

# How to Discuss Sexual Health

Sexual health is an essential element of overall health and well-being, yet providers and patients often do not discuss this topic. Many patients want to discuss their sexual health with you, and most want you to bring it up. By asking all your adult and adolescent patients a few essential questions, you help to remove the stigma around discussing sex and normalize these discussions.

## KEY POINTS TO ENSURING A PRODUCTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH CONVERSATION

- Assess your own comfort discussing sex with various patient groups and identify any biases that you may have. If you are uncomfortable talking about sex and sexuality, your patient will be too.
- Make your patient feel comfortable and establish rapport before asking sensitive questions.
- Use neutral and inclusive terms (e.g., “partner”) and pose your questions in a non-judgmental manner.
- Avoid making assumptions about your patient based on age, appearance, marital status, or any other factor. Unless you ask, you cannot know a person’s sexual orientation, behaviors, or gender identity.
- Try not to react overtly, even if you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Pay attention to your body language and posture.
- Ask for preferred pronouns or terminology when talking to a transgender patient. Use those pronouns and support that patient’s current gender identity, even if their anatomy does not match that identity.
- Rephrase your question or briefly explain why you are asking a question if a patient seems offended or reluctant to answer.
- Use ubiquity statements to normalize the topics you are discussing. These statements help patients understand that sexual concerns are common.
- Ensure that you and your patient share an understanding of the terms being used to avoid confusion. If you are not familiar with a term your patient used, ask for an explanation.

» For more guidance on taking a sexual history and talking to your patients about sexual health topics, turn to the **Where to Learn More** section.