

HANDOUT ...**Characteristics of Healthy Sexuality**

From a holistic perspective, sexual health includes emotional, psychological, physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. Sexual health is developed through the life course, from birth to death. Integrating sexuality into one's life in a balanced way is a life-time endeavor.

The following are characteristics of someone who embodies healthy sexuality:¹

COMMUNICATION

- Communicates respectfully their desires to have sex or to not have sex.
- Communicates unintended risks of engaging in sexual activity with partner(s) and takes responsibility for mitigating harm (e.g. unintended pregnancy, spread of STIs, use of mind-altering substances, etc.)
- Accepts refusals of sex respectfully and without hostility.
- Talks with partner(s) about sexual activity before it occurs, including limits and boundaries, contraceptive and condom use, and meaning in the relationship.
- Is sensitive and attuned to partner(s)' non-verbal cues during sexual activity.
- Able to communicate before, during, and after sex their own needs, limits, and boundaries as well as listen and adhere to their partner(s)' needs, limits, and boundaries.

RELATIONSHIPS

- Develops friendships with individuals of all genders that do not have a sexual agenda.
- Chooses partners who are responsible, trustworthy, safe, and giving.
- Can be sexually intimate without being physical (e.g., talk about sexual feelings, verbally express attraction, do things that awaken desire in partner).
- Can express themselves romantically or sexually in ways other than involving genitals (e.g., holding, caressing, kissing, etc.).

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-WORTH

- Appreciates their own body and can touch their own body without feeling shame or disgust.
- Allows themselves to experience pleasurable sensual and sexual feelings.
- Has the capacity to nurture themselves and others, and accepts nurturing from others.
- Feels joy in sexual experiences of their choosing and enjoys sexual feelings without necessarily acting upon them.
- Can distinguish between a desire for touch rather than desire for sexual activity.
- Has a developed sense of self; an understanding of who they are.
- Allows themselves to be vulnerable.
- Is comfortable with their sexual identity and orientation.
- Is becoming aware of the impact of negative sexual experiences such as sexual abuse, and the impact of negative cultural messages on their sexual development, and aims to take steps to address issues that have arisen as a result of past experiences.

HANDOUT...**Characteristics of Healthy Sexuality** (continued)**EDUCATION**

- Realizes and understands the risks of engaging in sexual activity with others.
- Comprehends the impact of external messages on thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, and behaviors related to sexuality.
- Understands that the drive for sex can be powerful and can be integrated into one's life in positive and healthy ways.
- Respects the right of all people to enjoy and engage in the full range of consensual, non-exploitative sexual behaviors.

VALUES

- Decides on what is personally "right" and acts on these values.
- Shows respect to others whose cultural values, ethnic heritage, age, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression are different from theirs.

SEXUAL HEALTH

- Takes responsibility for their own bodies and their own orgasms.
- If desired, uses contraception effectively to avoid unplanned pregnancy and uses condoms and safer sex to avoid contracting or spreading a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Practices health-promoting behaviors such as regular checkups, breast or testicular self-exams, regular and routine testing for STIs.

SPIRITUALITY

- Honors what they regard as sacred in relation to sex and sexuality.
- Understands that sexuality can be a way to connect body and soul.

¹ Adapted from Hadsall and Associates. (2010). *Characteristics of sexually healthy adults*. <https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/sexualhealth/characteristics.html>