

SEXUAL HEALTH

The GP's Role

The GP has a key role to play in adolescent sexual health:

- Prevention of sexual health problems through screening and treatment of sexually transmissible infections (STIs); and provision of contraception
- Promotion of sexual health through identification of risk behaviours and education about safe and unsafe behaviours
- Helping young people understand and feel comfortable with their sexuality and sexual identity

Management Approaches

- Establishing a trusting relationship will help the young person feel comfortable discussing sexual health issues:
 - adopt a non-judgemental approach
 - reassure the young person about confidentiality
- Be prepared to raise the issue and show comfort in discussing the topic
- Do not assume that a young person is heterosexual
 - acknowledge that feelings of attraction to the same sex are common and may or may not imply homosexual orientation
 - enquire about both opposite and same-sex relationships
- Adopt a holistic approach addressing the whole person and their developing relationships
- Where necessary, refer to specialist services – e.g.
 - family planning association
 - sexual assault services
 - support services for gay and lesbian young people
 - women's health services

Sexual History Taking

A comprehensive sexual health assessment should include not only information pertaining to 'risk' and screening for STIs and pregnancy but also a broader exploration of the young person's sense of well-being and sexual identity:

- Use the **HEADSS** assessment with younger adolescents or for an adolescent who presents with a seemingly unrelated issue
- Ask permission to ask sensitive questions and use the 'third person' approach to explore sexuality and sexual behaviour, for example:
"Some young people your age have begun to have sex. Have you ever had a sexual relationship?"
- When taking a sexual history, ask about partners in a gender-neutral way, eg:
"Are you in a sexual relationship?" not *"Do you have a boyfriend/ girlfriend?"*
"Have your sexual partners all been male, female or both?"
- If the young person presents directly with a sexual health issue – such as a request for contraception, pregnancy test or HIV test – take a more in-depth sexual history

Sexual Health Counselling

- Check the young person's level of knowledge – provide education and counselling about their body and their sexuality; safe and unsafe sexual practices; abstinence; contraception
- Help the adolescent to develop skills for dealing with difficult situations, e.g.
 - negotiating with a partner who is pressuring them to have sex
 - sexual decision-making
 - talking to parents
- Discuss situations where sexual risk taking behaviour may be occurring – such as with substance use; unprotected sex
- Explore ways to reduce risk taking and how to stay safe, e.g.
 - how to negotiate safe sex or condom use with a partner
 - explain what 'safe' and 'unsafe' sexual behaviors are
- Explain correct condom use
 - if available, demonstrate using a penis model

Gay and Lesbian Young People

- Young people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or uncertain of their sexual orientation can be a particularly vulnerable group
- Screen for psychosocial risks – depression; anxiety; suicidal risk. Provide support or referral for counselling where necessary
- Provide a range of options – opportunity to discuss their sexuality; referral to support services where available; literature
- Provide information/education on safer sexual practices

Information, counselling and support for gay and lesbian young people:
2010 Gay and Lesbian Youth Services – 1800 652010 or 02 95526130
www.rainbow.net.au/~twenty10/

Conducting Examinations

- Ask girls if they would like a female support person with them during the examination – e.g. a friend, relative or female practice staff member
- For some cultures it may be uncomfortable or even shameful for a male doctor to examine a female patient
 - ask the parents' permission
 - arrange for the girl to be examined by a female practitioner where possible and /or to have a female support person or family member present
- Explain in detail what you will be doing
- Check that the young woman has understood and gives consent to the procedure
- Allow the patient to undress and cover herself before starting the examination
- Explain what you are doing at each step of the procedure

For information on sexual health issues contact FPA Health (Family Planning Association) – 1300 658886 (telephone information line)
Website: www.fpahealth.org.au