

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Healthy Relationships, Sexual Health and Teenage Pregnancy

Introduction

Healthy relationships

There are many factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of healthy relationships including commitment, trust, respect, and responsibility.

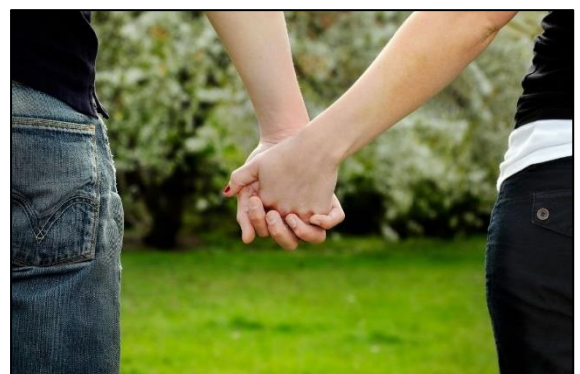
Signs that a child might be in an unhealthy relationship include:

- Becoming isolated and spending little time with family or friends.
- Being told what to wear, always needing to let the person know where they are or what they are doing or having their social media accounts monitored.
- Feeling pressured or like they have to do things they are uncomfortable with. This could include being pressured into sex or to send nudes or sexual images.
- Having their money, access to food or day-to-day items controlled.
- Being prevented from working or going to school or college or feeling reluctant to go to school.
- Persistent changes to a child's mood or behaviour can also be a sign that something is wrong.
- Being bullied or experiencing sexual bullying, either online, in private or in front of others at home or in school.

Source: [NSPCC Website, Healthy and unhealthy relationships](#)

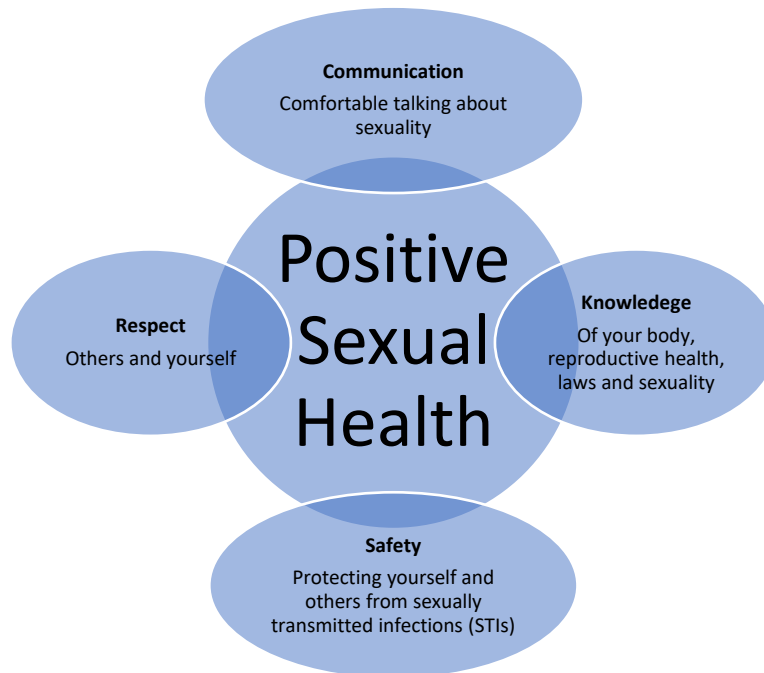
Sexual health

It is important to understand what healthy sexual development looks like in children as they grow. Children's sexual development is shaped by their environment, experiences and what they see. Children now are more likely to see or come across sexual images and videos at a younger age than their parents would have done. This can be through films, music videos or online, including pornography. Every child is different and may become



interested in relationships, sex, and sexuality at slightly different ages. As children get older, the way they express their sexual feelings changes. It is natural for teenagers to show interest in sex and relationships for example, or for children to be curious about the changes that happen during puberty.

Many sexual behaviours children and teenagers show as they grow up are normal and healthy, as long as they are not causing harm to others or to the child themselves.



The WHO defines sexual health as "a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence" ([World Health Organization, 2021](#)).

What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

Healthy relationships

Children form bonds with others at all stages of their development. Forming healthy, positive relationships helps children and young people feel safe and supported as they grow up.

Being in an unhealthy relationship negatively affects a child's well-being. They may feel anxious and nervous, or not free to make their own decisions. They may suffer from low self-esteem and depression, experience headaches or have other ongoing physical health symptoms ([Women's Aid, 2016](#)).

It is important that anyone who works or volunteers with children is able to recognise if something is wrong in a child's relationship and is able to take appropriate action to keep them safe ([NSPCC, 2021](#)).

Sexual health

Sexual health can often be associated with children in a negative way. It should be a positive feeling about good sexual experience. This applies to all children including the LGBTQ+ Community. Young people should be supported to practise safe sex, encouraging the use of contraception, avoiding unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

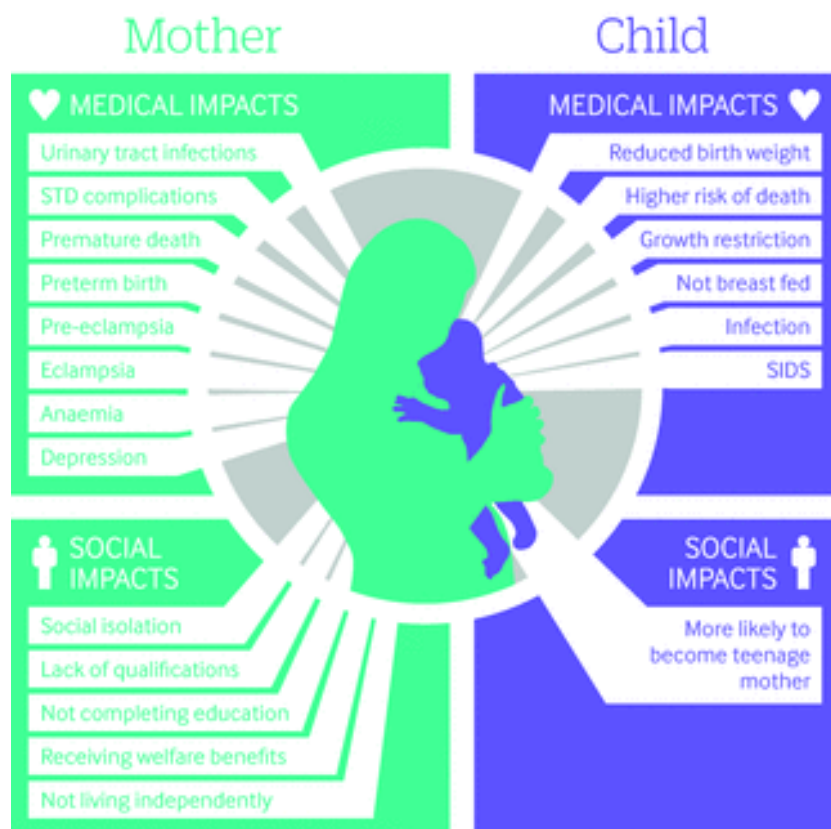
It is important for professionals to recognise any safeguarding concerns in relation to sexual health, such as:

- describing sexual activity that they are not happy with,
- feeling pressured to have sex,
- not practising or educated around safe sex.

Remember, sexual activity is not only about physical contact, it also involves young people's emotions.

Teenage pregnancy

The majority of teenage pregnancies are unplanned and around half end in a termination. Research has shown that teenage pregnancy is associated with poorer outcomes for both young parents and their children. Teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education, are more likely to bring up their child alone and in poverty and have a higher risk of mental health problems than older mothers. Infant mortality rates are 60% higher for babies born to teenage mothers. As children they have an increased risk of living in poverty and are more likely to have accidents and behavioural problems ([Nuffield Trust, 2021](#)).



Pregnancy in teenage mothers is associated with increased risks, both to themselves and to the child ([McCarthy and Kenny, 2014](#)). It is important for professionals to be aware of the following considerations:

- Safeguarding issues may arise because of young parents' vulnerability, unstable relationships, and lack of long-term accommodation. These issues can affect both parents and their children.
- Some young parents under-18 years old should be considered as children in need.
- If a child is considered a 'child in need' as defined in the [Children Act 1989](#), has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, a [referral](#) by any professional should be made immediately to children's social care.



Young people who are looked after (children in the care of the local authority) may:

- be more likely to experience the risk factors for early pregnancy,
- have missed out on protective factors, such as:
 - strong engagement with school
 - relationships and sex education
 - a secure family life
 - a trusted adult
- find parenthood challenging because they have difficult lives and lack positive parenting role models,
- be less likely to access support because they mistrust services and are afraid of being judged.

Facts and figures ([PHE, 2019](#))

- Care leavers entitlement to support from a personal adviser to age 25 also applies to young parents who have been looked after and meet the conditions to receive leaving care support from their local authority.
- Teenage mothers have higher rates of poor mental health for up to three years after the birth of their child.
- An estimated 12% of the number of young women aged 16 to 17 who are not in education, employment, or training, are teenage mothers; and by the age of 30, teenage mothers are 22% more likely to be living in poverty than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over.
- Young fathers are twice as likely to be unemployed aged 30, even after taking account of deprivation.

Additional Resources and Information

Local

Isle of Wight

[Children in Care & Care Leavers Nurse Team](#) - The Service delivers direct clinical contact, advice and support to children in care/care leavers, their carers and social workers to address health issues unique to this group of children and young people.

Telephone: 01983 524081

Email: IOW.childrenincare@nhs.net

[Public Health Nursing 0-19 years](#) - The Isle of Wight 0-19 Public Health Nursing Team offer services to all children under 19 who live on the Isle of Wight including those currently in elective home education.

Telephone: 01983 821388 ext 1

Email: 0-19yearsduydesk@nhs.net

[Isle of Wight Youth Trust](#) - Youth Trust offer a range of support for children, young people and their families, providing a professional one-to-one counselling service. They also offer group work and increasingly, training and other early-intervention opportunities.

Telephone: 01983 529569

Email: info@iowyouthtrust.co.uk

[Barnardo's Talk 2 Service](#) - A confidential therapeutic counselling service for children and young people that provides support for children's mental health and wellbeing, that is child directed, systems focused, strengths based, and outcome informed.

Telephone: 01983 865657

Email: talk2@barnardos.org.uk

[Safe Haven](#) - This service offers face-to-face mental health support sessions for children and young people on the Island.

Telephone: call to pre-book is 07741 665182

[Sexual Health Service](#) - Drop-in clinics- 18 and under - Tuesdays, 3pm - 6pm (St Mary's Hospital) and Thursdays, 3pm - 6pm (Ryde Health & Wellbeing Centre).

Hampshire

[0-19 years public health service for Hampshire](#) - Health visiting, school nursing and FNP services are based on national priorities for public health and the health and wellbeing of our Hampshire 0-19 children, young people and their families.

Telephone: ChatHealth Young People: 07507 332 160

Email: childrenscomms@southernhealth.nhs.uk

[Hampshire Youth Access \(HYA\)](#) - A partnership of 11 leading agencies providing counselling, information, advice, and support to children and young people aged 5 to 17 across Hampshire. They also offer advice and information to anyone concerned about a child or young person's emotional wellbeing.

Telephone: 02382 147 755

Email: enquiries@hampshireyouthaccess.org.uk

[Safe Haven](#): Provide out-of-hours support to young people experiencing, or on the verge of, mental health crisis. Anyone aged between 10 and 17 who needs support for a mental health crisis can drop in to receive help.

- [Havant and East Hants](#)
- [Aldershot \(Surrey and Borders Partnership\)](#)
- [North and Mid-Hampshire](#)
- [North East Hampshire and Farnham](#)

National

[Brook](#) - Visit the nearest Brook service for free confidential advice if under 25 or use the Ask Brook online service.

[Family Lives](#) - Visit the website or call 0808 800 2222 for support for families, including young parents.

[Family Nurse Partnership](#) - A family nurse may be able to visit a home, if there are young parents, to offer support from early pregnancy until a child is 2.

[Shelter](#) - A national housing charity that can advise about housing options and housing benefits for young parents; visit the website or call them on 0808 800 4444.

[NSPCC](#) - If worried about a child or young person, contact the NSPCC helpline for support and advice for free – call them on 0808 800 5000.

Healthy relationships

[BBC bitesize](#) - Information for children about what constitutes a healthy relationship.

[NSPCC](#) - Advice for parents and carers on how to talk to their child about relationships, sex and consent.

[Barnados Real Love Rocks](#) - Educational resources regarding healthy relationships and exploitation.

[SafeLives](#) - Resources on healthy relationships for professionals to use with children.

[Women's Aid](#) - A toolkit for professionals to support children with learning about healthy relationships.

[Women's Aid – Love Respect](#) – A national charity working to end abuse against women and children.

Sexual health

[NHS Choices](#) - Information regarding sexual health.

[Let's talk about it](#) - Information regarding sexual health.

Teenage pregnancy

[Tommy's](#) - Information to support pregnancy and also premature births and baby loss.

[Government Teenage pregnancy prevention framework](#) - Guidance for local teenage pregnancy prevention programmes to help young people avoid unplanned pregnancies and develop healthy relationships.

References

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