



Let's
talk about ...
**Sex Outside of
Marriage**

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This Facilitator Resource is one of a set of resources developed by International Headquarters to enable The Salvation Army family to talk about sexuality and relationships. A facilitator hosts each conversation and has access to the following resources:

- **Conversation Guide:** This guide will help facilitate the conversation. The questions aim to help the conversation flow. The group facilitator may decide to omit some questions. The goal is not to give 'correct' answers but rather to have a genuine conversation, being open to the Holy Spirit's leading. The facilitator can decide whether to give a copy to all participants.
- **Facilitator Resource:** This is what you have in your hand! These are not the answers to the questions. The resource aims to help the facilitator inform and inspire the conversations.

Before the Conversation

- 1. Invite:** People need to be invited to attend the conversation. No one should be forced to participate. When people are invited, they need to be informed as to the nature of the conversation and the confidentiality and respectful behaviour that is expected. Facilitators are asked to make sure every participant has read the Information Sheet. This will help people prepare for the conversation.
- 2. Prepare:** Facilitators should have studied this Facilitator Resource before facilitating the conversation on Married Life.
- 3. Anticipate the risks:** Talking about human sexuality is personal. Some people hold strong opinions and many have had experiences which

have affected them deeply. Consider the risks and prepare as much as possible. Confidentiality must be respected.

What happens at a conversation?

A group of people (ideally 10-12 people) meet together for between 90 and 120 minutes conversation using the Faith-Based Facilitation (FBF) process. Anyone not familiar with FBF can download the book, *Building Deeper Relationships* from www.salvationarmy.org/fbf. It is available in seven languages. During the conversation, the facilitator decides which questions to use from the Conversation Guide. Not all the questions have to be used. It is recommended the facilitator asks one of the group to be the recorder and make notes of the discussion. If there is a flip chart available, the recorder can use that to note down the main points of the discussion. Although the notes are confidential and not for use outside the conversation, it will help the discussion to be able to refer back to the discussion notes. Each conversation should begin and end in a time of prayer.



Facilitator Resource

This Facilitator Resource does not aim to answer the questions. Rather it provides the facilitator with key information from the Bible, our faith tradition and scientific facts from reputable sources. It includes all the questions in the Conversation Guide and provides background information to inform the conversation as the group work through

the FBF process. Not everything can be covered in the Facilitator Resource. If you don't know the answer to a question from a participant, it is fine to say, 'I don't know' and to encourage them to further explore the topic themselves or with other members of the group.

STEP ONE / What Is The Issue?

Conversation Guide Questions

- In our community, how do we define 'having sex'?
- What do people in our community think about 'sex outside of marriage'?

Sex outside of marriage' covers many issues

- Casual sex – promiscuity.
- Pre-marital sex between couples in committed relationships.
- Couples who live together as if they were married but have not had a ceremony or blessing.
- Adultery – the unfaithfulness of one or both parties in a marriage.
- Sexual behaviour such as sexting pictures to a person you are not married to.
- Involvement in the sex trade – prostitution.

This guide focuses on sex before marriage and adultery, but facilitators need to be ready if other issues related to sex outside of marriage are raised during the conversation.

What do we mean by 'having sex'?

'Having sex' is defined differently by different people. It will always help a conversation if the participants agree what is meant by certain

words and terms. For some people 'having sex' involves penetration, for others it could include oral sex, masturbation, touching or petting each other or even touching on top of clothes. A helpful definition of sex outside of marriage is 'intimate contact between two individuals that involves arousal, stimulation, and/or a response by at least one of the two partners'.¹

Facilitator Tip

A discussion on Sex Outside of Marriage is likely to raise many issues – far more than can be covered in this session. The group may wish to focus on one or two issues.

Facilitator Tip

Conversations about Sex Outside of Marriage will overlap with issues covered in the Married Life conversation. It is recommended that groups discuss Married Life before they discuss Sex Outside of Marriage.

Facilitator Tip

Some conversation participants may be very uncomfortable talking about sex. This is not talked about in some cultures – and rarely in The Salvation Army. Be sensitive to these feelings. Don't encourage jokes. Encourage discussion to be calm, factual and mature.

¹McIlhane, Joe S. and McKissic Bush, Freda, Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting our Children, 2008, Moody Press, Chicago, USA

STEP TWO / Describe and Analyse

Conversation Guide Questions

- Why do people have sex outside of marriage?
- What are some of the consequences of having sex outside of marriage?
- How does a faithful spouse feel if their spouse is unfaithful with another person?
- What is the impact on the life and witness of the corps (church) if members are having sex outside of marriage?

Why do people have sex outside of marriage?

There are three main contexts in which sex outside of marriage occurs:

1. Couples who have sex as part of a committed relationship before they marry.
2. Individuals who have sex with consent but without any commitment.
3. An individual who has sex with another person without consent.

It is important to understand that having sex without consent is always wrong. It is rape. It is not only against God's law but it is also a violation of basic human rights. This includes husbands or wives forcing their spouse to have sex with them and any adult who has sex with a child², even if the child says yes.

Most Christians agree that having casual sex or committing adultery is wrong. However there is less agreement on whether sex as part of a committed, unmarried relationship is always wrong. People have different reasons.

While not comprehensive, the reasons for having sex in a committed relationship while not married may include:

- It feels right and we enjoy it.
- Having sex before marriage is normal, everyone does it.

- It is too difficult to abstain.
- We tried to abstain, but it just happened.
- This is our personal business – it has nothing to do with other people or God.
- It enables us to learn about each other and see if we are compatible before marriage.
- Weddings are too expensive. If we agree to commit ourselves to each other that is sufficient.
- Living together allows us to enjoy the sexual and emotional closeness of marriage while enjoying the freedom to leave without consequences.
- Marriage doesn't work; we would rather just live together. We love each other as much, if not more, than married couples. We don't need a 'contract' to stay together. Marriage is an out-of-date institution.
- Marriage is bad for women. There are fewer expectations placed on men and women who live together as if they are married in comparison with the roles expected of a wife and husband.
- If the relationship does not work out we will not have to deal with a divorce.
- We have both already been married before, why wait again?

Are there any long-term effects of people having sex outside of marriage?

Sex allows couples to share the most intimate parts of themselves with each other, deepening communication, loyalty and closeness. Intense mental, emotional and physical bonds form between people during sex. Scientific research shows that besides the physical effects that can occur from engaging in sex, such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, engaging in sex almost always carries long term psychological consequences.

Sexual activity releases chemicals in the brain creating feelings of calm and closeness. Hormones called endorphins, which are highly addictive, are

²The minimum legal age for consent varies between countries. However the United Nations recommends that anyone under the age of 18 is considered a child

also released during sex causing you to want to experience the rush again and again. These bonds are formed in the same way, whether it's a one-off encounter or a long-term commitment.³

Therefore when people engage in sex outside of marriage a strong bond is formed between two people who are not committed by marriage. When these bonds are repeatedly broken, the ability to bond is decreased over time. This leaves people with a reduced ability to bond through sex in a committed relationship.⁴

It is increasingly common for people, including some Christians, to choose to live together without making a covenantal commitment of marriage. It is often seen as a trial phase to learn about each other and find out if you are compatible. Some couples live together for many years in loving relationships. However recent research suggests that living together before marriage is associated with marital dissolution and couples who wait to live together until marriage – or until they have clear, mutual plans to marry – are more happy, have less conflict and feel they are more compatible.⁵ It has also been reported that couples who are married when they have children show more family stability than couples who have children while living together but not married, regardless of their education levels.⁶

The effects of adultery

Adultery is one of the most devastating events that can occur in a marriage, destroying trust and leaving the other spouse with a lot of pain, guilt and humiliation. It has the potential to destroy a marriage. It is estimated that approximately

only 30 per cent of marriages continue after the discovery of adultery.⁷ Adultery not only affects the marriage but also any children in the family. Children of all ages, even adult children, can be impacted by adultery. Children often look to their parents for guidance and as role models and put their trust in them. However, once adultery occurs this trust is often broken and leaves the children feeling betrayed.

The damaging of relationships through adultery also impacts the extended family and – if Christians are involved – the church (corps). The impact of church leaders committing adultery seriously damages the confidence of people in the gospel. This could not be more serious. Non-believers are understandably put off the Christian message when they see Christians not living up to the standards they proclaim.

Facilitator Tip

The questions for Steps Two, Three and Four should connect in a natural way with the issue your group identified in Step One.

Facilitator Tip

Make sure the conversation does not move into 'decide and plan' mode. Keep the conversation focused on describing and analysing the issues..

Facilitator Tip

The Facilitator Resource for the conversation on Married Life includes additional information about couples living together before marriage.



³Ibid¹ ⁴Michael, Robert T, Gagnon, John H, Laumann, Edward, and Kolata, Gina, Sex in America, 1995, Time Warner, USA, 124

⁵Kuperberg, Arielle, 'Age at Coresidence, Premarital Cohabitation, and Marriage Dissolution: 1985-2009', Journal of Marriage and Family, 2014, 76(2), 352-369, Wiley ⁶www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/march/three-myths-of-cohabitation.html

⁷https://news.gallup.com/poll/105682/Most-Americans-Willing-Forgive-Unfaithful-Spouse.aspx?g_source=infidelity&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles

STEP THREE / Reflect and Evaluate

Conversation Guide Questions

- Read Proverbs 6:20-35. What do these verses say to you?
- Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. What do these verses say to you?
- Is there a positive message about marriage in the Bible? What is it?
- Do healthy Christian marriages have any common characteristics? Make a list.

What is the main message in the Bible about sex outside of marriage?

There are many references to adultery in the Bible. All of them instruct people not to commit adultery. Read Proverbs 6:20-35.

Although there are multiple commandments against adultery in the Bible, the emphasis is not on a negative 'thou shalt not' message. God does not want to frustrate his people – he wants the best for his people.

The central message throughout the Old and New Testaments is God's desire to be in relationship with all people. This relationship is initiated by God and formalised in a number of covenants throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, God made covenants with the people of Israel and promised to protect them if they were faithful to him (Genesis 9:10-17; Genesis 15:18; Genesis 17:1-14). In the New Testament, God sent Jesus to make a new covenant for all people – not only the Jews (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6-13).

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine teaches that all our relationships should be covenants:

'Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of all that the Old Testament law had promised and anticipated. He taught that the Law was, in fact, fulfilled in love. This was the ethic of love. To realise Jesus' radical ethic of love is to treat all our relationships as holy covenants. God is able to love through us.'⁸

God is able to love others through us in all our relationships. However, not all relationships have the same degree of intimacy as marriage. Marriage is a special covenant first mentioned in the creation story. 'A man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24).

In Ephesians 5:25-32 Paul likens this relationship between a husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

The New Testament also offers instructions on how we should live in a way that is pleasing to God by learning to control our body and not act in lust (1 Corinthians 7:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8).

What is the problem with adultery and polygamy?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks admits that monogamy (one husband with one wife) was not the norm at first for the Jewish people. He writes:

'Monogamy did not immediately become the norm, even within the world of the Bible. But many of its most famous stories, about the tension between Sarah and Hagar, or Leah and Rachel and their children, or David and Bathsheba, or Solomon's many wives, are all critiques that point the way to monogamy. And there is a deep connection between monotheism (one God) and monogamy, just as there is between idolatry and adultery.'⁹

While sex outside of marriage might give some personal pleasure, it is a form of idolatry – putting ourselves ahead of the will of God. Many long-term benefits come from a long, stable marriage. Family life is an essential building block of society. Rabbi Sacks notes that the traditional family is increasingly rare in the UK. In 2012, 47.5 per cent of children were born outside of marriage and 42 per cent of marriages end in divorce. He explains the implications of this: 'The collapse of marriage has created a new form of poverty concentrated among

⁸*The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, International Headquarters, 2010, 197 ⁹Jonathan Sacks, 'Seven Key Moments in History' in *Not Just Good But Beautiful: The Complementary Relationship Between Man and Woman*, 2015, Plough Publishing House, Walden, NY, USA

single parent families, and of these, the main burden is borne by women, who in 2011 headed 92 per cent of single parent households.¹⁰ While the Church must not make single parents' lives more difficult by judging them, we cannot be silent about the value of marriage. Rabbi Sacks writes:

'The family – man, woman and child – is not one lifestyle choice among many. It is the best means we have yet discovered for nurturing future generations and enabling children to grow in a matrix of stability and love ... For any society, the family is the crucible of its future, and for the sake of our children's future, we must be its defenders.'¹¹

We live in a world that wants instant pleasure – so it is not surprising that sex outside of marriage is common. However, there are long-term implications. For example, marriage breakdown often results in complicated family relationships between parents, siblings, grandparents and other family members.

What does the Church teach about sexual relationships?

The consistent teaching of the Christian Church for hundreds of years is that intimate physical sexual relationships should only take place inside a marriage. Sharing our body with another person in sexual intercourse is one of the most intimate and vulnerable things we can do. Sex connects people in such a way that Jesus calls them 'one flesh' (Matthew 19:4-6); to form such a connection without the committed intention to stay together

goes against the very nature of God's intention for sexual intercourse.

Covenant and commitment are the foundations of a Christian marriage – if a partner is unable to have sexual relations for some reason, the marriage is not dissolved. Marriage is much more than a sex act.

The Salvation Army Articles of Marriage set out the potential of a Christ-centred marriage:

'We do solemnly declare that, although we enter into this marriage for reasons of personal happiness and fulfilment, we will do our utmost to ensure that our married status and relationship will deepen our commitment to God and enhance the effectiveness of our service as soldiers of Jesus Christ in The Salvation Army.

'We promise to make our home a place where all shall be aware of the abiding presence of God, and where those under our influence shall be taught the truths of the gospel, encouraged to seek Christ as Saviour, and supported in the commitment of their lives to the service of God.

'We declare our intention to be to each other, by the help of God, true Christian examples and, through times of joy, difficulty or loss, to encourage each other to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".'¹²



¹⁰Ibid, 31 ¹¹Ibid, 29-30 ¹²Salvation Army Ceremonies, 2018, 19-20

STEP FOUR **Decide and Plan – How Then Shall We Live?**

Conversation Guide Questions

- How should Salvation Army corps respond to people who have sex before marriage? Is there any difference in the way a corps should respond to older people who have sex before they marry than to younger people?
- What are we doing in our corps to encourage and model healthy marriages? Look at the list of characteristics made in Step Three. How can we do better?
- How can we provide appropriate pastoral care to people who have sex outside of marriage?

The priority at this point of the conversation is to decide and plan what we need to do in light of the conversation. Encourage the participants in the conversation to identify actions that are practical and that they themselves can, or help to, implement.

STEP FIVE **Act**

Once the conversation has concluded and the group has closed in prayer, encourage participants to further explore the issues discussed in their own time or with other members of the group.

Facilitator Tip

It may be helpful to pray for anyone in the group who has been particularly affected by this discussion. Perhaps follow up with a pastoral visit or phone call in the following week.

All **participants** are encouraged to complete an online feedback form using the link <https://sar.my/ihqletstalk>



All responses will be anonymous. You will only be asked to indicate your age range and your country of residence. Your comments will help other Salvationists around the world as we all listen, learn, discuss and discern together