

# Sexuality

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# Dating and Relationships

- Broad age range (15- 39) so different stages
- Sentinel milestone
- Cancer as interruption
- Relationship stressors
- Disclosure



# Developmental tasks for healthy sexuality

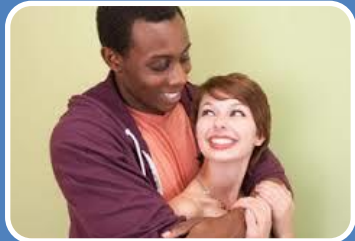
- Creating sexual identity
- Establishing romantic and sexual relationships
- Exploring sexual preferences and practices  
(Morgan, Davies, Palmer, & Plaster, 2010)
- Cancer may delay attainment of these milestones
- Dependence on parents may prevent sexual experience
- Silence from health care providers (Kelly, 2013)
- Issues for sexual minority survivors complex

# Context of relationship development



## Early young adulthood (15 – 19 years)

- Fluid relationships
- Sexual activity without commitment



## Middle early adulthood (19 – 26 years)



- Relationships increase in duration
- Level of intimacy deepens



## Older early adulthood (27 – 35 years)

- Committed relationships
- Sexuality and intimacy connected

# Cancer = interruption

- Gap in socialization  missed opportunities
- Missed experiences and diminished maturation
- Missed sex education at school
- Over-protective parents  lack of distancing, independence and sexual identity

(Evan, Kaufman, Cook, & Zeltzer, 2006)

# Sexual difficulties

- Females
  - Decreased desire
  - ? Effects on arousal and orgasm
- Males
  - Detrimental effects on erections, ejaculation and orgasm
- Fear about fertility impacts both

# Relationship stressors

- Being partnered at time of diagnosis +
- Good relationship = support
- Conflicted relationship = re-evaluation and break up (Carpentier & Fortenberry, 2010)
- YAs remain in relationships longer BUT greater distress when relationship ends

(Thompson, Marsland, Marshal, & Tersak, 2008).

# Impact of cancer on romantic partner

- Instrumental tasks
- Income
- Female partners experience ↓ in quality of life
- Greater distress than survivor
- Positive change and personal growth possible

(Li & Loke, 2013)

(Bowman et al., 2006)

(Turner et al., 2013)



# How to help the YA with cancer

- OPEN and OBJECTIVE communication
- Regular and consistent assessment
- Limited pharmaceutical interventions for women
- Limited specific psychosocial interventions for YAs
  - Psychoeducational intervention showed positive outcomes that were maintained for 3 months
    - Knowledge
    - Body image
    - Decreased anxiety about relationships and overall distress

(Canada, Schover, & Li, 2007)