



Auntie Nomsa CARDS

Letters to and from a wise and caring auntie addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescents





Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children

REPSSI (the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative) is the leading African psychosocial support organisation. REPSSI's vision is that all girls, boys and youth enjoy psychosocial and mental wellbeing. REPSSI has strong partnerships with regional economic blocks, governments (particularly the ministries responsible for social services, education and health), development partners, international organisations and NGOs in thirteen countries of East and Southern Africa. The best way to support vulnerable children and youth is within a healthy family and community environment. For fifteen years REPSSI has provided technical capacity enhancement to its partners to strengthen communities' and families' ability to promote the psychosocial wellbeing of their children and youth.

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Introduction

Across Southern and East Africa, the region where REPSSI operates, children and youth meet as part of support groups or clubs. The overarching objectives of REPSSI's support group intervention – the Youth emPower Toolkit are: 1) to provide a forum for sharing and support leading to **improved psychosocial wellbeing** of group members and 2) to support **adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights** of the group.

TOOL SUMMARY

Other tools in this toolkit include:

TOOL	ABSTRACT	SESSIONS 1-2 hours	AGE (years)	TARGET GROUP	THEMES
CARING AND SHARING - disclosure	A tool to support disclosure of HIV status	3	10-24	children living with HIV	Disclosure and stigma
CELEBRATE YOUR LIFE – adherence	A set of picture codes exploring and supporting adherence. Each picture code has set of prompts to facilitate discussion on adherence related topics as well as key messages.	3	10-24	children living with HIV	Adherence, treatment, resistance,
LET'S TALK TO OUR CHILDREN– a community raising awareness conversation around ASRHR.	A set of prompts and key messages designed to raise awareness amongst community members are leaders around ASRHR, ending with the development of an action plan to raise awareness around ASRHR. Not designed for use with youth but for those who support these youth.	3	Adults	caregivers of all children	ASRHR
FLIP IT - Card game / quiz	A card game to facilitate discussion and learning providing accurate factual information around adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights	4	10-24	all children	ASRHR
TREE OF LIFE	Tree of Life – a psychosocial tool based on Narrative therapy practices that uses tree parts as a metaphor for different aspects of our lives. The tool can help trained counselors and paraprofessionals facilitate conversations with children about their lives in a way that helps them also share stories of hope, shared values and connections to those around them, as well as to those who have died.	4	10-24	all children	PSS

TOOL	ABSTRACT	SESSIONS 1-2 hours	AGE (years)	TARGET GROUP	THEMES
HERO BOOK	An art and narrative therapy based intervention in which children and youth explore their ability to have power over problems in their lives.	3	10-24	all children	PSS
TRACING BOOK	Guides a person living with HIV to develop a patient-held file / journal that tracks ongoing wellness / illness and communicates health status to key support persons. In the Tracing Book individuals living with HIV are able to literally track and trace their health status which might for example include skin rashes, side effects to medication, infections as well as their emotional wellbeing or worries.	4	10-24	children living with HIV	Side effects, ART, adherence
MY SPECIAL INTELLIGENCES	Some of us get good grades at school and some of us don't but this is not to say that some people are intelligent and others are not. The latest research (Howard Gardner, 2001) tells us that there are 9 different kinds of intelligence all of which are important to succeed in life. For example, some people are good with numbers and at mathematics but not so good at making friends or dancing or singing. In this activity you will find out what your special intelligences are.	2	10-24	all children	Multiple intelligences
		27			

Auntie Nomsa – Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Young HIV + Adolescents

– allows any facilitator - even if he or she is not very knowledgeable or comfortable answering questions about sex and sexuality - to provide accurate and relevant ASRHR (adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights) information with the help of a “script”. The format is as follows. Questions with particular topics are printed on an a4-sized card. A participant chooses a card and reads out the question to the facilitator. Before the facilitator finds the corresponding answer and reads it to the group (or has a participant read it to the group), there are a series of talking points allowing the group to engage with the questions and relate it to their own experience. After discussion guided by the talking points, the facilitator (or a participant) reads out the scripted answer (Auntie Nomsa’s reply) to the question, which is in turn followed by reflection points. Please bear in mind that Auntie Nomsa’s reply is “not the gospel” or necessarily the highest truth. What she says should indeed be questioned and engaged with. Her letter is designed to stimulate further discussion and learning on the topic. Our approach has been to identify issues pertinent to HIV positive youth, but also to treat HIV positive youth just as one would treat any young person approaching or going through puberty. Topics presented via Auntie Nomsa cards include relationships, longevity, sex and sexuality, menstruation, wet dreams, prevention of HIV and prevention of re-infection, contraception and virginity testing.

Do not try and work through all the cards in one session. There are enough cards to fill 3-6 two hour sessions.

Separation by sex

The Auntie Nomsa cards are not designed as “cards for boys” and “cards for girls.” Even the cards relating to a girl’s body changes as she enters puberty is of interest to boys and vice versa. The Auntie Nomsa cards are also designed to be used amongst mixed groups comprising of both girls and boys. Having said this, some facilitators prefer to separate boys and girls so that both sexes feel more comfortable to ask questions and share experiences. You as a facilitator and as a group must decide if you want to have “girls only” and “boys only” groups, or if you want mixed groups.

How to use the cards

- There is no scoring
- Divide the participants into groups of about 5 and give one group a card which begins with "Dear Auntie Nomsa."
- Allow one person in the group to read out the letter.
- Allow each group to discuss the letter covering all the prompts.
- Ask each group to choose a spokesperson who will share with the larger group what was discussed in their group.
- Read out Auntie Nomsa's reply or allow one person in each group to read out this letter.
- Allow for further discussion using the reflection points.
- Ask each group to choose a new spokesperson who will share with the larger group what was discussed in their group.
- Give a new card to another group and proceed as above.
- Take as many sessions as you need to work through as many cards as you need (topics can be chosen by the group or the facilitator).





Emotional aspects of sex (for participants aged 14 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am a 16-year old girl and I am writing to ask you advice about sex. I don't want to know about condoms or the risk of pregnancy but about the emotions that go with sex. Whenever I have sex with my boyfriend I feel very emotional, sometimes happy but also sometimes sad and I even cry after the sex. Is this normal?

Yours truly
Emily.



Talking points

- What do you think about what Emily has written?
- Why do you think she sometimes feels happy after sex with her boyfriend?
- Why do you think she sometimes cries after sex with her boyfriend?
- Do you think her boyfriend and boys in general also have similar emotions during and after sex?
- What do you think Emily can do to stop feeling sad after sex?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Emily

Thank you for writing to me and for your excellent question. I think that many girls and boys will benefit from it.

Firstly let me say that crying after sex is common for many girls and boys, so yes, this is a normal response. But this is not to say that this is the way it should be or has to be. Also if we think about sex you are right we mostly focus on the non-emotional issues that go along with sex, e.g., prevention of pregnancy, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, etc. But sex is also a very emotional issue and an act that often makes us very vulnerable. This is why it's good to be in a relationship before one has sex and not just any relationship but one that involves trust (both partners trust each other), honesty, good communication, caring, respect, empathy, having fun together and being able to resolve conflicts.

Regarding you crying after sex, this may be because you don't feel 100% safe in your relationship with your boyfriend. Maybe there is not enough trust in the relationship or that you feel that he does not feel as deeply about the relationship as you do. Is there good communication in your relationship? This will help you put some of your feelings into words.

I hope what I have written helps.

Yours truly,
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think about Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- It is definitely normal for both boys and girls to have strong emotions during and after sex
- Intimacy means that you feel close and open to someone else
- If there is no intimacy during and after sex, it can be a negative experience
- For sex to feel emotionally safe and good it helps to be in a good or strong relationship
- This means a relationship in which there is trust, caring, respect, empathy, having fun together, being able to resolve conflicts, honesty and openness.
- It might help Emily to discuss with her boyfriend what she is feeling during and after sex.



Viral suppression (for participants aged 12 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 15 years old and am HIV positive. I worry a lot whether it will be possible for me to have a relationship and get married one day. I also worry about whether I can ever have a child who is HIV negative. Please can you advise me?

Teresa



Talking points

- Do you have worries similar to Teresa?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say in her reply?
- Do you think it is only girls who worry about this or also boys?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Teresa

Thank you for these excellent questions. Let me start off by saying that there are lots of HIV positive people in the world who are in relationships, are married and who have given birth to HIV negative children when either or both the man and the woman were HIV positive. So yes, this is definitely possible. Let us take these things one at a time. If you fall in love with a HIV negative person and this person loves you too, it is important that you disclose your HIV status to them, allowing them to decide if this is something they can cope with.

Regarding babies, many HIV positive women give birth to HIV negative babies, the important thing is that the mother takes ARVs.

If the mother is HIV positive and the father is HIV negative, in order to make a baby they will have to have sex without a condom, which puts the father at risk for HIV. However if the mother is taking her ARVs as she is supposed to, and has a reduced viral load, and if the father takes ARVs before and after the sex, there is a high chance that he will remain HIV negative and that the baby will be born negative.

If the father is HIV positive and the mother is HIV negative there is also a lot that can be done to reduce the risk of the baby and the mother becoming HIV positive. Viral suppression refers to the viral load (number of copies of the HIV virus in the blood) being reduced by taking ARVs. If the positive partner has an undetectable viral load as a result of adherence to ART, the risk of transmission is significantly reduced. The risks are that a partner may be positive and not virally suppressed or could be newly infected and not know it. To reduce the risk of HIV infection the viral load should be undetectable for 6 months so it's important to consult your doctor. The advice and guidance of the local clinic is essential here.



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Does this make you feel more confident that you can form a relationship and have children?



Re-infection (for participants aged 14 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 18 years old and I am HIV positive. I have a boyfriend who is also HIV positive. We are both on ARVs. We have sex and sometimes we don't use a condom. Someone told me that we can re-infect each other. Please can you give me more information on this?

Yours truly,
Lerato.



Talking points

- Do you have similar worries to Lerato?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say?
- Do you have any other questions?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Lerato

Thanks for this excellent question. You are right, you and your boyfriend might have different strains of the HIV virus and can re-infect each other which might result in your ARVs no longer working. You and your boyfriend should also be aware that there is another good reason to use a condom, that is, to avoid an unwanted pregnancy. So now you have two good reasons to use a condom.



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Are you in a similar situation to Lerato, or do you know someone who is?



Disclosure to a partner (for participants aged 14 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 16 years old and am HIV positive. I have a girlfriend who is HIV negative (I think) and I have not told her I am HIV positive. I feel I should tell her but don't know how to go about it. Please can you advise me?

Yours truly,
Sizwe



Talking points

- Are you in a similar situation to Sizwe?
- What do you think of this question?
- What would you do if you were Sizwe?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Sizwe

Thank you for your honesty. You are raising an issue that many young people are facing. I suggest that you make a list of all the reasons you should disclose your HIV status to your girlfriend and also a list of all the reasons you might not disclose, compare the two lists and then decide. I am guessing that you are worried that if you disclose your positive HIV status to her, she might leave you. This might be the case but you know that this is not a secret you will be able to keep forever so you may as well find out her feelings about your HIV positive status sooner rather than later. Another big factor here is whether you and your girlfriend are having sex. If you are, the chances of her becoming infected are real but it is both her's and your responsibility to practice safe sex and to use a condom. If you are leaning in the direction of disclosing to her, I advise that you practice exactly what you want to say with someone you trust before you disclose to her. If you disclose to her, this will show great honesty on your part as well as good communication, two qualities that are very important in relationships. I do however acknowledge that disclosure may be very difficult, may have advantages as well as disadvantages and that the final decision to disclose or not is up to you. I wish you the best of luck Sizwe.

Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Did she leave anything out, things you would say to Sizwe?
- If so what are these things?



How long can I live with HIV? (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am a 13 year old boy and I am HIV positive. I am worried that I will die young. This affects my motivation to do things and even to study. I ask myself, "What is the point? I am going to die young so why make the effort?"

I want to know how long can I expect to live?

Yours truly
Thabo



Talking points

- What do you think of this question?
- Is this something you worry about too?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say in reply?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Thabo

This is an excellent question and one I think that many young HIV positive people have on their minds:

Having HIV is never easy but it is important for you to know that with today's drugs, HIV for many people is a treatable and manageable infection. This does not mean that there is a cure for HIV but that HIV can be treated and managed. ARV's lower the amount of the HIV virus in the body to the point that is almost undetectable even though it is still there in very low amounts. With HIV treatment you can live till you are old and have a good quality of life.

As long as you take your HIV medicines and keep your viral load down, the risk from HIV-related complications is pretty low. So in short, if you continue to take your ARVs, and look after your health (eat a healthy diet, exercise, don't drink alcohol or smoke) you can live till you are an old man or an old woman.

I also recommend that you find someone in your own community or "online" who is 1) "old" or "older", 2) HIV positive and 3) healthy and living an active and fulfilled life. This person can then be your role model.



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- What did it make you think?



Adherence (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I sometimes forget to take my medications for HIV. Do you have any tips that can help me remember?

Yours truly,
Lebo



Talking points

- Do you find yourself in the same situation as Lebo?
- Do you sometimes also forget to take your HIV medication?
- What do you do to remember to take your medication?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Lebo

This is a very important question you have asked. Thank you so much. You are talking about adherence, which means taking your HIV medication exactly as and when it's meant to be taken.

Below is a list I have put together to support adherence, I hope it works for you. This information is a repeat of some of what has been presented before but because it is so important we are repeating it here.

Kindly

Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- How does it relate to your own life?

List of things you can do to support adherence

- Do your best to take your medication every day. For some people taking them at the same time each day helps. Perhaps try using an alarm to remind you.
- Use a pill box which makes it easy to see which pills you have taken and need to take.
- Keep a medication diary, Tracing Book or journal and check off your medications each time you take them.
- With the support of your clinic keep back-up supplies of your medications at places where you regularly stay.
- Plan ahead for weekends, holidays or travel by packing your medications according to the number of days you will be away.
- Make sure you don't run out of your medications by planning ahead. If you travel take a few extra doses with you just in case you get delayed.
- Talk to other people with HIV or AIDS and learn from their experiences.
- It can take time, but it is important to try to build a supportive network of friends and family who can help remind you to take your medications. Having supportive people in your life can also help when every day things get to be too much. Don't be afraid to ask for help.



Puberty and milestones in adolescent sexual development for girls (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 13 years old. My body started to change about a year ago and I am finding it quite hard to deal with. My breasts are growing and hair is beginning to grow between my legs around my vagina. Please can you explain what is going on and what other changes I can expect?

Yours truly
Rebecca



Talking points

- Do you have similar questions and issues to Rebecca?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to write?
- Is there someone in your life who you can trust and go to with questions like these?
- Do you think boys who are going through puberty also need advice and accurate information?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Rebecca

You are beginning to go through puberty. Puberty is when your body develops and changes from being a child to an adult. For girls puberty begins and ends earlier (begins at 10-11 years and ends at 14 years) and begins and ends a bit later for boys (begins 12-13 years and ends at 16 years).

Puberty can start even earlier and continue even later depending on the person. Many young people living with HIV however have pubertal delay, which means that puberty is late or delayed (especially delayed menstruation for girls). This is nothing to worry about.

For girls these are the changes that occur during puberty.

Gets taller
Breasts get bigger
Hips widen
Hair grows under arms
Hair grows around genitals
Monthly periods (menstruation)
Discharge from vagina
Sweats more
Skin gets more oily
Pimples

I hope this information is useful

Yours truly,
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- You don't need to share in the group but just think about if you have noticed any of these changes in or on your own body
- Was this information useful to you?
- What was it like to learn about changes during puberty of the opposite sex?



Puberty and milestones in adolescent sexual development for boys (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 14 years old. My body started to change about a year ago and I am finding it quite hard to deal with. Hair is beginning to grow between my legs around my penis. Please can you explain what is going on and what other changes I can expect?

Yours truly
Richard



Talking points

- Do you have similar questions and issues to Richard?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to write?
- Is there someone in your life who you can trust and go to with questions like these?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Richard

You are entering puberty, a time when your body and mind transition from childhood to adulthood. These are the changes boys can expect

Hair grows on face and around genitals

Sweats more

Pimples

Skin gets oilier

Chest and shoulders get wider

Voice "breaks" and deepens

Penis and testicles get bigger

Produces sperm

Can ejaculate

Wet dreams (ejaculation at night during sleep)

I hope this information is useful

Yours truly,

Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- You don't need to share in the group but just think about if you have noticed any of these changes in or on your own body
- Was this information useful to you?



Menstruation (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 13 years old. Yesterday I noticed that there was blood on my underwear. Another girl told me this means that I am pregnant. I have never had sex with a boy so I am very confused. Please can you tell me what is going on?

Mildred



Talking points

- Can you explain to Mildred what is going on with her body?
- If you are a girl, has something similar happened to you?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Mildred

A girl starts to menstruate when she is about 12 years old or sometimes younger and sometimes older.

Each month, one egg is released into your Fallopian tubes. This is called ovulation. The egg travels down the tube to your womb. And while this happens, your uterine lining thickens with blood - just in case an egg is fertilized by sperm (after sexual intercourse) and so that the womb can provide a strong and rich environment for the fertilized egg to grow into an embryo and then a fetus and then a baby.

If the timing is right, the egg and sperm join together, and the fertilized egg attaches to the lining of your uterus. Pregnancy begins. Without a fertilized egg, the thickened lining has no purpose. So it sheds and comes out through your vagina. At first, it's common to have one period, and then not another for a few months. But even if you don't have a period every month, you can still get pregnant. Every woman's menstrual cycle is a little different but the typical menstrual cycle lasts three to five days, although a few days shorter or longer can still be normal. Cramps can happen when your uterus contracts to help the shedded uterine lining move out of your body.

At around this age (12 years) or a little before, girls also develop breasts and begins to grow pubic hair around their vaginas. About a year or two later they begin to have their periods. These changes mean that their bodies are now able to grow and feed a baby. However this does not mean her body is completely ready to have babies. At this age a girl's hips are not wide enough to give birth and a girl of this age is also not emotionally mature enough to give birth and to raise a child. Girls under 18 are at risk of birth complications because their bodies are NOT completely ready to have babies yet even though it is possible for them to have babies as soon as they begin menstruating.

Menstruation is completely normal and it happens to all girls. You will need to buy sanitary pads or tampons to absorb the blood or if you cannot get these you can use a clean cloth.

Yours truly

Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Did you learn something new?
- Do you still have some unanswered questions about menstruation?



Erections and wet dreams (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am a 14 year old boy. Ever since I can remember my penis sometimes gets hard. Often this happens in the morning when I wake up but more recently it happens when I see a pretty girl. This is very embarrassing. What is even more confusing is this. When I dream about girls sometimes I wake up to find that my sheets are wet but it is not urine, it is something else.

Yours truly,
Harold



Talking points

- Have you had similar experiences to Harold?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Harold

Well done for asking me these excellent questions. I am sure many other boys are also wondering about these things and will benefit from your questions and my answers. Firstly when a man or a boy's penis becomes hard, this is called an erection and is caused by blood rushing from the body to the penis. The reason for this is that an erect or hard penis is necessary for sexual intercourse but even in young boys who are not yet sexually active, the penis will become hard if it is rubbed or stimulated. The penis can as you describe also become hard if you are near or even thinking about a girl to whom you are attracted. If this happens and you are embarrassed I suggest you just excuse yourself and move away till your penis returns to is flaccid (not erect) state.

Now let us talk about the wet dreams. When a boy reaches puberty it is common for wet dreams to begin. This means that he has a dream about sex and his penis discharges or releases sperm during that dream.

The sheets are wet from semen i.e. the fluid that contains the sperm. Sperm are cells that can fertilise a female egg and result in a baby being born. Your sheets are wet as you correctly say not from urine but from sperm. This is natural and can continue into adulthood.

Yours truly
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Did you learn something new?
- Do you think Harold was satisfied with the answer?



Naming girls sexual and reproductive body parts (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

Please can you help me name all the different parts of my sexual and reproductive anatomy. Many people when referring to these use rude names but I would like to know the proper names as well as what each part does?

Yours truly
Mary



Talking points

- Do you know how to name the different parts of your sexual anatomy? For example do you know the there are at least 10 different parts of your body that have to do with sex and reproduction? See how many of these you can name.
- Apart from naming these, can you say what their purpose is?

Ask participants to get into groups of 4 and to try and name as many parts of girls' sexual organs as they can.



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Mary

The female genital organs can roughly be divided into the **external** sexual and reproductive organs and the **internal** sexual and reproductive organs.

The internal sexual and reproductive organs in the female include:

Vagina: The vagina is a tube of muscle connecting the cervix to the outside of the body. Your vagina is actually inside your body – the part on the outside that you can see and which is frequently mistakenly called the vagina, is your vulva.

Uterus (womb): The uterus is a hollow, pear-shaped organ that is the home to a developing foetus (baby). The uterus is divided into two parts: the cervix, which is the lower part that opens into the vagina, and the main body of the uterus, called the corpus which can easily expand to hold a developing baby. A channel through the cervix allows sperm to enter and menstrual blood to exit.

Ovaries: The ovaries are small, oval-shaped glands that are located on either side of the uterus. The ovaries produce eggs and hormones.

Fallopian tubes: These are narrow tubes that are attached to the upper part of the uterus and serve as tunnels for the ova (egg cells) to travel from the ovaries to the uterus. Conception, the fertilization of an egg by a sperm, normally occurs in the fallopian tubes. The fertilized egg then moves to the uterus, where it implants into the lining of the uterine wall.

The external sexual and reproductive organs include:

The **hymen** is a membrane that covers the opening to the vagina. It can tear by itself or be broken the first time a girl or woman has sexual intercourse

The **labia majora** enclose and protect the vagina and other external reproductive organs. Literally translated as “large lips,” the labia majora are relatively large and fleshy.

Labia minora: Literally translated as “small lips.” They lie just inside the labia majora, and surround the openings to the vagina.

The **urethra.** Located between the vaginal opening and the frontal connection of the labia minora, the urethral opening is where a woman expels urine from her body.

The two labia minora meet at the **clitoris**, a small, sensitive gland that is similar to the penis in males. The clitoris is covered by a fold of skin, called the prepuce, which is similar to the foreskin at the end of the penis. Like the penis, the clitoris is very sensitive to stimulation and can become erect.



Reflection points

- Did you learn something new from Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- If your friend had to ask you to describe the sexual and reproductive anatomy of a woman, what would you say?



Naming boys' sexual and reproductive parts (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

Please will you explain the names and purpose of my sexual and reproductive organs?

Thanks

Robert (15 years old)



Talking points

- Can you name and explain your sexual and reproductive organs?
- What do you think Auntie Nomsa is going to say when she replies to Robert?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Robert

Unlike the female reproductive system, most of the male reproductive system is located outside of the body. These external structures include the penis, scrotum, and testicles.

Penis: This is the male organ used in sexual intercourse. It has three parts: the root, which attaches to the wall of the abdomen; the body, or shaft; and the glans, which is the cone-shaped part at the end of the penis. The glans, also called the head of the penis, is covered with a loose layer of skin called foreskin. This skin is sometimes removed in a procedure called circumcision.

The opening of the **urethra**, the tube that transports semen and urine, is at the tip of the penis. The glans of the penis also contains a number of sensitive nerve endings. The body of the penis is cylindrical in shape and consists of three circular shaped chambers. These chambers are made up of special, sponge-like tissue. This tissue contains thousands of large spaces that fill with blood when the man is sexually aroused. As the penis fills with blood, it becomes rigid and erect, which allows for penetration during sexual intercourse. The skin of the penis is loose and elastic to accommodate changes in penis size during an erection. Semen, which contains sperm (reproductive cells), is expelled (ejaculated) through the end of the penis when the man reaches sexual climax (orgasm). When the penis is erect, the flow of urine is blocked from the urethra, allowing only semen to be ejaculated at orgasm.

Scrotum: This is the loose pouch-like sac of skin that hangs behind and below the penis. It contains the testicles (also called testes), as well as many nerves and blood vessels. The scrotum acts as a "climate control system" for the testes. For normal sperm development, the testes must be at a temperature slightly cooler than body temperature. Special muscles in the wall of the scrotum allow it to contract and relax, moving the testicles closer to the body for warmth or farther away from the body to cool the temperature.

Testicles (testes): These are oval organs about the size of large olives that lie in the scrotum, secured at either end by a structure called the spermatic cord. Most men have two testes. The testes are responsible for making testosterone, the primary male sex hormone, and for generating sperm.

Yours truly,
Auntie Nomsa

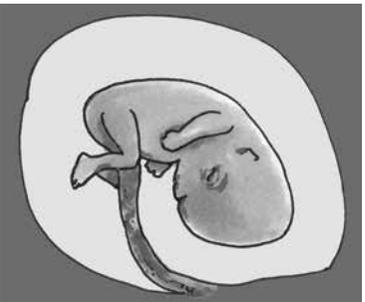
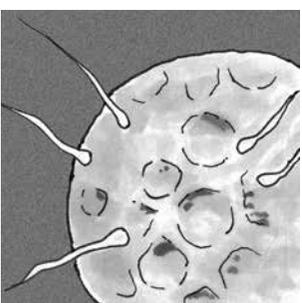
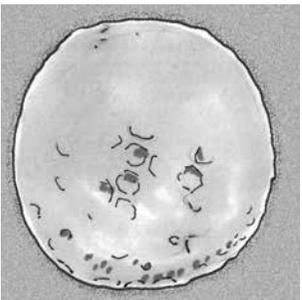
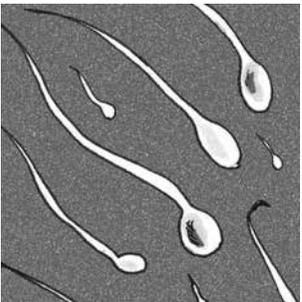


Reflection points

- What do you think of the answer given by Auntie Nomsa
- What surprised you about her answer?



Conception
(for participants aged 10 – 24 years)



Dear Auntie Nomsa

My older sister just had a baby and I'm embarrassed to say that I don't know how babies are made. My mother is no longer alive and my father does not like to talk of such things. Please can you give me some information.

Zandile



Talking points

- Get into groups of 3 and try and answer this question before you hear what Auntie Nomsa says



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Zandile

Thank you for asking such an important question. Babies are made as a result of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. Once a man's penis is hard enough as a result of blood filling it (an erection) and he inserts it into a woman's vagina, and if sperm are released through the penis into the vagina, the sperm swim up the vagina and meet the woman's egg, which is released from the ovary. The strongest sperm will join with the egg and fertilise it and this fertilised egg will grow into a foetus in the womb where it will develop for 9 months until it is ready to be born. A woman is most likely to fall pregnant 14 days after her period.

Yours truly
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- Was there anything that surprised you about Auntie Nomsa's reply?



Prevention of pregnancy and STIs (for participants aged 14 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I have begun to have sex with my boyfriend but I am not sure that he is faithful to me and I don't want to get an infection from him or fall pregnant. Do you have any suggestions?

Carol
18 years old



Talking points

- What advice would you give Carol?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Carol

Thanks for being so honest. You are here talking about contraception. Either a male condom or a female condom can prevent both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) of which HIV is one of several. There are other forms of contraception e.g. "the pill" which will prevent pregnancy but not STIs and it is for this reason I recommend condoms. Condoms however are not 100% safe as they can break or slip off. Did you also know that if you are using lubricants with condoms you cannot use Vaseline or any oil based lubricant? This will cause the condom to tear. If you do not trust your boyfriend I am wondering why you continue to be in a relationship with him, it seems you are really placing yourself at risk.

Yours truly,
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's advice to Carol?
- What do you think Carol should do?



Masturbation / solo sex (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 15 years old and often feeling like masturbating (or engaging in solo sex) but have been told that it is a sin and that it can cause me to go blind. Is this true?

Yours truly
Alex



Talking points

- Do you know what masturbation or solo sex is? Can you define it?
- Do you think that you can go blind if you engage in solo sex?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Alex

Masturbation or solo sex refers to a person touching or stroking his or her own genitals for pleasure. This is a normal activity especially for teenagers during puberty when their sexual hormones are very active. Many believe that solo sex is not a sin. It is also known that it has no negative side effects, for example going blind. Mutual masturbation or mutual touching refers to a couple touching each other without penetration of the penis into the vagina. This is a safe alternative to penetrative sex.

Yours truly,
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Are there any issues she may have missed?



What are STIs? (for participants aged 14 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

My name is Roger and I am 17 years old. I have begun to have sex and now have an itchy penis. Someone told me I might have an STI but I am not sure what that is. Can you advise me?

Yours truly,
Roger.



Talking points

- Do you know what an STI is? What does STI stand for?
- How is an STI spread?
- What are the signs or symptoms of an STI?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Roger

Thank you for your letter and for being so honest. This bodes well for your future – being able to communicate openly and honestly about sex is a real life skill.

An STI is a sexually transmitted infection. They are infections that are passed from one person to another during sex. Some examples of STIs are HIV, Herpes, Chlamydia, Genital warts, Syphilis and HIV.

STIs are spread by having unprotected sex with a person who already has an STI.

Symptoms include:

- Sores on genitals
- Rash on genitals
- Swollen genitals
- Discharge from penis or vagina
- Itching on genitals
- Pain in genitals
- Pain when urinating
- Swollen glands

I hope this information is useful. Please consult your clinic so they can examine you and determine if you indeed have an STI. Remember the only way to prevent contracting an STI with someone who already has one is to use a condom during sex.

Yours truly,
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Are there any issues she may have missed?



Virginity testing (for participants aged 14 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am 16 years old and live in a rural area. In my village they have virginity testing for girls whereby they do physical examinations of our vaginas to see if we are virgins. I find this really embarrassing and feel that it invades my privacy.

Please can you advise me what to do. The virginity testing is going to take place in about a month's time and I think about it all the time with lots of fear and anger.

Yours truly,
Mary



Talking points

- What do you think about virginity testing?
- Is it a violation of human rights?
- What do you think Mary can do to avoid being “virginity tested?”
- Do you think virginity testing is accurate?
- What do you think happens to a girl if she is found “not to be a virgin”?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Mary

Thank you for your letter, you raise a very important issue. Allow me to tell you a few truths about virginity testing.

Virginity testing most often works on the assumption that a girl is a virgin if her hymen (a fringe of tissue around the vaginal opening) is present or torn.

But:

- Some girls are born without a hymen.
- Others have only a little bit of tissue.
- Sometimes the hymen gets partly torn when girls play or are active.
- The hymen might have been broken as a result of rape or sexual abuse.

These are all very good reasons why virginity testing should not be allowed. It is a practice that is not only un-scientific but one that is deeply humiliating to girls as well as unethical because it violates their rights to privacy.

Mary, I suggest that you (perhaps with some friends or adults who are also against virginity testing) contact a child rights organization and see if you can be supported to stop this practice in your community. I wish you the best of luck.

Kind regards

Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply?
- Are there any issues she may have missed



Child sexual abuse (for participants aged 10 – 24 years)

Dear Auntie Nomsa

I am a 15 year old girl and for as long as I can remember, my uncle who stays with us gets me to sit on his lap, makes me touch his penis, and also touches my breasts and my vagina. When I was small I thought this was normal but now I know it is sexual abuse and I want it to stop. He has told me he will hurt me if I tell anyone but I have decided to tell you because you offer so much good advice to other children. My father is no longer alive and my uncle supports the family which is another reason I am afraid to report him. Please help me.

Yours truly,
Veronica



Talking points

- What do you think of Auntie Nomsa's reply
- How would you define sexual abuse?
- What do you think Veronica should do?



Auntie Nomsa's reply

Dear Veronica

Thank you for breaking the silence around the issue of child sexual abuse. You are very brave. First I want to tell you that none of this is your fault. Your uncle is to blame 100% and what he is doing must be stopped immediately. I suggest that you go your local clinic and speak to a nurse or a social worker or a counselor as soon as possible, not only does your uncle's behavior have to be stopped but you also need support and counseling. You can also consider going to the police but it will be good to have the support of people you trust to help you with this. What your uncle is doing is called child sexual abuse and it is a crime for which he can be imprisoned. I do understand that you are afraid that if he goes to jail there will be no one to support your family. You definitely need the support and guidance of a social worker here.

Yours sincerely
Auntie Nomsa



Reflection points

- All sexual touching between an adult and a child is sexual abuse.
- Sexual touching between children can also be sexual abuse when there is a significant age difference (often defined as 3 or more years) between the children or if the children are very different developmentally or size-wise.
- Sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain, or even touching.
- If an adult engages in any sexual behavior (looking, showing, or touching) with a child to meet the adult's interest or sexual needs, it is sexual abuse.
- Most often child sexual abuse is a gradual process and not a single event.





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