

# Conducting a Sexual Health Assessment

## Starting the Conversation

**Transitional statements** can help you move comfortably from addressing the client's stated needs into assessing the need for other services.

### Examples:

*"Having a healthy pregnancy and baby starts with keeping your body healthy. I'd like to ask you some questions about your sexual health."*

*"The same things that put you at risk for being pregnant may put you at risk for getting an STD. I'd like to ask you some questions about your sexual health."*

A **normalizing statement** helps put the client at ease and lets them know that a sexual health assessment is an important part of providing comprehensive services.

### Examples:

*"These questions may feel very personal, but know that we ask all clients these questions so that we can provide the best care possible."*

*"I ask these questions at least once a year of all my clients because they are very important for your overall health."*

## Helping the Client Feel Comfortable

Effective interviewing and counseling skills are essential to obtaining an accurate and complete sexual history.

Providers should strive to establish and maintain client rapport throughout the assessment.

### ▶ Show respect and compassion for the client

### ▶ Use open-ended questions

Example: *"Tell me about any new sex partners you've had since your last visit."*

### ▶ Use understandable, nonjudgmental language

Example: *"Are your sex partners men only, women only, or both men and women?"*

### ▶ Use normalizing language throughout the assessment

Example: *"Some of my clients have difficulty using a condom with every sex act. How is it for you?"*



### Sources:

CDC. Sexually transmitted diseases treatment guidelines, 2015. MMWR 2015;64(No. 3). [www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/](http://www.cdc.gov/std/tg2015/)  
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National LGBT Health Education Center, National Association of Community Health Centers. Taking routine histories of sexual health. 2013.  
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## Five Ps

You may find the “Partners” section is a comfortable place to begin your assessment, or you may find it is more natural to begin with another section based on that client’s unique visit (for example, if the client came in for a pregnancy test, you might begin with Pregnancy Prevention).

Remember, these questions follow your transitional statement and/or introducing the reasons for asking these personal questions.

**Partners:** It might be necessary to define the term “partner” to the client or use other, relevant terminology. Remember: never make assumptions about the client’s sexual orientation.

*Tell me about any current or recent partners you’ve had sex with?*

If needed: *To help me understand, do you have sex with men, women, or both?*

*In the past 2 months, how many partners have you had sex with? How about in the past 12 months?*

*Is it possible that any of your partners in the past 12 months had sex with someone else while still in a sexual relationship with you?*

*Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your partner(s)?*

**Past STD History:** Begin with “I’m going to ask you about past sexually transmitted diseases, because the likelihood of you getting an STD is higher if you or your partners have had one in the past.”

*What STDs have you had in the past, if any?*

*Have any of your partners had an STD?*

### **Pregnancy:**

*What are your current plans or desires regarding pregnancy?*

If not wanting to be involved in a pregnancy: *What are you doing to prevent pregnancy?*

*What’s been your experience with using your current method? OR Do you have a method in mind you might want to use?*

**Practices:** Begin with “To understand your risks for STDs, I need to understand the kind of sex you have had recently.”

*What kinds of sex do you have or have you had?* (for example, oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex, sharing sex toys)

Some clients may feel more comfortable with simple, direct questions:

*Have you had vaginal sex, meaning penis in vagina? Have you had anal sex, meaning penis in rectum/anus? Have you had oral sex, meaning mouth on penis/vagina?*

*Is there anything else about your sexual practices that I need to know about to ensure I can provide you with good care?*

### **Protection from STDs:**

*What do you do to protect yourself from STDs and HIV?*

*Tell me about your use of condoms when you have [vaginal, anal, oral] sex.*

If a client uses condoms inconsistently: *In what situations (or with whom) do you use condoms?*

If a client never uses condoms: *There are lots of reasons why people don’t use condoms; what might be your reasons?*

### **Concluding the Assessment:**

*Is there anything else about your sexual practices and health that I need to know about to ensure I can provide you with good health care?*

*What other concerns or questions about your sexual health would you like to discuss?*