



YOUNG PATIENTS AND SEX

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Communicating about sex may not always be easy, and yet knowing how to openly approach this topic can significantly improve our lives.

These Communication Principles have been created by young people who took part in the STYPA 2022 training course and are meant to act as peer advice to fellow young patients.

They cover three thematic areas: how to feel confident about sex as a young patient, communicating with your partner(s) and communicating with your healthcare provider.

Check them out — perhaps they can support you in your journey of communicating confidently about sex!

FEELING CONFIDENT ABOUT SEX AS A YOUNG PATIENT

The first step in successful communication about sex is to think about your own feelings, your sexual needs and what you want out of sex and relationships.

Try to consider the following principles to help you do that:

1

Sex is a valid need

You should not be ashamed of your sexual needs or lack thereof

2

Exploring your own sexuality by getting to know yourself and your needs can be helpful

Establish boundaries that will make you feel comfortable and get the most out of sex

4

Your decisions regarding sex are valid and should be respected. It is okay to take your time to make those decisions before moving forward with sex (if you want to move forward)

Being aware of how your health condition affects you physically and mentally can help you have a healthy sex life

6



...COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PARTNER(S)

As a young patient you are likely to need to make decisions about when and how to share your health condition with a potential partner. Whether it is a long-term partnership or a one-night stand, it is useful to consider how to set boundaries, and what can be important to communicate before having sex.

Below are some of the principles to consider:

1. You get to decide what to share and when to share. It's ok not to advertise your health condition right at the beginning of a relationship, as it's confidential information, which first and foremost belongs to you. Start the conversation at a good time and make sure there's enough time to finish talking. Also, trust your instincts. Sometimes it is not only about the communication challenges — you may simply be with not the right person. In such a case, you can leave the relationship if/when you need to.

2. You need to build trust with your partner and vice-versa. Create a safe space where you can be honest with your partner(s) regarding your doubts, insecurities and whatever else may be troubling you. Being vulnerable is OK. Be sure that you can be safe sharing how you are feeling when you need to. Leave space to argue without feeling like arguments are a sign of failure.

3. Encourage informed dialogues when discussing things regarding your health condition rather than dialogues based on assumptions and prejudices about your condition. Be open to change if things don't go as planned or expected. Talk about how the condition might affect your relationship and sex life now and in the future.



4. To keep both the communication and the relationship healthy, honesty is essential towards your partner(s) and yourself. A relationship is a two-way street. As much as we deserve patience and empathy, we also need to have patience and empathy for our partners. If compromises are needed, they should not just fall on one side. We should be equals in the relationship.

5. Be conscious of your own wants, needs, emotions, triggers, and values. These constitute the foundation for your boundaries and the discussions you will have in a relationship. While discussing, all sides need to consider each other's boundaries.

6. Respect each other's views, needs, experiences and boundaries. Respect and understand their reactions, and respect yourself. Loving and appreciating yourself will help you love and appreciate your partner(s).

7. If your prospective partner(s) doesn't accept you with your health condition, then consider that maybe it's not meant to be.

8. Relationships and sex can get complicated, and discussions can get heated. But remember, the point of a relationship is to make life more enjoyable.

9. If your condition means you have more limited control or feeling in some areas of your body, consider how to share and discuss this with your partner before having sex.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

Having a quality sex life can be an important part of our overall health and well-being. When it comes to communicating with your healthcare provider, many questions can arise: Should my healthcare provider know about my sex life? How will my treatment affect my sex life?

Below are some principles to help you set expectations towards your healthcare provider and communicate more effectively:

1. Patients should take concerns around their sex issues as importantly as concerns around their health condition. If you are concerned, ask questions, do not be ashamed.
2. Identify your wants and needs regarding your sex life and decide what you want to talk to your healthcare provider about in relation to those.
3. Your healthcare provider should understand that your sexuality and sex life is an important part of your life and can have significant impact on the quality of life.
4. You should be informed by your healthcare provider how your health condition may impact your sexual life. If your healthcare provider does not mention anything, you should be empowered to ask for further information.
5. You should be informed by your healthcare provider as to whether the treatment for your health condition can impact upon your sex life, and how. If it negatively impacts your sex life, and that's not acceptable to you, you should feel free to ask for a different treatment, if available.



6. If you can, choose a healthcare provider who is sex positive and who you feel comfortable talking with. Be aware that you have the right to a healthcare provider with whom you can talk about your sex life and, especially, how it's being affected by your health condition. Your healthcare provider should not minimise the importance of sexual health

7. If you can, choose a healthcare provider that invests in sex education classes for their staff and know how to talk with patients who have different health conditions, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

8. Your healthcare provider should engage without assumptions or prejudice and should not discriminate against you based on your gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, sexuality, age, disability, or pregnancy status. The right to non-discrimination is a fundamental human right.

The [European Patients' Forum \(EPF\)](#) is an independent non-profit, non-governmental umbrella organisation of patient organisations across Europe. EPF's 78 members include disease-specific patient groups active at EU level and national coalitions of patients. The mission of EPF is to advance the interests of patients and patients' communities by strengthening their collective impact across Europe through effective advocacy, education, empowerment, and partnership.

The [Summer Training Course for Young Patient Advocates \(STYPA\)](#) is a European Patients' Forum (EPF) training dedicated to young patient advocates (18-30 years old). STYPA is an exciting and unique opportunity offering tailored high-quality courses for young patients or representatives of young patients.