

AGE
10-15



Growing
up and

thinking
about

sex



Puberty

Huge changes take place as you grow up and develop from being a child to becoming an adult. These changes occur in your body, your emotions and your behaviour. This stage – known as puberty – is a process that takes place slowly over a number of years, usually between the ages of 9 and 18. Various changes occur at different times for different people. Girls and boys often begin puberty at different ages. Adolescents living with HIV might reach puberty later than other adolescents. All bodies are unique.

During puberty, some physical changes happen in both girls and boys, and some vary. Girls and boys grow taller, their sexual organs develop, and pubic hair and underarm hair grows. They sweat more and may get spots on their faces. Good hygiene is especially important.

Girls develop breasts, wider hips and menstruation (monthly bleeding) begins. Boys' voices get deeper, their facial hair grows and they may have 'wet dreams', when semen comes out their penis at night. These changes are all completely normal.



Menstruation, erections (when the penis gets hard) and wet dreams are nothing to be ashamed of.

Emotionally, this can be a difficult and confusing time, when you may question who you are. You may sometimes feel shy and awkward. But it's also an exciting time. You gain new skills. And friends and relationships become more important as you gradually move away from your parents.

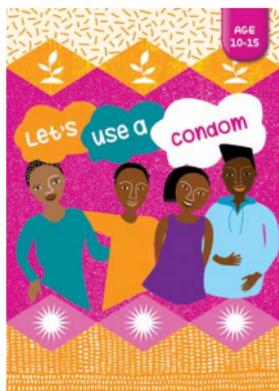
Puberty is the start of a long journey to becoming an adult and taking on more responsibilities in life. These changes to the body mean that a boy could get a girl pregnant if they had sex. But it doesn't mean that they are ready to become parents yet.



Making the right decision about sex

As you grow up, you'll probably meet someone you really like and feel sexually attracted to them. Having sexual feelings and wanting to be close to them is natural. But there's no rush to have sex.

It is important to think carefully about what having sex could lead to, for example, an unwanted pregnancy or you could get a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV. If you're living with HIV, you could pass the virus on or become reinfected. That's why it's a good idea to wait until you're older before you have sex and, when you do, you should use a condom.



See the leaflet 'Let's use a condom'.



Being able to say no and hear no

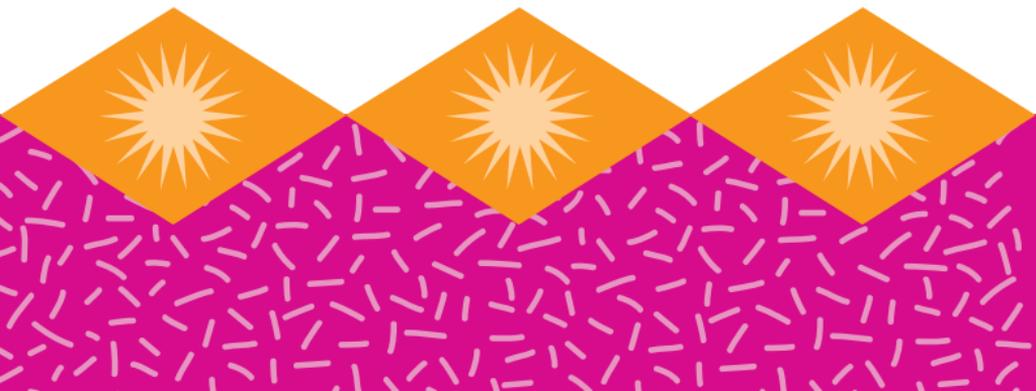
It's your body. So it's up to you if you have sex – or sexual contact of any kind – with someone else or not. Just because you like kissing and cuddling someone, or just because you're going out with somebody, doesn't mean you have to have sex with them. You have the right to say no to sex, and you also have the right to change your mind. This is essential for everyone to understand, but especially girls.

Saying no to sex isn't always easy. So it's a good idea to practise saying no firmly and clearly.

No. I don't want to have sex.



The other person must respect your choice. If they force you to have sex when you don't want to, it could be sexual assault or rape. This is never okay.



If someone says no to sex, this doesn't mean they don't care for you or that they are rejecting you. It means that they're not ready to have sex yet. You can still care about each other and enjoy each other's company without having sex. Also, in many countries, having sex with someone under the age of 16 is illegal.

In a loving relationship with someone you trust, sex can be a wonderful way to express how you feel. It's a special thing that should be enjoyed with the right person, at the right time, when you're both ready.