

**GIRLS' POWER INITIATIVE  
(GPI) NIGERIA**

*"towards an empowered womanhood"*

**SEXUALITY EDUCATION SERIES**

*For*

**Young Persons**

**No. 5**

**QUESTIONS ADOLESCENTS ASK**

*Editor*

**Bene Madunagu**



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## Acknowledgement

This volume is the 5<sup>th</sup> in the Sexuality Education Series for young persons that GPI, Calabar Centre is producing. As young people participate in GPI public education activities, as well as GPI lessons at the centre and in schools and during the holiday programmes, listen to our weekly television programme, “THE GIRL CHILD”, to get informed and encouraged to raise questions that trouble their minds for which they had no answers, we have also learnt and generated materials from such activities. My appreciation for this special No. 5 edition in the series goes, first of all to the young people who raised the questions contained in this publication through phone calls, and from the “GPI Adolescent Concerns” boxes in schools, as well as special boxes used at GPI public events, to encourage young people to ask questions during lessons at the GPI Centre, and also in schools and during community intervention activities. Through these questions, other young persons with similar challenges but with no opportunity to reach GPI would benefit from their contribution.

I sincerely thank them all. GPI facilitators are skilled in being able to get young people to open up and speak out their minds. I truly salute them for their efforts, commitments and contribution in getting these questions from the young people and of course, there are a few people who were assigned to play certain roles to pull together these questions, sort them into categories for ease of comprehension by young persons and help in providing answers to meet the level of understanding of the young persons. In this category therefore, special thanks go to Ndodeye Basse who supervised the compilation of the questions, proof-read and made corrections right from the initial stages of this production; Ofonasaha Ekpoudom who took-over where Ndodeye stopped in providing guidance, proof-reading and also supervising progress; Unoma Madunagu a youth volunteer, made a lot of contributions in proof-reading, correcting and assisting in organizing and ensuring accurate information in terms of content and context of answers, whoa!

Of special mention are the two youth facilitators, Gloria Henry Edet and Comfort Ikpi. These two young women started off the process of collecting and pulling all the questions together, taking on the type-setting of all the questions and first attempt of compiling the answers. Comfort Ikpi on submitting what she brought to me as the final version for my editing did so with a broad smile. I was surprised by her smile because I was just about to apologize for being - a slave driver - having made so many amends, so many times and almost pushing her to the wall with it- with my perfectionist attitude. Before I said anything, again another surprise -Comfort thanked me in appreciation of the mentoring and training I gave her during the process and how much she benefited from my -push-, comments and corrections. Comfort Ikpi, this is my turn to say thank you, to you. Your commitment and hardwork and then your appreciation continue to put a smile on my face.

Of course, much as I tried to ensure some level of perfection in this production, I still had my limitations. The final product was a result of the constructive criticisms, questions and editorial skills of my friend, comrade and partner, Edwin Madunagu. He not only encouraged me in the process but as usual, volunteered his time and journalistic expertise through the process of this production.

All of these efforts would probably have produced typed copies for our shelves but for the support for the production of these series by the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), MacArthur Foundation and the International Women's Health Coalition (IW|HC). Their support made it possible to produce this publication to reach out to young people widely. I sincerely thank them for their belief in GPI and hence, their support to promote sexual and reproductive rights and health of young people, particularly the adolescent girls in Nigeria.

**BENE E. MADUNAGU**

December, 2007







## **KNOWING GPI**

### **Background**

Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) Nigeria is an independent, not-for-profit, non-sectarian, non-partisan, non-governmental organization. GPI was founded in 1993, but effectively started the execution of regular comprehensive sexuality education programmes and other related and relevant activities in 1994. GPI first started with two centres in Benin-City, Edo state and Calabar, Cross River State. By the 2001 project year, GPI had increased its physical locations, or centres to four, with the two new ones in Asaba, Delta state and Uyo, Akwa Ibom state. The national secretariat/headquarters of GPI is in Calabar, Cross River State.

GPI is a registered organization (Corporate Affairs Commission No. 10290, 1997), and was awarded a special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in 2001.

The organization focuses on the education, leadership and other gender-sensitive life management skills and information on human sexuality, Family Life/HIV/AIDS Education (SFLHE), sexual vi



health and rights, reproductive health and rights, particularly for those adolescent girls, aged 10-18 years in Nigeria.

GPI's mandate is to assist young girls to live healthy lives and achieve their full potentials, towards an empowered womanhood. This also includes helping young girls to overcome the risks of early sexual activity, adolescence, unwanted, or unintended pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, unsafe abortions, all forms of sexual abuse, harassment as well as gender-based violence and exploitation.

GPI vigorously promotes gender equality and equity and works with adolescent girls to develop their leadership and capacity to respond to, and work for social transformation towards gender and social justice.

# **Content and meaning of the Acronym - GPI**

## **G = Girls**

A female child below 18 years after which she becomes a young woman from 19 -29 years and then an adult woman, from 30 years and above.

## **P = Power**

Inner strength and capability to make things happen, as appropriate. Acting from an informed position and conviction of what is right to overcome prejudices.

## **I = Initiative**

As contained in the organization's name, it carries its literal meaning which is:

The act of taking the first step to do something that must be done without being told. It is also the ability to identify what is right and just. It enables one to recognize injustice and take action without waiting to be told what to do. It means setting one's goal in life; having a vision and aspiring to reach one's goal, taking practical positive actions.

## **GPI's vision**

- To be a leading sustainable feminist institution with critical consciousness and capacity for analysis on

social and gender prejudices, committed to empowering girls into healthy, self-reliant and productive women for the achievement of positive changes and transformation of patriarchal values in Nigeria.

## **GPI's Mission**

- To empower adolescent girls with accurate information on their sexuality, human rights, life management and leadership skills from a gender perspective for social actions.

## **Overall objectives**

1. To increase leadership and life management skills through providing a forum and safe space for girls to exchange ideas, seek solutions to their problems and receive support to develop.
2. To increase the awareness of adolescents, parents, guardians, teachers, media persons and the public on the issues of sexuality, gender and human rights of girls and women.
3. To reduce the social, cultural and religious practices, myths, patriarchal values and norms that violate the rights of the girl-child.
4. To increase the capacity of adolescent girls to overcome the challenges of growing up female in Nigeria

so that they can become the catalysts of social change.

5. To increase the institutional capacity of GPI as a prime resource for the promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for adolescent girls from a gender perspective in Nigeria.
6. To increase policy advocacy of stakeholders to advance the sexuality, human rights and sexual health of adolescents girls in Nigeria.

## **GPI Intervention Strategies/Activities**

- ◆ Weekly lessons
- ◆ Outreach programme
- ◆ Counselling and referrals
- ◆ Library services
- ◆ Dissemination of information through:
  - Media programmes
  - Production of IEC materials
  - Quarterly newsletter



- Internship programmes
- Workshop/training
- Capacity-building
- Gender Development Institute
- Community intervention/social work
- Economic skills training
- Life management skills development
- Networking and collaborating with other NGOs
- Research and documentation.

## Research and publications

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| ■ Culture and adolescents' concern on sexuality -   | 1996   |
| ■ Understanding and knowing your body   | - 1996 |
| ■ Myths and facts about contraceptives,<br>drugs and sexually transmitted diseases,<br>including HIV/AIDS | - 1998 |
| ■ Questions adolescents ask about their sexuality<br>and answers  | - 1998 |
| ■ Assertiveness Vol. 1  | - 1999 |
| ■ Self- Identity Vol. 2   | - 1999 |
| ■ Body image Vol. 3   | - 1999 |
| ■ Violence against girls and women  | - 1999 |
| ■ GPI training manual   | - 1999 |
| ■ GPI at Five   | - 1999 |
| ABC of relationships  | - 1999 |



Adolescents and sexual health problems -		2000
Assessing the impacts of GPI lessons on adolescent girls	-	2000
Life management for adolescents	-	2000
Beijing + 5: Assessing the health and rights of women: General issues, adolescents reproductive health and rights, violence against girls and women	-	2001
Trafficking in girls	-	2002
GPI song book	-	2002
GPI training manual: Levels 1,2 and 3	-	2003
GPI at 10	-	2004
Sexuality Education Series for young persons: No. 1 - Decision-making: Postponing sexual activities. No. 2 - What you need to know about sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS No. 3 - My Body, My Responsibility No. 4- Interpersonal relationships	-	2006



## SEXUALITY SERIES NO 5

### Body Image

**1. Question:** *I am slim and tall but my legs are “tiny”. I am always ashamed when I walk on the road. What can I do about this?*

**Age: 19 years**

**Answer:** I thank you for writing in to share this concern. I am sure quite a number of girls of your age are feeling the same way as you do. The fact that one is slim or has “tiny legs” does not make her/him less human or unintelligent. Be comfortable with the way you look because you are unique and no one is like you. Be proud of the physical qualities you possess.

Does being slim stop you from passing your examination with good grades or becoming what you want to be in the future? You just have to set your goals and work towards achieving them. Feel free with yourself and mix freely with others around you.

**2. Question:** *Thanks for your informative and educative magazine; I have learnt a lot through this magazine.*

*Please, I want to know the meaning of body image because I came across this term in one of your publications.*

**Age: 17 years**

**Answer:** Body image is the way a person feels about her or his physical appearance. It is the mental picture of our whole physical structure.

Almost every man or woman, boy or girl judges some parts of his or her body, sometimes all of it as “not right” and tries to hide it from others. Everyone is unique. Never stop to appreciate and be proud of who you are. You may feel ashamed of it, because sometimes we complain of our hair being too straight or too curly, nose too small or too large, breasts too big or too small, stomach or thighs too fat, frame too bony!

It is important to note that a positive image of our body is essential for the development of high self-esteem.

## Cancer

**1. Question:** *Which part of the body is cancer likely to occur?*

**Age: 17 years**

**Answer:** Cancer can occur in any part of the body. Many people are not aware of this fact. The common parts of the body people know that cancer can occur are the lungs, bone, cervix, blood, breasts. Cancer can be treated and controlled appropriately if detected early enough. It is only through periodic self-examination that one can detect cancer.

## Early sexual activity

**1. Question:** *Is it possible for a 17- year-old boy to impregnate a 14- year-old girl?*

**Age: 14 years**

**Answer:** Sperm production as one of the pubertal changes for boys

begins from the age of 12 years, while girls begin to experience pubertal changes between the ages of 8 and 10. This means that for a boy of 17 years, sperm production might have occurred and for the 14 years old girl, there may be matured eggs in her ovaries. If both of them engage in an unprotected sexual intercourse when the girl is ovulating, pregnancy is likely to occur.

**2. Question:** *I am so pleased to read about new information . from the last newsletter that was sent to me, more grease to your elbow. I have heard that having sexual intercourse increases one's weight, buttocks, and the hip size. Could there be any fact in this statement, as my friends tend to tease me that I know what to do to increase my body weight in order to look more beautiful? Your answer will be appreciated.*

**Age: 20 years.**

**Answer:** Thank you so much for your interest in our newsletter and I hope you will continue to read it. I am also pleased that you found it useful.

In life when we are born, we inherit certain natural traits that are contained in the genes of our biological parents. These

traits determine our weight size, height, colour of the skin, colour of the eyes, etc.

Weight, size of buttocks and hips would increase more during puberty for a girl. Eating habit, peace of mind and stress - free life, happiness also contribute to good health which may be observed in other parts of the body. Having sexual intercourse will not increase them. I would also like to tell you that what your friends are doing to you is referred to as negative peer pressure. Concentrating on your studies and making excellent grades will make you happy and could increase your weight because you will feel good about yourself.

Be yourself and stay away from early sexual activity. The consequences of sexual intercourse are many and examples of such include infections that can lead to infertility, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, inability to meet set goals, unsafe, abortion, or even death.

- 3.** *Question: If a girl feels sexy and a boy is there and the girl asks the boy to make her feel like a girl, what will the boy do especially if the girl is very serious about it? Please tell it to the public if it is a bad thing, at the next meeting.*

**Senior Secondary School Class 1 Boys**

**Answer:** More often than not, young people usually find themselves wondering about sexual intercourse: “What is it?” or “What is having ‘sex’ really all about?” Being curious about sexual intercourse at your

age is natural and normal. This curiosity comes from many different sources.

All boys and girls go through a special time called puberty. During this period, their bodies change to become sexually mature. This is natural because it results from naturally occurring chemicals in our bodies called hormones, which stimulate the development of secondary sexual characteristics. But changes in how our bodies work are not the only changes that happen during puberty. Our thoughts and feelings change, too. We get sexual feelings - like wanting to be close to another person, giving and receiving affection with same or opposite sexes.

However, experimenting with unprotected sexual intercourse as a way to satisfy curiosity is not a healthy way for adolescents to learn about sexual activity. Although, it is natural and normal if you do have sexual feelings during your adolescent years, it is important that you remember that, indulging in it does have consequences.

Consequences that might result if you choose to engage in early unprotected sexual activity include-

- ◆ You may contract Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS;
- ◆ Unwanted/unintended pregnancy;
- ◆ Dropping out of school, in the case of girls who are pregnant
- ◆ Unsafe abortion and its attendant consequences;
- ◆ Depression; low self-esteem; loss of self-respect;
- ◆ Long and obstructed labour, ending up with complications such as Vesico-Vaginal Fistula (VVF) - **leaking of urine, or Recto-Vaginal Fistula (RVF) - Leaking of faeces;**

- ◆ **Serious/life - threatening illness due to pregnancy; and even death.**

- 4. Question:** (a) *How can you stay away from sex?*  
(b) *How can you prevent yourself from getting pregnant?*  
(c) *If you are pregnant, what should you do?*

**-Young girl**

### **Answer**

**a) Before you make a decision on staying away from sex, it's important to think about:**

**How you feel about yourself;**

- \* **Your reasons for not wanting to have sex;**
- \* **The risks you'll face if you decide to have sex;**
- \* **The things that are important to you in life.**

**Abstinence is the 100% effective way of preventing yourself from getting pregnant or contracting STIs. It is also important to be clear on why you have resolved to postpone sexual activity. Individuals have to make a definite personal decision and to be consistent with their decision until they review their situation and consciously decide to do so, convinced that they are ready for such responsibility and its consequences. You have to be able to resist the pressure to be involved in sexual activity when you do not want to do so yet. This means you need to develop strong refusal, negotiating and resisting skills. You need to be firm with your decision to postpone sexual intercourse. Note that there are over**

**100 ways of pleasurable relationship without involving in sexual intercourse, some of which are:**



- \* Exchanging cards you can design
- \* Exchanging notes of appreciation
- \* Trusting one another;
- \* Respecting each other;
- \* Going to a concert together;
- \* Exchanging gifts;
- \* Exchanging flowers, etc.

Here are few tips on how to resist pressure and postpone sexual activity:

- => Avoid being alone with someone to whom you are sexually/ physically attracted in order not to be tempted.
- => Set your limits in all forms of relationship and avoid being cajoled into going beyond those limits.
- => Talk about the issue, the situation and what your standpoint is. => When you say “NO”, mean “NO” and act “NO”.
- => Do not receive gift from strangers.

**b)** Many young people choose to wait to have sexual intercourse until they feel they are either old enough or responsible enough to make healthy decisions about sex. This is called ***postponement***. Postponement means to delay until a later time. The only 100% effective contraception to prevent an unwanted pregnancy is not to have sexual intercourse. This is called ***abstinence***. However, there are also contraceptives which do prevent pregnancy when used appropriately, but they are not 100% effective and may not

protect you from contracting STIs, including HIV/AIDS, given such problems like expiry date, storage, wrong application, etc.

c) If one gets pregnant, the choice to keep it or not, depends on the person. You have to consider the effects of teenage pregnancy or unwanted/unintended pregnancy, which may affect your health and future. Depending on the choice you make, seek counselling from a qualified health worker/a counsellor, to assist you in the process of decision-making. You can also visit the GPI counselling unit, to help you make the right decision based on informed choice.

**5. Questions:** a) *Why is it that boys would want to force girls into having sex?* b) *What is sex?*

**Age: 13 years**

**Answer:** a) It is important for you to know that it is your right to say “NO” to any sexual activity. Someone who pressures you is being selfish and is not thinking about you and your feelings and cannot be a friend. You have to decide and learn how to say “NO” strongly, stand by it and give good reasons as to why you do not want to engage in sexual activity. This might help the person to understand your feelings and concerns and prevent negative reactions. If the person persists, it is important to report such to your parents or an elder person you trust to protect you from being forced into sexual activity.

b) Sex refers to either being male or female, e.g. as a boy or a girl, man or woman. However in our society, the word sex is often times, used to refer to the term, sexual intercourse.

**6. Question:** *After sexual intercourse and one drinks krest mineral drink or uses water mixed with salt to wash her vulva, will it wash out the sperm?*

**Answer:** No it will not, because during sexual intercourse, the sperm is released into the vagina, through the cervix to the fallopian tube. If an egg is released it fuses with a sperm cell. The process is called fertilization. So drinking krest mineral drink after or before sexual intercourse has no effect on the sperm cells. As the krest is being taken, it moves from the mouth through the oesophagus to the stomach. Looking at this, there is no way the krest would pass to the vagina to wash off the sperm. Washing of the vulva with water mixed with salt again has no effect on the sperm cells that have moved up the reproductive system of the woman. Indeed, these chemicals can be dangerous to the vulva.

**7. Question:** *Can someone take (7) seven sachets of Andrews liver salt after sexual intercourse to avoid getting pregnant?*

**Answer:** There is no report from researchers that Andrews liver salt can be used as an emergency contraceptive to prevent pregnancy. Andrews liver salt has been known to help in constipation; and related stomach disorder.

**8. Question:** *Is it every girl who is raped that stands the chance of getting pregnant?*

**Answer:** If a girl is raped when she is ovulating, she will get pregnant. Apart from getting pregnant, she may be infected with

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or HIV/AIDS if the rapist is infected.

**9. Question:** *If my boyfriend wants to have sexual intercourse with me and I don't want, what should I do?*

**Answer:** Sexual intercourse occurs between people who are ready and able to bear the consequences. Explain to your boyfriend why you are not ready to have sexual intercourse. If he loves and respects you, he will not continue to pressurize you into doing something you are not ready for. You should also explain to him the consequences that could result from early sexual activities as a young person who is still in school.

## Early Marriage

**1. Question:** *Is it right for a 19-year -old girl to be married out?*

•

**Age: 19 years**

**Answer:** A 19-year-old girl is expected to be concerned with her school work, or setting future goals and working hard to achieve them. She may also not be emotionally and psychologically ready to carry out responsibilities of marriage or parenting when she has children. However, at 19, she has attained the legal age of marriage, which is from 18 years, if she decides without being forced and is responsible enough to make such a decision. It is her right to choose to marry or not. Where she is forced or coerced into such a union, her rights are being violated.

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

1. **Question:** *I am a girl of 25 years. I want to know what to do if a man says I should be circumcised before he marries me. Please, what should I do?*

**Age: 25 years**

**Answer.:** If a man loves you sincerely, he wouldn't want any part of your body to be mutilated, or cut off or to condemn you to the effects and complications that could arise as a result of FGM, such as painful urination, infertility, painful sexual intercourse, obstructed labour, WF/RVF, excessive bleeding and the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS from unsterilized equipment.

Think before you leap. Do not allow him to force you into what you might not like, just to meet his selfish reasons. Because you are the one to bear the effects.

2. **Question:** *I am a married woman of 35 years and a victim of Female Genital Mutilation. I have been married for five years and I have no children. I am bothered that it could be as a result of the Female Genital Mutilation I had. Could this be true?*

**- Bothered woman**

**Answer:** Thanks for sharing your problem with us. Your inability to have children could be caused by any factor. It is only a medical expert or gynaecologist that can detect this after medical examination.

However, FGM could contribute to infertility, due to the unsterilized

instruments used during the process. Also, the narrowing of the vaginal opening due to scarring from FGM could prevent easy flow of semen through the vagina for fertilization and pregnancy to occur.

All the same, I would advise you to see a medical expert for proper diagnosis of your problem and treatment.

3. **Question:** *Please, I have been informed that Female Genital Mutilation should not be encouraged, but someone says that if the clitoris is not cut off, the person won't have children and that the person's husband will not enjoy sex. I'm also told that because of this, my husband may leave me. Please is it true?*

**Age: 15 years**

**Answer:** Thank you for your question. Female Genital Mutilation is a harmful traditional practice, which involves the total or partial removal of part of the female external genital or sex organ. Cutting off the clitoris is an act of violence against females and a violation of the right of the victim. It has nothing to do with having children or enjoying sexual intercourse. FGM exposes girls and women to infections like HIV/AIDS because of the possibility of using unsterilised instruments; FGM also causes excessive bleeding and intense pain. Husbands and wives do enjoy sex without FGM, and if they have no infertility problems, they will have children.

## Female Reproductive System

1. **Question:** *Please, why do girls have vaginal discharge?*

**Age: 21 years**

**Answer:** There are different types of vaginal discharge. The vagina has a natural way of cleansing itself; this is what comes out at times as vaginal discharge. It is normal and healthy when it is a whitish/colourless discharge. But when your vaginal discharge has foul smell or it is yellowish, brownish, reddish and comes out more than usual, there is the possibility that you have an infection and so should visit a qualified medical practitioner/doctor for proper diagnosis and treatment. Sometimes, the discharge may be accompanied by itching, burning sensation, blisters or sores.

**2. Question:** *Where is the perineum situated?*

**Answer:** The perineum is the region between the anus and the vulva in the external part of the female reproductive system.

**3. Question:** *What are fibroids and where are they found in the body?*

**Answer:** Fibroids are non-cancerous growths of the uterus that appear during child bearing years. They are not associated with uterine cancer and never develop into cancer. Most women with uterine fibroids are unaware of them as there are no signs or symptoms. Fibroids may be felt and found during pelvic examination in a hospital. They are found in the uterus (outside,

inside, or within the walls of the uterus) often changing the size and shape of the uterus. Fibroids can require emergency treatment with medication or operation - myomectomy (i.e. removal of the fibroids leaving the uterus in place) if it causes sudden, sharp pelvic pain.

**4. Question:** *How is the normal vagina discharge ?*

**Answer:** {please refer to question 1 of this section}

## Friendship and Interpersonal Relationship

**1. Question:** *My name is Jessy and I am in SS2. Please my question is, is it good for a girl to have a boyfriend?*

**Age: 15 years**

**Answer:** Thank you for writing in. There is nothing wrong in having friends whether male or female. A friend is someone you know and like, someone you play with and study together; someone we can learn from positively and not the ones who can influence us negatively. When someone we call a friend influences us to get involved in risky behaviours that could mar our future ambition, such person is not a friend and so, should be avoided. However, some people may refer to a boyfriend as someone that a person is having sexual relationship with. If this is what you mean, it is important to reflect and ask yourself if you are ready for the consequences of early sexual activities. I will advise you at your



age to pay more attention to your studies to build a solid future for yourself and your family.

2. **Question:** *I have a friend in school who told me that she was having a relationship with a male teacher. Please is it good?*

**Age: 17 years**

**Answer:** There are different forms of relationships such as relationship between parents and children; relationship between brother/sister; an employer and employee; people belonging to same social group; peer-to-peer relationship or teacher-to-student relationship.

Teacher-to-student relationship should be the type that is linked to classroom activities for the development of such a student. Some relationships between a female student and a male teacher may likely be sexual, abusive and exploitative and therefore, it is not healthy.

3. **Question:** *Is it true that I must sleep with a boyfriend just because it is a Valentine's Day? Can we give something else other than sexual intercourse?*

**Age: 18 years**

**Answer:** Valentine's Day is a day during which people traditionally show love to others, not only between lovers but also in the family and the country at large. So, the significance of this

day is that of fostering healthy relationships and promoting human dignity. Friendship is not equal to sex. There are more than one hundred and one ways of showing love without having sex. E.g., you can send a card, go on excursion together take a walk, sit out in an open place to chat, send inexpensive gifts, visit each other, etc. What should be paramount for young people at this age is how to work towards finishing their education and making a career for themselves. I wish you all the best.

**4. Question:** *Please, is it wrong for a girl of 20 years of age to have a boyfriend?*

**Age: 20 years**

**Answer:** No, there is nothing wrong in having a boy as a friend. A friend is someone you know and like; someone that you can share your feelings with, and such may be a girl or a boy, man or woman, brother or sister, father or mother.

Friendship can be a relationship between people of the same or different sexes and is different from a sexual relationship. So, having a boyfriend is not bad. But if you mean a sexual partner, you need to know that it requires commitments and that you can take responsibilities of the outcome of such a relationship.

**5. Question:** *I am a lady in Senior Secondary Class 2. I am staying with a guy. I have a child, and I'm back in school again. So please I want to know how can I control myself as a lady and how can I plan for my family?*

**- SS 2 girl**

**Answer:** You did not tell us your age but we can assume you are a young female, that you live with a guy is suggesting that you are not married, but perhaps the guy is the father of your child.

You do certainly have great responsibility, especially now that you are a parent. The challenges and difficulties associated with young parenting are numerous. It is obvious you need a lot of support, especially psychologically, and you need guidance to enable you to plan for your future and for the future of the child. It is advisable you go for counselling to help you through this process. You can visit the GPI Counselling Unit located at 44 Ekpo Abasi Street, from Mondays-Fridays, 9:00am to 4:00pm, daily.

You can plan for your family by completing your education, taking up an employment to assist you in fulfilling your responsibilities as a parent.

## HIV/AIDS

1. **Question:** *Is it true that having sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS?*

**Age: 14 years**

**Answer: No,** it is not true at all. HIV/AIDS has no cure yet. It is a myth that having sexual intercourse with a virgin cures AIDS. Please, you should try and discourage as many people as possible who hold this belief because it only increases the number of

people who may contract HIV/AIDS. The virgin may also contract the virus and so becomes infected.

**2. Question:** *How can you prevent yourself from contracting HIV/AIDS when you are married?*

**- Married girl.**

**Answer:** First of all, both of you need to know your HIV status by going for voluntary HIV counselling and testing at the approved hospitals or centres where advice will be given to you. If none of you is infected with HIV ensure that you and your partner are faithful to each other. If in doubt, use condom all the time.

The best way to prevent yourself from contracting HIV/AIDS is by avoiding all activities that will put you at risk, such as:

- ◆ Engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse
- ◆ Not adequately treating sexually transmitted infections after proper diagnosis.
- ◆ Sharing needles, razors or other sharp objects, etc ◆ Taking injections from unsterilized needles.

**3. Question:** *How can I prevent myself from contracting HIV/ AIDS in my life?*

**-Young girl.**

**Answer:** You need accurate information on sexual and reproductive health to enable you to make informed decisions about your sexual and reproductive behaviours. You should be able to reduce your exposure to HIV infection through the following: ◆ one option is abstinence which is the safest, simplest, most effective, easiest way/method to avoid HIV/AIDS.

- ◆ For the sexually active, the best way to avoid HIV is to stay in a mutually faithful relationship with an uninfected partner.

If partners are not faithful, correct and consistent use of condom is necessary to reduce the chances of infection.

- ◆ Avoid having sexual intercourse with persons who have multiple partners.

4. **Question:** *Please what is the meaning of HIV/AIDS?*

**Answer:** **HIV** refers to **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. It is the virus that kills the cells that fight off infection and disease in the human body. These cells are called CDU cells or T-helper cells. HIV can be passed from person to person if someone with HIV infection has sexual intercourse or undergoes blood transfusion, or shares injection needles with an infected person. It can also be passed from mother to the baby during delivery and less so when the infected mother breastfeeds the baby.

**H - Human** refers to the fact that the virus is transmitted only between human beings. It is not transmitted between humans and animals.

**I - Immunodeficiency** refers to the aspect of HIV, involving the virus killing the cells (CDU) that protect the body by fighting off infection and diseases thus depleting the protective cells and hence the term **“deficiency”**. The CDU cells provide immunity to the body.

**V - A virus** is a germ or an infectious agent consisting of RNA or DNA (but never both), encased in a protein coat (capsid) and it is incapable of metabolism or reproduction outside a living host cell.

AIDS stands for Acquired immune Deficiency Syndrome.

ACQUIRED - Not hereditary, but acquired from another source.

**IMMUNE DEFICIENCY** - The breakdown of the immune system.

SYNDROME - A collection of symptoms and signs.

5. *Question: I heard that HIV/AIDS is not real, please is it true?*

**-A young boy**

**Answer:** HIV/AIDS is real and more and more people are contracting the virus due to ignorance and disbelief. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The syndrome was first discovered in the United States in 1981. The first case of AIDS in Nigeria was reported in 1986. The infection has spread rapidly over the years. About 50% of all new HIV infections around the world occur among people of ages 15-24 years - the age range within which most people begin their sexual lives. When children under the age of 14 are added, the total increases to 60% of new infections. The vast majority of these young people live in less developed countries where AIDS cases are concentrated. In Nigeria, the infection cuts across both sexes and all age groups. However, youths between the ages of 20 and 29 years are most affected.

6. *Question: How can one take care of oneself when one contracts HIV/AIDS?*

**Answer:** When someone first finds out that he/she is HIV- positive, one might find the news hard to deal with. You might feel depressed, angry or in despair. But you can continue to live relatively normally. Being HIV -positive presents major challenges. Your mind and body need careful attention if you and your loved ones need to stay healthy. Some HIV- positive persons are still living happily, loving and contributing to society even after having been infected more than 10 years ago.

The following are tips on how to take care of yourself if you are HIV- positive:

- ◆ Eat nourishing meals regularly. A good diet will help you stay strong and fight off infections.
- ◆ Keep yourself, your surroundings and dwelling place as clean as possible.
- ◆ Treat all infections on time.
- ◆ Go for regular check ups.
- ◆ Do not share needles or sharp objects.
- ◆ Exercise regularly. Have plenty of rest.
- ◆ Join a support group of other People Living with HIV and learn from their experiences. They are there to help and encourage one another.
- ◆ Avoid drinking alcohol, smoking or taking hard drugs. These substances can be harmful to your health and could also put you in situations where you might take unnecessary risks.
- ◆ Go to a health centre to get expert advice on drug treatment called Antiretroviral (ARV) Therapy for HIV positive persons.

**7. Question:** *How did HIV/AIDS spread in this country?*

**Answer:** HIV lives in human body surviving in body fluids like blood, semen and vaginal fluids of people infected with the virus. The virus is spread when these fluids get into the body of another person. This means that HIV/AIDS can spread through:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse with someone who has the virus.
- Using unsterilized needles and syringes, or any sharp skin - piercing objects.
- Blood transfusion, if the blood has not been screened to be sure it is HIV-free.
- Infected mother to her baby through pregnancy, birth or
- Deep kissing or oral sex when the lining of the mouth has cuts

On the other hand, HIV/AIDS cannot be contracted by:

- Touching, pecking, or hugging an infected person;
- Sharing food or bed with an infected person;
- By sharing or washing clothes, bed covers with an infected person;
- Sharing of spoons, cups or drinking glasses, etc.

**8. Question:** / don't know what brings HIV/AIDS. Please tell me.

**Answer:** [please see answer to questions 4 & 7]

**9. Question:** Please what is the meaning of HIV and what does it look like? -



**Answer:** [please see answer to question 4]

**10. Question:** *How can somebody know if he/she has HIV/ AIDS without being tested?*

**Answer:** Blood test is used to determine whether you have been exposed to HIV. Without this, one cannot know his/her HIV status. You can't determine if a person is infected by mere physical appearance. However, HIV gradually destroys the immune system even though the person might look healthy and feel fine for a long time and then later becomes vulnerable to all kinds of infections and so becomes very sick. The person might start having swollen glands, fever, night sweats, fatigue and persistent cough. Then serious diseases may occur, e.g. tuberculosis, cancer, lung disease, brain illnesses and fungal infections. These might eventually result in death. At the point where the person starts manifesting the signs mentioned above, the person is said to have reached the final stage of HIV infection, which is, AIDS. It is important to note that not all persons with these rare illnesses are HIV-positive. It is however important to know one's HIV status.

**11. Question:** *HIV/AIDS passes from human to human how come it can pass from razor blade and clippers?*

**Answer:** If an infected person uses a particular razor blade and in the process of doing that, cuts his or herself and another person cuts himself/herself using that same razor blade that has been used by the infected person, there is possibility of contracting the

infection since blood is what is involved. A barber who attends to an infected person may not sterilize the clippers before using it on another person. There is also a possibility of infecting the next person if he/she is wounded with the same clippers. Always get new razor blade whenever you need to use it and insist that barbers should sterilize their clippers before using it on another person or better still get your own personal clippers if you can afford it.

**12. Question:** *Can cervical cap protect one against HIV/AIDS?*

**Answer:** Cervical cap does not protect one against HIV/AIDS. It prevents pregnancy only, though not 100% effective.

## Human Rights

**1. Question:** *Please, I have been reading your publications and in one of them I came across the word, "RIGHT". Please what does it mean?*

**Age: 15 years.**

**Answer:** Thank you for your question. A right is simply defined as a natural due, a moral claim and a legal entitlement. This simply means that as a human being, regardless of sex, everyone is born with inherent rights, which are natural, protected by the law and accepted by the family.

The UN General Assembly, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1984 had proclaimed human rights as a common standard of achievement

for all people, (female and male).

Human rights are generally accepted principles of fairness and justice or universal moral rights that equally belong to all people simply because they are human beings.

Human rights as described by the UN in 1984 “are those rights which are inherent in our nature,” without which we cannot function as human beings. Therefore respect for human rights is very important and needs to be upheld.

## Human Sexuality

### **1. Question:** *What is sexuality?*

**Answer:** Sexuality refers to the totality of who you are, what you believe, what you feel and how you respond. It is also the dimension of being, which includes sex, gender, sexual and gender identity, sexual orientation, emotional attachments/love and reproduction. It includes all the feelings, sexual thoughts, attitudes, experiences, learning, ideas, values, imagination and behaviours of a person, whether male or female.

### **2. Question:** *What is the difference between genotype and blood group?*

**A:** Genotype is a genetic inheritance, i.e. genes inherited from parents that determine the physical, intellectual and emotional characteristics of a person, while blood group is any of the various types of blood one possesses either O, A, B or AB.

## Knowing about GPI

- 1. Question:** *Please, how can I become a member of GPI, because when I came for the holiday programme at the Paradise City Hotel for three days, I made a determination that I will like to be a GPI girl. When do you hold your meetings so that I can be there?*

**Answer:** GPI Calabar Centre is located at No. 44 Ekpo Abasi Street. We hold weekly lessons every Sunday, from 3-6pm at the Centre. The lessons are for young girls aged 10-18 years.

Registration for lessons is twice a year (August and January) and it is free. Still we have other activities and services to help educate non-GPI girls and other members of the public such as the TV programme (on CRBC, every Wednesday from 6.30pm - 7.00pm); library services (during week days at the Centre); counselling services (during week days at the Centre); home visits and referrals, etc., you can come to the GPI Centre for more information.

- 2. Question:** *I found it fascinating when I read some of your publications that were made available to me by one of your students. I must confess that I appreciate your self-less effort towards educating, empowering and moulding our young girls and moving them away from moral decadence through the carefully designed sexuality education. My commendation to you is based on what I have found out about GPI programmes.*

*My question is this: Many girls would have liked to be part of the programme, but are discouraged by the long distance away from GPI;*

*i.e. some are in rural areas. What have you done to remedy this?*

*In view of the prevailing scourge of HIV/AIDS and girls trafficking in our nation, why has the government refused to introduce sexuality education as an antidote in our secondary schools? Thanks.*

**Age: 20years**

**Answer:** Let me explain that sexuality education which is a broad term deals with all aspects of human life and relationships and includes the way we express ourselves as males and females as well as how we walk, talk, dress, sit and express love, hate and sadness.

Sexuality is one's total behaviour from birth to death.

Now to your questions: GPI cannot reach out to all the rural areas because of limited funds and scheduled activities, but we do carry out social interventions or community work in some rural areas. This is one criterion needed for the graduation of our final year girls under the programme.

Since 2003, the Cross River State Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), has trained teachers on 2 (two) career subjects in all secondary schools (public schools) in the state, including the Teachers' Training Colleges in Calabar, Akamkpa and Ogoja, on sexuality education.

In line with this, the government has also approved that sexuality education be incorporated into the schools' curriculum. This has been done and most schools have incorporated aspects of sexuality in subjects like social studies and integrated science.

- 3. Question:** (a) *What is the full meaning of GPI?*  
(b) *Why was GPI formed?*  
(c) *Is GPI only in Nigeria, or is it all over the world?*

**Answer**

a) GPI stands for Girls' Power Initiative.

Girl - Female child

Power - means inner strength and capability to make things happen.

Initiative - means the act of taking the first step to do something that must be done without waiting to be told.

b) GPI is a Nigerian non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, established to address the issues of sexuality, gender and human rights of girls and women, including sexual and reproductive rights. GPI is aimed at educating and informing adolescent girls, aged 10-18 years on life management skills, and helping them overcome the risk of unwanted pregnancy, harmful traditional practices, etc.

c) GPI operates in 4 states in Nigeria

- Calabar Centre in Cross River State, located at 44 Ekpo Abasi Street, Calabar.

- Uyo Centre in Akwa Ibom State, located at 205 Aka Road, Uyo.
- Benin Centre in Edo State, located at 2 Hudson Lane, Akpakpava Street, by Dawson Junction, Benin City.
- Asaba Centre in Delta State, located at 10 Anwai Road, Asaba, Delta State

## **Masturbation**

**1. Question:** *Is there any effect in masturbating?*

**Age: 16 years**

**Answer:** Masturbation is a pleasurable, common, and varied sexual behaviour. It does not have any physical harm. It will not cause insanity, sterility, sexual dysfunction, or any other physical affliction. There is also no evidence that masturbation leads to unhealthy relationships. The primary danger associated with masturbation is within the individual's own mind - the guilt or shame he/she may feel about masturbating. Masturbation is so common that human sexuality and psychology experts now consider it a normal sexual act. It is normal to masturbate, and it is normal not to.

## Menstruation and Personal Hygiene

1. *Question: Please, how many types of sanitary pad do we have and can tissue paper cause infection when you use it in cleaning your vulva after urinating?*

**Age: 11 years**

**Answer:** There are more than 10 types of sanitary towels in the market now. They have names like Simple, Comfit, Always, Dr. Browns, Every Woman, Everyday, Classic, etc. You just have to look for one that you feel comfortable with.

Regarding your second question, wiping the vulva area with tissue after urinating will not cause infection. This is because the tissue is not being kept inside for long and therefore, cannot cause infection, provided you wipe from front to back.

2. *Question: Please, what leads to delay in menstruation?*

**Age: 17 years**

**Answer:** There are several reasons why some girls experience a delay in their menarche (first menstruation). For such girls, it might be as a result of the development rate of their internal reproductive organs.

While some girls have a slow rate development, others are faster. Because of this difference, some girls might experience menarche earlier than others. For adults who have already started menstruating for some years and then suddenly experience a delay in menstruation, this could be as a result of hormonal changes, stress, change in environment, etc.



**3. Question:** Please what causes painful menstruation and what can I use in absorbing menstrual flow?

**Answer: Causes of painful menstruation**

Girls and women are taught that menstrual pain is normal. This may not always be the case. The most attention-grabbing symptoms of endometriosis is pelvic pain, amongst others, including heavy or irregular bleeding, nausea, diarrhoea, constipation, stomach problems, abdominal pains, yeast infections, allergies, asthma, etc.

What causes menstrual cramps is an imbalance of the substance called *prostaglandin*. *Prostaglandin* regulates the activities of the smooth muscles in the uterus, intestines and other tissues. An imbalance of *prostaglandin* in the body can, therefore, cause the uterus to contract too strongly leading to a lot of pains.

**Recommended treatment**

Regular exercise (running, biking, swimming, walking or other aerobic activities), good nutrition (fresh fruits, vegetables and fish) and oils from sunflower can correct an imbalance of prostaglandin and build a healthy immune system.

One should avoid food and chemicals that contain dioxins, pesticides and herbicides and living close to incinerators as well as taking of anti-prostaglandin medicine (non-narcotic, non-addictive).

Sanitary pads are recommended for menstrual flow because it is hygienic and does not cause infection. You must change your sanitary pads when soaked at least two times daily and also maintain a high personal hygiene. If you cannot afford sanitary pads, clean white cotton towels can be used but you must wash and sterilized them properly.

It is possible to obtain non-chlorinated, organic cotton sanitary products as well as the alternatives, washable cotton menstrual pads.

**4. Question:** *Thanks so much for all your efforts towards educating young people, may God bless you.*

*I have a problem; my menstrual flow is irregular why? When it starts early in the month, it will never come on the same date of the previous month. I'm confused and worried; your response would really be of help to me. Thanks.*

**-Worried girl**

**Answer:** Everybody has a peculiar menstrual cycle, depending on their system and body composition. It has never been written in any book that every woman has a particular menstrual cycle but, it has been said that on average, girl's/women's menstrual cycle is between 21-30 days, and it does vary, depending on your hormonal change, stress, diet, etc., especially during the onset of menstruation. The cycle days may vary from 21-22,25 and maybe 30 in different months and you need not fear, it is normal, with time it will stabilize.

**5. Question:** *I am an SS2 student. My peer health educator in the school once told me that fourteen days from the last of my menses are within the safe period. Please, could this be true?*

**Age: 15 years**

**Answer:** Thank you for the interest to seek clarification on this very important issue. Most girls your age at one time or the other have been exposed to this inaccurate and misleading information. The result has been lots of cases of teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

Girls and women have different menstrual cycles. Some have short cycles and others long cycles. The issue of safe period is not reliable as one's menstrual cycle can be affected by nutrition, stress, environment, health, etc., and so, this can change. The fact that a girl or a woman sees her menstruation on a particular day(s) does not mean that every other girl or woman will experience same.

**6. Question:** *I have this very disturbing question and will need some information: Can a girl become pregnant if she has sex during her menstruation?*

**Age: 16 years**

**Answer:** Thank you for your question. Some girls and women who have very short cycles may ovulate during the last days of menstruation and so, if they engage in any unprotected sexual intercourse, pregnancy may occur. Some persons, due to the menstrual flow, may consider it unhygienic to engage in sexual intercourse, it could also be risky as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections could be transmitted easily as a result of the presence of body fluid/blood. As a young girl while menstruating, maintain a good personal hygiene-change sanitary pads, pants and bathe at least twice a day.

**7. Question:** *What is the meaning of menstruation?*

**Answer:** Menstruation is the monthly shedding of the uterine lining through the vagina. Menstrual flow consists of cell tissues, mucous, the disintegrated unfertilized egg and blood. It is the selfcleaning action of a healthy uterus.

**8. Question:** *How can one know her ovulation period?*

**Answer:** Ovulation refers to the release of an egg or ovum from the ovary. It usually occurs 14-16 days before the start of the next menstrual bleeding. However this could still vary.

**9. Question:** *Is it good to use cloth/material to absorb menstrual flow?*

**Answer:** Yes it is good to use cloth / material to absorb menstrual flow. The cloth/material should be clean not coloured and used only for absorbing menstrual flow. Remember, the material should be cotton.

**10. Question:** *If a girl has sexual intercourse while menstruating, will she get pregnant?*

**Answer:** [please see answer to question 6 of this section]

**11. Question:** *Is it proper for a girl of 9 years to start menstruating?*

**Answer:** We do not all have the same body system, and the changes that take place in our bodies differ from person to person. It is very normal for a girl of 9 years to start menstruating. This can happen due to good nutrition, hereditary, factors, etc. This shows that her pubertal changes started early but the same changes may not start early in another person's body.

**12. Question:** *How can I count my menstrual cycle?*

**Answer:** For one to determine her menstrual cycle, one should keep record of the first day of menstruation to the next month's first day of menstruation for about six months. Then count in between and know the number of days. Menstrual cycle ranges from 23 - 30 days. But most girls / women have 28 days. If during the last six months your days were regular, then you can determine your menstrual cycle and always count and know when next to see your period.

**13. Question:** *If you are menstruating and you don't feel pains in your abdomen, does it mean that you are no longer a virgin ?*

**Answer:** Virginity has nothing to do with menstrual cramps. Whether you are a virgin or not, menstrual cramps is as a result of the lining of the uterus trying to contract or shed off what comes out during menstruation.

**14. Question:** *Is it true that sugary things contribute to menstrual cramps?*

**Answer:** Menstrual cramps are natural occurrences as a result of the walls of the uterus contracting to bring out the flow. Sugary things are also factors that contribute to menstrual cramps and in some people, it is not sugary things but salt. So watch out for what your body system does not like and try to cut down on the amount of intake of salt and sugar as the case may be. It is recommended that you take lots of fruits and vegetables,

**15. Question:** *Why do people menstruate two times in a month ?*

**Answer;** It is very possible for one to menstruate 2 times (twice) in a month. This has to do with the person's menstrual cycle. Take for instance, if one has a 24-day menstrual cycle and sees her menses on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month to the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month, then definitely the next menses will come towards that same month. This is to show that females may menstruate twice a month.

**16. Question:** *Why do people start menstruating at different ages?*

**Answer;** Just as we are made of different qualities, so does our body system change differently. For some people their body changes start early, including the internal development, while for some people the changes start late. So, with menstruation, some start menstruating at early age while some start late.

## Menopause

1. **Question:** *Why is it that when a woman is about 50 years, she won't menstruate again? What is really stopping the menstruation from coming like when she was 15-49 years?*

**Age: 16 years**

**Answer:** When a woman stops menstruating at the age you have stated, it is only natural. This period is called *menopause*. Menopause refers to a woman's last period. Most women reach menopause between 45-55 years of age. Studies have shown that at age 52, 80% of women no longer menstruate. The declining functioning or the artificial removal of the ovaries triggers the physical changes of menopause. As a woman ages, so the ovaries age too, shrinking in size, stopping the release of eggs and less production of oestrogen. The processes generally begin for a number of years before a complete cessation of menstruation.

2. **Question:** *Is it anytime a woman wants to have sexual intercourse that an egg is released? Because I heard that whenever a woman has sexual intercourse she will be pregnant.*

**Answer:** This is not true an (ovum) egg is released from the ovary into the fallopian tubes during the process of ovulation and most cases 14 days before the next menstruation starts. In the process of the egg moving from the fallopian tubes to the uterus, if a woman has sexual intercourse and sperms swim up to meet the egg in the fallopian tube, fertilization (fusion of the egg and



sperm) occurs, the zygote travels and implants in the uterus where the embryo grows from there.

## Sexual Dysfunction

**1. Question:** *I am a regular reader of your publications and I have learnt a lot from them, but I have an issue that has been bothering me. Please, I want to know if sexual dysfunctions in males can be treated.*

**Answer:** Thank you for the question and for being our regular reader. Some sexual dysfunctions can be treated, depending on the stage, so, I would advise anyone with such cases to seek the services of a medical expert early enough.

**2. Question:** *What could be the reason for premature ejaculation?*

**Answer:** Premature ejaculation could be as a result of sexual dysfunction in men. Though it is not easily defined, if a man has an expectation of how long he should be able to have sexual intercourse and then he cannot maintain that time, he may define it as premature ejaculation.

## Sexual Harassment

**1. Question:** *I am a regular reader of your magazine and I am always impressed about the way you respond to adolescents' problems. I have been sexually harassed by a teacher in my school, but each time I tell him no, he would threaten to fail me in my subjects. Please help me before it is too late, I am confused.*

**- Confused girl**

**Answer:** Thanks for writing. The issue of sexual harassment is a common



problem faced by girls and women daily.

It could be between students, boss/staff students/teacher or neighbours. The fact remains that sexual harassment is illegal. This is any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, be it physical contact, or touching, patting, brushing and grabbing of sensitive parts of another person's body for sexual attention.

It could also take verbal forms like making nasty comments, etc. It is important to note that in whatever form sexual harassment may take, it has negative effects on the person harassed. This is because it can lead to depression, confusion, discomfort and fear and may even be insulting and cause shame, anger, sadness, lack of trust, and low self-esteem.

Here are some tips on how to handle the situation: Don't blame yourself. Speak out- that is, talk to the teacher about the way you feel. Report to the school authority if the teacher refuses to withdraw or better still, involve your parents in case of victimization.

## Sexual Orientation

**1. Question:** *Lawrence is a boy that has many boyfriends. What should I tell him?*

**Answer:** It depends on what kind of relationship he has with his 'many boyfriends'. A relationship can be between people of same or different sexes. It may not necessarily be a sexual relationship. On the other hand, if you are referring to him as being a homosexual, that is, having sexual relationship with another male, and then it's different. Some people disapprove of homosexuals because they feel or think homosexuals are different from them. Their views are often based on fears or misinformation,

not on facts. Your friend might have his reasons for getting involved in such relationship. However, you do not have to be judgmental, or discriminate as this will not affect how he would associate or participate freely in his school activities.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) & Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs)

**1. Question:** *My name is Awatt and I am 16 years old. There is this sickness that has been bothering me, but I am always too shy to share it in the group. My problem is that when I go to the toilet and then wipe myself, I would see white things coming out from my vulva area. I know it's not normal but I don't know what to do to treat it.*

**Age: 16 years**

**Answer:** It's very good for you to open up when you see or discover things in your body that are abnormal, whether discharges, rashes, boils, coloration, etc. These could be signs that something is wrong. I will suggest you visit a hospital for proper check-up and test so that proper treatment can be administered by a trained medical personnel. On the other hand, you can come to GPI Office at 44 Ekpo Abasi Street, Calabar for counselling and referral to one of GPI's youth-friendly clinics.

**2. Question:** *What causes syphilis?*

**Answer:** Syphilis is caused by a micro - organisms called bacteria and is contracted primarily through sexual activities.

**3. Question:** *What is the difference between RTIs and STIs?*

**Answer:** RTIs are reproductive tract infections of the lower tract

and upper tract of both sexes. RTIs are caused either by virus, bacteria protozoa or poor hygienic conditions. Some RTIs are also Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or infection acquired as a result of poorly performed medical treatment. And STIs are sexually transmitted Infections which affect the lower reproductive tract. But if left untreated it can also affect the upper reproductive tract. They are gotten primarily through sexual activities.

**4. Question:** *Can RTIs lead to ectopic pregnancy?*

**Answer:** Yes, most of the RTIs can lead to ectopic pregnancy if they are untreated. The RTIs that are most likely to lead to ectopic pregnancy are those that affect the upper tract and even those that affect the lower tract if untreated can affect the upper tract leading to ectopic pregnancy.

**5. Question:** *Can a woman who has syphilis put to birth safely?*

**Answer:** The possibility of a woman who has syphilis putting to birth safely is low. Because a woman who has syphilis can have repeated miscarriages, her heart, brain, spinal cord and the eyes may be damaged due to the infection and even death can occur. There is also the tendency of having still birth (baby born dead), low birth weight, pre-mature birth, etc.

**6. Question:** *What are the ways one can prevent STIs?*

**Answer:** If one should abstain from sexual activities, avoid wearing

tight nylon panties and at nights, changing sanitary pads regularly, avoiding use of oils and perfumed products on genitals, wiping from front to back after using the toilets, taking bath when necessary, maintaining a healthy environment,

keeping toilets and toilet seats clean, exposing undies to intensive sunlight after proper washing, avoid sharing of towels then there is a possibility of preventing STIs and other infections.

**7. Question:** *Apart from sexual activities, how can one get STIs?*

**Answer:** Candidiasis, for example, can be gotten through unsanitary condition like unclean toilet seats, unclean and wet towels, unclean and undry undies, etc. Candidiasis can also be transmitted through sexual activities. Pubic lice and scabies can also be gotten through unsanitary conditions like close body contact and also through sexual activities. That is why candidiasis, scabies and pubic lice are still classified under sexually transmitted infections

**8. Question:** *I noticed that when my vulva itched and I told my mother she said it is normal. Is it true?*

**Answer:** Itching around the vulva signifies an infection, or you are reacting to the cream you use around the vulva area. But most importantly, you cannot tell what it is until you go to the hospital for diagnosis and treatment.

**9. Question:** *How will you know if your boyfriend has an STI?*

**Answer:** One can only know that he/she has an STI by noticing the signs and symptoms. But for one to detect it in some other person is difficult. You may not know that your partner has an STI, until medically tested.

## Pregnancy and Child Birth

**1. Question:** *How can one determine the sex of a child?*

**Answer:** The female has 23 pairs of chromosomes, a pair consisting of 2

chromosomes (XX) while a male has the same 23 pairs of chromosomes, a pair consisting of 2 chromosomes (XY). If the male X chromosomes meet with the female X chromosome, it becomes XX forming a female baby. If the male Y chromosomes meet with the female X chromosome, it becomes XY forming a male baby. From the explanation above, it is seen that the sex of a child is determined by the male chromosome.

**2. Question:** *Why do women undergo caesarean section?*

**Answer:** Before delivery, when a pregnant woman goes for antenatal care, various examinations are carried out like examining the vagina, cervix, the foetus' condition and the mother's own. If it is discovered that a woman cannot deliver vaginally or normally due to one problem or the other that may be discovered, such as pelvic problem, the baby lying in transverse position or breech, etc., the woman can be advised to undergo caesarean section to either save her life and/or that of the baby. Also, a pregnant woman living with HIV would be advised to deliver through caesarean section to avoid passing the virus to her baby during delivery.

**3. Question:** *What is the difference between still birth and breech birth?*

**Answer:** When a pregnant woman delivers a dead baby, it is called still birth, while breech birth is delivery where other parts of the child's body comes out first like the feet, buttocks or arms instead of the head. This is as a result of abnormal positioning of the baby in the womb.

**4. Question:** *What is ectopic pregnancy?*

**Answer:** Ectopic pregnancy occurs when the zygote is not implanted in the uterus (womb) after fertilization but remains in the fallopian tube. That can also be referred

to as pregnancy occurring outside the womb.

**5. Question:** *Can a woman deliver twins or triplets without any operation?*

**Answer:** Yes! A woman who is duly registered and who attends ante-natal regularly and goes through all the required examinations before delivery without problems or complications can deliver her twins or triplets normally without any operation.

**Operation comes in as a result of certain complications during pregnancy or delivery.**

**6. Question:** *What is miscarriage?*

**Answer:** Miscarriage is the process in which a pregnancy is lost and not carried to term due to many factors such as incompetent cervix, abnormal position of the foetus, stress or disease condition especially sexually transmitted infections.



