Navigating Sex and Intimacy

By Zamora Evans (they/them)

LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience anxiety, eating disorders, bipolar disorder, depression, and other mental health challenges due to stigma, oppression, and discrimination. Mental health challenges can complicate a person’s relationship to intimacy and sex. For example, symptoms of mental health challenges can include changes in sexual and romantic desires and satisfaction. Moreover, some antidepressants and antipsychotic medications reduce sexual desire or satisfaction. Symptoms like low mood and other factors like communication struggles or insecure attachment can make navigating and addressing romantic and sexual life more difficult.

On the other hand, intimacy and sex can positively affect our mental health. Research suggests that sex and intimacy can boost mood and reduce stress. While fluctuations in sexual satisfaction, arousal, or desire are normal, a support system, such as a licensed mental health clinician, can be vital in caring for and healing our intimate relationships with ourselves and others.

Since this is HIV/AIDS Awareness Month, it’s important to note that anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination and stigma can contribute to risk factors for HIV such as being uninsured or underinsured, being unhoused, being underemployed or unemployed, and having a lack of access to safe and affirming healthcare. Thus, LGBTQ+ individuals are disproportionately affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These phenomena are compounded through racism, ableism, and other forms of marginalization. Individuals that are intersectionally marginalized, such as transgender individuals and LGBTQ+ individuals of color, are even more likely to be diagnosed with HIV.

The LGBTQ+ community has historically created space for sex positivity, and continues to do so today. Looking to the future, I hope we continue to educate, empower, and support each other in navigating sex, mental health, and LGBTQ+ identity.
5 HEALTHY TIPS ...for Talking With Your Partner About STI Testing

1. Before becoming intimate, **think about timing and setting**, and choose somewhere relaxed and private.

2. **Use language that destigmatizes and normalizes STI’s as a routine health concern**, like using the term infection instead of disease. You can show you value regular STI testing and are willing to share your results by modeling open communication.

3. **Disclosure gets easier with practice.** Consider asking a friend or trusted therapist to help you role play the conversation.

4. **Educate yourself** by using vetted resources, learning about medication and side effects, being aware of what protection options are available, and using a trusted space for regular testing that promote safer practices.

5. Some STI’s are lifelong due to a lack of cure, or can be undetectable with medication, like HSV or HIV. It’s important to **know you’re not alone** by connecting with community through online forums or support groups to talk openly about experiences and build social support.

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The holidays are hard and so is talking about mental health. How to Have the Talk provides tips on how to start a conversation with your friends and loved ones when you notice they may be struggling. Our weekly How to Survive the Holidays posts on Instagram will give you some suggestions, mindfulness practices, and encouragement through the holiday season. To find out more, please follow us @HowToHaveTheTalk on Instagram or go to our website at www.envision-you.org/how-to-have-the-talk.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Envision:You is delighted to highlight our partnership with Mesa County Public Libraries, who hosted our first set of **Q is for Questioning** workshops at their Grand Junction Central location. The library not only hosted three in-person two-hour sessions for parents, adult caregivers, teachers, social workers, and nonprofit leaders to learn more about being affirming supporters of LGBTQ+ youth, but library staff also participated in the workshops, provided tech support, and made our participants feel safe and welcome.

In a time where the right for many LGBTQ+ people to exist and thrive is up for debate in political arenas and on school boards, Mesa County Public Libraries is a beacon of hope on the Western Slope, sponsoring Pride events and LGBTQ+ inclusive programming even in the face of some community backlash. We could not be more grateful for their partnership!