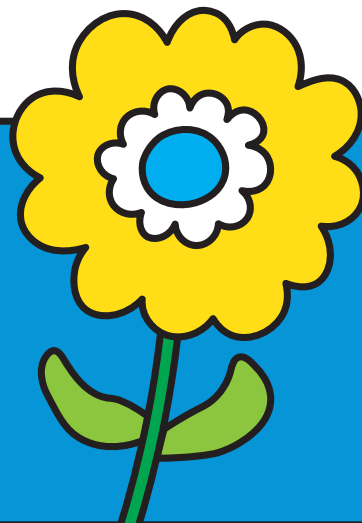
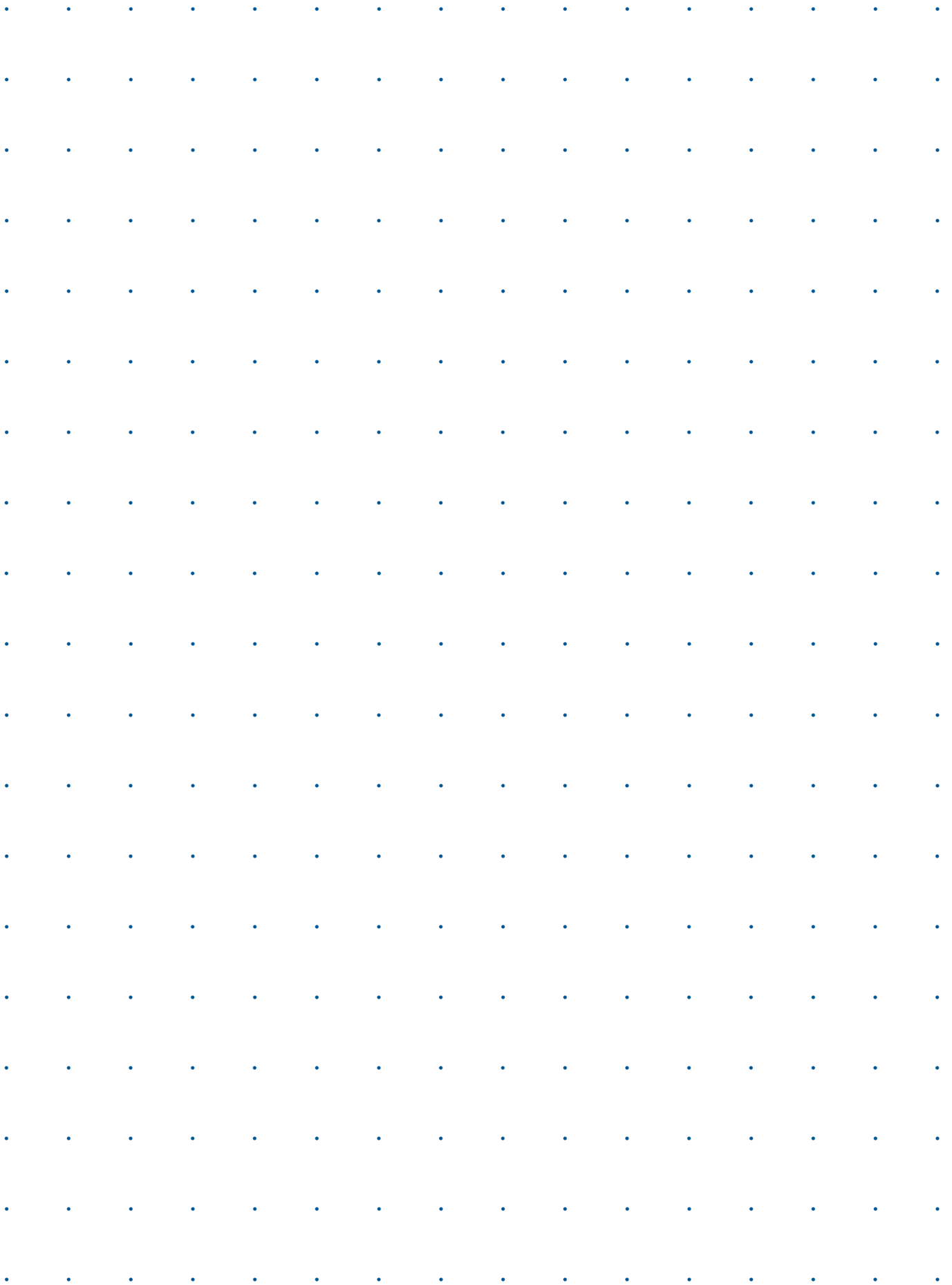




***THE
CONSENT
GUIDE
BOOK***







Welcome!

Throughout our lives, we receive many different messages from our family, our peers, the media, and society about bodies, agency, and sex—and a lot of these messages may be incorrect.

Our goal with this workbook is to give you accurate information about consent and sexual communication in order to support you in your relationships and remind you that you are the author of your own experiences—experiences that can be fun, enjoyable, and pleasurable.

Joy is an act of liberation, and with this guide, we hope you feel inspired to explore more about your needs and desires in relationships and sexual experiences!

With care,

The Counseling and Wellness Center at WWU

We are all worthy of being treated with love, dignity, and respect.

If you are experiencing, or have experienced, relationship abuse, sexual violence, stalking or harassment, you are not alone and support is available.

Visit: cwc.wvu.edu/survivorservices#24hour



Let's Look at Some Definitions

Consent

There is a lot of talk about the concept of consent, but what does it look like in action? How do we practice and center consent in all relationships? The first place to start is a definition.

consent [kən-sěnt´]

(n.) Consent is an ongoing mutual agreement between partners about what they want to experience. Part of negotiating consent means discussing values, boundaries, preferences, desires, and interests.

This means reflecting on what you want! What are you into? What are your goals? Do our interactions match what feels good in our bodies? Each person decides to share power with their partner(s) in creating a shared sexual experience, and learning to be in touch with our bodies is part of consent.

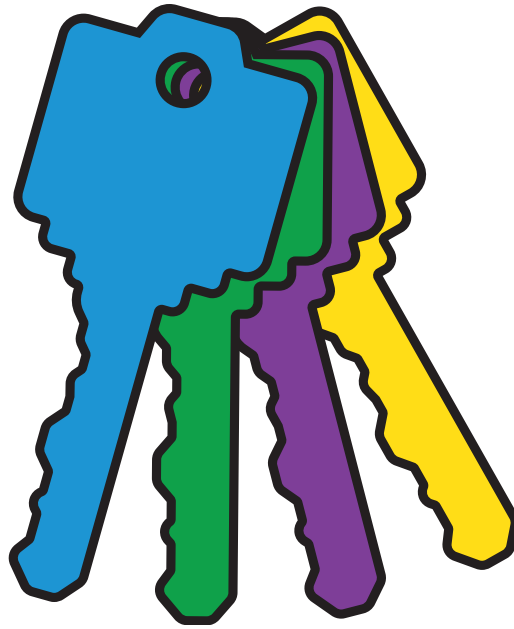
Sexual Health

Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, rooted in autonomy and choice (adapted from the World Health Organization). Being rooted in autonomy and choice means being free of coercion, discrimination, or violence.

sexual health [sěk´shōō-əl·hěłth]

(n.) Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease or dysfunction.

For sexual health to be obtained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected, and fulfilled.



4 Keys to Consent

1. Consent Is Rooted in Autonomy and Choice

You and your partner(s) say yes and are choosing to engage from a place of genuine desire. This means no one is forcing anything to happen or trying to convince someone to have sex with them. You and your partner feel a sense of safety and are present in the experience. Consent does not exist if there is coercion, intimidation, or fear.

2. Consent Is Enthusiastic!

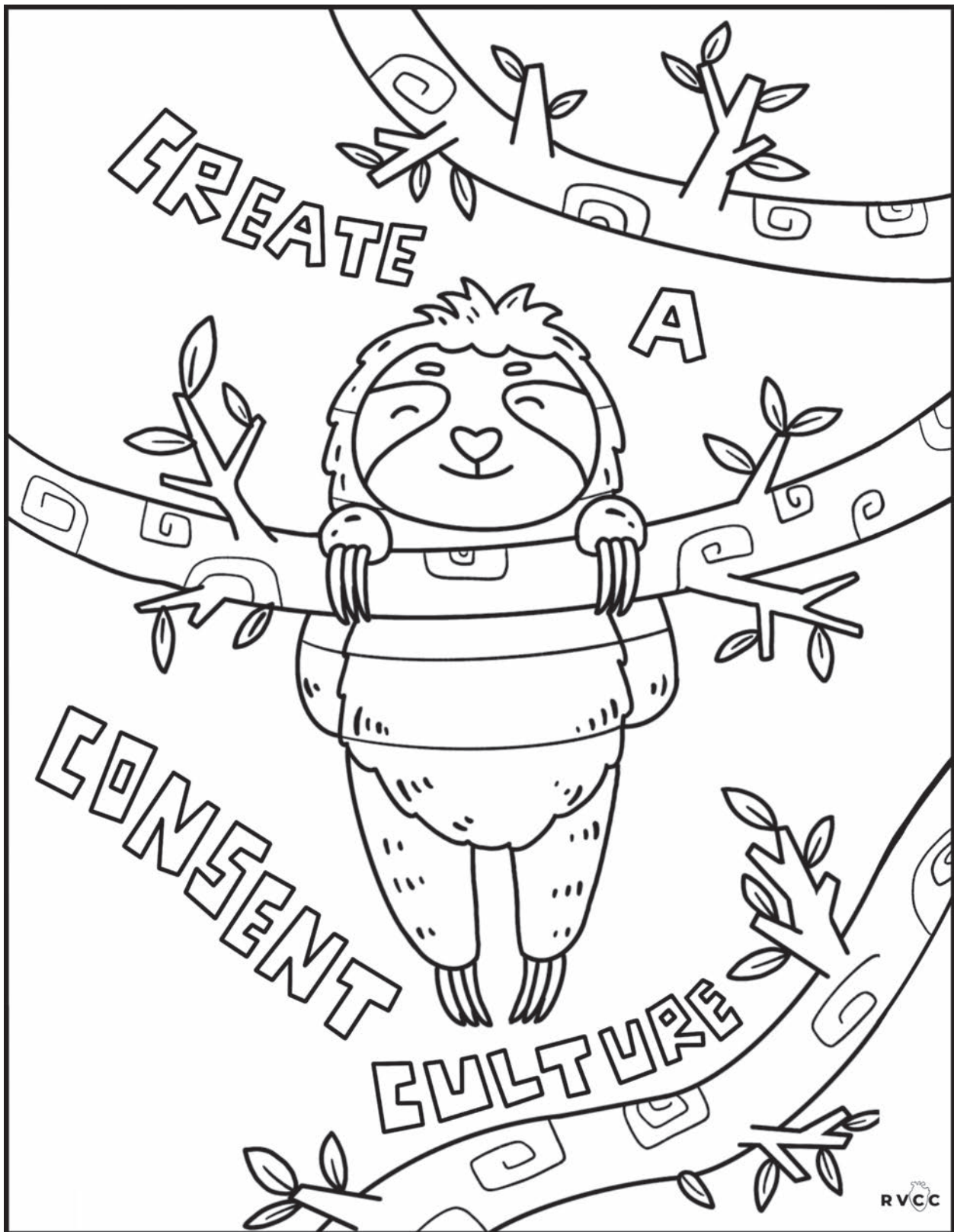
We are looking for a HECK YES! Consent means all partners are equally excited about what is taking place. And, a lack of enthusiasm is a no.

3. Consent Is Ongoing

Anyone can change their mind about what they want to do at any time. Consent is constantly checking in with each other and being aware of how the other person is feeling during the experience. Consent is not just given at the beginning of an experience, but throughout.

4. Consent Reflects Mutual Interest

There is a foundation of respect and care. This means that partners are interested in the same things, such as each other's needs, working together, and treating each other with respect. Mutual interest involves being in tune with each other's desires, needs, and boundaries.



RVCC

Coloring page courtesy of RVCC: Recognize Violence, Change Culture.

Find more resources at: joinrvcc.org

Consent and Communication

Now that we've defined consent, let's take a look at open communication, another important part of consent.

In a healthy relationship, we are able to communicate our needs, desires, and boundaries, but this is another skill we aren't usually taught. One way to start learning how to communicate your needs is by identifying what they are.

Sexual inventory: Yes, no, maybe so!

Reflect on what your boundaries and desires might be in sexual interactions using the [Yes, No, Maybe So](#) checklist created by the folks at [Scarleteen.com](#), a website dedicated to providing inclusive information about sexuality and relationships.



Open communication also means talking about safer sex practices, such as how you want to practice safer sex before things get hot and heavy or if anyone has an STI (sexually transmitted infection). Open communication can help partners feel comfortable discussing these important aspects while centering everyone's safety, health, and pleasure.

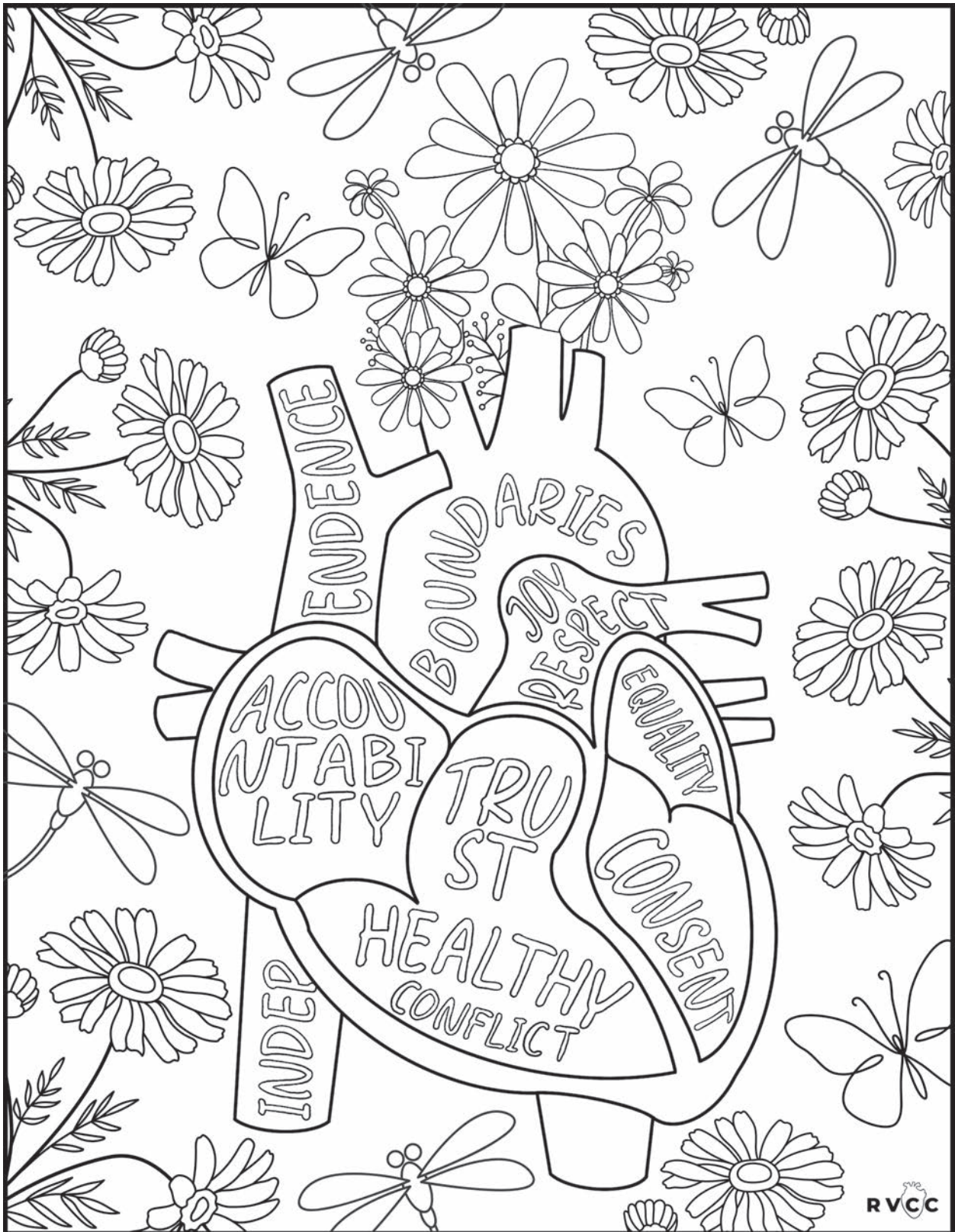
What Does Consent Look Like in a Healthy Sexual Relationship?

- You check in with each other before, during, and after sexual activity
- You talk about what you want and don't want to do sexually
- You listen to one another
- You always honor each other's no's
- You respect each other's privacy and don't share your partner's personal information or belongings (e.g., videos or pictures)

What Are Some Things You Can Say to Demonstrate Consent?

- "I want you to feel comfortable. What makes you feel safe?"
- "I'd like for us to get tested for STIs before we have sex."
- "Let's carry condoms/latex barriers with us so we are always prepared!"





Coloring page courtesy of RVCC: Recognize Violence, Change Culture.

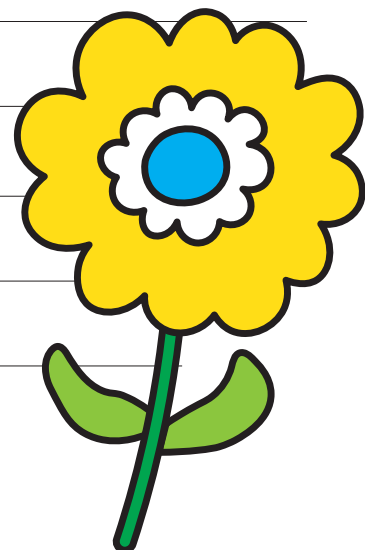
Find more resources at: joinrvcc.org

Relationship Reflection

Who are the people that I enjoy being around? That make feel good?

Who do I go to when I am in need of connection?

What are boundaries that I have in my relationships?





Relationship Checklist

Think of a relationship you have and use the checklist below to assess which of these areas are strong and which may need some attention. It can be helpful to do this on your own and with your partner(s).

Good Communication

- We talk openly about our relationship.
- We listen to one another and try to understand one another.
- We tell each other how we are feeling.
- We communicate together about the needs of the child(ren), as well as the needs of the parent(s), if we are parenting.

Fun/Fulfillment

- We genuinely enjoy the time we spend together.
- We make each other laugh, can be playful, and have fun.
- We feel encouraged to pursue and achieve our goals and dreams.
- We want to continue to be in the relationship.

Personal Time/Freedom

- We enjoy spending time apart, alone, or with others.
- We support each other's need for individual interests and respect each other's need for time apart.
- We encourage each other to stay connected to family and friends.

Trust and Honesty

- We can be our true selves with one another.
- We believe what each other has to say.
- We can speak our own truths openly without fear, even when it feels hard.
- We respect each other's right to privacy and personal boundaries.
- We admit when we are wrong.
- We are honest about our actions, feelings, and intentions.

Conflict Resolution

- We expect to have disagreements.
- We respect that neither one of us is always right.
- We compromise when possible.
- We discuss the real issue when a conflict arises in a safe and respectful way.

Consent and Safety

- We talk openly about sexual and reproductive choices, desires, preferences, and boundaries.
- We continuously check in and ensure there is a genuine desire in all physical, intimate, and sexual interactions.
- We care for one another's personal well-being and do not put one another in harm's way.

Equality/Partnership

- We give and take equally in the relationship.
- We share in making plans and decisions together.
- We each work on the relationship.
- We have equal say with regard to finances if we share finances.

Respect

- We value each other as we are.
- We care about each other's thoughts, feelings, and identities.
- We celebrate each other's successes.
- We honor and celebrate each other's identities.

After completing this checklist, take some time to ask each other:

- What are the strengths of our relationship?
- What do we want to work on together?
- What can each of us do to build a healthier relationship?
- How can we start that process?

Adapted from: loveisrespect.org/everyone-deserves-a-healthy-relationship/relationship-spectrum and joinrvcc.org Recipe for Healthy Relationships handout.

How to Experience More Sexual Pleasure



3 Important Conditions for Sexual Pleasure:



1. To be relaxed
2. To feel in control
3. To become aroused

Each of these conditions may look different for different people. It is important to examine and test out your needs in a safe context.

11 Ways to Embrace and Foster Sexual Pleasure

1. Know yourself.

You're going to be able to truly connect with someone only to the degree that you are connected with yourself. Getting familiar with your own body and what feels good can make it easier to share that with another person.

2. Be in the present moment.

Learn to practice mindfulness during sexual activity. As much as possible, be present, engaged, and focused on yourself and your partner(s).

3. Honor your body and your sexuality.

Many people are unfortunately taught to feel ashamed or embarrassed about their body or their sexuality, and those feelings can and need to be overcome in order to fully appreciate and enjoy these parts of your life. Start by focusing on what you already love, and consider seeking

help with anything that still brings up big feelings that stand in the way of self-acceptance.

4. Take care of well-being.

Take care of your well-being—physically and emotionally—as well as the well-being of your partner(s) and your relationship. Things like stress, fatigue, illness, and conflict can interfere with one's capacity for sexual arousal and pleasure.

5. Live a passionate life.

Live a passionate life in general, and passion will flow into your sex life. Make time for the stuff you love—activities, people, places—and pause to take stock of all that you are grateful for. Passion is created and nourished by devoting attention, energy, and skills to the things that matter most to you, whether in your sex life or anything else.

6. Know it won't be "perfect" every time.

The media sets us up to have unrealistic expectations about sex that can lead to disappointment. Be open to experiences that are "just okay" as well as those that are "amazing!" Both can and likely will happen. As with most things, sex gets better with practice and good communication.

7. Be a generous partner.

Be curious and learn what your partner really likes and needs to feel good. Many people get a lot of pleasure from pleasuring their partner(s).

8. Aim for variety and creativity.

Get your whole body involved. Explore with all five senses. Sex should be much more than a genital exercise, and so many other parts of the body can contribute to sexual arousal and pleasure.

9. Focus on the experience, not the orgasm.

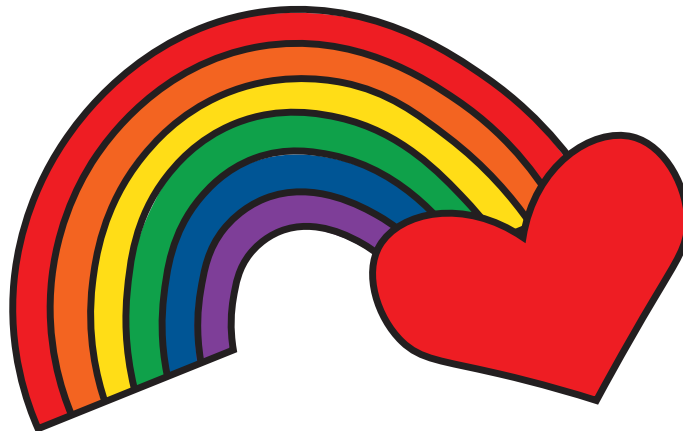
Peak orgasmic intensity is not going to happen every time. Making orgasms the focus or goal every time can feel like a lot of pressure and could result in missing out on all the other pleasure and intimacy there is to enjoy. Consider shifting from goal-oriented sex to being present with what's happening.

10. Strive for balance.

Allow yourself to experience the emotional and physical pleasure of a sexual interaction—but allow yourself to focus on one more than the other at different moments. As with so much else, it's a matter of striving for balance.

11. Value the connection.

Don't rely on sex alone to create a magical connection between you and your partner(s), but honor the bond and the intimacy that can be created and renewed by having sex.





Coloring page courtesy of RVCC: Recognize Violence, Change Culture.

Find more resources at: joinrvcc.org



Consent and Pleasure

In her book *Pleasure Activism*, author adrienne maree brown describes how pleasure is our right as well as an act of liberation. She outlines four key points when it comes to consent:

Consent Isn't Just Necessary, It's Sexy!

We are often taught to be uncomfortable talking about sex, even with people we are engaging with sexually! Consent-based pleasure teaches us that consent is the foundation for sex and talking about what feels good can open the door for more fun and experimentation.

Consent Is Self Care

It is helpful to have an idea of your boundaries before engaging in sexual activity! Spend time reflecting on what you might be comfortable with and what are boundaries for you. For example, deciding not to engage sexually with anyone if you or they have had any substances. Creating boundaries is a process that can change and evolve over time as you learn what feels good and what doesn't.

Practice Consent in Everyday Life

We aren't taught how to create consent with each other, so one way to practice is outside of sex and intimacy. You can try asking your friends if they want a hug. Practicing consent in everyday life allows us to feel more comfortable in sexual settings.

Consent Has Levels

There is a common myth that asking for consent can "ruin the mood." What we actually know is that asking for consent and creating safety increases pleasure and enjoyment in an experience. Just because someone says yes to one thing doesn't mean they are saying yes to everything. Consent can change during sexual experiences, so ask for consent frequently.

Sex, Drugs, Alcohol & Consent

What role do alcohol and drugs play in your sex life?

Everyone deserves healthy, positive sexual experiences that make them (and their partners) feel good. If substance use is involved in your sexual activities, ask yourself:

- Why am I having sex when I'm intoxicated and/or with partners who are intoxicated?
- How is substance use impacting the quality of my sexual experiences?
- Does being intoxicated contribute to me doing things sexually that I later regret? How do I think about that now?
- What would it be like to have my sexual experiences be more clear-minded?

Intoxication vs. Incapacitation

Consent cannot be given by a person who is incapacitated by alcohol or other drugs. Therefore, it is imperative to be able to recognize the signs of incapacitation. Someone who is intoxicated by alcohol may exhibit some physical or mental impairments (clumsiness, loss of articulate speech, increased emotionality) and still be aware of and in control of their behavior and decisions. Incapacitation, however, is a state beyond drunken-

ness or intoxication. If your partner is showing signs of incapacitation or you're not sure, STOP.

Signs of incapacitation include but are not limited to:

- Inability to speak clearly or coherently
- Confusion on basic facts (Where am I? How did I get here? Who are you?)
- Inability to stand or walk unassisted
- Vomiting
- Glassy or unfocused eyes
- Loss of consciousness (passing out)

Can you give consent when you've been drinking/using other drugs?

Yes, you can give consent if you have been drinking or using other drugs. However, the ability to give consent depends on your ability to make decisions free from pressure, coercion, and incapacitation. If you are incapacitated from alcohol or other drugs, you cannot give consent.

Can you get consent from someone who has been drinking/using other drugs?

Yes, you can get consent from someone who has been drinking/using drugs as long as they are not incapacitated and the consent is clear

and voluntary. Agreeing to have sex can only happen when it is free from pressure or coercion. Taking advantage of a person's impairment from the use of alcohol or other drugs is not okay under any circumstances. If you see this happening around you, do what you can to intervene and stop it.

If someone has been using alcohol/ other drugs and you're thinking about having any kind of sexual interaction with them, it is your responsibility to check in and find out whether they are okay with what you'd like to do before moving forward. If you are not totally sure they want to, don't do it.

What if both/all of us have been drinking/using drugs?

It's okay to have sex when drinking or using other drugs, but all the rules of consent still apply and this adds an additional level of responsibility to make sure that consent is clear before moving forward.

Even if you are intoxicated or impaired by alcohol or other drugs, you are still responsible for making sure your partner(s) really want to participate in any type of sexual activity with you. If there is any uncertainty about whether someone is incapacitated or uncertain, don't have sex.

Things to keep in mind when drinking/using other drugs and hooking up

Sexual activity requires active and ongoing participation from both/all parties involved. People have different definitions for things like "hooking up" and "making out." Be sure you and your partner(s) are clear about what each of you actually wants.

Communication about sex can feel challenging and awkward. Adding alcohol or other drugs to the situation can make that communication even more challenging, especially with people who don't know each other very well and/or are more uncomfortable talking about sex.

There are a number of factors that can impact how alcohol or other drugs affect a person (e.g., body size, tolerance, gender, mood, medication use, etc.). Determining whether someone is incapacitated has less to do with how much they have consumed than how it is affecting them.

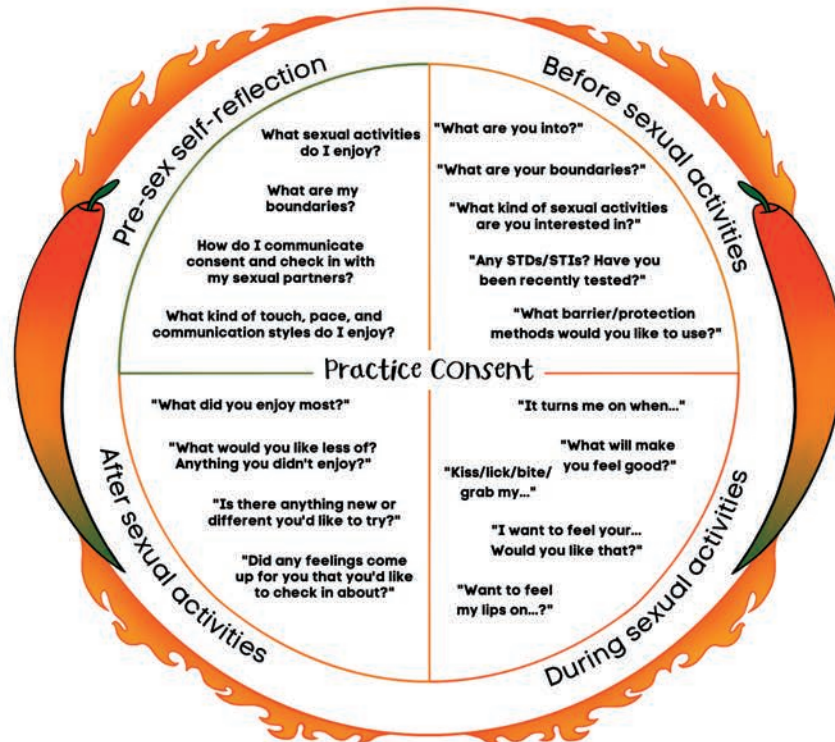
It is always best to rely on a clear verbal YES and stay attuned to your partner(s) facial expressions and body language to make sure they are in congruence. If you're getting mixed messages, or you haven't asked and received a clear yes, STOP and check in. If it's not clear, it's not consent.

Information adapted from Dartmouth College
dartmouth.edu/consent/sex_drugs_alcohol/index.html

Practicing Consent IRL

Practicing Consent

Whether you're hooking up or engaging with a long-term partner, consent is essential during all sexual engagements. Below are examples of ways you can check in with your sexual partners before, during, and after sexual engagements.



What is consent? Why is it important?

How do I practice consent with my sexual partners?

How do I know what sexual activities they are interested in? How they like to be touched, what their boundaries are, etc. How do I assess that they are expressing consent?

Consent Values: Active, Ongoing, Collaborative, Informed, Freely Given, Genuine Interest, Specific



Worksheet courtesy of RVCC: Recognize Violence, Change Culture.

Find more resources at: joinrvcc.org

Practicing Consent IRL



Self-Assessment



Growing up, what messages did I receive about sex from my family, peers, the media, and/or porn?

How does my culture, identity, upbringing and/or the messages I received growing up impact my relationship to sex?

How comfortable am I with expressing my desires and boundaries with my sexual partners? What factors impact my comfort levels (ex. the person I'm with)?

If I struggle with sexual communication, what barriers do I experience to communicating my wants and boundaries? What makes it challenging?

What areas do I want to work on when it comes to communicating my wants and boundaries with my sexual partners, and/or listening and checking in about theirs?

Sexual Partnership Goals

Sexual Partnership Goals

5 qualities that are important for my sexual partners to embody:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Expectations I have of my sexual partners:

(Ex. getting tested, using protection/barrier methods, engaging with respect, etc.)

HOW DO I WANT TO FEEL DURING/AFTER SEXUAL ACTIVITIES WITH SOMEONE?

WHAT DO I HOPE MY SEXUAL PARTNERS WILL FEEL DURING/AFTER OUR SEXUAL ACTIVITIES?

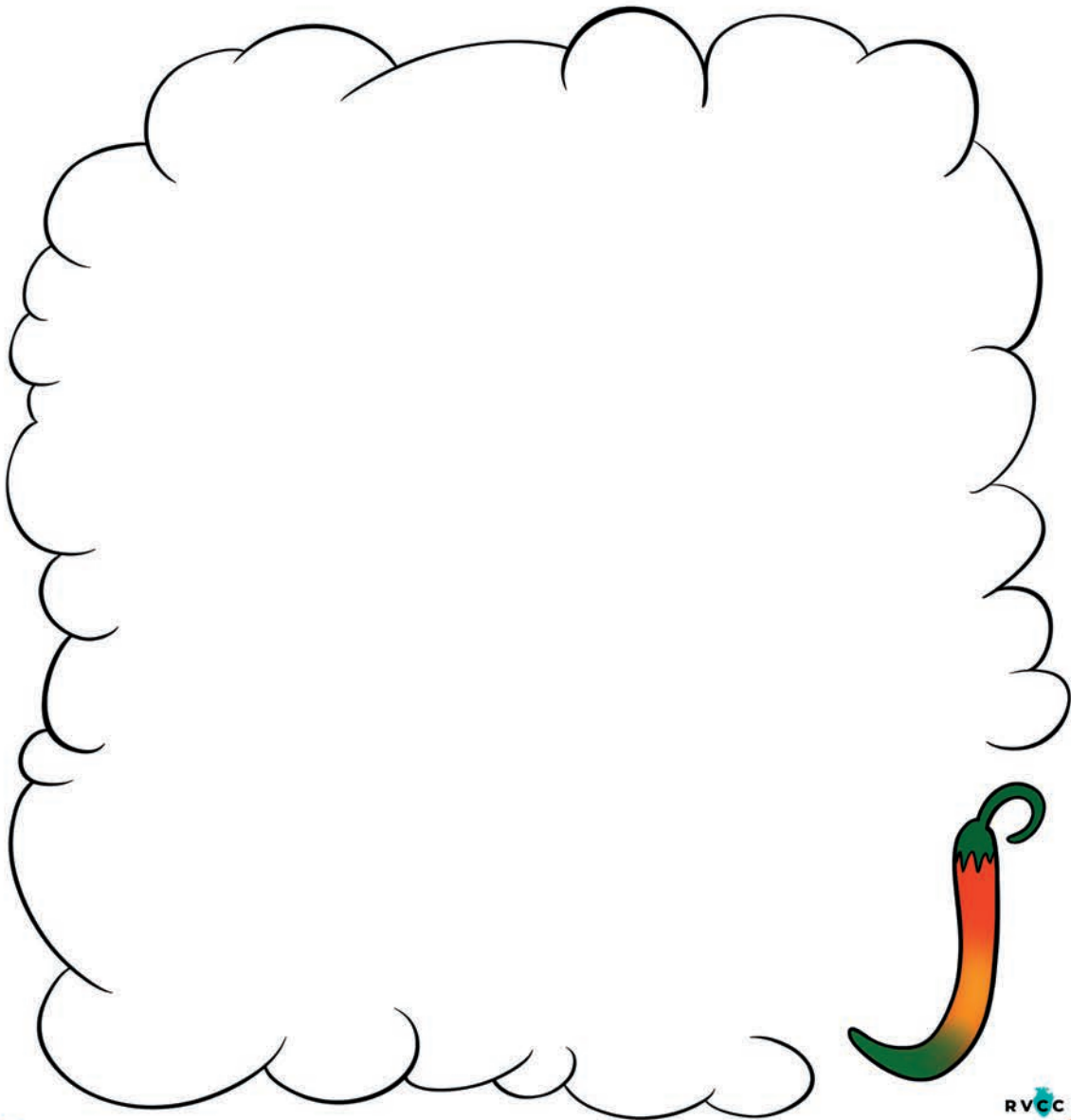
Do I have past trauma and/or triggers that impact my sexual experiences? If so, how do I want my sexual partners to respond when feelings come up for me during or after sexual activities?



Dream Sexual Partnership

My Dream Sexual Partnership

Imagine your dream sexual partnership. What does that look like? What kind of relationship do you have with your sexual partners (is it exclusive, open)? How do they make you feel? What sexual activities would you engage in if you felt completely safe with them? How do you communicate? What level of emotional and/or physical connection do you feel? What kind of environment are you in? Use this as your sexual partnership dream board.



RVCC

Worksheet courtesy of RVCC: Recognize Violence, Change Culture.

Find more resources at: joinrvcc.org



More Resources for Sexual Pleasure & Health

Websites

Sexplanations with Dr. Doe:

[youtube.com/@sexplanations/videos](https://www.youtube.com/@sexplanations/videos)

Scarleteen—Sex Ed for the Real

World: www.scarleteen.com

Planned Parenthood:

www.plannedparenthood.org

Kinkly: www.kinkly.com

Queer Sex Ed Community Curriculum:

www.queersexedcc.com

Queer Sex Therapy (Instagram):

[@queersextherapy](https://www.instagram.com/queersextherapy)

Podcasts

Safeword // Sex with Emily // Swoon

Books

All About Love by bell hooks. Examines the many aspects of romantic love in modern times and offers a new way of thinking about love.

The Body Is Not an Apology by Sonya Renee Taylor. Explores the radical act of self-love and how to unlearn societal shame that oppresses all bodies.

Come as You Are by Emily Nagoski. An exploration of why and how women's sexuality works that offers information to help you center confidence and joy in your sex life.

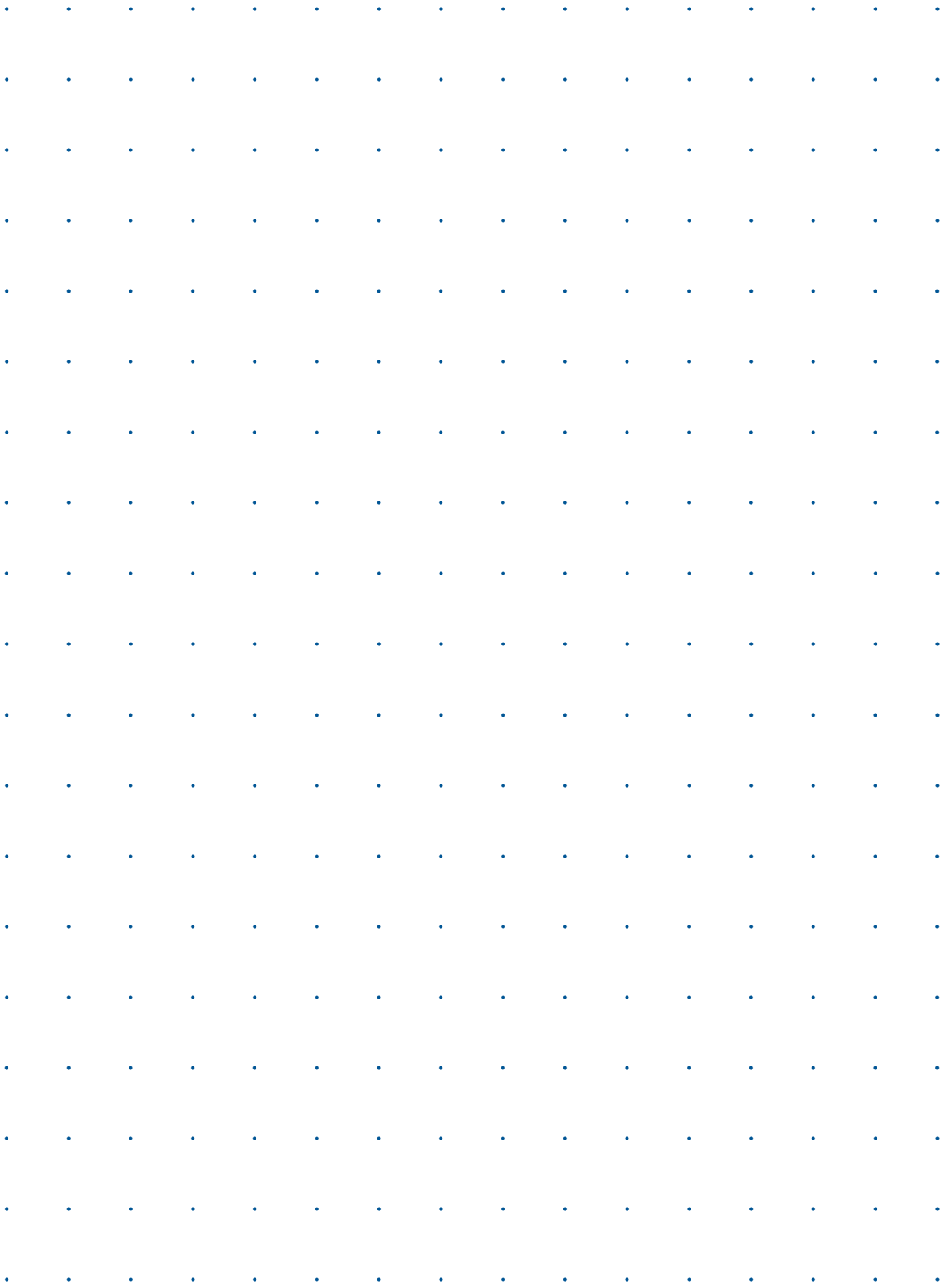
The Ethical Slut by Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy. A self-help book that explores non-monogamy as a concept and a practice.

Healing Sex: A Mind-Body Approach to Healing Sexual Trauma by Staci Haines. A sex-positive guide for all survivors of sexual assault who want to reclaim their sex lives.

Let's Talk About Down There by Jennifer Lincoln. A gynecologist answers real-life sex questions.

Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence by Esther Perel. Examines the complexities of sustaining sexual desire in long-term relationships and offers inspiring, practical advice.

Pleasure Activism by adrienne maree brown. A collection of artwork, poems, interviews, and essays looking at how pleasure is an act of liberation that can heal.



COUNSELING AND WELLNESS CENTER



Information provided by the WWU Counseling and Wellness Center. To receive this booklet in an alternate format, email cwc@wwu.edu. To learn more about our programs and services, scan the QR code or visit cwc.wwu.edu. AA/EO. Rev. 3/24.