my partner and I got pregnant?
- Do I know how to protect myself and my partner from getting a sexually transmissible infection (STI)?
- Do I have condoms or dams and know how to use them?
- Do I know how to get an STI test?
- Do I know how to get my own Medicare card?

“There are lots of things to consider when you are working out if you are ready to begin having sex.”

# Consent

Sexual consent is an agreement to engage in sexual activity. Before being sexual with someone, you need to know if they want to be sexual with you too. Without consent, sexual activity is sexual assault (sometimes called rape).

## Consent must be:

- **F**reely given – a choice you make without pressure, being tricked, forced, threatened or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- **R**eversible – anyone can change their mind about what they feel like doing, at any time. Even if you have done it before, and even if you are both naked at the time.
- **I**nformed – you can only consent to something if you have the full story (e.g. If someone says they will use a condom, and they don't. This is not consent).
- **E**nthusiastic – it's only things you and your partner WANT to do, not things you are unsure about. You need an enthusiastic 'yes' from your partner before starting anything sexual.
- **S**pecific – saying yes to one thing (like kissing), doesn't mean you've said yes to other things (like having sex).

**“You need an enthusiastic ‘yes’ from your partner before starting anything sexual.”**



## What does the law say about consent?

Although sex means different things to different people, when it comes to the law, sex is when a penis, finger, object or any part of a person is fully or partially inside another person's vagina or anus. Sex also includes any kind of oral sex.

In Western Australia, the legal age for consent is 16 years or older. This means that you can have sex with another person aged 16 years or older if you both consent to it.

It is a crime for a person who is caring for you or has authority over you (like a coach, teacher or employer) to have sex with you if you are under 18.

A person cannot consent (no matter what age they are) if they are drunk, drugged, unconscious, asleep, have an intellectual condition that impacts on their ability to understand what they are consenting to, or if they are tricked/threatened.

Youth Law Australia ([yla.org.au](http://yla.org.au)) is a great website if you would like more information about the laws that relate to you.

It is important to know that laws differ from state to state and country to country.

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act or behaviour that a person has not consented to. This includes: unwanted sexual touching, kissing, hugging; making you watch a sexual act (e.g. porn); being forced to perform any sexual act.

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual behaviour that makes a person feel uncomfortable, offended, intimidated or humiliated. This includes: unwelcome sexual advances; requests for sexual favours; sexual jokes; staring; wolf-whistling; touching.

## Where can I get help for someone who has been sexually assaulted?

The Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) has a 24-hour emergency helpline (1800 199 888) for people 13 years and older.

In cases of recent sexual assault, go to the nearest hospital or doctor.

## Safer sex

Sex can be enjoyable and fulfilling but can involve risks. It is important to know about these risks so that you can make informed choices and help to reduce risks and unwanted consequences.

Safer sex means protecting the health of both you and your partner by having sexual contact in ways that reduce the chances of unintended pregnancy or sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

STIs are very common in young people that are sexually active. These are passed on through body fluids like semen, vaginal fluids and blood. Some are also passed on through skin-to-skin contact.

Some sexual activities have less risk than others. For example, not having penis-in-vagina sex means that there is no risk of pregnancy. And only kissing, cuddling, massaging and rubbing each other's bodies reduces the risk of STIs.

For penis-in-vagina, penis-in-anus, and oral sex, the best way to prevent STIs is to use condoms and dams (this is sometimes called having 'protected sex').

- An **external condom** is a tube of very thin latex that goes over an erect penis. It stops semen from entering another body and protects the skin that is covered.
- **Internal condoms** are a thin latex tube with a ring at the top and bottom that allow it to be put inside a vagina. This stops body fluids entering from another body and protects the skin that is covered.
- **Dams** are thin pieces of latex that can be placed over the genitals to protect the skin during oral sex.

Condoms are available at places like supermarkets, pharmacies and petrol stations.

There are lots of places, like sexual health clinics, that offer condoms for free. You can 'find a free condom' location at [getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au](http://getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au).

Safer sex also means getting regular STI testing if you have been sexually active.

Most STIs don't cause any symptoms so many people don't realise if they have an STI. The only way to be sure is to have a test. This can be done by a doctor or at a sexual health clinic. It usually involves providing a urine sample, swabs and sometimes a blood sample.

Some other things to know about STIs:

- STIs can cause long term health issues if left untreated.
- All STIs can be treated and managed – the sooner you see a health professional, the easier it is to treat.
- You can't tell by looking at a person if they have an STI or not.
- Condoms and dams are the only contraception that protect against pregnancy and STIs.
- People who are sexually active should consider getting tested once a year, whenever they have a new sexual partner and any time they have had sex without a condom.

**“You can access free STI testing in Western Australia at [healthysexual.com.au](http://healthysexual.com.au) by taking an online quiz, downloading a form and taking it to a testing clinic.”**

# Pregnancy

Becoming a parent is a big deal, and there is a lot to think about when it comes to deciding if you would like to have a baby and if you are ready to raise a child. Part of deciding if you are ready to have sex is understanding that penis-in-vagina sex can result in a pregnancy and knowing how to prevent unintended pregnancies.

## How a pregnancy can begin

For a pregnancy to happen, sperm needs to meet up with an egg (ovum). When a penis ejaculates inside a vagina, about one teaspoon of semen (containing millions of sperm) is released into the vagina.

The sperm swim into the uterus and fallopian tubes. If a sperm joins up with an egg, this is called fertilisation. If this fertilised egg travels down to the uterus and implants into the uterus lining, conception occurs and a pregnancy begins.

It only takes one sperm to start a pregnancy and sperm can be released from the penis in the fluid that comes out even before ejaculation (sometimes called pre-cum).

It is helpful to know a little bit about the menstrual cycle to have a better understanding of how a pregnancy can happen.

During puberty, the ovaries begin to release an egg about once a month. This is called ovulation.

Every month the uterus gets ready for a possible pregnancy by building a thick, soft lining for a fertilised egg to implant. If a pregnancy does not happen, the thick uterus lining is not needed and breaks down. It comes out of the uterus through the vagina and looks like thick blood. This is called a period. The uterus lining then begins to build up again. The whole process is called the menstrual cycle and a cycle is usually between 21-38 days (this can vary from cycle to cycle).

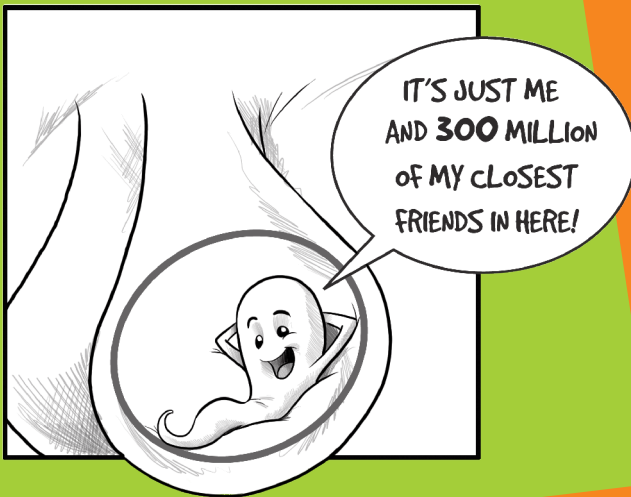
The first day of a period is the first day of the cycle and ovulation happens about 14 days before a period is due (about half way through the menstrual cycle).

Once the ovaries start releasing eggs (which can happen before a first period), a pregnancy can happen if the person has penis-in-vagina sex.



## Some things to know if you are going to have penis-in-vagina sex:

- A person with a uterus can get pregnant the first time they have sex.
- Around the time of ovulation is the most likely time for a person with a uterus to get pregnant if they have had penis-in-vagina sex.
- It is possible for a person with a uterus to get pregnant at any time in their menstrual cycle (even when they have their period or has just finished it).
- A person with a uterus can get pregnant even before they have had their first period (because they may have already started releasing eggs).
- Sperm can stay alive in the uterus for up to five days after sex.
- 'Pulling out' (when the penis is pulled out of the vagina before ejaculating) is not a very effective way of preventing pregnancy – sperm can be present in 'pre-cum' (and it doesn't protect against STIs).
- Not having sexual activity where sperm can come in contact with the vagina (abstinence) is the only 100% effective method of preventing pregnancy.
- Condoms are the only form of contraception that also protect against STIs.



# Contraception

Contraception is something you do or use to prevent pregnancy. The most effective way of preventing pregnancy is to not have any sex that allows any semen (including pre-cum) to be in or just outside the vagina.

If two people decide to have penis-in-vagina sex, it is important for both partners to talk about ways to prevent pregnancy and STIs before having sex. The responsibility for contraception should be shared equally.

There are different methods of contraception available and each method has different factors to consider when deciding which is the best method for you – the effectiveness, how easy it is to use, cost, possible side effects, etc. Every body is different and contraception options will have different effects on each person. Although it can be helpful to talk to friends and trusted adults about contraceptive options, the best person to speak to is a health professional who can help you decide which option is best for you.



## Fit and forget

Contraceptives like IUDs and Implanon are often called 'fit and forget' methods because they last a long time and you don't have to remember to take or use them. This makes them good options for young people to consider. Using one of these methods as well as condoms offers the best protection from unintended pregnancies and STIs.

### Some common contraceptive options include:

- IUD (Intrauterine device) – a small T-shaped device that is put into the uterus by a health professional. These can last 5-10 years depending on which type you use and can be removed any time by a health professional.
- Implanon ('The rod') – a small plastic rod that releases hormones implanted under the skin of the arm by a health professional. This lasts 3 years and can be removed any time by a health professional.
- Injection (Depo) – an injection given by a health professional that stops ovulation. This lasts 12 weeks so regular visits to the doctor or nurse are needed.
- The Pill – pills that are taken every day to stop ovulation.
- Emergency contraception pills (ECP) – these are pills that are used to reduce the risk of pregnancy after penis-in-vagina sex has happened without the use of contraception or when contraception has failed (e.g. a condom has broken). These are most effective the sooner they are taken but can be effective up to 5 days after sex. These do not cause an abortion, it works by preventing or delaying ovulation. ECPs are available over the counter at most pharmacies – you don't need a prescription or a Medicare card.

# Pregnant?

Contraceptives are highly effective when used correctly but no contraception is 100% effective. A pregnancy dates from the time of the last period, so a person can be four, five, six or more weeks pregnant before realising it. Knowing about a pregnancy early is vital to make sure the person gets the help they need.

## How would you know if you are pregnant?

If an egg is fertilised by a sperm and implanted into the uterus, the lining of the uterus will stay intact to be able to nourish the egg. This means that the person will not get their usual period. A missed or late period is usually the most obvious sign of pregnancy (this doesn't always mean that someone is pregnant – especially for young people who may have irregular menstrual cycles in their first few years).

Some people notice symptoms early in their pregnancy, but others may not have any symptoms at all. Some common signs can include:

- missed period
- swollen or tender breasts
- nausea or vomiting
- feeling tired
- bloating
- constipation
- peeing more often.

Some of these signs can sometimes feel like other common conditions. So the only way to know for sure if you are pregnant is to take a pregnancy test. It is important to get confirmation of the pregnancy as early as possible.

A pregnancy testing kit (which involves weeing on a test strip) is quick and usually very accurate when taken around the time of the first missed period.

These can be bought at supermarkets and pharmacies, but it is also really important to get the results checked by a doctor as soon as possible. If you or someone you know thinks they may be pregnant, it is really important they talk to a trusted adult.

## Decisions about unintended pregnancy

Finding out you are pregnant when you don't expect it can be very stressful. Unintended pregnancies are common in Australia - about half of all pregnancies are not planned.

People who are pregnant have a number of options:

- continuing the pregnancy
- adoption
- foster care
- end the pregnancy (taking medication or having a medical procedure that ends the pregnancy. This is sometimes called an abortion or a termination.)

Sometimes deciding what to do about an unintended pregnancy is easy. Other times it can be difficult and complicated.

Your decision is very personal and everyone's situation is different.

Family, relationships, school, work, life goals, health, safety and personal beliefs can all be factors when making a decision about an unintended pregnancy.

If someone discovers they are pregnant, it is vital to seek help as quickly as possible so that they can get the care and help they need. Talking to trusted adults and health professionals can help them look at their full range of options, considerations and choices.

If someone you know is pregnant and needs support, they can get non-judgemental support from the Sexual Health Helpline (08) 9227 6178 (Metro) or 1800 198 205 (Country)

# Accessing health services

When it comes to accessing health services, young people sometimes have concerns. They might feel embarrassed to talk about their sexual health, they might worry about other people finding out (confidentiality) or they might worry about the cost. Some things that you might find helpful to know:

- There are youth friendly services around WA that provide free or low cost options for young people.
- Once you turn 14, you can manage your own My Health Record and you can choose if you would like your parent or guardian to have access to it. This can help you to keep your information private. ([www.myhealthrecord.gov.au](http://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au)).
- Having your own Medicare card can help you to access health services for free or very low cost. You can apply online for your own Medicare card when you are 15 ([www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/medicare-card](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/medicare-card)).
- There is no age limit on being able to access sexual health services and contraception.

The Sexual Health Helpline is a free and confidential service that can help answer any questions you have or point you in the direction of a service that can help you. (08) 9227 6178 (Metro) or 1800 198 205 (Country).



# CONCLUSION

The teenage years are a time of huge change. It can be fun, exciting, intense and wonderful. It can also be challenging. Don't forget that there are people around who care for you and who will be willing to offer you advice or just be there to talk things over with. You don't have to do the hard bits alone.

There is always someone available to listen and help. You have lots of wonderful experiences ahead of you on the road to becoming an adult!





Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**  
Public and Aboriginal Health Division

## Further information and help

### Get the Facts

(WA Health youth website providing information on STIs, BBVs and relationships)

[getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au](http://getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au)

### Healthysexual

WA Health website with information on sexual health and free STI testing

[healthysexual.com.au](http://healthysexual.com.au)

### Sexual Health Helpline

Confidential answers and referrals for your sexual health questions

Ph: (08) 9227 6178 (Metro)  
1800 198 205 (Country)  
[sexhelp@shq.org.au](mailto:sexhelp@shq.org.au)

### Freedom Centre

Support for young people who are sexually diverse or gender diverse

Ph: (08) 9228 0354  
[freedom.org.au](http://freedom.org.au)

### Intersex Peer Support Australia

Information and peer support for intersex people and their families

[isupport.org.au](http://isupport.org.au)

### Transfolk of WA

Peer support for transgender people and their loved ones in WA

[transfolkofwa.org](http://transfolkofwa.org)

### Headspace

Help with mental health concerns

[headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

### Kids Helpline

Online information, webchat, email, and 24 hour telephone support for all concerns

Ph: 1800 55 1800  
[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

### Beyond Blue

Mental health support and information

[beyondblue.com](http://beyondblue.com)

### Sexual Assault Resource Centre

Information and help in the case of sexual assault (for ages 13 and over)

Ph: (08) 9340 1828

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