

## Teen Talk – Information for Boys



Before you left primary school, you will have had a talk explaining the changes in your body that take place over a few years – you will probably have a growth spurt, you start to grow hair under your arms, on your face and around your genitals (sex organs), your sex organs develop, your voice gets deeper and you might have wet dreams.

You'll know that, along with the changes in your body, there are often changes in how you feel. Maybe your mood will change suddenly from happy to sad..... or you'll lose your temper and make everyone's life a misery.....or you might stop being a chatty sort of person and turn into someone quiet who wants to be shut away in the bedroom listening to music and who grunts instead of talks.

Your friends in school might be talking non-stop about girls and sex, the magazines are full of people looking fantastic and if you have Spina Bifida or disabilities linked to Hydrocephalus, you might be wondering about where you fit in with all this. Lots of boys of your age with Spina Bifida worry about sex and feel they can't talk to anyone about it. It's hard to ask a doctor in an out-patient clinic with your mum or dad by your side.

Remember that most of us don't have amazing sex lives and get by with love and a sense of humour and there's often a lot more talk than action. Most people have had to deal with fancying someone who isn't interested in them or relationships coming to an end.

### Some important things to remember before talking about sex

Having a disability doesn't mean you can't have a good sex life. There are lots of men with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus in loving relationships and often with children of their own. Having a good sex life isn't the only way of being happy.

Having sex – gay or straight (that is with another boy or with a girl) is illegal until you are both sixteen or over. Even if your partner agrees, you could be prosecuted. Even when you're 17, it is illegal for someone like a teacher or a carer in a position of trust to have sex with you.

But it isn't illegal for you to get confidential advice about sex or contraception before you're 17 as long as the person giving it is sure you understand what it's all about. The most important thing is not to feel pressured by anyone to do anything that you're not happy about. You may not feel ready for a sexual relationship or you may have cultural or religious reasons for ruling out sex before marriage. You'll know that some people think that sex is a really important part of their relationship and some that other things matter more. Some people think that same-sex relationships are wrong but others do not.

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### Things that can make life difficult.....

- Having had a lot of people looking at your body and touching you... doctors, nurses, carers. You might feel your body doesn't belong to you. You might have "switched off".
- Feeling unhappy and embarrassed about your body
- Not having much chance to explore your body and find out what feels good.
- Other people thinking that, because you're disabled, you won't be interested in sex
- Missing out on a lot of the playground or going home chat because you are using a taxi or coming to school with your mum or dad.
- Not having much privacy
- Not having much chance to be alone with a girl or same-sex friend
- Wanting to touch girls without their permission
- Having difficulties with your bowel or bladder. Maybe having a urine or colostomy bag.
- Having reduced or no feeling in the lower part of your body
- Finding it hard to get or keep an erection (hard-on)
- Finding you can't ejaculate (come) properly
- Worrying about whether you'll be able to have children
- Some people take advantage of a person with a disability, especially those with learning difficulties or who are not streetwise.

### Things that can help

- Feeling good about yourself and looking good
- Starting to build up your independence skills with help from your parents. Remember this might be as hard for them as for you!
- Talking to disabled people whom you can trust and who are a bit older than yourself; try out some of your questions on them.
- If your parents can't answer your questions or you feel embarrassed asking them, talking to an adult you can trust: maybe another member of the family, someone in school or a health professional. A urologist or urology nurse specialist might be helpful if you could ask to see them in private..
- Making sure people respect your privacy ... not easy if you spend much time in hospital or need a lot of personal care from your family.
- Getting used to asserting yourself. If you don't want someone to touch you, learn to say so pleasantly but firmly.
- Respecting other people's right to privacy. They may not want you to hug or touch them the first time you meet.
- Thinking about how and when to share personal information – like about having a colostomy bag – and maybe practising how to do that.

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- Getting to touch and know your own body and what makes you feel good. If you don't have much feeling in the lower part of your body you might get pleasure from other parts. Most people masturbate and, as long as you don't have any religious or cultural reasons for not doing it, you will find it feels nice and helps you to learn about how your body works.
- Finding out ways of dealing with any problems with erections or ejaculation. Urology or spinal injuries unit staff can often advise and so can other disabled people. Drugs like Viagra and sex aids can help when you're old enough and ready for them.
- Asking your GP or urologist about doing a sperm count if you're worried about having children. Even if it's a problem, there are ways of dealing with it.
- Sex isn't just about having intercourse (which is illegal before you are 17 anyway) and you might enjoy kissing and cuddling just as much. You might need to experiment to find a position which is comfortable for you especially if you have a wheelchair getting in the way.
- Making sure you've emptied your bowels and bladder before you go out on a date.

### Keeping Safe

- Take things slowly and don't feel you have to be sexually active until you're ready for it.
- If you are having sex and don't want to make your girlfriend pregnant, you have to use contraception, and you will probably have learnt in school about different methods of this. If you are using a condom and you or your partner has Spina Bifida, it needs to be latex-free as a lot of people with Spina Bifida are allergic to latex.
- Your GP or specialist organisations like fpa or the Brook Advisory Centres can supply condoms. You might feel shy about going to your GP without your mum or dad but try to get used to this just for ordinary things and everyday illnesses.
- If you are having sex, have safe sex and use a condom – latex-free if you have Spina Bifida. You can pick up a sexually transmitted infection (STI or lovebug) just like anyone else but, if you do not have full feeling in the lower part of your body, you might not be aware of symptoms of pain or stinging or discharge.
- Remember that when you do want your partner to get pregnant and if one of you has Spina Bifida, she should take high dose folic acid tablets to reduce the risk of your baby having Spina Bifida. Anyone without a family history of Spina Bifida should take a lower dose of folic acid.

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### Age of Consent

- It is not illegal to seek advice and help about sex if you are under 17. This can be advice about sexuality, contraception or just how sex works.
- It's not illegal to be given contraception by a doctor or family planning clinic, providing they are certain that you understand the issues surrounding sex and contraception.
- Clinics are confidential. If you don't want anyone to know you're having sex, that's okay, contraception will still be available to you. If you can, it's better to let your parents know, but that decision is up to you. Clinics will respect your wishes.

Likewise, it's not illegal to seek confidential advice about abortions. If your partner finds herself pregnant, go and talk through your options with your doctor or one of the many support organisations