

Tips on How to Negotiate Safe Sex

Negotiating safe sex refers to communicating (either verbal or non-verbal) between two people in order to reach an agreement around ensuring safe sex that both people are comfortable with. Safe sex means sexual contact that:

- ❖ Reduces the risk of passing on any infections
- ❖ Reduces the risk of an unwanted pregnancy

Many people know that if they are considering having sex, it's really important to make sure it is safe. Safe sex is about being responsible for your own health. But it isn't always easy to talk about and it can be embarrassing. If you are considering having sex, it is important to be able to talk about safe sex with your partner. This factsheet offers information and advice for people on how to do this. Remember: safe sex is vital every time you have sex regardless of age, circumstances, relationship etc.

Sexual Decision Making

Deciding whether you want to engage in sexual activity is an important part of negotiating safe sex. Before you get to the stage of negotiating safe sex with a partner, it might help you to think about the following things,

Sex is meant to be:

- something you decide to do when you are ready
- something that makes you both feel good
- something you can interrupt or stop at any time
- safe because you are both prepared to protect yourselves from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy
- a positive experience, not something to feel bad or guilty about

You can decide:

- when to start having sex
- if you want to have sex
- if you want to have sex every time
- what kind of sex you want to have

What if I decide I don't want to have sex?

- Not having sex is OK!
- You always have the right to decide if you want to have sex or not...it is your decision.
- There are other ways to be close, like kissing, cuddling and holding each other.
- If you don't feel OK or safe, then it's probably not the right time for you to have sex.

If you decide to have sex:

If you choose to be sexually active, then it is time to talk about negotiating safe sex

IMPORTANT!

Be aware that alcohol and drugs can have an impact on your ability to make safe decisions.¹

Safe Sex & Contraception

Contraception is the prevention of pregnancies and does not protect against STIs. The prevention of STIs is as serious as preventing pregnancy. There are heaps of different types of contraception available, but the most popular with young people are condoms, the pill and implants. Everyone is different so the type of contraceptive option you choose will depend on what works best for you. You can talk to your local Family Planning Agency, your doctor, or School Nurse to help you choose a contraceptive method that suits you.

What is so great about Condoms?

The great thing about condoms is that they protect against unplanned pregnancy and most STIs. Condoms work by holding the semen so that it does not pass into the vagina, anus or mouth. So using condoms effectively prevents pregnancy and STIs when used correctly and each time you have sex. The other good things about condoms are that they are

- Readily available
- No hormonal side effects
- Affordable
- male and female condoms

But the use of condoms does require some prior negotiating with your partner. So how can you do that...here are some tips

Tips for Negotiating Condom Use

Discussing condom use is a tricky conversation for everyone but it is also one of the smartest conversations. It is best to talk about condom use early and not to leave it to the last minute before you have sex. Often it is too late to discuss their use during the heat of the moment.

Choose a good time that allows you both the time to talk openly about condoms. The main thing to remember is that if you are considering engaging in sexual activity with someone you need to negotiate condom use with that person. This could be on a first date, after meeting at a party or early on in a relationship depending on your circumstances. Likewise the way you start the conversation will be different for everyone and will depend on your relationship. You may find it helpful to practice what you'll say or perhaps even write it down. Starting the conversation can be tricky. Some conversation starters may be:

'What do you think about condoms?'

'I think we should talk about safe sex'

'As our relationship is getting more serious we should discuss protection'

'If we are going to have sex tonight then we need to talk about condoms'

'I really like you, do you have condoms?'

If you are still feeling uncomfortable and don't want to come straight out with it, maybe you could introduce safe sex into a conversation. Perhaps you could mention a conversation you had with a friend or an article in a magazine you read. It is important to remember that your health is very important and that any initial feelings of awkwardness are normal.

Hopefully you will both agree that practicing safe sex is a must. However, if you can't come to an agreement around using condoms you need to reconsider your decision to have sex with this person. The chances of getting a STI or experiencing an unplanned pregnancy are not worth the risk.

Be Prepared!

The more prepared and comfortable you and your partner are about condoms, the more likely you are to have safe sex. The following tips will help you to feel more comfortable:

- Find a place you feel comfortable purchasing condoms from. They are available from a range of places, including pharmacies, supermarkets and service stations. Investigate different colours and flavours – this can be fun!
- Learn how to put on and take off a condom before using one for the first time (if you are male, you can practice on yourself. If you are female, use a banana or carrot). Instructions can be found on the pack. A word of advice for women - don't assume that a man will feel confident using condoms. Learn how to use them yourself, so you can help.
- Putting lube onto the head of the penis can make sex more pleasurable for men (and less like they are wearing a condom).

Always have condoms handy if you think there is a possibility that you will be having sex. Don't assume that safe sex is a man's responsibility - women can carry condoms too. ¹

Down to Business

Once you have talked with your partner and come to an agreement about condom use, it's important to stick to it when it comes to having sex - sometimes people try and 'back-down' on agreements once they get to the bedroom. It may help to think of some statements that you feel comfortable using to reinforce your feelings should this happen, such as:

- I want to have safe sex to protect both of us
- Let's have a good and safe time
- This is for both of us...and I won't have sex without protection. Let me show you how good it can be – even with a condom
- I want to enjoy sex without worrying about getting pregnant
- To make sure I don't get an infection, I always use condoms

Afterwards, let your partner know that you appreciated their positive approach to safe sex²

IMPORTANT!

Sometimes people don't like to use protection for sex, so it can be helpful to think about how you might respond if you're ever with a partner who doesn't want to use a condom. Remember, you have a right to protect yourself and your health, and using condoms is a way to take care of your partner too – so you're not being selfish at all.



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¹ www.ashastd.org/condom/condom_negotiation.cfm

² <http://www.fpwa.org.au/resources/negotiating safesex.pdf>