

#BeMoreDaring



LOVE, SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

FOR YOUTH 15 - 29





TIP BOX



FEATURE BOX



ACTION BOX



PROMPT BOX



WHO WE ARE

bumb'INGOMSO – an isiXhosa phrase meaning “mould the future”
– is a multi-faceted HIV prevention project that supports
and empowers young people to fulfil their potential by
connecting them to key resources, support and networks.

WHY TALK ABOUT LOVE, SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS?

Love and sexual attraction are a natural part of life, but can also be
confusing and full of pressure. This booklet helps you make informed
choices that protect your health, emotions and build your future.

UNDERSTANDING LOVE AND YOURSELF

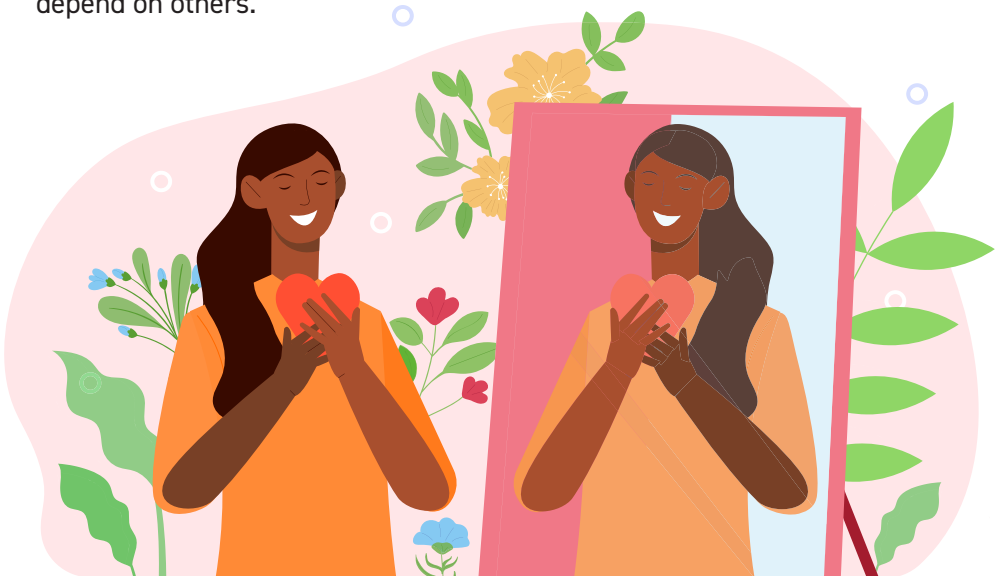
Love is one of the most powerful emotions we experience. It takes many forms – friends, family and romantic partners – each with different mixes of intimacy, passion and commitment.

Family love is the love between parents and children, siblings, or people who care for one another unconditionally. It's often high in commitment and intimacy. These are people you care for, belong to, feel responsible for, are loyal to and feel the need to protect.

Friendship love is built on trust, respect, loyalty and shared experiences. It's also high in commitment and intimacy. Friends support you, through good and bad times, make you feel understood, and celebrate your growth.

Romantic love is what you feel for someone you are attracted to. This can be to people of any gender or sexual orientation. It often begins with passion – the spark that draws people together. This may not last, but it can deepen into intimacy and commitment as you get to know each other.

Caring for yourself is the foundation for loving others. **Self-love** means looking after your emotional and physical well-being and setting boundaries to protect your energy. Healthy self-love allows you to form stronger, better relationships, and reminds you that your worth doesn't depend on others.





What is the difference between a crush and real love?

A crush is usually intense and exciting but often based on attraction or fantasy rather than real connection. It can fade quickly. Genuine love grows over time through trust, honesty and shared experiences. It includes both intimacy and commitment.

THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

People express and receive love in five main ways: words, acts of service, quality time, gifts and touch. Notice what makes others feel loved, even if it's not your strongest love language – and let them know how you like to be loved. It's often different!



LGBTQ+ love and acceptance

Love and attraction can exist between people of any gender or sexual orientation. Everyone deserves to love safely and openly, and the South African law allows anyone to get married. But the reality is that many young people are bullied or attacked for being LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex). Sometimes it's not safe to come out to your friends or family. Talking to a counsellor or LGBTQ+ organisation can help you feel less alone. Reach out to:

The Triangle Project: triangle.org.za

OUT LGBT Wellbeing: out.org.za

Or call **LifeLine**: 0861 322 322

WHAT MAKES A RELATIONSHIP HEALTHY?

Healthy relationships are built on communication, trust, respect and boundaries. They make you feel safe, supported and free to be yourself without fear of being judged or controlled. They boost your confidence and give both people the space to grow and make decisions for themselves.

Of course, it isn't like in the movies – those are often just a fantasy. But there is a difference between normal struggles and unhealthy relationships. If you can listen to each other, be honest and work through disagreements, it's a strong foundation.

Unhealthy relationships, on the other hand, drain your energy, damage your self-worth and make it harder to cope. They often involve control, selfishness, jealousy, a power imbalance, disrespect or even abuse.

SPOTTING UNHEALTHY PATTERNS

Warning signs of toxic relationships include:

- Constant criticism, jealousy, or control
- Pressure, manipulation or threats to do things you don't want to do
- Being cut off from friends or family
- Disrespecting boundaries, stalking or invading privacy
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Feeling unsafe or on edge
- Avoiding problems or responding to conflict violently
- One person making all the decisions or controlling the money
- Discouraging ambitions or independence
- Extreme affection followed by neglect or mistreatment.



BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

Every relationship needs boundaries so that both people feel safe and respected. This can be around:

- **Touch:** "I'm not ready to have sex."
- **Time:** "I need space to focus on my studies."
- **Communication:** "Please don't read my private messages."
- **Online:** "Don't post pictures of me without asking."

Everyone's boundaries are different, and they change depending on the situation or person.



"Setting boundaries is like a velvet rope around VIP areas in your life, allowing your partner to love you without granting all-access."

– Yoxolo: bumb'INGOMSO participant

WHAT IS CONSENT?

It means both people agree freely to take part in something. Not because of pressure, intimidation or guilt. Being silent or uncertain does not count as consent. You can **change your**

mind or withdraw consent at any time. If

someone is drunk, high, asleep or not fully aware, they cannot give consent. Remember you don't owe anyone access to your body and nobody should ever touch you without permission.

SETTING DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

You have the right to privacy online, even in an intimate relationship. Think before sharing photos, videos or passwords and never pressure someone else to share private content.



SAYING “NO”

Saying “no” can be hard, especially when you care about someone or don't want to hurt their feelings. But you don't have to explain or apologise when you need to set a boundary. Likewise, if someone says “no” to you, always take it seriously. Don't try to bargain with them or guilt-trip them.

POWER IMBALANCES

When someone uses their position or resources to get what they want, it's not love, it's an abuse of power.

BLESSER RELATIONSHIPS

A *blesser* is usually an older, wealthy man who gives younger women money, gifts or a fancy lifestyle in exchange for sex. While it might seem exciting, these relationships often come with real dangers.

Because of the age and power difference, young women aren't free to insist on condom use or make their own sexual choices. This increases the risk of HIV and other STIs. Nearly one in four new HIV infections in South Africa happen among young women aged 15–24 – often through relationships with older men.

Once the relationship ends, many young women are left feeling discarded, threatened or exploited. These relationships often disrupt their education, make them financially dependent and trap them in cycles of abuse. Remember, no gift is worth your health or freedom.



HOW TO END A RELATIONSHIP

Rejection and heartbreak are tough, but they are a normal part of life. Everyone experiences them at some point. The best way to end a relationship depends on whether it's healthy or unhealthy.

IF IT'S HEALTHY

- End things face to face if it feels okay to do so.
- Be honest about your feelings and why you're ending it.
- Speak kindly and listen with empathy.
- Don't criticise or blame them. Stick with what you need moving forward.
- Cut contact to give each other space to process emotions.

IF IT'S UNHEALTHY

- Prioritise your safety above everything else. You do **not** owe them an explanation.
- End the relationship from a safe place. This could be a phone call, message or with someone you trust nearby.
- Cut all contact.
- Seek support from organisations that help survivors.
- Focus on your recovery.

HEALING AND MOVING FORWARD

Here are seven tips for moving forward afterwards:

1. Accept that you'll feel sad and empty for a while. It won't last forever.
2. Feel your feelings fully so they can pass.
3. Talk to close friends and family.
4. Move past regret by thinking about what you can learn.
5. Resist unhealthy behaviours like excessive drinking or eating.
6. Exercise to get rid of negative energy and boost your mood.
7. Get back to the people and things you enjoy.

Need to talk? Reach out for confidential support:

LoveLife: 0800 121 900 |

Please Call Me: 083 323 1023 | WhatsApp: 060 017 9672

LifeLine: 0861 322 322 | WhatsApp: 084 922 8808.



LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Sex should be a positive and enjoyable experience, but the sad thing is it can end up having a negative impact on your life when you're not prepared for it. You often hear young people saying sex just happened, or they did it in the heat of the moment. Others feel pressured, or even forced, into having sex when they don't want to. Here are some things to think about – whether you have had sex or not – so that you can take control of your sexual health.

AM I READY?

Friends, partners, social media and popular hook-up culture make sex seem like something you do to prove your love or fit in. But it's a serious decision. Apart from the physical consequences, there are psychological, emotional, spiritual and social things to consider. Before starting a sexual relationship, ask yourself:

- Am I truly ready to have sex now, not just physically?
- Do I trust the person completely?
- Can I protect myself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like HIV?
- If I/my partner were to get pregnant, would we keep the baby or terminate the pregnancy?
- Does having sex now match my personal values?
- Will this negatively affect my friendships, reputation or how I'm treated in my community?

If any answer is “no” or “I'm not sure,” it's better to wait.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS ABOUT CONSENT

You should also wait if you are younger than 16, which is the legal age of consent. Anyone younger can't legally agree to sex, even if they say yes. For example, if two people aged 15 and 18 have sex it is considered rape. This law protect teens from being exploited.

GETTING TO KNOW YOURSELF SEXUALLY

Masturbation is a great way to get to know your body and what feels good sexually. It is also a safe and healthy way to explore sex without the possibility of contracting an STI or having an unplanned pregnancy. Sex toys enhance this experience, but using your hands is just as effective. Visit Bwise for tips on sexual health and pleasure:

www.bwisehealth.com/Resources/MasturbationFacts

Hygiene tips

Make sure your hands and genitals are clean when playing with yourself or your partner to prevent skin irritation and urinary tract infections (UTIs).

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT MY QUESTIONS?

If you feel awkward talking to your family or friends about your sexual questions, call the bumb'INGOMSO Call Centre for free at 0800 555 558. You can also get medical advice from young nurses at #Keready: WhatsApp 060 019 0000.



PROTECTION AND SAFE SEX

One of the biggest responsibilities of having sex is protecting yourself and your partner from unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. This is called safe sex and you will need to use contraceptives and condoms for it.

CONTRACEPTIVES: YOUR OPTIONS

Contraceptives are a method you use to prevent pregnancy. There are many options, and each has pros and cons. Talk to a healthcare professional to find what works for you.

Condoms are your best bet because they are the only contraception that protects against both pregnancy and STIs/HIV. Male and female condoms are also free at health clinics, and have no long-term side effects for women. You need to use a new one every time you have sex, so keep a few in stock and make sure you know how to use them properly.

The other options to prevent pregnancy apply only to women and many are free or available cheaply at clinics and health centres. None of them prevent STIs.

- The Pill (oral contraception): Must be taken every day at the same time.
- Injection: Given every two or three months at a clinic.
- IUD (loop): A small device placed in the uterus by a nurse or doctor that prevents pregnancy for up to 5–10 years.
- Implant: A small rod placed under the skin that releases hormones to prevent pregnancy for up to 3 years.
- Emergency pill (the “morning-after pill”): Can be taken within 3–5 days after unprotected sex or if a condom failed, but the sooner the better. It's not for regular use, though, only emergencies.

Some medications may make hormonal contraception less effective. Always tell your **healthcare provider** or **pharmacist** what you are taking to ensure your contraceptive works effectively. For more info, visit www.bwisehealth.com/Resources/Contraceptives

CONTRACEPTION MYTHS

- “Pulling out” just before ejaculation doesn't prevent pregnancy because men often release small amounts of sperm beforehand.
- Balloons or plastic wrap do not work instead of condoms!



PREVENTING STIS AND HIV

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs for short) are nasty infections that are passed from one person to another, mostly through unprotected sex (oral, anal or vaginal). Common ones, like chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HPV and syphilis, can cause pain, infertility, cancer and dreadful diseases. HIV is the most serious STI you can get as it attacks your immune system and can lead to AIDS. There is no cure for it but it can be managed well with antiretroviral drugs. The sooner you start treatment the better.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF?

The best way to protect yourself from all STIs is to use condoms every time you have sex. You should also:

- Get tested regularly, even if you feel healthy, as some STIs don't have side effects to start with.
- Limit sexual partners
- Avoid alcohol or drugs before sex (they make you more likely to have risky sex without a condom)
- Know your partner's HIV status and talk openly about protection.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SAFE SEX

Sometimes it feels awkward to bring up the topic of using protection, putting on condoms or STI testing. Try saying: "I care about both of us, so I want us to use protection." Or, "Let's go for testing together before we stop using condoms." If your partner refuses, tries to pressure you, or says they don't like condoms, that should be a warning to you. You have the right to insist on protection, because it's your body.

How to use condoms properly

Condoms work really well if you use them properly every time. Practice putting one on before you need it so you're confident when it matters!

1. Make sure the condom isn't expired or damaged. Gently tear the wrapper open (not with teeth or scissors).
2. Put the condom on (male or female) before any sexual contact to stay fully protected. Never use two condoms at once – they break when they rub against each other.
3. Make sure it's on correctly. For a male condom, pinch the top to leave space for semen, then roll it all the way down to the base of the penis. For a female condom, squeeze the inner ring and gently insert it into the vagina, making sure the outer ring stays outside the body.
4. Only use water-based or silicone-based lubricant. Never use any oils like Vaseline or baby oil.
5. After sex, hold the condom in place while pulling out or removing it so nothing leaks. Tie or wrap it in tissue and throw it in the bin (not the toilet).
6. Use a new condom for every round of sex, even with the same partner.



EXTRA PROTECTION FROM HIV

Another option is PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis). It's a daily pill that an HIV-negative person can take before having unprotected sex to protect themselves from HIV. Chat to a youth-friendly clinic nurse about how it works.

EMERGENCY PILLS FOR HIV

PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) is different from PrEP. It's an emergency pill you must take within **72 hours** of being exposed to HIV to protect yourself. You can only get it from a clinic or health centre, and the course lasts for 28 days.

STI VACCINE FOR HPV

Girls and women aged 9 to 26 who have not yet been sexually active can have a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine to protect them against HPV and cervical cancer. It's usually a series of two or three injections. If you missed these during vaccine roll-outs in school, ask for them at your nearest clinic.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET AN STI?

- Get treatment as soon as possible from a clinic.
- Avoid sex until the nurses say it's safe.
- Take all your medication, even if your symptoms disappear.
- Let your partner know or, if you have lost contact with them, trace them so that they can be tested and treated too.
- Encourage your current partner to get tested and treated to avoid re-infection



WHEN SEX IS FORCED

In South Africa, sexual violence is so common that society sometimes treats it as normal. Victims are blamed, rapists go unpunished, survivors are shamed online and their pain dismissed.



There are many myths that we need to set straight. For example:

- "If they didn't fight back, it wasn't rape." This is false. Many people freeze or are too scared to fight back. That doesn't mean they agreed.
- "Rape only happens with strangers." Actually, most survivors know their rapist.
- "How someone dresses or behaves causes rape." Clothing, flirting or drinking never justify rape.
- "Men can't be raped." Sexual violence can happen to anyone. Stigma often makes male survivors hide their experience.
- "People lie about being raped." Actually, the opposite is true. Most survivors never report being raped because they are afraid.

We all have a responsibility to speak out against sexual violence, talk about consent, call out harmful behaviour and stand up for survivors.

Where to get help

GBV Command Centre (Confidential advice and referral to shelters or social workers):

0800 428 428 | Please call me: *120*7867# |

For the deaf: SMS 'help' to 31531

Masimanyane GBV Intervention: WhatsApp: 066 306 2407



PREGNANCY AND PARENTHOOD

Pregnancy happens when a sperm cell from a man joins with an egg from a woman during unprotected sex. The fertilised egg settles in the womb, where it begins to grow into a baby. Pregnancy can happen the first time you have sex, even if the penis doesn't go in fully, or the man withdraws. It can also happen if a condom breaks or you forget to use birth control correctly.

YOUR CHOICES

If you or your partner become pregnant, you have three main options:

Parenting: You can choose to raise your baby. This is very rewarding but also comes with a lot of responsibilities. Parenthood means putting your child's needs first, making sure they are loved, safe, fed and educated. It requires sacrifices and gives you less time for yourself, your studies, friends and work. It helps to have family, friends and community support.

Adoption: If you're not ready to raise a child, adoption allows another family to do so. In South Africa, adoption is legal, safe and confidential when done through the correct channels. Speak to a social worker or call Child Welfare 0861 4 CHILD (0861 4 24453).

Termination of pregnancy: If you don't want to continue with the pregnancy, safe and legal termination of pregnancy is available at public hospitals and clinics up to 20 weeks of pregnancy. For the first 9 weeks, Termination of pregnancy can be done using pills. From 9 to 20 weeks, it needs to be done surgically. The earlier, the better.

You don't need anyone's permission to terminate pregnancy, but it's a difficult decision to make, so you should always talk to a trusted adult or counsellor before you do.



Backstreet terminations of pregnancy are not safe options, and many women die as a result of them. Reach out to a social worker confidentially or call Marie Stopes SA for advice on where to get a safe termination of pregnancy.

Toll-free phone: 0800 11 77 85 | WhatsApp Live Chat: 060 094 9173

TEEN PREGNANCY

Falling pregnant as a teen makes it very challenging to finish school and earn money. If this happens to you, getting support early makes a big difference for you and your baby's future. Clinics, social workers and youth programmes can help with healthcare, counselling and accessing government grants for young mothers.

Can AI give relationship advice?



Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a popular space for young people to get advice on love, sex and relationships. While it's convenient, fast and anonymous, it also has risks. AI chat bots are programmed to keep you coming back, which can make you emotionally dependent on them and cut you off from real people. They often validate your negative perceptions and sometimes even encourage harmful behaviours. While machines can simulate conversation, they cannot feel or understand human emotions. There is always someone you can find to talk to who will understand you and give you reliable guidance, even if that is anonymously over a helpline.

ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS AND SAFETY

Today, many relationships begin online, and while the digital world can help you meet amazing people, it's also risky. You need to protect your digital space the same way you protect your body and your heart – with care and strong boundaries.

SPOTTING ONLINE RISKS

Online predators and catfishers (people pretending to be someone else) often try to gain your trust, isolate you or manipulate you into sharing sexual photos or personal information. Be suspicious if anyone avoids showing themselves on a video call, rushes you into meeting quickly, doesn't want to meet in public places, tells you to keep the relationship a secret or tries to guilt-trip you.



SEXTING

Sexting (sending or receiving sexual photos or messages) might feel fun or romantic in the moment, but once your content is out there, it can spread fast without your consent. This often leads to intense embarrassment, bullying, reputation loss, depression and even leads to suicide. You can also go to jail for creating or distributing porn.

SEXTORTION AND ONLINE ABUSE

Sextortion is when someone threatens to share your private images or demands money or sexual favours. If you're being harassed, threatened or blackmailed online (for example, someone demanding money or sex to keep your pictures private), block the person immediately. And if someone pressures you to send nudes, refuse.

What to do about online abuse

- Block anyone who threatens or pressures you.
- Save evidence (screenshots, messages) to show authorities if needed.
- Report it to the police.
- Tell a trusted adult, or contact **TEARS Foundation**: 08000 TEARS / 08000 83277 | Please call me: *134*7355#

LOVE YOURSELF

You deserve love that brings out the best in you. With self-love and healthy relationships, you can grow stronger in confidence and make choices that nurture your happiness and build your future.

GET IN TOUCH

bumb'INGOMSO is here for you.

Nothing is ever too small or unimportant.

Toll-free Call Centre: 0800 555 558

WhatsApp: 021 493 5637

Facebook: bumb'INGOMSO

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