Virginity: A Very Personal Decision

Sometimes it might seem like everyone in school is talking about who's a virgin, who isn't, and who might be. For both girls and guys, the pressure sometimes can be intense.

But deciding whether it's right for you to have sex is one of the most important decisions you'll ever have to make. Each person must use his or her own judgment and decide if it's the right time — and the right person.

This means considering some very important factors — both physical ones, like the possibility of becoming pregnant or getting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) — and emotional factors, too. Though a person's body may feel ready for sex, sex also has very serious emotional consequences.

For many teens, moral factors are very important as well. Family attitudes, personal values, or religious beliefs provide them with an inner voice that guides them in resisting pressures to get sexually involved before the time is right.

Peer Pressure Problems and Movie Madness

Nobody wants to feel left out of things — it's natural to want to be liked and feel as if you're part of a group of friends. Unfortunately, some teens feel that they have to lose their virginity to keep up with their friends or to be accepted.

It doesn't sound like it's all that complicated; maybe most of your friends have already had sex with their boyfriends or girlfriends and act like it isn't a big deal. But sex isn't something that's only physical; it's emotional, too. And because everyone's emotions are different, it's hard to rely on your friends' opinions to decide if it's the right time for you to have sex.

What matters to you is the most important thing, and your values may not match those of your friends. That's OK — it's what makes people unique. Having sex to impress someone or to make your friends happy or feel like you have something in common with them won't make you feel very good about yourself in the long run. True friends don't really care whether a person is a virgin — they will respect your decisions, no matter what.

Even if your friends are cool with your decision, it's easy to be misled by TV shows and movies into thinking that every teen in America is having sex. Writers and producers may make a show or movie plot exciting by showing teens being sexually active, but these teens are actors, not real people with real concerns. They don't have to worry about being ready for sex, how they will feel later on, or what might happen as a result. In other words, these TV and movie plots are stories, not real life. In real life, every teen can, and should, make his or her own decision.

Boyfriend Blues or Girlfriend Gripes

Although some teens who are going out don't pressure each other about sex, the truth is that in many relationships, one person wants to have sex although the other one doesn't.

Again, what matters most differs from person to person. Maybe one person in a relationship is more curious and has stronger sexual feelings than the other. Or another person has religious reasons why he or she doesn't want to have sex and the other person doesn't share those beliefs.

Whatever the situation, it can place stress and strain on a relationship — you want to keep your boyfriend or girlfriend happy, but you don't want to compromise what you think is right.

As with almost every other major decision in life, you need to do what is right for you and not anyone else. If you think sex is a good idea because a boyfriend or girlfriend wants to begin a sexual relationship, think again.

Anyone who tries to pressure you into having sex by saying, "if you truly cared, you wouldn't say no," or "if you loved me, you'd show it by having sex" isn't really looking out for you and what matters most to you. They're looking to satisfy their own feelings and urges about sex.

If someone says that not having sex after doing other kinds of fooling around will cause him or her physical pain, that's also a sign that that person is thinking only of himself or herself. If you feel that you should have sex because you're afraid of losing that person, it may be a good time to end the relationship.

Sex should be an expression of love — not something a person feels that he or she must do. If a boyfriend or girlfriend truly loves you, he or she won't push or pressure you to do something you don't believe in or aren't ready for yet.

Feeling Curious
You might have a lot of new sexual feelings or thoughts. These feelings and thoughts are totally normal — it means that all of your hormones are working properly. But sometimes your curiosity or sexual feelings can make you feel like it's the right time to have sex, even though it may not be.

Though your body may have the ability to have sex and you may really want to satisfy your curiosity, it doesn't mean your mind is ready. Although some teens understand how sex can affect them emotionally, many don't — and this can lead to confusion and deeply hurt feelings later.

But at the same time, don't beat yourself up or be too hard on yourself if you do have sex and then wish you hadn't. Having sexual feelings is normal and handling them can sometimes seem difficult, even if you planned otherwise.

Just because you had sex once doesn't mean you have to continue or say yes later on, no matter what anyone tells you. Making mistakes is not only human, it's a major part of being a teen — and you can learn from mistakes.

**Why Some Teens Wait**

Some teens are waiting longer to have sex — they are thinking more carefully about what it means to lose their virginity and begin a sexual relationship.

For these teens, there are many reasons for abstinence (not having sex). Some don't want to worry about unplanned pregnancy and all its consequences. Others see abstinence as a way to protect themselves completely from STDs. Some STDs (like AIDS) can literally make sex a life-or-death situation, and many teens take this very seriously.

Some teens don't have sex because their religion prohibits it or because they simply have a very strong belief system of their own. Other teens may recognize that they aren't ready emotionally and they want to wait until they're absolutely sure they can handle it.

When it comes to sex, there are two very important things to remember: 1) that you are ultimately the person in charge of your own happiness and your own body; and 2) you have a lot of time to wait until you're totally sure about it.

If you decide to put off having sex, it's OK — no matter what anyone says. Being a virgin is one of the things that proves you are in charge, and it shows that you are powerful enough to make your own decisions about your mind and body.

If you find yourself feeling confused about decisions related to sex, you may be able to talk to an adult (like a parent, doctor, older sibling, aunt, or uncle) for advice. Keep in mind, though, that everyone's opinion about sex is different. Even though another person may have useful advice to share, in the end, the decision is up to you.

**Questions:**

1. True or False: Some teens feel that they have to lose their virginity to keep up with their friends or to be accepted.
2. True or False: Sex is not emotional, it is only physical.
3. True or False: In many relationships, one person wants to have sex although the other one doesn't.
4. True or False: Sex should be an expression of love, not something a person feels that he or she must do.
5. True or False: If you have a lot of new sexual feelings or thoughts, it is not normal— your hormones are not working properly.
6. True or False: Though your body may have the ability to have sex and you may really want to satisfy your curiosity, it doesn't mean your mind is ready.
7. True or False: If you had sex once, you have to continue or say yes later on.
8. As written in this article, what are 4 reasons why some teens choose not to have sex?
9. As written in this article, what are the 2 very important things to remember when it comes to sex?
10. If you find yourself feeling confused about decisions related to sex, who are some people you may be able to talk to?
11. If your boyfriend or girlfriend tries to pressure you into having sex, what are some things you can tell them to let them know you are not ready? **LIST 3-4 REASONS**