Healthy Sexuality

What is healthy sexuality?

- Healthy sexuality involves recognizing that we are all sexual beings, and celebrating the ways that our sexuality benefits us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Healthy sexuality is positive and enriches our lives. Healthy sexuality allows us to enjoy and control our sexual and reproductive behavior without guilt, fear or shame.
- Sexual expression is a form of communication through which we give and receive pleasure and emotion. It has a wide range of possibilities - from sharing fun activities, feelings and thoughts, warm touch or hugs, to physical intimacy. It is expressed both individually and in relationships throughout life.

The healthy sex "CERTS" model

Wendy Maltz developed the CERTS model for healthy sex; this model requires that the following conditions be met for a person to enjoy healthy & satisfying sex: Consent, Equality, Respect, Trust, and Safety.

- **CONSENT** means you can freely and comfortably choose whether or not to engage in sexual activity. You are able to stop the activity at any time during the sexual contact. It also means that you respect when someone else does not want to engage in a particular activity, for any reason.
- **EQUALITY** means your sense of personal power is on an equal level with your partner. Neither of you dominates the other.
- **RESPECT** means you have positive regard for yourself and for your partner. You feel respected by your partner and you respect them.
- **TRUST** means you trust your partner on both a physical and emotional level. You have mutual acceptance of vulnerability and an ability to respond to it with sensitivity.
- **SAFETY** means you feel secure and safe within the sexual setting. You are comfortable with and assertive about where, when and how the sexual activity takes place. You feel safe from the possibility of harm, such as unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection, and physical injury.

It takes spending time together and engaging in lots of honest, open communication to make sure that the CERTS conditions are operating in your relationship. That's why it is helpful to allow all aspects of a relationship to grow and develop at a consistent pace with physical intimacy.

Meeting the CERTS conditions does not ensure that you'll have amazing sex, but it can help you feel more secure in your relationship and increase your level of self-esteem.

Practice good communication

- Good communication is crucial to healthy sex. You can greatly increase feelings of mutual respect, emotional closeness, and sexual pleasure when you and your partner know how to communicate well with each other. Knowing how to talk openly and comfortably can help you solve sexual problems that come up from time to time in the normal course of an on-going intimate relationship.
- Be patient with yourself and your partner as you work to develop new communication skills. It takes time and a lot of practice to open up emotionally and discuss personal topics in safe and sensitive ways.

Strengthen trust

- Trust is an important quality in healthy sex. It helps us feel emotionally safe and secure about choosing to remain in an intimate relationship with our partner. Without trust, we're likely to feel increased amounts of anxiety, fear, disappointment and betrayal.
- Trust grows when both people in the relationship act responsibly and follow-through with commitments. While no one can guarantee that any relationship will last and remain satisfying for both people, you can strengthen mutual trust by having clear understandings about what you expect from each other in the relationship.
- Spend time with your partner discussing what you need and expect in the relationship for you to feel emotionally safe. Based on your discussion, create a list of understandings you will both agree to honor. You may want to formalize your list into an actual "contract" you will follow.

Healthy sex comparison chart

Learning how to distinguish healthy sex from other forms of sex can empower you to bring healthy sex more into your own life.

The chart below outlines how healthy sexuality differs from abusive and addictive sex.

Healthy Sex	Sexual Abuse and Addiction
Sex is controllable energy	Sex is uncontrollable energy
Sex is a choice	Sex is an obligation
Sex is a natural drive	Sex is addictive
Sex is nurturing, healing	Sex is hurtful
Sex is an expression of love	Sex is a condition of love or devoid of love
Sex is sharing with someone, sex is part of who I am	Sex is “doing to” someone
Sex requires communication	Sex is void of communication
Sex is private	Sex is secretive
Sex is respectful	Sex is exploitative
Sex is honest	Sex is deceitful
Sex is mutual	Sex benefits one person
Sex is intimate	Sex is emotionally distant
Sex is responsible	Sex is irresponsible
Sex is safe	Sex is unsafe
Sex has boundaries	Sex has no limits
Sex is empowering	Sex is power over someone
Sex enhances who you really are	Sex requires a double life
Sex reflects your values	Sex compromises your values
Sex enhances self esteem	Sex feels shameful

References

Much of the information in this handout was obtained from:

Healthy Sex web site: www.HealthySex.com
Region of Peel Public Health’s Healthy Sexuality web site: www.peelregion.ca/health/sexuality/relations/

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: **http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu**

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