

Teenage sexual health

Sexual health is making sure you protect your health when you are sexually active.

Donnie, Faith and Ava are all 17 and can have legal sex. In England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales the age of consent for both straight and gay people is 16.

Explaining that she had sex with Fatboy to get a shower, Faith said 'People make sex seem like a big deal, when it isn't.' However many young people who contact Childline about sex express regret. They say they felt pressurised into it or they're worried about getting pregnant.

Teenage sexual activity

- most young people become sexually active between 16 and 19
- sexual activity among teenagers is often unplanned
- sexual activity is affected by alcohol and drug-taking
- young people who stay in education longer are less likely to have early sex and they are more likely to use contraceptives.

Cultural differences

There are different attitudes to sex among young people of different ethnic backgrounds. Key factors are:

- how much they socialise with other groups
- the role of religion in their lives
- the attitude and beliefs of their parents
- how gender differences vary in different ethnic groups.

(Teenage Pregnancy Unit)

Pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Faith's advice is 'Boys don't be a fool, wrap your tool. No glove, no love.' But Faith did not use a condom when she had sex with Donnie. She said 'with Donnie it's different innit – I know him'.

Whether you know someone or not, sex without contraception can lead to pregnancy and if you don't use a condom you can get a STI. There are many different types of contraceptives, but condoms are both 98% effective in preventing pregnancy and number one for preventing STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and the HIV virus which can lead to AIDS.

How many young women get pregnant?

In 2009, 35,966 under 18s in England became pregnant. Nearly half of those had abortions.

In 2009, 7,100 under 16s in England became pregnant of whom 60% had abortions.

(Office of National Statistics)

Getting contraceptive advice

All young people, including under 16s have a right to access confidential sexual health advice and treatment, provided:

- they understand the emotional and physical implications of sexual activity
- they are not being pressurised into having sex.

They will be encouraged to tell a responsible adult about their relationship.

Young people can get free confidential advice about sexual health and contraception from:

- a Brook centre (if they are under 25)
- a family planning clinic
- some youth centres
- their GP
- another GP (if they prefer not to go to their own).

Under 25s can get contraceptives free from chemists, youth clinics and sexual health clinics. People of any age can buy condoms in supermarkets, from vending machines in public toilets or petrol stations.

Emergency contraception

Because Faith had unprotected sex with Donnie, she could choose to have emergency contraception up to five days after sex. Emergency contraception can be used if no contraception was used, if a condom splits or a pill is missed. Information about emergency contraception can be found at the places listed above, at an A&E unit or a GUM clinic.

Alcohol and sex

When Donnie and Faith spent the night together, they were very drunk.

The legal age for drinking alcohol is 18, but the law recognizes that some young people drink under adult supervision. Many under 18s can buy alcohol in shops and off licences. After drinking alcohol, among 16-24 year-olds:

- one in seven have had unprotected sex
- one in five have had sex that they regretted
- one in 10 was unable to remember if they had sex the night before.

Sixty per cent of young women who are infected with a STI were under the influence of alcohol when they had sex.

(Brook)

Many teenagers drink responsibly. However average weekly consumption has more than doubled since 1990. The UK has some of the highest levels of drunkenness in Europe:

- In 2009, half of 11-15 year olds had drunk alcohol
 - the amount drunk by 11-15 year olds doubled between 1990 and 2000.
- (Alcohol Concern)

Where can young people get advice about sexual health and contraception?

Brook has a free, confidential advice line on Ask Brook on 0808 802 1234.

Childline has a free, confidential helpline for young people who are worried about anything, including sex on 0800 1111