



Dating older people

Key Facts and Discussion

Facilitators' Guide

Thinking of dating someone much older than you? Here are our top tips:

Going out with an older man – or woman – might mean you get presents and taken out to nice places, but remember:

1. They may expect, or demand, things in return that you don't want to give, like sex.
2. They're likely to want to be in control, so it may be hard to have your say on using condoms.
3. It's more likely that they could be living with HIV. If you can't agree on protection like condoms you could be putting yourself at risk of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
4. They may be dating/having sex with other people your age at the same time, increasing the risk of passing on STIs.
5. You may feel you're ready, but their expectations could be very different to yours.
6. Just because some of your friends are dating older men or women, you should still decide what's right for you.

Ideas for discussion

What do you (or your group) think about relationships between people of very different ages? Maybe you've never really thought about it before. Here are some questions to think about yourself, or discuss in your group.

1. 'Blessers' and 'Ben 10s' are examples of names used to talk about older men in relationships with younger women (blessers), and younger men in relationships with older women (Ben 10s). Do you have the same or similar words where you live? When you hear people being called these names, does it feel positive or negative to you?

FACILITATORS' NOTES

The group might think of words such as: sugar daddy/sugar mamma/ blesser/uncle bae etc. Notice how often these words make it sound like having an older partner is a treat, or something to feel lucky about. Likewise calling someone an uncle makes it sound like they are someone who will look after you, or someone you should respect and do as they say.

When discussing these terms you can start to explore the power imbalance that they might suggest. For example, if someone is considered a 'blessing', you might think that you have to treat them a certain way because you are lucky to have them and don't want to lose them.

2. What do you think are some of the reasons that younger women/men might think about dating someone much older?

FACILITATORS' NOTES

Often people are attracted to the money that older partners have and the gifts they might offer. It might also be that younger people feel that dating somebody older will give them status; that with them they will be able to go out drinking or go to cooler parties. Discuss these reasons and keep exploring what issues and concerns there might also be – for example if they lead to one person having more power or control than the other.

3. If you were dating someone older than you who gave you presents and financial support, how do you think this would affect your relationship? Think about both the positive and negative things that might be a result.

FACILITATORS' NOTES

Groups might acknowledge that older people may be able to provide their partners with things that they might need. They might pay their school fees or travel. This might make them feel grateful, or they might find that they feel closer to their partner or like them more because of these things.

However, they should also spend time talking about how receiving gifts can make it more difficult to disagree with your partner in the future. It might make them feel like they owe their partner something in return, which can lead to them feeling less able to say no to sex, or insist on using a condom.

4. Did you know older men and women are more likely to have HIV and other STIs than younger men and women because they have been sexually active for longer? Would this change your feelings about dating someone much older than you?

FACILITATORS' NOTES

The intention in this conversation is not to stigmatise those who have HIV or other STIs, but to explore the risks associated with dating someone older than you.

When there is a power imbalance in a relationship, you might have less control over whether you use condoms and what kind of sex you have. This is when you are more at risk. Groups should think about whether they want to be in a relationship where they can't control their own sexual health.

5. Most age-disparate relationships, where one person is older than the other, are between people who are not married to each other. What do you think might happen to the younger person in the relationship as a result of this?

FACILITATORS' NOTES

Marriage isn't essential for a healthy and safe relationship. But it is important that both partners get to agree on what they want out of the relationship, including whether it is ok to see other people.

Groups should be aware that having multiple partners increases the risk of HIV. If an older partner has more than one girlfriend or boyfriend, the risk of being exposed to HIV and other STIs increases. Honesty and shared responsibility and control is important when it comes to open relationships, especially when it comes to sexual health.