

# Warning Signs Spotlight: Pressuring for Sex

At some point in dating or a relationship, the topic of sex might come up. When there is open communication, respect, and trust, sex can be a comfortable and enjoyable experience. If you aren't ready for sex, saying "no" or "I'm not ready" is still perfectly fine because there is mutual respect. But, there are times when one person doesn't respect their partners' verbal or physical 'no'. They might use **coercion** or pressure to convince their partner to do something sexually that they don't want to do or that makes them feel uncomfortable. Using coercion is a major warning sign that someone might be sexually abusive.

The tricky part of coercion is that it doesn't always sound mean and scary, but it *is* a way to break down your vision of a Healthy Me. Sometimes a person might pressure their partner by saying things like, "I thought you loved me," or "We've done it before, and it was great. Why can't we do it now?". Pressure can also come in forms of put-downs and guilt trips if someone says, "You're acting like a kid," or "You got me excited, what do you expect". The reality is, it doesn't matter if you've had sex before or the other person was aroused; you don't ever owe your partner sex or need it to prove your love to them. There are hundreds of ways to show love for someone without having sex.

Expecting someone to have sex just because you're in a relationship or dating or you went home with them after a date creates a false narrative about the role sex should play in a relationship. Coercing a partner is an attempt to get power and ownership over their partner's body. Coercion says that you don't have the right to say 'no' or show that you don't want to have sex. It also shows that they don't care about YOUR pleasure, comfort levels, and boundaries. Everyone has a right to be respected, and pressuring someone for sex is a huge sign of disrespect.

No matter if it's a long-term relationship, a thing, or a date, pressuring someone for sex or assuming they want to have sex is not okay. It's everyone's responsibility to check in with the other person, and respect their choices. Being a Healthy We means that you both have the ability to talk openly and freely about your boundaries and wants around sex, including what you like and don't like, how far you want to go, and if you want to wait. This creates intimacy - intimacy is emotional closeness, and mutual trust. Respecting your partner's choice to not have sex can build that emotional closeness and mutual trust that truly make a healthy relationship.

## It's Time to Talk

Here are a few questions that parents and caring adults can use to start conversations about isolation with the young people in their life:

- What does it mean to have boundaries?
- How do you establish your boundaries?
  
- What are some ways you can respect other people's boundaries?

### **What if this happens to me?**

If your partner is not respecting your boundaries and pressuring you for sex, here are a few things you could say if you feel safe:

- I feel really uncomfortable when you don't respect my boundaries.
- We've talked about this before and I'd really appreciate it if you would stop asking. If or when I'm ready, I will tell you.
- I can show my love for you without sex.

Remember, if someone isn't respecting your boundaries, you have a right to end the relationship. Healthy relationships include trust, respect, and open communication. If you have experienced sexual pressure from a partner, support is available through RAINN by calling 1-800-656-4673 and texting the Title IX Coordinator at 520-494-6456 or [titleix@centralaz.edu](mailto:titleix@centralaz.edu)