

IT AINT

WHAT YOU DO,

IT'S THE WAY

THAT YOU DO IT



A sex and relationships guide for
lesbian and bisexual women by the
Young Women's Health Project 2016



INTRODUCTION

HELLO

Welcome to this guide for young lesbian and bisexual (LB) women, to help you have fun, safe, healthy sex and relationships. This guide does not make assumptions about your body, or the type of sex you have or want to have. We do not tell you how you should look or act.

WE ARE THE YOUNG WOMEN'S HEALTH PROJECT

Run by and for young women, and supported by The Proud Trust. We create information and spaces for young LB women, focussing on healthy lifestyles and relationships. We encourage positive attitudes about LB women's identities, and we welcome you to join us! We plan fun activities and events for young lesbian and bisexual women, aged 14-25 years old, from Manchester and beyond.

So get in touch to find out more

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SOME WORDS

THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO KNOW

LGBT+

stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, plus other identities such as Questioning, Intersex and Non-binary gender identity. You may see these letters used all together, or in different, shorter combinations e.g. LGBT or LB.

★ Lesbian

someone who identifies as a woman and is usually only attracted to other women.

🌸 Bisexual woman 🌸

someone who can be attracted to other women as well as attracted to different genders, e.g. men or people who are non-binary.

↪️ Pansexual

someone who can be attracted to people of any gender or biological sex.

Cisgender or Cis

Someone who identifies with the gender that they were assigned at birth, e.g. female and identifies as a woman.

↪️ Trans

someone whose gender is different to the one they were assigned at birth, e.g. assigned male at birth but who identifies as female.



Intersex

someone whose sex characteristics don't match with medical definitions of male or female. The external and internal body, chromosomes and hormones can all be factors when assigning someone as intersex.



Monogamous

a relationship in which an individual has only one sexual/ romantic partner at a time.



Polyamorous

someone who has more than one sexual/ romantic partner at a time.



Asexual

somebody who experiences little to no sexual attraction to other people.



Aromantic

somebody who experiences little to no romantic attraction to other people.



Feminism

is the belief that all genders and biological sexes should have equal rights and opportunities.

Coming Out

usually means realising you are LGBT (*coming out to yourself) and/or telling people you are LGBT. Coming out can be a positive experience, but may also affect your relationships with the people around you, if they don't understand or are not supportive. Some people have good experiences of coming out, some have bad experiences, some have an experience that is somewhere in-between. There is support available if you want to come out, or have come out and have faced negative attitudes. Try to use this support rather than turning to drink, drugs, self-harming behaviour or unhealthy relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS

A 'relationship' means the connection you have to another person. This section focuses on romantic and/ or sexual relationships with people you might call your girlfriend, boyfriend, lover or partner. In this guide we'll use the term partner.

FACTS

- You may have sex with people who you are not in a relationship with.
- You might have romantic or sexual relationships with more than one person at the same time. This doesn't mean you have sex with more than one person at the same time, but it might.
- Being in a relationship does not mean you have to be in love with the other person, but you might be. Only you can decide if you are in love, there is no clear definition.
- If your partner says 'I love you', you don't have to say it back unless you want to.
- You don't have to prove your feelings by being someone's partner or having sex with them.
- Don't be rushed into making a physical/ emotional commitment to someone unless you're ready.
- If you fancy someone it might be hard to work out if the other person likes you back in a sexual/ romantic way, or just as a friend. The only way to know for sure is to ask them, so be brave and try to work out a way to do that.
- Try to achieve equality – being equal – in your relationships. You both need to compromise and make an effort. For example, **you might not have the same amounts of money to spend on each other**, so if the richer partner pays for a meal out, the other could cook a meal at home in return.

FRIENDS, OR LOVERS?



If you develop feelings for a friend, it can be hard to know what to do about those feelings and how to communicate them. Your feelings for your partner may change over time too, and you might begin to see them more as a friend.

REMEMBER..

- ★ Whatever you're feeling, it's okay. You have a right to your emotions, so don't feel bad, but do try to talk it through with them.
- ★ Friendships are just as important as sexual/ romantic relationships. They often last longer and can be an important source of love and support.
- ★ It's normal to find yourself feeling emotionally passionate and physically comfortable with a close friend, so this doesn't necessarily mean that you want to take the relationship further, either physically or romantically.
- ★ It's okay to not be in love with a partner. If you're honest with them, you might find that they feel the same way. As long as you're happy, it might not matter that you're not in love.
- ★ People change, you change, and so can your feelings. It's as easy to fall out of love as it is to fall in love, and this might happen many times within one lifetime.

DATING

HOW TO START A CONVERSATION

Introduce yourself!

“Hi, my name is...
What's your name?”

is a great start!

Ask questions - people often like to talk about themselves! But also accept that they might not want to answer certain questions and that's their right. Try to discover a shared interest.

Ask them, ...

‘What are your hobbies/
what are you interested in?’

It is ok to ask someone if they are a lesbian or bisexual woman, as long as you ask politely! Sometimes a woman might fit a stereotype but it doesn't mean she is LB. How she dresses or talks doesn't define her sexuality, so avoid making assumptions.

HOW TO ASK SOMEONE OUT



“Would you like to go on a date?” is a good start! But this can be really nerve-wracking, so you could ask...

“Do you want to go and see a film with me?”

“Do you want to go for a coffee some time?”

ON A DATE



Be yourself and have fun! It doesn't have to be completely serious. Meet in a public place so you're on safe ground and can leave when you want to. If you have pre-date jitters you could make a list of things to talk about, or call a friend for encouragement. Don't put too much pressure on yourself or your date. You might not feel that 'connection' straight away but you can still have a good time.

ONLINE DATING



You can find friends and partners online e.g. through OkCupid, Her, Tinder, Snapchat, Facebook and WhatsApp. Some are 18years+ because of adult content that you might find there. Some apps are GPS/ location-based and can be used for 'hooking up' or meeting people quickly for sex, but not always.



- Keep to first names only and don't give personal information like your address. Use Skype or Facebook messenger if you want to talk so you don't have to give out your telephone number.

- Be careful. Even if you have been talking a long time, the person on the other side may not be who they say they are, and may not always be telling the truth.
- Trust your gut – if someone is avoiding questions or leaves the conversation quickly they might be hiding things from you e.g. they might have a partner or might be older than they say.
- If the person you're talking to comes on too strong or says they love you after just a few online conversations then be very wary. Can you really love someone without even meeting them?
- Be careful of sending naked photos. This is illegal for under 18s anyway, and many people regret sending photos that then get shared publicly without their consent. If you receive unsolicited naked photos, it's best to delete them and let that person know you don't want to receive them.
- If you chose to meet, ask them for a recent photo so you can see who you are meeting.
- Meet in public. Feel free to cut your meeting short. You could bring friends along to make you both safer.
- Tell someone where you are going, and contact them afterwards so they know you are safe. You could even arrange for a friend to ring you during the meeting and have a code word that means something's wrong or you want an excuse to leave.



RESPECT YOURSELF

When it comes to sex and relationships, take care of yourself. Everyone deserves to be treated well, and that includes YOU!

LIMIT DRINKING AND DRUG USAGE

Alcohol and drugs might make you do things you wouldn't do when sober. You might make decisions you later regret. You might become ill, disoriented or aggressive. People might take advantage of you if you're drunk or on drugs. Though the person taking advantage is at fault and you are not to blame for their actions, it is important to be aware of how un/able you are to look after yourself.

MAINTAIN A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

We're being constantly shown images of thin, cosmetically enhanced, "glamorous" women by the media, so it can be difficult to feel happy with our own bodies.

REMEMBER ★★★

- ★ Anyone who truly cares about you will accept you whatever your body shape, size or looks.
- ★ Different people are attracted to different body shapes, sizes and parts.
- ★ It's normal to be a self-conscious or not to like all of our bodies but it's also important to accept ourselves the way we are. If we want to change ourselves to be healthier then it is best to choose safe and consistent ways to do this e.g. improved diet and regular exercise.

WHEN A RELATIONSHIP ENDS



Relationships sometimes end e.g. when you are not equally into each other, because of time and distance pressures, cheating, or addictions, or you or the other person just might not feel the same anymore. It's hard, but when things aren't right it might be time to call it quits. What helps?

- ★ **Talk** – to friends, family, a counsellor or helpline. Talking can help you to deal with/ accept / embrace your emotions.
- ★ **Exercise** – although you might not feel like it, exercise can help you release tension, feel better about your body (and self-image), and release feel-good chemicals in your brain improving your mood.
- ★ **Avoid alcohol and drugs** – you might want to get really drunk or take drugs to forget your heartbreak, but these are only likely to make you feel worse in the long run.
- ★ **Time** – it's a cliché, but the situation will get better with time.



ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

When most people hear the word 'abusive' it usually conjures up images of domestic violence, child molestation or rape. What most people don't realise is that these are examples of extreme abuse, and that many forms of abuse happen a lot more frequently than you might think.

Myth

Women do not abuse. It is only men that abuse women in relationships.

Myth

It is the fault of the victim that the abuse is happening to them. They should just leave.

Reality

Most abuse is about power and control; where one person forces control over their partner. This can happen in all types of relationships, including same sex ones, friendships and in families. It is the fault of the person who is committing the abuse and not the fault of the person being abused.

Financial Abuse

If someone tries to restrict access to your own money, this could be financial abuse. A partner may run up debt in your name, or encourage you to get in to debt for their benefit.



Mental/ Psychological Abuse



When someone mentally abuses you they might put you down, make you the butt of jokes, insult you, try to isolate you by preventing you from contacting others, or persuade you that you're better off without friends or family. They might try to convince you that you're to blame when they treat you badly.



Emotional abuse

If someone tries to manipulate your feelings to make you do what they want, they are being emotionally abusive. They might say things like "If you leave me I'll kill myself." They might use moodiness to get their own way. They might be rude and aggressive one minute, and the next minute be happy and loving, so you end up confused and feeling like you're walking on eggshells.

Did you know
non-violent forms
of abuse are also
known as coercive
control, and are
against the law?



Physical Abuse

This is the easiest form of abuse to recognise. It may involve: pushing, slapping, punching, kicking, restraining, hitting, biting or burning. It may also involve stopping you from leaving the house, locking you out, depriving you of food/ water/ any medical attention you might need.

Sexual Abuse



If someone touches you in a sexual way or performs sexual acts without your consent, this is sexual abuse. It can also include pressuring or persuading you to have sex (with them or with other people) when you don't want to, or being told that you should repay gifts with sexual acts or to have sex to 'prove' that you love them. Sexual abuse might include photographing or videoing you, or both of you, during sexual acts and sharing them with other people or online. It can also include forcing you to watch pornography when you don't want to.

Did you know that if someone shares sexual pictures or videos of you without your consent this can be considered 'Revenge Porn' and is now an offence?

Did you know that taking or sharing sexually explicit (in underwear, naked or performing sexual acts) pictures/ videos of someone under the age of 18 (even if it is of yourself) is against the law?

IS THIS RELATIONSHIP HEALTHY?

Do you wonder if a friendship or sexual/ romantic relationship you have is healthy? Read over the types of abuse again and see if any of them are true in your relationships. If you recognise you are in an abusive relationship, leaving it is not always easy, or possible right away. An abusive partner may intensify their controlling behaviour to try to prevent you from leaving them. Just remember, help is available for you to figure out what you want to do. If you recognise this behaviour in yourself, it's important to recognise it and look for support to change.

- ★ Telling someone you trust is really important: a friend, counsellor, doctor, nurse, teacher, or your parents or other family member.
- ★ Contact an organisation that supports people experiencing domestic abuse, such as Women's Aid (www.womensaid.org.uk), or Refuge (www.refuge.org.uk). They have helplines where you can talk about what you're experiencing in confidence. They may have a local group or outreach programme that can offer you support.
- ★ Find out your legal rights e.g. through the Citizen's Advice Bureau or online. Violence and abuse are against the law. No one deserves to be hurt or abused. No one has a right to hurt you.



SEX

HAVING SEX

Why might you have sex?

- ★ You find it pleasurable
- ★ You want to feel close to your partner
- ★ You're curious and want to experiment
- ★ You have a physical urge to have sex
- ★ To get pregnant

There are also some not so good reasons to have sex with someone: you're trying to get someone to like you; you're being pressured by someone to have sex; you're drunk or on drugs.

The best sex is when you feel relaxed, happy and safe to enjoy the experience. YOU choose when you have sex, no one else, so feel confident in your right to say NO if you don't want sex. Respect and communicate with your partner or partners.

Myth

In some sex relationships one person takes on the 'male' role and one takes on the 'female' role.

Reality

Some women like to play more dominant roles in sex, whilst others like to be more passive, but many women like to take it in turns - it's all about talking to each other about what you like.



THE BASICS



- ★ Before having sex, ask yourself: am I ready? Do I want to? Have I got protection and will I use it? If the answer is yes to all of these, then go for it.
- 🕒 Sex can involve, kissing or touching different parts of the body, as well as penetrating the vagina, mouth and anus, with for example, fingers toys, penis or object.
- 🌸 Orgasms aren't the be all and end all. Lots of people get just as much pleasure from sex without reaching orgasm.
- 🌟 Talk to your partner about sex, find out what they like and what they (and you!) are comfortable doing.
- 🌺 Vaginas and mouths can sometimes lubricate themselves, but you can also buy (or get for free) lubricant (lube) from shops, clubs, clinics, youth groups/projects. Lube is a liquid that you apply to your body, genitals or a sex toy.
- 🌀 If you feel like it, you might want to try sex toys or objects in sex. The key is to start small (sometimes literally!) and find out what you both enjoy. Some people enjoy fantasy role-play or sadomasochism (S&M) which might involve restraints, handcuffs etc. If you do this it is vital that you and your partner/s are comfortable with it and that you have ground rules and a 'safe word' to use if you want to stop.
- 🌸 It should be enjoyable, so never rush to have sex. Take it slow, experiment, have fun and be safe!

Myth

Sex is when a person with a penis uses it to penetrate someone else's vagina.

Reality

There are so many more ways to have sex, and experience sexual pleasure!



Masturbation, also known as wanking, or 'getting yourself off', is when you give yourself sexual pleasure by touching and rubbing your genitals, usually with your hand or using sex toys. It is perfectly natural and nothing to feel bad about! It isn't just men who masturbate; women do too. There is no right or wrong way to masturbate and it is usually the first sexual experience people have, helping them to explore their bodies and what they find pleasurable. It doesn't matter how often you masturbate and if you're not interested in masturbating then that's ok too.



Mutual masturbation or 'getting each other off' is basically just masturbating each other at the same time.

Oral sex or 'going down' on your partner, is stimulating someone else's genitals, using your mouth and tongue to lick, suck or penetrate.



Anal sex is when one person penetrates the other person's anal passage with their fingers, sex toy or a penis. It is not restricted to sexuality – anyone can do it. Unlike the vagina, the anus does not lubricate itself, therefore lube should be used.



SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIS)

STIs can be transmitted when vaginal fluids, blood, or semen, from an infected person comes into contact with another person during sex. You can have an STI and not realise you have it (because you have no symptoms). For this reason you should have regular checks at a clinic, if you are having sex, so you don't pass on an infection without realising it. Also some infections can get much worse if they are not treated – If you think you have one...



GET TESTED AT A CLINIC!

Some STIs just exist in our bodies naturally without showing any symptoms, so it is possible for your partner to develop symptoms of an STI that you don't know you have.

WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE AN STI?

Go get yourself checked out by a doctor, sex health clinic or ask a pharmacist. Don't have sex with anyone until you know you are clear. If you live with an STI that can not be cured, you should consider telling your sexual partners, depending on the type of sex you may have. Remember stigma exists in relation to some STIs. Health care professionals can help you understand the risks of transmission to a sexual partner.

SAFER SEX

The only kind of sex with a very low STI risk, is sex that doesn't permit any bodily fluids to enter into yours or your partner's body, so you can kiss and hold each other, touch each other's bodies, and masturbate with low risk of infection. But, you need to be careful if you are going to swap bodily fluids.

HOW CAN I REDUCE THE RISKS?

➤➤➤ **Oral sex** is relatively low risk, but avoid oral sex (without a dental dam) if:

- ⦿ you have a mouth infection such as a cold sore
- ⦿ you have cuts in your mouth (commonly caused by brushing your teeth immediately before sex)
- ⦿ you or your partner have a visible symptom of an STI

Using a condom or dental dam might be a good idea. You can get flavoured condoms and lubricants to make things a bit more fun. A dental dam is a thin square of latex that can be placed over the vulva or anus and you can then give oral pleasure with the latex between your tongue and your partner. They can be improvised with a condom – cut along one side so that you are left with a square shape. You can even do the same with non-microwavable cling film if you're skint, (the non-microwavable bit is important as this means it doesn't have tiny holes in it!) When using lube, make sure it is water-based as other types can disintegrate the condom/ dental dam.

▶▶▶▶ **Fingering** is also low risk but again be careful if you have cuts on your fingers. If you do, wear finger cots or latex gloves. Also make sure that your nails are short, and use lube. Do not use the same hand to finger someone anally then vaginally, (unless you put a condom on your fingers for one hole and take it off for the next).

▶▶▶▶ **Fisting** (putting your whole hand in your partner) is higher risk as it is more likely that it could lead to cuts. Again latex gloves and lots of lube can minimise risk and it's always advisable (and much nicer!) to take it slow, e.g. start with one finger, then two, then three...

▶▶▶▶ **Using sex toys** with your partner is low risk but remember that if you are sharing sex toys that have penetrated one of you then this can be risky. Always give them a good clean in between, or condom them up and use lube to help prevent the condom from splitting, then take the condom off before you use the sex toy on another person/ hole.

▶▶▶▶ **Vaginal/ Anal Sex** Try not to transfer vaginal fluids from one vagina to another during sex (or from penis to vagina). If your partner enters your vagina with their penis, then you should consider wearing a condom, which can reduce the risk of transmitting STIs and unplanned pregnancy. (See more about this on the next page).

If you're going to have anal sex then it's a good idea to use a condom (to cover the toy or penis). Unlike the vagina, the anus does not lubricate itself, so using lube is advised.

If you're having both anal and vaginal sex, then make sure you change the condom between vaginal and anal sex.

PREGNANCY

People assigned female at birth can become pregnant e.g. through sex with a cisgender male, or with a trans women/ non-binary person who has a penis which ejaculates sperm. This may not be true for people who have undergone certain gender reassignment, so if you are unsure, talk to your partner or seek medical advice.

Cisgender women have a number of contraceptive options to avoid pregnancy, but many do not prevent STIs, so it's best to consider using a condom aswell.

PREGNANCY IN LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN

Lesbians may become pregnant through choice e.g. by having sex with a cisgender male, by using artificial insemination or through IVF. They could also become pregnant due to rape or involvement in sex work.

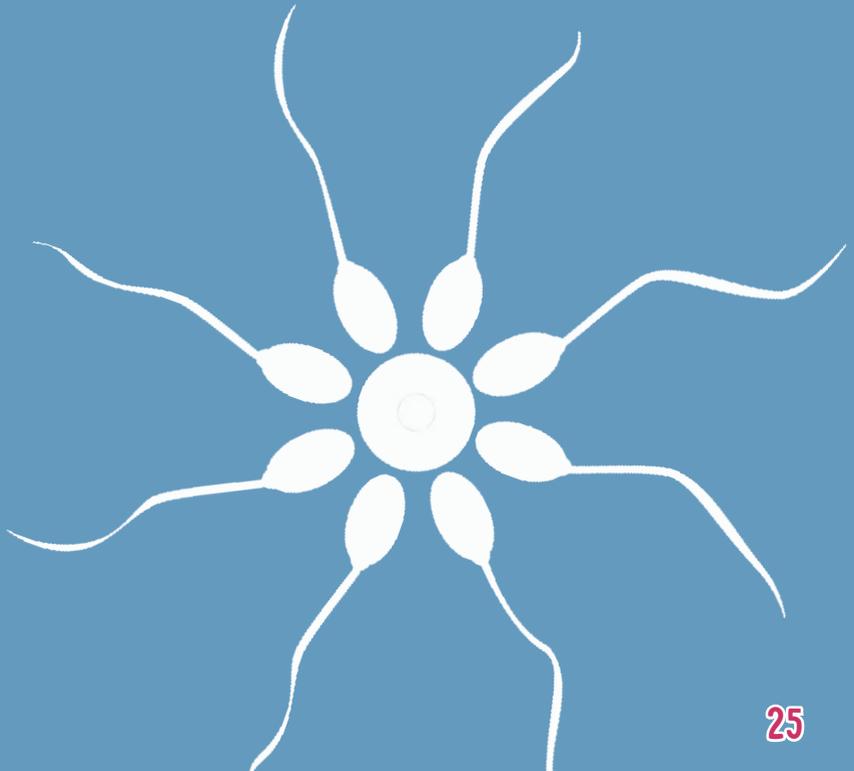
CONTRACEPTIVES

There are many different methods of contraception, so find which one is best for you. The most common ones are: The pill, male condom, female condom, the coil (an intrauterine device, or IUD), contraceptive injection or implant, and the diaphragm also known as 'the cap'.

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVES

If you think there is a chance you could be pregnant and you do not want to be, then there are emergency contraceptives, (although neither are 100% effective): the ‘morning after’ pill, or the coil. You can get these free from many GPs, any contraception/ sexual health/ young person’s clinic, NHS walk-in centres, some pharmacies. The ‘morning after’ pill is more effective the sooner it is taken after having unprotected sex.

The coil is a small plastic and copper device that is put into your womb by a specially trained doctor or nurse. It may stop an egg being fertilised or implanting in your womb. It can be fitted up to five days after unprotected sex at any time in the menstrual cycle, provided this is the only unprotected sex that has occurred since your last period.



I THINK I'M PREGNANT, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Signs you might be pregnant include missing a period, sickness (nausea), feeling tired for no reason, frequently needing to pee, and tender/ enlarged breasts.

Use a home pregnancy test, following the instructions on the packet. You can buy home pregnancy tests online, in the supermarket or at your local chemist. Some GPs, family planning clinics and young people's services offer free tests, as do some pharmacies, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and Marie Stopes' clinics.

I AM PREGNANT, WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

If you have an unplanned pregnancy then you have decisions to make. You should go to your doctor or a family planning clinic and get as much advice as you can from them, as well as from friends and family. There are no right answers here and it is up to YOU what you do.

ABORTION

If you decide on an abortion you will need to see a GP, doctor or an reputable organisation that specialises in abortions. Physically people usually recover quite quickly, depending on how far along you are. After an abortion you may feel relieved, guilty, or sad or a mixture. These emotions may come and go, and can be heightened by the sudden hormonal changes in your body after an abortion. You can see a counsellor or seek advice support organisations to get help.

CONTINUE WITH THE PREGNANCY

Parenthood is a life-changing decision that you should be prepared for. If you decide to keep your baby you should seek support from your doctor, health visitor, partner, friends/family etc.

ADOPTION

If you decide to continue with the pregnancy and pursue an adoption, you should seek advice your doctor, a hospital, social worker/ social worker from your local council, voluntary adoption agencies or the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAFF).

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Whether you are in a relationship, or not, and whether you are having sex or not, it is important to always look after your own mind and body.

- ★ Take time for yourself e.g. to watch a film or have a bath
- ★ Spend time with people you love eg family, friends, partners
- ★ Try to eat well including a variety of foods, and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Make sure you drink plenty of water
- ★ Take regular exercise that you enjoy. Some people like to make this part of their routine e.g. cycle to work/ school/ college. Others like to go to the gym or join classes. Exercise can include dancing and sex!
- ★ Make sure you have regular contact with your doctor and attend appointments that they suggest e.g. smear tests or breast checks. These could save your life!

SIGNPOSTING AND CONTACTS

LGBT SERVICES

Young Women's Health Project.

LGBT Centre, 49-51 Sidney St,
Manchester M1 7HB

Contact us for more info, to
get involved with our group or
to volunteer

Text/call 07531 316 656
myrtle.finley@theproudtrust.org
youngwomensgroup.org
@YWHP | facebook.com
YoungWomensHealthProject

To find your local LGBT
youth group visit
theproudtrust.org and
click on 'For Young People'

Text/call 07873 351 702
matty.donaldson@theproudtrust.org

The Peer Support Project

Trained LGBT young people
who offer different kinds of
support to their peers

Albert Kennedy Trust – Supports young LGBT 16-25 year olds who are made homeless or living in a hostile environment.

0161 228 3308
contact@akt.org.uk
akt.org.uk

SEXUAL HEALTH INFO AND SERVICES

anyplanstonight.co.uk – A website providing a guide to contraception and sexual health services in Manchester.

Brook – general info on sex and relationships, counselling, sexual health testing, pregnancy advice.
Manchester Brook centre, Commonwealth House, 81 Lever Street (near Great Ancoats Street), Manchester, M1 1FL.

0161 237 3001
brook.org.uk

Manchester Centre for Sexual Health (NHS) – Fast friendly advice and free treatment available at daily walk-in clinics. The Hathersage Centre, 280 Upper Brook Street, Manchester, M13 0FH.

0161 276 5200
anyplanstonight.co.uk

Naz Project – Sexual health info specifically for Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities.

020 8741 1879
naz@naz.org.uk
naz.org.uk

St Mary's Sexual Assault/Rape Referral Centre – The Old St Mary's Hospital, York Place, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9WL.

0161 276 6515
stmarys.sarc@cmft.nhs.uk
stmaryscentre.org

OTHER HELPFUL WEBSITES

The Mix – Website for 16-25 year-olds providing support and information on sex, relationships, health, wellbeing, work, study, travel and free time.
themix.org.uk (formally thesite.org)

FRANK – A detailed website for young people about drugs and alcohol.
0300 123 6600 – frank@talktofrank.com – talktofrank.com

End the Fear – Information and contact details about domestic abuse support.
0161 636 7525 – helpline@independentchoices.org.uk – endthefear.co.uk

FPA sexual health charity – Help and support to enable everyone to make positive choices about their own sexual health and wellbeing.
fpa.org.uk

British Pregnancy Advisory Service – Support and advice for women and couples who decide to end a pregnancy.
bpas.org

Marie Stopes International – Independent provider of sexual and reproductive health services in the UK.
mariestopes.org.uk

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