Florida Tech’s Counseling & Psychological Services

Consensual Sex - Mutual Responsibility

Sexual activity in the context of experimentation or in a relationship is a normal aspect of college life. Although this is perfectly natural and healthy, sexual situations can open the door for a whole host of problems such as pressure, regret, unplanned pregnancy, STDs, and even date rape. The purpose of this brochure is to explore issues of consensual versus non-consensual sex. We hope to provide suggestions and discussion points so that we may help you take responsibility for your actions and hopefully remove pressure, uncertainty, and regret from sex and sexual situations. To navigate the murky waters of dating in an era where both sexes are permitted to be sexually assertive, we must all be sensitive to, and respectful of, the comfort levels of our partners and ourselves.

- Take responsibility for your alcohol and drug consumption. Intoxication is not an excuse for your actions, though it may cause you to regret them. Regret following sex while intoxicated is a common experience. Research shows that non-consensual sex is far more likely to occur when drugs or alcohol are involved. If you have sex with someone intoxicated who gives consent under the influence you may still be charged with rape. Additionally 60-70% of the STD’s contracted by college students occur when one or both partners have been utilizing alcohol.

- Do not attempt to seduce someone after you have been drinking or utilizing drugs. Intoxication may make you confident, but it also impairs your ability to read another person’s body language and communication signals.

- Err on the side of caution. If you are uncertain about your partner’s comfort level, back off. Do not assume that (s)he will soon become wildly excited and forget his/her concerns. Even if it happens, there will likely be a morning-after regret.

- Think about the messages you’re sending. If you’re going out with a friend and you don’t want him/her to think it’s a date, or you’re going out on a date and you don’t want him/her to think sex is a possibility, don’t dress seductively. Yes, you have the right to wear anything you want. You also have the right to count your money in front of a bus station in south Chicago at 3 a.m. That may, however, create problems that are easily avoidable.

- Always consider your comfort level before inviting your date back to your apartment, room, or other private location. Thinking in advance about what you are implying could save awkwardness, hurt feelings, and pressured situations. In addition to considering your own comfort level, consider the comfort level of your partner. Is (s)he really interested in going back to your room, or is (s)he nervously giving in? If you’re not sure, back off. Being sensitive to his/her discomfort is a great way to earn his/her trust.

- If you find yourself becoming physically intimate, step back physically and emotionally and make sure that you are both on the same page. This may not be the time for a discussion of your feelings for each other (hopefully, you’ve already had this discussion), but there are two questions you must answer before you get intimate: 1) Is this foreplay? 2) Is protection available? If you’re not mature enough to ask those questions, you’re not mature enough for sex.

- It is perfectly acceptable to desire physical intimacy without desiring sex. To avoid misunderstandings, pressure, and bruising the ego of your partner, you should communicate this well in advance. When and if you do, be respectful of your partner’s feelings. You have the right to not be interested in having sex.

- If you and your partner have been increasing your level of physical intimacy, be careful that you don’t get carried away and end up sending messages you will later regret. Sex is a
wonderful experience between two people who are ready for it; make sure you are ready
before you change the boundaries you and your partner have established.

• If you find yourself in a situation that is making you uncomfortable, communicate this very
clearly. Don’t offer half-hearted protests or act like you’re just playing hard to get. You can
be absolutely clear without being rude or screaming; if your partner is showing a lack of
respect for your boundaries then you should leave. If (s)he tries to prevent you from leaving,
then it is time to be assertive and explain your perception of what is occurring as well as the
potential consequences (i.e. rape charges) for the individual who is apparently not hearing
you.

• Do not assume that feeble protests or coy behavior are proof of your seductive powers. It’s
more likely that you’re just too distracted to notice what your partner believes to be clear
signals that (s)he is sending. Be an adult: stop and ask “Am I making you uncomfortable?” or
“Are you sure you’re OK with this?” Err on the side of caution if (s)he gives you vague
answers or seems unsure.

• If you are confused about your limits, resolve the matter in your own mind-and your partner’s-
before you start what could be foreplay. If you say no, mean it. Your partner will only be
clear about your limits if you express them directly and clearly.

• Do not pressure, wheedle, cajole or otherwise beg for sex. Do you really want your lover to
have sex with you out of pity? Or because (s)he is intoxicated? If you and your partner are
not on the same page sexually, accept the reality and back off, or re-evaluate your dating
relationship.

• Don’t assume that someone who had sex with you once, particularly casual sex, will be
interested in having sex with you again the next time you see each other. The “what are we to
each other” conversation is generally a clumsy one, especially if you have already had sex.
Nonetheless, it is much better than the clumsy awkwardness and uncertainty between
individuals who have not had the conversation.

• If you choose to have consensual sex don’t forget to protect yourself from STDs and HIV. Pick
up some free condoms from the Student Health Center, and use them when you have sex

Sex is one of the normal aspects about being an adult. Like all the other privileges of adulthood
(driving, drinking, voting), it must be treated with the utmost respect and care or it can ruin lives. If
you have any questions, concerns or confusion about these issues, contact a counselor at CAPS to
explore this topic confidentially. The CAPS website at www.fit.edu/caps/ also has an anonymous
question corner titled “What’s Up Doc? where you can ask your questions anonymously.