# Ready vs not ready:

## How do young people know if they are ready for sex?

The WA Health Department book: [*Talk Soon. Talk Often. A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex*](http://gdhr.wa.gov.au/resources/booklets-and-brochures/-/asset_publisher/arcOQ3YIBkzj/content/talk-soon-talk-often-a-guide-for-parents-talking-to-their-kids-about-s-1?_101_INSTANCE_arcOQ3YIBkzj_redirect=%2Fresources%2Fbooklets-and-brochures) includes a section “What young people need to know to decide about having sex” which considers how parents might help their teenager make such a decision.

The *Talk Soon. Talk Often* resource can also provide teachers with additional checkpoints and conversation starters to be prepared and able to facilitate discussions with students about these matters when and if they arise.

In supporting a young person to work out if they are ready or not ready for sex, there are multiple important principles to consider:

* Know that you have a right to choose not to have sex, or to wait until you feel really ready.
* Try to work out what are your values and beliefs about ‘having sex’.
* Understand that people have sex for a range of reasons, including to become closer, to feel loved, to feel good, to get it over and done with, to be popular, to fit in, or to rebel. Not all these reasons are ideal.
* If getting someone to love you is the reason for having sex, ask yourself whether you think that person actually likes you? If you don’t think they like you, then they are not going to hang around to love you.
* Remember there are lots of different ways to enjoy sexual feelings. Some people do nothing. Some masturbate (and may have done so since they were babies). Some people decide that some sexual behaviours are ok but not others.
* Everyone has the right to decide what sexual behaviours they are happy to engage in, if any.  It is reasonable to expect their friends and sexual partners will respect those decisions.
* It’s crucial that you decide whether you are ready before someone else ends up deciding for you.
* Everyone, females and males, gay and straight, married or not, can choose not to have sex at any time.
* Having sex once does not mean you have to do it again.
* Every young person has a right to information that will help them keep safe and healthy, which includes information about avoiding pregnancy and STIs.
* Sex can lead to getting or giving an STI, or pregnancy. It’s important to protect yourself. Oral sex won’t cause pregnancy but it can spread STIs such as chlamydia. If a person has vaginal or anal sex, condoms will stop the spread of most STIs but not necessarily others such as genital warts and herpes.
* Making safe sexual decisions can be nearly impossible if a person is drunk or high.

Young people need to think about and keep their own ‘personal list’ of indicators in mind when making decisions (everyone is different).  It’s vital that they decide whether they are ready before someone else decides for them.

Some of the following prompts may help provide useful discussion starters for those young people to work out if they are ready to begin having sex.

* Do you know how to prevent a pregnancy from happening?
* Do you know how to protect yourself and your partner from getting an STI: do you have condoms and you know how to use them?
* Will you feel OK about having had sex the next day ‘in the cold light of day’?
* Have you wanted to have sex and have said so?
* Have you considered having a baby?
* Are you 16 or over and understand the rights of consent and the related law?
* Does the decision ‘feel right’?
* Do you feel comfortable with the person you are going to have sex with?
* Do you feel you could say no, and that it would be OK and respected by your partner, but you still want to do it?
* Do you have anxieties but not fear?
* Is somebody forcing, pressuring or coercing you to make this decision?
* Have you both agreed to care for each other and want to take this next step?
* Do you both want it for yourself, and not just because the other person wants it and you want to please him/her?
* Are you sure you’re not doing it to keep your partner (he/she has given you an ultimatum, or you feel there is no choice)?
* Are you sure you’re not doing it to make yourself more popular or to gain acceptance?

The above lists may not fit everyone’s values and beliefs; however the aim is to provide a starting point and possible discussion triggers.

This section is adapted from: WA Department of Health. [*Talk Soon. Talk Often. A Guide for Parents Talking to their Kids about Sex*](http://gdhr.wa.gov.au/resources/booklets-and-brochures/-/asset_publisher/arcOQ3YIBkzj/content/talk-soon-talk-often-a-guide-for-parents-talking-to-their-kids-about-s-1?_101_INSTANCE_arcOQ3YIBkzj_redirect=%2Fresources%2Fbooklets-and-brochures). 2013.