



Ask Sr. Ruth “Sexy Smarts” November 2008

Sister Ruth is a nursing sister with over 10 years of experience working in the field of sexual health education. She teaches in schools, facilitates workshops for adults and writes about sexual health issues. Visit her website: www.sisterruth.co.za

Feedback on our Topic of the Month: “Media and Cyber-bullying” Your Wordz.....

"When my dad was our age, everything was censored, the youth were more protected, but then again teens couldnt talk about sex openly.."

"..for little kids... seeing two girls kissing each other on tv could make a huge difference in their life and view point. Children are easily manipulated because they're used to doing what they're parents ("adults" to them) tell them."

Sr. Ruth's Wordz

The majority of teens I've spoken with on this subject agree that media portray sexuality in ways that can negatively affect sexual perceptions in youth. One girl commented on the fact that when TV characters have sex and break up, everything seems OK; there is never commentary on the emotional pain or other consequences like pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections. A recent study published in *Paediatrics* found that teens who watched programmes that had a lot of sexual content e.g. Friends, Sex and the City, had a higher incidence of teen pregnancy. Other sources say that not enough factors were taken into account. The bottom line is we need to be more aware! To read more on this visit: <http://www.sexetc.org/blog/>

While we cannot change directly what is available in the media, we can increase our *awareness* of its positive and negative effects through regular critique. Media *is* shaping our self and sexual understanding and evaluating this, together with peers can help correct misperceptions and counter negative influences.

Media Critique – Activity to do with friends

AIM: Critique what you see and talk about it with others.

1. Make a 'date' with a group of friends. Rent a movie or view a few programmes on TV, *including the ads!* Include the popcorn, snacks etc. that you would normally have for a fun 'movie night'.
2. Observe – relationships, what ads are selling and how, body image, gender roles, sex and communication, consequences etc. etc.

3. Critique Questions: How does the story compare with reality? With what can you identify? What messages are you getting about products / sexuality / relationships etc.? How are women portrayed? How are men portrayed? Is there manipulation, abuse or violence? How does the story 'end'?
4. How did you feel? Talk about the things that 'hooked' your emotions – positive and negative.
5. What have you learnt from this experience together – about media, your friends and yourself?
6. Take action: Write to the company, blog or tell younger children what you have learnt. Better yet, include them in your group for discussion (as long as the material being watched is something they would normally have access to).

Q&A – Pregnancy Symptoms and Tests

How long after sex can you tell if you are pregnant?

Some early signs of pregnancy include needing to pass urine frequently, tingling breasts, nausea, changes in appetite and missing a period or a period that is substantially lighter in flow. Home pregnancy tests are very reliable and can identify pregnancy hormones between 1 and 2 weeks following intercourse.

“Cyber-clinic”: Is this normal? (Genital Geography)

We look in the mirror a lot – counting zits and plucking stray eyebrows! Yet when I mention the importance of knowing what your genital area looks like, young people say, “ooh, gross!” I get lots of questions asking about what is *normal*. This is especially important since media can manipulate images to look 'perfect'! The reality is that everyone's body parts are uniquely different – this goes for everything, including our private parts.

Guys: The penis size – circumference and length vary greatly. Smaller relaxed penises increase more during erection. Curving to the right or left is also normal. The skin sac behind the penis (scrotum) contains two similar sized testicles. One can hang slightly lower than the other. Colour of the skin can vary greatly, especially when sexually aroused. Secretions from the penis include 'pre-cum' and semen. Uncircumcised guys should regularly pull back the foreskin and clean around the head of the penis (glans) – normally occurring creamy white mucus in this area is called smegma.

Problems: See a medical practitioner if there are bumps and lumps, your urine burns, there is a discharge that is painful or smells offensive or if there are warts / sores. If the foreskin is difficult or painful to pull back, get it checked.

Girls: The *vulva* contains a number of parts – the outer and inner *labia* (lips), the *clitoris*, *urethra* (where urine comes out), *vagina* and anus. The colour of the genitals also vary greatly and this is especially so when sexually aroused. The inner labia can be quite short, or longer – with one side longer than the other. The clitoris, above the urethra, can be small and tucked behind the skin 'hood' or slightly larger and easily visible. Girls with a larger clitoris may

experience some discomfort if underwear or jeans rub roughly against it. The vagina is a stretchy, muscular tube that links the outside reproductive parts to the interior parts. Normal discharge keeps the vagina clean and the colour and consistency changes through the cycle – from creamy to whitish or clear. Moisture increases in the vagina during sexual arousal. The *hymen* is a thin membrane that partially covers the vaginal opening. This also varies greatly from woman to woman and in some women the hymen can be nonexistent. Many women will experience a little bleeding when this membrane breaks.

Problems: See a medical practitioner if you have burning of urine, redness and itchiness together with ‘cottage cheese’ discharge (fungal infection), any discharge that is has a strong or offensive smell.

MIRROR MAGIC: Get yourself a small mirror that you can use to keep tabs on how your genital area looks. Take some private time to get to know yourself - that way, if there are any changes, you’ll be the first to know!

“Hot Debates” – Have your say!

TOPIC OF THE MONTH: New Year “Relationship Resolutions”

Time magazine (Dec.3) reviewed a book *Outliers*, by Malcolm Gladwell. The author looks at what makes people truly remarkable. He says that significant people are successful and popular not because of who they are in and of themselves, but because of the relationships they form, the context in which they live and how others support them and encourage their dreams. Our sexuality in the broadest sense of the word has to do with how we develop these relationships. Share some thoughts around the following questions:

- What things can you do this year to improve your relationship with yourself?
- What can you consistently do to maintain healthy relationships with friends / partners?
- Are there relationships that should be politely ended because they are negative or harmful to you?
- Which group of marginalised people could you encourage by your participation in their lives? How can you add value to the lives of others?

What are girls and guys saying to each other about sexuality and relationships? Post your response on the website – we want to hear your thoughts!

Web Resources: For ALL of those ‘hard to ask’ questions!

Sr. Ruth: www.sisterruth.co.za

SA Sexual Health Association: www.sexualhealth.co.za

Teen Sexuality: www.sxetc.com

Sexual Information: www.siecus.org

Dr. Eve: www.dreve.co.za

Sexual and Reproductive Health Services:

DISA Health Centre: 011-7871222 or visit www.safersex.co.za