

# Six Sexual Health Principles

- 1. Consent:** A “voluntary cooperation” and the permission to reach sexual satisfaction and intimacy with oneself and willing partners (Wertheimer, 2003, p. 124). Consent is a balance between one’s autonomy to give clear unambiguous consent for sex in combination with everyone’s right to engage in sex with whomever he or she [or they] chooses (Wertheimer, 2003). “Safe consensual sex is a human right” (Swartzendruber & Zenilman, 2010, p. 1006) and the essential sexual health principle that makes mutually positive sexual interactions possible.
- 2. Non-exploitation:** Exploitation can be seen as leveraging one’s power and control to receive sexual gratification from another person, which compromises that person’s ability to consent. A person can increase the likelihood of nonexploitive sex when he or she [or they] remains highly motivated to ensure he or she [or they] is not taking unfair advantage to gain access to a sexual partner or sexual activity. Nonexploitive sex is likely when each person considers the risk of exploitation as it relates to the consent between partners, the potential for harm, and the mutual advantageousness for each person to enjoy the sexual situation (Wertheimer, 2003).
- 3. Protection from STIs and unintended pregnancy:** This sexual health principle is evident when those involved in the sexual activity are capable of protecting themselves and their partners from an STI (including HIV) and unintended or unwanted pregnancy. This includes access to testing and medical care and to scientifically accurate information regarding disease transmission, reproductive health, and contraception resources.
- 4. Honesty:** Sexual health involves direct and open communication with oneself and one’s partners. Self-honesty involves being open to sexual pleasure, experiences, and sexual education. Honesty is a crucial building block for sexual relations with others and is necessary for effective communication to uphold all of the sexual health principles. Honesty in sexual relationships varies based on relational factors and contexts and is not to be confused with complete transparency and unlimited candidness.
- 5. Shared Values:** Sexual relations between partners involve clarifying underlying motives, sexual standards, and the meaning of specific sexual acts for each person. This principle promotes conversations between sex partners to clarify their consent for sexual relations, discuss their sexual values, and articulate motivations for having sex.
- 6. Mutual Pleasure:** The mutual-pleasure principle prioritizes the giving and receiving of pleasure. There are many ways for both giving and receiving sexual pleasure. Each moment of heightened pleasure can have many meanings that can change over time and with different partners. Valuing the pleasure of sex as a positive and life-enhancing aspect of sex is vital for ensuring mutual pleasure. Mutually pleasurable sexual activity invites clients to consider their bodily, erotic, and emotional sensualities for themselves and their partners.

Adapted from Braun-Harvey, D. & Vigorito, M. A. (2016). *Treating Out of Control Sexual Behavior*, pp. 46-47.