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# Insight into Youth Sexual Health

Tees Valley Youthwatch

November 2023



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## Introduction

Tees Valley Youthwatch explored the theme of Sexual Health after identifying this as a key theme amongst 13 to 25 year olds, they found that this was a subject which not many people spoke about outside of school PSHE lessons. The group wanted to expand both their own knowledge and that of their peers through creating a resource that could be easily accessed and understood.

**Hey Teesside!**

We need **local community members** to have your say on **sexual health provision** in Teesside.

**We are running:**

- Focus groups
- 1-on-1 interviews
- Interactive workshops

Face-to-face | Online

As a thank you, we will provide you an Amazon gift card for your participation!

**£15**

Want to help us out? Contact us!

or DM us at: **YPEC\_ YPEC**

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**Who We Are**  
Jo Hatfield and Charlotte Parker set up Young Peoples' Education Community CIC to support children and young people around healthy choices, engagement, and empowerment.  
We are affiliated with the research and engagement company InsightNow Ltd, members of the Market Research Society (MRS) and follow MRS code of conduct.

INSIGHTNOW | YPEC

## What did we do?

This project initially came about when a survey from an organisation called YPEC was shared with the Tees Valley Youthwatch Project Lead. This was a Teesside wide survey for members of the community to 'have their say on sexual health provision in Teesside', they proposed to run focus groups, interactive workshops or 1 to 1 interviews with people who were interested in taking part and as a thank you they were giving out £15 amazon gift vouchers to each individual.

As the theme of sexual health had already been expressed to the Lead Worker, she then contacted YPEC for more information on how they could work collaboratively to gain information on this topic area and how it affects young people in the Teesside area. Together

they planned three interactive workshops, one was face to face at Youth Focus North East's Middlesbrough Office and the other two sessions were held on Zoom. Two of the three sessions went ahead, the other was unfortunately cancelled due to lack of intake

## During the interactive workshops the YPEC and Youth Focus team asked the participants a series of questions regarding the theme:

- In terms of Sexual health what sort of issues do you think local communities in Teesside are facing today?
- What sort of barriers do you think community members are facing when accessing sexual health services?
- Where do you want to access sexual health services from?

- Where do you get key sexual health messages from?
- How important do you think sexual health is to other members of the community?
- When and where was the last time you saw a poster/advert, promoting positive sexual health?
- What sort of information or key messages do you think young people (and the wider community) should be getting around issues of sexual health? Where and who should they be getting these messages from?
- What improvements could be made with sexual health provision in Teesside?

The young people answered all of the above questions and more with openness and honesty as they were keen to get their voices heard in a safe and comfortable environment. They commented on how they “don’t get the option to discuss these issues enough with adults who won’t just shut us down if it gets uncomfortable for them”. In light of this, the young people asked if they could have an additional conversation with staff to discuss the theme of sexual health further and gain insight into how and where they could keep themselves safe in existing services in the area.

From this a Youthwatch session was held at Tuned In in Redcar for the young people from the focus group to attend and have an opportunity to explore their questions with Youth Focus North East staff. The young people engaged in round table discussions, quizzes and information sharing about services in their area whilst enjoying the opportunity to come together as a group over pizza.

**After the feedback we gained from the young people during this information sharing session, the Lead Youth Worker for Youthwatch shared the opportunity out to many youth organisations within the Tees Valley area. Due to scheduling conflicts, she was only able to attend one more youth provision session. This again was in the Redcar area, and was for an organisation who work predominantly with young people who have an additional learning need or disability.**

**When speaking to staff and young people in this session, it was suggested that some organisations/professionals shy away from talking about Sexual Health - amongst other potentially “challenging” topics - with young people who have additional learning needs or disabilities. The argument made was that these young people in particular should have the same, if not more, education around this topic due to potential increased vulnerabilities. The young people enjoyed participating in the round table discussions and we had a lovely, and humorous session talking about what sexual health means to them, how they could keep themselves safe and where they could go in their local area for support if they should need it.**

During these sessions, it was evident that when it comes to sexual health education, key messages and advice on how to stay safe differ a great deal depending on different schools, religious groups and even physical/mental ability of the individual. Both groups encouraged peer to peer support on this topic as they found that they could learn and support each other. From this conversations were had around the key messages that they would like other young people to know around this theme. Once key messages were identified the young people settled on the idea of creating a poster for young people of Secondary School ages (10-16 years old) and a small working group came together over zoom to bring it to fruition.

After a few design tweaks, this is what they created:

**Tees Valley Youthwatch**

# What is **SEXUAL HEALTH**?

“Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.”  
(WHO, 2006)

**Why is it important to look after our sexual health?**

- It's important to your physical and mental health
- It can affect other people if not looked after correctly
- It can impact your relationships with potential partners

**What are we protecting ourselves against?**

**Unwanted Pregnancy:** You may not be ready for it, you and your partner may have different views on having children, or it may disrupt your life and future plans i.e. career.

**STI's:** If left untreated they can impact your physical and mental health, as well as other people's. They can make you infertile or put you on medication for life. It can negatively affect your current and future relationships.

**What is consent?**

- ✓ Consent is when you say yes to having sexual interactions with another person, and not feeling forced or pressured into doing so.
- ✓ It's having the complete capacity to say yes!
- ✓ You must be over the age of 16 to legally say yes.

**What isn't consent?**

- Consent is not given if someone says no, feels uncomfortable, or if they are asleep.
- If they do not have the capacity to say yes e.g. if they are asleep, drunk or taken drugs, or have a learning disability.
- If you are forced.

**Why is it important to talk about Consent when looking at sexual health?**

Consent must be verbally given before and during each sexual interaction! This makes sure that both partners are looking after each other as well as their own needs. Just because someone has said yes once does not mean that they consent every time you want to have a sexual interaction.

**Help and Advice Services:**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Middlesbrough | Sexual health Teesside, 3rd Floor of The Live Well Centre, Dundas Shopping Centre, Middlesbrough, Cleveland, TS1 1HR |
| Redcar        | Sexual Health Teesside, Redcar & Cleveland Leisure & Community Heart Ridley Street Redcar, TS10 1TD                  |
| Hartlepool    | Sexual Health Teesside, One Life Hartlepool, Park Rd, Hartlepool TS24 7PW  |
| Stockton      | Sexual Health Teesside, Lawson Street Health Centre, Lawson Walk, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 1HU                          |
| Darlington    | Sexual Health Darlington, Floor D, Darlington Memorial Hospital, Hollyhurst Rd, Darlington DL3 6HX                   |

**Youth focus: healthwatch**  
North East Working together across Tees Valley

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## Key Learning Points

This section will focus more on the findings from both the Interactive focus sessions with YPEC and the two additional Sexual Health information sharing sessions held by Youth Focus North East.

### What is Sexual Health?

Within the conversations, the young people generalised the term sexual health as being about;

- Consent and communication between partners, having a healthy relationship
- Learning about different body types and body parts and how this changes through adolescent development
- Understanding how or how not to become pregnant
- Looking after yourself and your general health
- How to keep safe with condoms and contraception
- Learning about STI's
- Where to go for help and support

### Where do we learn about sexual health?

The young people highlighted that they would have a wide variety of people or places to go to for help or advice around Sexual Health issues, such as;

- Social media and the internet
- Friends at school or football
- Family
- School
- Youth clubs

And from those places they would learn some of the following: how to put a condom on correctly; safe spaces to talk about how to have consensual sex and how to find the right partner; about their bodies in general form.

## Where would you go for help or advice?

Whilst they would go to the above for day to day questions or themed talks about the topic of sexual health, if they had a more pressing question on their mind the young people stated that they would go to these people for further support or advice:

- Teachers
- Pharmacy
- Doctors or nurses
- Parents
- Youth workers

### **From these people they said that they would expect to be taught about the following:**

- Learn how to make their issue better, through conversations, advice or treatment if it was needed
- To be spoken to as an adult, “We expect adults to talk to us as they would other people, they need to be professional and nice”
- To be able to have a laugh and a giggle with them where we can, it will make the experience easier and less stressful.
- To be shown how to use contraception properly i.e. condoms
- Tell us about all of our options not just their own opinions

## What advice or information about sexual health would you like to give other young people?

**“That sex is 100% natural and you shouldn’t feel embarrassed about it.”**

**“That sex is okay to have and the way we are told about it from different people is not good enough – ask those questions.”**

## Demographic of the Young People who engaged with this mini project

|   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>Areas which we engaged with</b>                    | <b>Middlesbrough<br/>Redcar</b> |
| <b>Age breakdown of young people who participated</b> | <b>13 to 18 year olds</b>       |

## Conclusion

Young people want to be informed about what is available to them in their local communities in regards to sexual health, they don't want to have to just talk to their friends and family about issues they have. From the conversations they had, many of the young people stated their issue would have to be very severe or unknown before they would go and speak to their GP about it as there was a fear of their family finding out what they were doing. They would like to see information about sexual health services shared more in the local area in a way that speaks to them as young people.





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focus:**  
North East