Am I Ready for Sex?

Almost everyone asks themselves "am I ready to have sex?" at some point in their lives, but unfortunately not many people will be able to answer it with a definite "yes" or "no".

Having sex for the first time can be a very special experience, but it can also lead to all sorts of complications. Sex without a condom or other form of contraception can result in pregnancy, and if your partner has HIV or a sexually transmitted infection (and you might not always know they do), you can become infected too. There can also be emotional consequences to having sex with someone – it can really change a relationship, and not always for the better. Sex can be enjoyable with the right person, but it's very easy to make mistakes and end up hurt, which is why people advise you: "don't have sex until you’re ready!"

Of course it's all very well saying this, but how do you know when you're ready? Legally, you aren't allowed to have sex with anyone until you're over the age of consent. But it takes more than just being a legal age to make you ready for sex – you need to be emotionally ready too. Here are some questions to help you work out if you're ready to have sex.

1) Are you doing this because YOU want to?
Or are you thinking about having sex because someone else wants you to? Maybe you're not sure you're ready, but your partner is keen? Or perhaps there's a bit of 'peer pressure' – all your friends seem to be having sex, so you feel you should be too?

Do any of the following sound familiar? -
"You would if you loved me!"
"It's only natural!"
"Everyone else is doing it!"
"Don't you want to make our relationship stronger?"
"You'll have to do it sometime – why not now, with me?"
"I'll be gentle, and it'll be really great, I promise!"
"I'll only put it in for a second..."

If you recognise any of these phrases, then you should think carefully! These are not the right reasons to have sex. A partner who says things like this is probably trying to put pressure on you and might not really care whether you're ready or not – this person doesn't respect your feelings, and they're probably not the right person to have sex with.

Nor should you have sex just because your friends are saying things like:
"You mean you've never done it?!?"
"I lost it when I was twelve..."
"Yeah, I've had sex loads of times..."
"You're a virgin, you wouldn't understand..."
"No-one'll be interested in you if they hear you're frigid."
"It's amazing - you don't know what you're missing!"

It may feel like your friends are all more experienced and knowledgeable, but who knows if its true! Many of them will only be saying this sort of thing because they think everyone will laugh at them if they admit they've never really done anything! Besides, being sexually experienced at a young age doesn’t necessarily make someone mature or sensible.
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2) Do I Know My Partner Well Enough?
If you've only just met your partner, haven't been going out with them very long, or perhaps don't even really know them, then sex may not be a good experience because there won't be much trust between you. If you've never even kissed the person you're with, then you're definitely not ready to have sex with them!

Sex can leave you feeling very vulnerable afterwards in a way you might not be prepared for, so it's better to be with someone that you know is likely to be sticking around. Usually, you'll have better sex with someone you know really well, are comfortable with, and who you can talk to openly about relationships and feelings.

3) Is It Illegal?
The age of consent differs between countries. In most states of the U.S, for instance, it ranges between 16 and 18. In the UK and India it's 16. In Spain, it's 13 while in some Muslim countries, sex is illegal unless you're married. Have a look at our age of consent page to find out exactly what it is where you live.

So why do countries have a legal age for having sex? Because this is the age when the government believes young people are mature enough to handle the responsibilities that come with having sex. All too often people think they are ready when they're not. Age of consent laws are also designed to prevent older people from taking advantage of children and young teenagers who may not understand the consequences of having sex, or even what sex is.

4) Do I Feel Comfortable Enough With My Partner To Do This, And to Do It Sober?
It's natural to feel a little embarrassed and awkward the first time you have sex with someone because it's not something you've ever done before. But if you don't trust your partner enough not to laugh at you or you don't feel you can tell them you've never had sex before, then it's far better to wait until you can.

And if you think you'll have to drink a lot of alcohol before you do it so you feel relaxed enough, or you only find yourself thinking about having sex when you're drunk, then that suggests you're not ready. A lot of people lose their virginity when they're drunk or on drugs, and then regret it. So if you're worried that you're going to be in a situation where you might be tempted to do something you wouldn't do normally, restrict your drinking, keep off the drugs, or make sure you stick with a sober friend who can look after you! Have a look at our drink, drugs and sex page for more information.

5) Do I Know Enough About Sex?
Do you know what happens during sex? Do you know how it works, what it's for and how and why a woman can get pregnant? Do you know about sexually transmitted infections? Lots of people worry that they're going to make a fool of themselves or do something wrong. Well, you shouldn't have to worry if you're with a partner who cares about you - (s)he won't laugh. And if you're not with a partner who cares, you probably shouldn't be doing it! Physically, sex is actually quite simple, but the more you know, the more comfortable you'll feel. Have a look at our teens pages for more information.

6) Will I Be Glad When I'm Older That Lost My Virginity At The Age I Am Now?
Imagine that you're looking back at yourself in ten years time. What do you think you'll think then about how and when you lost your virginity? Is there any way in which you might regret it? The answer should be 'no' – if it's not, you're probably not yet ready for sex.
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7) Can I Talk To My Partner About This Easily?
If you can’t talk about sex, then you’re not ready to have sex. It’s as simple as that. Being honest about how you’re feeling will make it easier for both of you, and will make sex better in the future.

8) Do I Know How To Have Sex Safely?
It’s really important that you know how to protect against pregnancy, STIs and HIV. Again, this is something you need to talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend about before the event, so you’re both okay about what you’re going to use. Have a look on our teens’ contraception options page for more details.

Especially with things like condoms, it’s good to have a bit of practise putting them on, and to feel okay about doing it – it’s not enough just to get a condom if you’re not confident enough to use it – they’re no good if they stay in your pocket the whole time!

9) Do We Both Want To Do This?
You may decide that you are ready to have sex, but it might be that your partner isn’t, even if they have had sexual partners before. For sex to work, you both have to be willing to do it. Don’t ever pressure anyone to have sex if they’re not sure – this is very wrong, and it’ll cost you your partner’s respect and the respect of other people. Also - there’s a fine line between pressuring someone to have sex and forcing someone to have sex – if you put too much pressure on someone, it can become force – and if you force someone into sex, you can be prosecuted for rape.

10) Does Sex Fit In With My/Their Personal Beliefs?
It may be that you, your partner or your family have beliefs that say sex at a young age (or before marriage) is wrong. Do you feel comfortable going against these views? Will it cause you unnecessary worry and guilt if you do (or frustration and heartbreak if you don’t)? Some young people will have sex simply because their family has banned them from doing so, even if they don’t realise that this is the reason. Having sex as an act of rebellion may feel great at the time, but if anything goes wrong, you face a very difficult situation, as you may not be able to rely on your family’s support.

Even if everything goes well, keeping sex (and all the emotions that go with it) a secret can be very hard – so, if possible, you should make sure you have someone else to talk to that you can trust to keep it to themselves. But remember, the decision to have sex should be an agreement between you and your partner, and while other people may help or influence your decision, they shouldn’t make it for you.

So, Are You Ready For Sex?
If you answered “Yes!” to all ten of these questions, then you’re probably pretty much ready, as long as BOTH of you feel okay about it. If you didn’t, then there are probably some issues you need to work through first, because all of these questions are important.

First time sex is always going to be scary whatever age you are when you have it. It can sometimes seem like losing your virginity is the most important thing in the world. But you can’t get your virginity back once it’s gone, so what is really important is that you have enough respect for yourself to wait until you’re truly ready, and can truly trust the person you’re with.

Information from: Avert.org