

Six Principles of Sexual Health

Sexual desires are as unique to each person as their fingerprint. Studying them can reveal insights about your subconscious realms and the intense emotions that are often processed by the erotic mind in the form of a turn on. As you embark on a journey of understanding your sexual self, you may uncover fantasies that make you question, “Am I normal?” or “Is that okay to fantasize about or act on?”

Sexuality researchers at the World Health Organization, in collaboration with Michael Vigorito and Doug Barun-Harvey developed six principles of sexual health as a guideline to answer these questions. No matter how quirky your sexual fantasy, if you are honoring these guidelines, then you can feel free to let yourself explore!

1. CONSENT

First and foremost, is everyone involved in this scenario giving their consent? Remember, consent is a voluntary approval of what is being done or proposed. Consent isn't just the absence of a NO. It is not always verbal, but it must be very clear to all parties as an ecstatic YES to make sure the the sexual space is a safe one. Importantly, consent can be revoked at any time.

3. HONESTY

Honesty is the foundation of any relationship, but especially a sexual one. Open communication is essential to sexual health because it creates a safe space to discuss boundaries, expectations, desires, fantasies, health status, relationship agreements, and the goals of each partner. Acquiring a person's consent without total honesty can quickly turn a pleasurable experience into one based on exploitation.

5. PROTECTION FROM STI, BBI, & UNWANTED PREGNANCY

For those struggling, it can be challenging to talk about Sexually Transmitted Infections, Blood Borne Infections, and pregnancy before entering into an intimate space. Yet protection from these outcomes is essential to sexual health. It is a shared burden for all parties involved to know their health status and take steps to prevent the transmission of disease and to prevent unwanted pregnancy.

2. NONEXPLOITATION

Is any party being manipulated or coerced into giving their consent? If so, this completely undermines the consent itself. Exploitation can look like guilt tripping, ultimatums, pressure, taking advantage of an intoxicated person, threats of violence or betrayal, or a manipulation of trust and boundaries. All healthy sexual play should be grounded in respect for boundaries and personal autonomy.

4. SHARED VALUES

Values around sex and relationships can vary widely across cultures, families, and even individuals. Certain boundaries or expectations might be a given in one family or culture, but not in another. Without a discussion prior to intimacy, these value differences can lead to uncomfortable situations or even accidental exploitation. Taking the time to discuss values leads to a safer sexual container and deeper understanding for all parties.

6. PLEASURE

Last, but not least, is the foundation of it all- pleasure. In both solo and partner play, stigma, shame, pressure, or outdated erotic scripts can put pleasure in the back seat. Sex isn't just about performance and orgasms, so the invitation is to stay curious and make sure all parties are enjoying the ride because what brings us pleasure can change over time. If all the above principles are being met, give yourself permission to be present to the feeling of pleasure itself.