

On the back cover of this booklet "It's Up TO You" are 8 questions. If you would like lead a discussion using these questions, the following is provided as a guide.

1. What kinds of things do you like to do with your friends?

In other words, where do they go together? What do they do? Are they uncomfortable talking about where they hang out, and if so, why? They may not want to publicly share their pursuits if they are illegal or destructive, but it may help that some teens like to go for walks, talk, go swimming, and so on.

2. How do you show your friends that you like them?

Do they have ways of expressing affection that are gentle and tender, or do they tease and roughhouse? If a boy and girl are considered a couple, do they "make out" in public? How do they feel about public displays? How do they distinguish between sex and affection?

3. How do you know if someone likes you?

Do they use intermediaries, and if so, is this satisfactory? Is it considered totally unacceptable to communicate feelings in words, and if so, why? If they completely mistake someone's feelings, is it painful? Are they uncomfortable when people talk about them?

4. If someone shows that they like you with a hug or a kiss, is that OK?

To what extent does anyone have control over the way other people express themselves physically? Conventions vary tremendously among different ethnic groups, making the "Canadian" standard confusing. It is important to point out to young people that they have choices: they can accept or reject touch. It is, however, often difficult to ascertain one's own feelings, It may also be difficult to determine how to deal with touch that is agreeable or disagreeable - for example, dancing very close may be either

5. What do you do if your friends push you to do something you really don't want to do?

Peer pressure is particularly strong in these early teen years. Drug and alcohol use, vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, fashion, music, and, of course, sexual experimentation are all issues that they are dealing with. They often are comparing the values that their families hold to those of their peers. If they are unwilling to go along are they ostracized or respected? How big a risk is it to say "that's not for me"?

6. How do you decide what's OK in kissing or touching?

Decision-making is the key concept - they have choices. They may not be in touch with their own feelings; they are formulating a new value system that lies somewhere between their friends' values (and those portrayed in the media) and their home values; they may have been coerced by an older person who assures them that it's OK, even though it is a secret. It is important that they consider themselves as sexual beings and acknowledge their sexual feelings. Denying these feelings or repressing them increase the risk of exploitive relationships and eventual teen pregnancy.

7. How do you stop someone from teasing or hurting you?

Everyone expresses distress and anger in different ways. Learning to clearly indicate why you are angry or upset is fundamental to improving communication. If someone is the butt of jokes, he or she needs to find a way to stop that behaviour. It seems to be atypical for people to express their feelings using words, but educators can help young people learn this skill. As far as dealing with being hurt is concerned, this question may open the door to a discussion about coercion or abuse, be it physical, sexual, or emotional.

8. Whom do you go to for help if someone is really bothering you?

If the above question results in a disclosure, or raises suspicions of abuse, the educator or facilitator needs to indicate people to go to - herself or himself, a public health nurse, or a parent, unless they are involved in the abuse. As for sexual coercion, which may vary from pressure to have sex to sexual assault, public health or Planned Parenthood clinics may be good places to talk over ways to raise self-esteem and assertiveness to a higher level. We want to encourage parents to make themselves available to their children, and similarly encourage children to seek help from their parents. Sometimes this is not possible. For example, if a teenager thinks he or she is homosexual, a sympathetic professional may be a more suitable choice for working it through. If he or she is involved in prostitution or drugs, professional help may be an easier first step.