

**WHAT DO
YOU NEED
TO**
#MAKEITGOOD?

Insight Topic 19:

TRUST +

HONESTY

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INTRODUCTION

NHS Tayside and partners want to adopt a positive approach to young people's sexual health. An insight gathering project has engaged young people in discussion of what they need to make relationships good. The purpose of the insight process is to bring detail to consideration of future services, particularly the possible use of social marketing or broader communication messages targeting young people.

This paper is one of a number of topic chapters published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org Each topic chapter presents:

- Insight from young people.
- Insight from other research, resources or services.
- A summary and discussion points.

For more about the insight gathering process please refer to '**About the Insight Gathering project**' also published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org

1. INSIGHT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

This section of the report on young people’s insight draws on discussion of two areas: *trust* and *honesty*. In the initial focus groups, the topic of **TRUST** was raised and discussed by 14 of the 16 groups and the topic of **HONESTY** by 7 of the 16 groups. In terms of online engagement, both the **TRUST** and **HONESTY** surveys had 39 responses each. This topic chapter reports on both themes because of the connections that arise in the insight offered by young people. As one contributor stated: “Honesty, kind of the same as trust, essential in a relationship.” (18/P&K/Male)

Online engagement by Local Authority:

TRUST	Number of online submissions
Angus	9
Dundee	26
Perth and Kinross	4
Other area	-
Total by method	39

HONESTY	Number of online submissions
Angus	6
Dundee	28
Perth and Kinross	4
Other area	1
Total by method	39

Online engagement by gender:

TRUST	Male	Female	Other gender identity
Number of participants	14	25	1

HONESTY	Male	Female	Other gender identity
Number of participants	26	11	2

Online engagement by age:

TRUST	Under 16	16	17	18	19	20	21+
Number of participants	9	13	8	2	1	2	4

HONESTY	Under 16	16	17	18	19	20	21+
Number of participants	10	20	7	1	-	1	-

In addition to discussion in focus groups young people were asked to respond online to the request: *Tell us about your experience of TRUST when it comes to sex or relationships* and *Tell us about your experience of HONESTY when it comes to sex or relationships*. Insight from young people points to several themes.

Trust and honesty; the basis of the good relationship

Across focus group discussion and in online responses a clear message emerges from young people, that both trust and honesty are key characteristics when considering what makes a relationship good. For some contributors they are essential.

Trust is essential in relationships though once lost it needs to be earned back. A relationship without trust will not last. (16/Dundee/Female)

Relationships have to have trust in them to make it work if there's no trust there's no relationship! (20/P&K/Male)

Honesty is good in a relationship as without it neither of them can trust or rely on each other and more conflicts start to air. And before you know it he is with another man. (16/Angus/Male)

Can't have a relationship without trust, it'll just fall apart. (Focus Group 1/Angus)

If there is no trust then there is no relationship, it's the most important thing. (Focus Group 3/Angus)

Honesty is very important in a relationship and if people aren't honest in a relationship, it won't work. (17/Dundee/Female)

Trust gets in the way of everything, doesn't matter even what kind of relationship you are in, trust is like the one thing that just gets between people all the time. If you don't trust them then you might as well just not bother. (Focus Group 7/P&K)

You need to be able to trust your partner and they need to be able to trust you. You can't just be together the whole time, if you were then I don't think that would be very sustainable either. It's not like you never see them, but you have

to have some time apart for your own stuff. Like having your own friends or stuff you do that is yours is really important. (Focus Group 8/P&K)

Being faithful

Within the context of discussions about trust and honesty young people identify the need for a partner to be faithful, and for the individual to be able to trust or 'have faith' their partner will not cheat. Responding to the prompts to *tell us about your experience of trust* or *tell us about your experience of honesty* young people said:

Being faithful to your partner. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Giving yourself to partner. (17/Dundee/Female)

I trust my girlfriend 100 percent. (19/Angus/Male)

Be truthful to your partner and be faithful don't cheat. (>16/Angus/Female)

Having faith in someone else. (16/Dundee/Female)

Q: Why is trust important? If you don't it's not healthy – you'd be paranoid they're going with someone else behind your back. You'd be worried. Like honesty, it goes both ways, you need both. (Focus Group 13/Dundee)

In these further contributions young people express a confidence in themselves, as well as in a partner to remain faithful.

Being true to yourself. (17/Dundee/Female)

My friends are always really shocked that I trust my boyfriend to go to parties, I tell him that if he sleeps with someone else when he's on holiday then he shouldn't come home. But they don't even trust their boyfriend to go to a party without them or they doubt they will be faithful. It makes me question whether I'm stupid to trust him. But I don't think he will cheat, and if he does then it's his loss. (Focus Group 9/Dundee)

Feeling comfortable and cared for

The insight chapter on the theme of PRESSURE+CONSENT identified that for young people a common way to think about relationships where consent is achieved is to think of a relationship as being *comfortable*. This idea of *being comfortable* and *being cared for* is also found in young people's responses to prompts about trust and honesty, where these characteristics of a relationship are experienced as follows:

Being open, feeling comfortable with someone. (16/Dundee/Female)

I have always had very good trusting and loving friendships and relationships. My current partner is caring and concerned for my wellbeing. (21+/Angus/Female)

Loyal, honest, caring, patient is what trust should mean in sex and relationships. (16/Angus/Male)

Should be able to tell anything to the person feel comfortable. (16/Dundee/Female)

Not lying. It's very important. Can't have a relationship without it. (20/Dundee/Female)

Important, demonstrates trust, fairness, kind, shows that you care. (16/Dundee/Female)

Trust/honesty and sex

For some young people trust is a necessary precursor to a sexual relationship.

You have sex because you want the relationship to be more serious anyway, don't you? So I think having sex means you get more trust for the person. Like you are building that bond. (Focus Group 6/Dundee)

No trust, no chance. (Focus Group 6/Dundee)

One online contributor, who wants to be honest about worries, reported that it is difficult to state that she has not had sex, and that she has worries about having sex.

I'm scared to be honest about how scared I am to have sex with anyone, but I don't want to tell people I've done it like it's nothing, because that wouldn't be honest. (>16/P&K/Female)

The past and concerns about reputation

Young people have reflected on notions of trust and honesty in terms of previous sexual relationships and personal reputation.

Best to tell each other your past. (17/Angus/Male)

Lies can tear relationships apart. Lying about the amount of people you have had sex with so that you can have sex with another person is awful. (>16/P&K/Female)

For one young person ideas of trust, honesty and reputation come together in the need for personal integrity.

Integrity is very important. Integrity will allow someone to make the right decisions for them based on their own knowledge of themselves. Honesty when communicating with others enables trust amongst friends and prevents an undesirable reputation. (17/Angus/Female)

Communication and getting to know each other

Insight from young people points to the importance and value of talking, sharing feelings and building trust by getting to know each other.

Communication, trust and respect are all key parts of relationships, sexual or non-sexual. (Focus Group 2/Angus)

Q: What do we need to make a relationship good? Trust and listening to each other. (Focus Group 3/Angus)

Telling the truth about something no matter how hard it is or how bad it could be. (17/Dundee/Female)

Hugely important to any relationship, partners need to be able to talk about their feelings in order for a relationship to function properly and openly; also desirable for partners to be able to speak openly about sexual fantasies and desires in absolute confidence. (17/Dundee/Male)

Knowing you trust someone by getting to know them. (Focus Group 3/Angus)

The benefits and importance of COMMUNICATION are also explored in another insight chapter published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org

Keeping confidences

While trust and honesty are enhanced by communication, young people have also identified the need for privacy and the keeping of confidences. There is a particular concern about trusting a partner when it comes to sharing or revealing details of sexual relationships; this can leave the individual feeling somewhat vulnerable. Again, considering what trust and honesty mean in relationships:

Feeling able to confide in someone, or trust them to do something correctly for you. (16/Dundee/Female)

Knowing that if you do something or tell someone something they won't tell anyone. (16/Dundee/Female)

Privacy, safety, understanding. (>16/Dundee/Female)

I have only had one boyfriend who I trusted. Anyone else I would be scared they would tell their mates about me and worried about what they thought and what they would say. (>16/Dundee/Female)

If a guy goes off bragging about it afterwards, or even if they tell their friends about you, it's not going to make you trust them or even want to see them again. What happens between the two of you, should stay between the two of you. (Focus Group 4/P&K)

You have to trust them not to spread rumours and hearsay. You have to trust them not to share. (Focus Group 3/Angus)

Difficult experiences with trust and honesty

Contributors have recognised that relationships might not always be characterised by trust and honesty, that trust and honesty are difficult to gain or earn, and that poor personal experiences can leave the individual doubtful about finding these attributes in a partner again.

Everyone has trust issues. (17/Angus/Female)

Hard to gain but easy to lose. (16/Dundee/Male)

When it comes to trust, I've had a big deal with trusting people. The constant chain of being cheated on, lied to or the pain of not knowing they love you or not. (16/P&K/Male)

I have had bad trust in relationships because I have been treated badly. (16/Dundee/Female)

I find it very hard to trust people because of life in general of being let down. (17/Angus/Female)

I feel trust is essential in a relationship and even though I'm often in relationships with people I trust before I have sex, that trust has to go to a bigger level which for me trust has never reached that and now I'm sensitive and struggle to trust anyone so it takes a lot longer. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Trust, honesty and STIs

For some online contributors trust and honesty are connected to openness about STIs. Responding to prompts about *tell us about your experience of trust/honesty* they responded:

Put a condom on x (>16/Dundee/Male)

Trust the other person to not have another of the STDs. (16/Angus/Male)

Don't hide your STDs. (16/Angus/Male)

Social media

Other insight chapters on the topics JEALOUSY and SOCIAL MEDIA also published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org.uk have recognised that trust can be undermined by what is shared and viewed on line.

Even if you do totally trust a bird you never really know and if you see pictures of her having a laugh with other people, it's just gonna make you not trust her. (Focus Group 7/P&K)

2. INSIGHT FROM RESEARCH, RESOURCES OR SERVICES

The purpose of identifying insight from other sources is to help locate young people's perceptions and lived experience in a broader context, and where possible to provide further evidence to support the stress which young people have given to an issue, in this section regarding *trust* and *honesty*.

Jennifer Connollyⁱ and colleagues, working in Canada, propose that "romantic relationships are a defining feature of adolescence" and "crucial first steps in the journey towards establishing loving romantic partnership in adulthood". They also identify **that trust is important throughout adolescence, first characterising important friendships and then becoming an essential part of intimate and romantic relationships** so that "the level of trust and openness that adolescents have with their friends is mirrored by comparable qualities in their romantic relationships".

Reflecting the importance that young people in this insight gathering process have given to the themes of trust and honesty, Sarah Sorensonⁱⁱ asserts that "**healthy adolescent romantic relationships are characterised by open communication, high levels of trust and partners who are relatively close in age**". Advice and information, online and in publications, which young people might source also recognise the importance of both trust and honesty to relationships; this might include sharing one's past (*reputation* also interested young people in this insight process). In 'Relationships for Dummies'ⁱⁱⁱ Kate M. Wachs (a 'romance specialist') writes:

"To form a healthy relationship with someone and become emotionally intimate, you need to share experiences and secrets with your partner that you don't share with anyone else. That kind of intense, intimate, highly private interchange requires both parties to be honest with one another. Honesty involves giving accurate information about events that are known or have already occurred".

This insight gathering has a key concern for sexual health outcomes. When it comes to condom use within romantic relationships there is an interface with the issue of trust, this has been recognised by young people in their earlier insight and is also reflected in research. Linda Long-Hock^{iv} and colleagues explored condom use with 'serious and long-term partners' amongst young people of African-American and Puerto Rican descent and report that *not* using condoms is a proxy for trust so that abandoning condoms demonstrates "one's love and commitment". The authors report that "**relationship characteristics thought to account for lower rates of condom use with serious partners include: higher levels of intimacy, trust and commitment**".

In their work, also in the US, Sarah Feldstein^v and colleagues identify that while young people make up only 25% of the sexually active population, 50% of all new

STI infections occur in this age group". The researchers identify **the importance of understanding young people's focus on trust and being faithful**.

"In particular... three relationship factors have been widely implicated in condom use in relationship contexts (1) length of the relationship, which has been inversely associated with the frequency of condom use, (2) frequency of intercourse, with more frequent sex correlating with less condom use, and (3) level of "trust" or "love" in the relationship, which is less well understood but may reflect the representation that youth in long-term monogamous relationships should not "need" condoms because of trust. Equally possible, youth may believe that condom use interferes with intimacy, including true "love," where there should be no physical or emotional barriers. The result is that youth may fear introducing condom use particularly in established relationships in which they have not been used before because this may potentially suggest a lack of trust and commitment and/or evidence that the partner was unfaithful".

Feldstein and colleagues also report that young people who are sexually experienced and those that are not may have different views or expectations regarding when condoms are used *in relationships* – with experienced young people recognising that condom use declines where the relationship is longer term and where sex is more frequent while inexperienced young people (particularly young men) thinking the opposite. This points to the need, they argue, for "tailored theorizing and intervention content for adolescents who have, versus who have not, had sex".

Findings from the FAQ community engagement project part of the HIV Prevention Needs Assessment^{vi} (conducted for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Lothian) which explored **the views and experiences of gay and bisexual men** also identified that when men are in a loving, trusting relationship they are likely to stop using condoms.

Meanwhile service providers understand that STI/HIV transmission takes place within relationships where there is concurrency or breaking of agreements for safer sexual practices, and so it can be complex to engage young people (and MSM) in ways that show respect for their relationships and choices, while seeking to support them to use condoms where there is risk.

As already highlighted, in their insight young people have identified that trust and honesty are demonstrated by a partner being faithful. In the insight chapter on the topic ONE-NIGHT STANDS also published at www.maeitgoodtayside.org.uk the recent analysis of the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL 3) in Scotland^{vii} is shared, giving insight on societal attitudes to one-night stands, this highlights gender differences. When asked if one-night stands are right or wrong, in terms of 16 to 29 year olds:

- For male respondents: 34% say they are always or mostly wrong; 23% sometimes wrong; 15% rarely wrong and 24% not wrong at all.

- For female respondents: 44% say they are always or mostly wrong; 34% sometimes wrong; 9% rarely wrong and 10% not wrong at all.

An overarching theme from the insight process, including when young people talk about *trust* and *honesty*, is that of COMMUNICATION. The insight chapter on that topic addresses this in more detail, including in terms of the skills and language to negotiate sexual encounters and insight from research that sexual communication matters if young people are to negotiate safer sex or condom use (also published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org.uk)

3. STRESS: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

When it comes to the insight offered by young people and other sources important themes and issues have been highlighted. These are summarised below and discussion points are highlighted. Again, some attention is given to the use of insight from this project in terms of the use of social marketing to promote positive sexual health for young people.

The importance of trust and honesty in the 'good relationship'

Young people's insight highlights the key importance of trust and honesty when they imagine the good relationship. In focus group conversations these themes were often the first and most discussed characteristics of the relationships young people want. In other insight chapters at www.makeitgoodtayside.org.uk young people have also talked about the importance of *happiness*, *respect*, *love* and *pleasure*; these all characterise the good relationship. They have also talked about *being comfortable* and *being cared for*. When considering the use of social marketing this *insight* and the *customer orientation* it provides means that communication with young people (and service provision which targets them) could usefully be informed by the positive and aspirational aspects of young people's personal and sexual relationships, not just worries, anxieties or deficits that can easily frame a view of young people's sexual health outcomes.

Trust, being faithful and condom use.

On the one hand it might be expected that agencies with an interest in 'the good relationship' would want to support young people to be in relationships with trust and love. However, it is also suggested that when these positive characteristics are attained then condom use can be abandoned. It is difficult to see how simple messages about condom use can be targeted at young people in loving, trusting relationships that do not feel like we (adults/service providers) are then disrespecting or not trusting the young person's judgement. In terms of supporting young people's use of condoms there is a real challenge in re-shaping how they view condom use and helping them to consider a different perspective. This may be too complex an area for social marketing, but should certainly inform more in-depth and personalised conversations with young people and with couples within the context of services.

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