**BREAKING THE ICE**

By Michael Schwab, 17, Staff Writer

It’s always hard to break the ice—you know, have that first conversation with someone, whether it’s telling that girl you noticed in class that you’re crushing on her or telling your boyfriend of three years that you have a sexually transmitted disease (STD). It can be scary and sometimes overwhelming. What will the person think of me when I tell him or her? Will they understand? Sex Etc. knows these conversations aren’t easy, but we’re here to help you through them!

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**FIRST MOVES! HOW TO ASK SOMEONE OUT**

By Allie Hough, 17, Staff Writer

Ever wanted to ask someone out, but you were so nervous you never got the courage to go through with it? And then, when you did get the courage to ask him or her out, you completely froze and all you and your crush did was share a moment of awkward silence? Asking someone out can be nerve-wracking and sometimes even embarrassing.

Most people assume the guy will ask the girl out. However, in today’s world, a lot of girls ask out guys, guys ask out guys and girls ask out girls. In any situation, there can be pressure and stress. It takes a lot of courage to ask someone out. Check out my tips below before making the first move.

• **Be yourself.** Although this sounds clichéd, this is probably one of the most important things to remember. If a person isn’t interested in you being exactly who you are, then he or she probably isn’t right for you.

• **Come up with something that you’d like to do with him or her.** Then, casually ask him or her to go to the movies or out to dinner. Who doesn’t like a good meal or movie?

• **Plan a group date.** This is a good move if you’re not comfortable asking someone out. You can have some of your friends and their friends all go out together. (If you end up having a bad time, at least you won’t be stuck.)

• **Don’t be shy!** According to my informal poll, guys especially think it’s hot when a person asks them out, so don’t hold back. Be bold and make the first move. Whether you’re a girl or guy, confidence is key, and most find it sexy.

• **Be a friend first and then ask your crush out.** It’s sometimes easier to plunge into something more if you get to know each other as friends first.

• **Bounce back, even if you’re rejected!** We all have different tastes, and if a person decides you’re not right for him or her, it doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with you. It just means you’re not right for that person, and you deserve to be with someone who thinks you’re great. There is ALWAYS someone else.

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**How to Ask Someone Out**

**Teens on Asking Someone Out**

I love when a girl asks me out. It shows me they’re not shy and takes a lot of pressure off of me.

—Sean, 20, South Orange, NJ

Start off by just saying “hello” to him as you pass him. Then, once you’ve got that small connection, you have an excuse to talk to him.

—Charlie, 19, United Kingdom

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Once you’ve asked someone out, you’ll most likely feel relieved that you did it. Remember all that’s left is to have fun on your date and be yourself.

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**Breaking the Ice**

We want to know how your date went! If this story helped you make the first move, go to Sexetc.org, click on “Forums” and tell us your story.
When I was 14 and just out of eighth grade, I dated an older boy for a couple of weeks. He was 16 and entering his junior year, and I wanted him to like me.

One night while hanging out, we began kissing, and as we undressed, we started to have sex. This wasn’t what I wanted. I pushed him off of me, while crying and screaming for him to go home.

I had told him earlier in the night that I was not prepared to go beyond kissing, but we got caught up in the moment. We hadn’t used a condom, either, which made me feel that much worse, because he had had many partners before me and I don’t know if he used protection with all of them. All that night, I felt ashamed and embarrassed about what had happened.

That night, I lost my virginity. I had always thought it would be a magical experience with someone I loved.

Now I make sure that my partner knows exactly what I am ready or not ready for sexually. When I’m ready to engage in something more sexual than just kissing, I remind my partner that we need to use condoms. I also let my partner know that the relationship isn’t going to work out if he doesn’t respect me and my wishes to protect myself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy.

I wasn’t ready to have sex, but I felt pressured by my older boyfriend. I didn’t want to seem immature or inexperienced, so I had sex with him. Now, we’re not even dating, and every day I’m reminded about my mistake. Maybe if I had explained to him, that I really wasn’t ready, it would have never happened like that.

—Audrey, 17, Hamilton, NJ

My girlfriend and I just had a talk about being intimate and stuff this past week, after months of just doing stuff and figuring it out as we go along. It’s so much more passionate now, knowing exactly how far she wants to go and what she likes. And she does more things that I like now, too! Talking is a great thing when it comes to sex, even though it is really hard to start sometimes.

—Dustin, 17, Green Bay, WI

Communicating with your partner is extremely important. If you both know exactly what you are or are not comfortable with, then you can have fun with each other without any awkward or uncomfortable situations.

**Here’s what I’ve learned about letting your partner know what you are or aren’t ready for sexually:**

- **Really be clear with yourself about what you’re ready for before engaging in any type of sexual play.** If you don’t know how you feel about touching, oral sex, vaginal sex or anal sex, how are you going to let your partner know how you feel and what you’re willing or not willing to do?

- **Make sure your partner takes this situation as seriously as you do.** Let him or her know that you deserve to be respected. If he or she doesn’t respect you or your wishes to go only so far, then it will be clear that you’ll have to end your relationship on the spot.

- **Don’t wait until the heat of the moment to explain what you’re ready for.** If you do get caught up in the moment, you can always stop and talk about what you’re both expecting to happen, instead of doing something you’re not ready for.

- **Explain clearly what you are and are not ready for.** So, if you want to have oral sex, but not vaginal sex or anal sex, make sure you say that.

- **Discuss which specific methods you will use to protect yourself and your partner from STDs or an unintended pregnancy, if you decide to engage in vaginal, oral or anal sex.** This means discuss condoms, Sheer Glyde Dams and the Pill or other birth control methods.

For more info, check out “Are You Ready for Sex? Important Questions to Consider,” by Tanya Maloney, 17. Check out our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on condoms and birth control.
Ready, Sex, Go!
How to Tell Your Partner You’re Ready to Have Sex

By Sharanya Durvasula, 17, Staff Writer

You and your partner have been together for a while. You talk about everything, and you’ve started to grow more comfortable with each other. You think that you’re ready to take the next step—emotionally and physically. You really want to have sex, which could mean vaginal sex, oral sex or anal sex. You know about the responsibilities that come with sex, so you go to a clinic to get contraception and enough informational pamphlets to teach your own sex ed class. But what do you do now?

Sex is supposed to be an act of pleasure. But don’t lie to yourself. Even if you really, really, really want to do it, don’t let your physical desires get in front of your emotional needs. Be sure that you’re ready.

First Things First

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my personal values and beliefs about sexual intercourse and am I abiding by them?
- What does my religion say about having sex?
- What would my parents think if they knew that I was in a sexual relationship?
- How will having sex change our relationship?
- Do I really want to have sex?
- Or am I having sex because I think I’m supposed to be?

So, if after answering those questions you’re certain you’re ready, here are some important conversations to have and things to do with your partner:

Is Your Partner Ready?

Sit your partner down, look him or her in the eye and say, “I think it’s time we took our relationship to the next level.” You can then discuss what you are or aren’t ready for sexually. Your partner might be ready for oral sex, but not vaginal sex, so be clear about this. (Check out “How to Tell Your Partner What You’re Ready (or Not Ready) for Sexually” on page 13.)

If your partner isn’t ready, it’s not a big deal. When you’re ready, waiting to take the next step may be difficult, but think about how much more meaningful it’ll be when both of you are ready. And if your partner says he or she is ready, too, slow down! There are still many precautions you need to take just to make sure that you’re having sex responsibly and safely.

What’s Your Number?

A good place to start is to discuss previous sexual partners. It’s a scary subject because you have to tell your lover-to-be about all your past lovers and—even worse—you have to hear about his or her’s. Be honest! If either of you has had a previous sexual partner, it’s time to get tested.

Testing, Testing 1-2-3

You can get tested at a local health department, your doctor’s office, a hospital or even a family planning clinic, like Planned Parenthood. It doesn’t cost very much or sometimes it is free, depending on where you get tested.

Then you wait for the results. If it comes back negative, great! You’re ready to move on. If either of you tests positive for an STD, don’t worry, it’s not the end of the world. There are many ways to protect yourself and your partner. (If you need to talk to your partner about having an STD, read “How to Tell Your Partner You Have an STD” on page 18.)

Play It Safe

Condoms protect against most STDs, so if either of you has an STD, be sure to always use condoms during vaginal and anal sex and Sheer Glyde Dams during oral sex. Condoms are also a great form of birth control. There are lots of other birth control methods to prevent pregnancy, like the Pill, the NuvaRing and the patch. Just remember that only condoms and Sheer Glyde Dams reduce the risk of STDs, so they would have to be used in addition to another birth control method. (Go to Sexetc.org to find out more about birth control options.)

If you’re really ready for sex, then you’re ready to talk to your partner about it and ready to take the necessary steps to protect you and your partner.

A Teen on Telling Your Partner You’re Ready

I think that if you are ready to have sex and you believe that he or she is special enough for you to give a part of you away then you should talk. My boyfriend and I thought it was a big step in our relationship and important enough to talk about.

- Leigh, 15, TX

For more information on deciding to have sex, getting tested and birth control, check out our FAQs at Sexetc.org.
Before sealing the deal with Mr. Big, Carrie Bradshaw, the sex columnist and shoe-a-holic on HBO’s Sex and the City, was dumped by her old flame, Jack Berger. With a Post-it note.

There is almost nothing worse than breaking up with someone through a Post-it note. My ex-boyfriend wouldn’t agree, of course; I broke up with him through an IM two days after our four-month anniversary. I don’t know what was worse—the fact that I told all my friends about the breakup before I confronted him, or the fact that I kept his $30 Spiderman 2 Special Edition DVD.

Whether you’re the dumped or the dumper, breaking up is never an easy thing to do. However, there are ways to let the dumped down easily.

• Offer your partner legitimate reasons for the breakup. Note that “we hardly talk or have anything in common” is much better than “you bore me.” He may be the biggest jerk ever. She may be the most boring snob you’ve ever met. But that doesn’t mean it’s OK to mock his or her shortcomings. If you’re going for the “It’s not you, it’s me” approach, it is important to provide specific examples as to why it is indeed you. If you don’t, your boyfriend or girlfriend will be playing sappy emo lyrics on his or her MySpace profile for weeks.

• Tell your boyfriend or girlfriend first. Don’t let him or her hear that you’re going to break up from your friend’s cousin’s ex-girlfriend’s picture comment on Facebook. If anyone has the right to know about your desire to end the relationship, it is the boy or girl you’re currently in the relationship with.

• Don’t put it off. Dragging it out is painful for both of you.

• Break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend in person, if possible. Being dumped is hard enough without someone blowing you off with a typical “I’m braking up wit u” text message and treating you like you don’t even deserve the time it takes to call or get together in person.

• Be gentle, yet firm and straightforward, when your leg is drawn back for that inevitable “kick to the curb.”

The Aftermath

“After I broke up with my boyfriend, I felt relieved, like a burden had been lifted. But at the same time, I did miss him a lot,” says Jeana Colbalt, 16, of Dallas, TX.

Like Jeana, it is normal for you to miss your boyfriend or girlfriend or have feelings of regret after the breakup. The longer you’ve been dating, the more likely you are to miss your ex, which is understandable.

Now that you’ve removed the date you two started dating from your AIM profile and changed your MySpace status to single, do not move on to your cute lab partner—even if said lab partner gives you the answers to the biology homework. Not only does it hurt the feelings of your former beau or belle, but rushing into the next best thing before you’ve had time to properly collect yourself is the making of a disastrous rebound.

The most important thing you should remember about breakups—whether you’re the dumped or the dumper—is that the world continues to turn. You move on. Life goes on.
When 20-year-old Deacon, of Hamilton, NJ, started dating his girlfriend, she thought he was a virgin.

“When I told her I lost my virginity to the girl she called ‘the school slut,’ it really put a strain on our relationship. When it came time for us to have sex, she was extremely uncomfortable,” he says.

Letting your partner know you’re not a virgin can be one of the hardest conversations you have in your relationship. Your partner may have assumed you were a virgin or may become jealous once he or she finds out you had sex with an ex. Either way, you must remember that honesty is the foundation of a healthy relationship.

- Find a good time to talk, when your partner is not stressed or distracted. You want him or her to hear you out and fully understand what you are saying.
- Explain that you lost your virginity, and this is in the past. Reassure your partner that the person you lost your virginity to is no longer part of your life. If you’re still friends
- Don’t start describing what happened when you lost your virginity. (Your partner doesn’t want to know how hot the guy was that you lost your virginity to.) But be straight if you had an experience that was bad or if this experience changed how you feel or think about sex.
- Get tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), if you didn’t use condoms with your previous partner. Let your partner know the results. (Need to tell your partner you have an STD? See page 18.) If and when you and your current partner decide to have oral, vaginal or anal sex, you should definitely discuss using condoms and birth control.
- Speak from your heart. Sincerity always helps when you’re having a tough conversation.

Deacon’s talk with his girlfriend helped their relationship.

“Although my girlfriend was a little unsure of us once she found out I wasn’t a virgin, it has made us a lot closer,” he says. “Looking back, I am glad I told her the truth before she heard it from someone else. It is almost three years later, and we’re still together.”

Everyone assumes you’re straight, but maybe you know you’re attracted to people of the same gender. Recognizing that you’re gay, lesbian or bisexual (GLB) is a big step, and letting other people—like your parents—know is even bigger.

So, if you’ve decided you want to talk to your parents about your sexual orientation, how do you go about telling them? There isn’t one way that works for everybody, but here are some tips that might help you have the talk.

- Rely on the support of a friend or someone who already knows and accepts you as you come out to your parents or guardians.
- Write a letter. The best way for me to do anything is to get all my feelings out on paper. So, I would suggest that you write a letter to your parents or guardians. Tell them what you have been feeling and why you wanted to let them know. You can either leave the letter for them to read and let them come to you in their own time, or be there when they read it and have a conversation with them about it afterwards.
- Have an up-front conversation with your parents, if you’re not the letter-writing type. You may be quite surprised at how well your parents or guardians take it. You can say flat out, “I’m gay,” or build up to it. Try not to scare your parents too much, though! Remember that when you say you want to talk to them about something, they might get just as anxious about the conversation as you. In the words of The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, DON’T PANIC!
- Be prepared to answer their questions. Your parents or guardians may have questions about your sexual orientation. Parents, Families and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG) offers support and can answer questions your parents or other family members may have. They also have meetings for your family to attend. Go to Pflag.org for more information.
- Contact a close friend, relative or a local community center that can provide a place for you to stay, if there is a possibility that your parents or guardians won’t take the news well. In some worst-case scenarios, teens get kicked out of their homes after coming out to their parents or guardians. While this only happens on occasion, it happens more than anybody would like. You know your parents best, so be prepared.

Coming out to your parents or guardians is a big step. To those of you planning to come out, I say, “Good luck and congratulations.”
When I was about 10 years old, my 15-year-old sister found out she was pregnant. It was difficult for me to understand what was going on, but I did. Of course, it was even more difficult for my sister to tell my mom. My mom wanted my sister to finish high school, establish a career and get her life on the right track before thinking about having kids. My mom was upset for a while, but in the long run she was there to help my sister get through this.

My sister chose to have her baby. Seeing her raise a child on her own, I understand how difficult it is. No matter what age you are or how grown up you may think you are, you still need a strong support system to raise a child.

It is hard to tell your parents or guardians that you're pregnant or that your girlfriend is pregnant, but telling them too late means you or your girlfriend won't get much needed care—whether you or she chooses to continue the pregnancy or not. So, I decided to pull together some tips for helping you through this difficult conversation.

• Seek outside help from a counselor or other trusted adult. Telling her or him will be good practice for telling your parents. Planned Parenthood provides counseling and can answer your questions about adoption, abortion and teen parenting. To find a Planned Parenthood near you, call 1-800-230-PLAN (7526) or go to Sexetc.org and click on “Get Tested” to find a link to a directory of clinics.

• Include the guy who’s responsible for the pregnancy, too—whether he’s your boyfriend or not. You didn't get pregnant by yourself. And if you’re the guy, support your partner. Being there when you talk to both of your parents and going with her to see the doctor are just two ways that you can help.

• Get your partner and both of your parents or guardians together for a meeting. Tell them face-to-face as soon as you find out. Listen to what they have to say and use the information to figure out what your next step will be.

• Have a backup plan, especially if you don’t know how your parents or guardians will react. Before you break the news to your parents or guardians, tell another trusted adult that you are worried about what will happen and ask this person to check on you after you talk to your parents or guardians. Ask a close family member or other trusted adult to take you in if you get kicked out.

You can also contact your local youth shelter or the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-RUN-AWAY (786-2929). While very few parents or guardians would put their child out on the street, it’s best to be prepared if you believe it may happen to you.

Your parents will probably be disappointed, but they will hopefully be right by your side. If you want their support, you’ve got to take the first step and tell them that you’re pregnant or your girlfriend is pregnant.

I got pregnant at 18, just months before my graduation. Telling my dad I was pregnant was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done (besides actually having my now three-month-old daughter). Don’t be afraid to tell them. It’s better for them to know early, because once they do get over the initial shock, they could be your number-one support. So, keep your head up.

—Amaya, 19, UT

My fiancée and I are worried that we couldn’t handle a child before marriage. I now realize that as long as you have faith and trust in each other, being a teen parent can be an amazing experience.

—Craig, 18, OH

My mom was a lot more understanding than I thought she would be. I had an abortion. If I would have had to keep the baby, I would have ended up killing myself. I was so afraid, and I just wanted to die. Luckily, my mom understood.

—Brenda, 17, TN
How to tell your partner

You have a Sexually Transmitted Disease

By Erica Scottbey, 17, Staff Writer

It isn’t easy to talk openly about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), especially when you’re the one who has an STD. Can you imagine trying to tell your boyfriend or girlfriend that you have an STD? And if you have to tell your partner that you have one, you can’t help but be afraid of how he or she will react. Is he going to tell anyone? Will she want to be with you after finding out you have an STD? As difficult as it may be, telling your partner is way better than not telling him or her. Wouldn’t you want your partner to be honest with you?

Trust and honesty keep a relationship strong. I’m sure your partner would trust you to be honest with him or her. When you’re in a sexual relationship, having an STD is no longer just about you. You’re putting someone else that you like or possibly love at risk.

Every year close to four million 15- to 19-year-olds are infected with an STD. The crazy thing about it is that most of them don’t even know. If you know you have an STD, open your mouth and say something to your partner. Don’t you owe them that much? Get the facts about the STD you have and make sure you get treatment. Call Planned Parenthood at 1-800-230-PLAN (7526) to find a clinic near you or go their Web site at www.ppfa.org and enter your zip code in the “Find a Health Center” window.

Once you get treatment, you’ll be ready to have a difficult, but necessary, conversation with your partner.

Here are some tips:

- **Practice what you’re going to say to your partner.** Yeah, it sounds cheesy, but it will help when you finally have the talk. Know what you’re going to say before you say it—whether you’re going into the relationship with an STD or you contracted it while with your partner.

- **Sit your partner down** and be prepared to share the facts, face to face. Choose a time when he or she isn’t distracted and can really listen to what you have to say.

- **Be ready for anything,** since you don’t know how your partner will react. He or she may need time away from you to think about what you’ve said. Or maybe your partner will be angry. Either way, let your partner feel whatever he or she feels. Once that blows over, you can talk about what to do next.

Part of being mature is being honest, even if it means your partner might want to break things off with you. And who knows? Maybe this experience will make your relationship stronger. Looking at yourself in the mirror and knowing that you did the right thing for you and your partner is the only thing that should matter.

For more information on telling your partner you have an STD, read “How to Talk to Your Partner if You Have an STD,” by Sylvia Mayorga, 17.