



**Maahanmuuttovirasto**  
**Migrationsverket**  
**Finnish Immigration Service**

# Finnish society course



Sexual health and Sexuality



## Sexual rights

Sexual rights belong to everyone and are an important part of a person's right to self-determination.

Sexual rights mean that you have the right to make decisions about your sexuality. Under the Declaration of Sexual Rights, which was made by the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS), all persons have:

- a right to sexual freedom
- a right to sexual self-determination, bodily integrity and physical safety
- a right to sexual equality, and
- a right to sexuality education.

## Right to self-determination

Everyone in Finland has the right to self-determination. This means a right to personal freedom, bodily integrity and safety. It also applies to sexuality as well as to the inviolability and right to self-determination that are associated with sexuality. In Finland, everyone has the right to make decisions about their sexuality and their own body, also when they are married or dating.



## Sexual offences

Any sexual act that is done to a person against their will is sexual violence. The willingness to engage in a sexual act must be expressed verbally, through behaviour or in another way. Having sex with a person aged under 16 is prohibited and a criminal offence under the Finnish law.

You must not do the following against the other person's will:

- touch the intimate areas, or any area, of their body
- call them sexually suggestive names,
  - use talk, gestures or materials that refer to sex
- harass anyone, call them names or watch them secretly
- upload to social media material that violates a person's privacy.

## Sexual offences against a child

The protective age limit for sexual interaction in Finland is 16 years. An adult, or a young person who is much older, may not have sexual relations with a person who is under 16. This is against the law even if the child had been willing to participate. The responsibility always belongs to the adult.

Sexual abuse means persuading or coercing **a child/young person** to participate in sexual activity by someone who is in a higher position or who exploits another person who is dependent on them or cannot defend themselves. This may include other sexual activity besides intercourse. Sexual abuse, harassment, touching, asking someone to undress, taking photographs and enticing a child, also online and on the social media, are examples of acts that are against the law. Child abuse which begins and/or takes place online and on the social media is known as grooming.

# Sexual health

## Concept of sexual health

Sexual health is part of your general health. It means that you are able to enjoy your sexuality and express it without the fear of such consequences as sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, discrimination, violence, abuse or pressure. Sexual health comes into play in relationships between persons, and sexual well-being is an important part of your general welfare.

Sexual health includes everyone's possibility to make decisions about having children and using birth control. It also means the freedom to decide how you wish to express your sexuality. Understanding your sexuality as well as feeling safe and being accepted as you are improve everyone's sexual well-being.

## The most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and how to prevent them

Sexually transmitted infections are infectious diseases caused by bacteria and viruses which are passed from person to person during unprotected sex. They cannot be passed on in everyday interaction, such as public spaces, toilets or the sauna. The condom is the only contraceptive which protects you against STIs if you use it right. Everyone should have the knowledge and skills needed to prevent STIs.



These infections include:

- Chlamydia
- HPV and condylomas
- Herpes
- Gonorrhoea
- Hepatitis B and C
- Syphilis
- HIV, and
- Pubic lice.

You cannot always see if a person has an STI, and the infections may not cause any symptoms. If you think you might have an STI, come and talk to us as soon as you suspect something and ask the nurse at the reception centre to refer you to tests.

It is important that STIs are treated, because an untreated infection is a health risk and continues to spread. It is important that your partner is treated at the same time, and that you let all of your sexual partners know about the infection. This way, a possible chain of infections can be stopped.

**Protect yourself and your partners against STIs!** A condom and a dental dam are the best ways of doing this. They can be bought in pharmacies, shops and kiosks in Finland.

### **Birth control methods**

To prevent unwanted pregnancies, birth control methods can be used. They include condoms, contraceptive pills, an IUD, and contraceptive rings and implants. Talk to your nurse to find a method that is suitable for you. If your birth control has failed, you can try to prevent an unwanted pregnancy by taking an emergency contraception pill. The pill works the best if you take it within 12 hours of having sex. However, the emergency contraception pill should not be used as a birth control method.

### **Termination of pregnancy (abortion)**

Abortions are legal and permitted in Finland before the 20th week of pregnancy. Abortion is not a birth control method. If necessary, talk to your nurse.

## **Circumcision**

### **Non-medical circumcision of boys**

Non-medical circumcision means an operation carried out for religious or cultural reasons in which some of the foreskin is removed from the boy's penis. There is no law against non-medical circumcision of boys in Finland. However, it is considered a violation of the child's bodily integrity and right of self-determination. The child's wishes must be listened to in this matter, and the operation must not cause the child pain. A circumcision may only be performed by a legalised doctor. Both parents must give their consent before a circumcision can be carried out. The parents must pay for the cost of this operation.

### **Female genital mutilation (FGM) – girls**

The female genital mutilation of girls is against the law. FGM means all procedures carried out for cultural or other reasons not related to treatment which involve partial or full removal of the woman's external sex organs, or damaging them in some other way.

FGM causes health harms, which include severe pain, bleeding, infections, pain when having sex, problems caused by scarring, problems when urinating, period pains and psychological problems, such as fear, stress, sleeplessness and nightmares. FGM may also cause problems during pregnancy and in connection with childbirth.

The female genital mutilation of girls is sexual violence. It is a punishable act under the Finnish criminal law. The authorities must protect girls and prevent FGM from being carried out. If a girl is at risk of FGM, the police and child welfare authorities must be told. Bringing a girl who lives in Finland abroad for FGM is prohibited. If a girl has had FGM earlier, the person responsible for it may also be brought to justice.

A girl or a woman who has had FGM can receive help, support, information and advice from the nurse at the reception centre, and if necessary, she will be referred to a doctor.

# Sexuality education

Sexuality education is part of every person's sexual rights. Its purpose is to support and protect human sexual development. In Finland, sexuality education is given to children and young people by society as part of health education at school. Sexuality is seen as a positive thing in Finland. Valuing and respecting other people is an important part of it.

## Sexuality

Sexuality is one characteristic of the individual and a key part of being a human in all stages of life. A person's body, behaviour, thoughts and feelings are part of sexuality. Everyone is sexually unique and diverse.

Relationships with other people and the way you behave in their company are also part of sexuality – for example, the way you behave with your partner or spouse, or with your friends. Sexual activity, or sex, is part of sexual behaviour. Different events and experiences in your life may change your sexuality.

## Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is a characteristic which determines who you feel attracted to and fall in love with. Around 90% of people are heterosexuals. This means that they are attracted to persons of the other sex. About 10% of people are homo-

sexuals (gay, lesbian, bisexual). This means that they feel attracted to members of their own sex, or both sexes.

The Finnish legislation allows sexual diversity to everyone, and homosexual relationships are also permitted. Everyone in Finland has the right to express their sexual orientation, or to keep it private.

## Children's sexual rights

Sexuality is part of the individual from birth and belongs to a child's normal development. A child needs guidance, support and information about questions related to sexuality. The parents have an important role in this. School-age children in Finland also receive information in health education classes at school.



## Puberty is a particularly important part of life. It causes many changes in a young person's mind and body.

During puberty, a child's growth into a man or a woman begins. The changes in boys include:

- growth of testicles and penis
- breaking of voice
- growth spurts
- acne (spots)
- ejaculations at night
- mood swings.

The changes in girls include:

- starting of periods
- growth of breasts
- growth spurts
- acne (spots)
- mood swings.



Puberty may take several years, and the rate of development is highly individual. It usually starts between the ages of 8 and 14 and takes 3 to 5 years. The physical changes happen first, and the growth of the mind takes longer.

During this stage, the child develops his or her own identity, and this should be respected. Everyone has the right to be who they are. In puberty, children start a significant period of growth and development towards becoming adults. **A child and a young person needs a lot of support, guidance and understanding from adults** to be able to grow and develop safely. Adults and parents must know enough about what happens in puberty to provide the support young people need.

## Information, guidance, advice and support

Everyone has the right to get more information as well as help and support when they face problems and difficult situations. It is important to be brave and ask for help in time! It is also important to advise, guide and help children and young people, so that they can receive the support they need and correct information about sexual health questions. You can talk to the nurses and the reception centre about these things! Do not hesitate, make an appointment to talk about it!



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