

Sex and the Law



What is the law on sex?

The law says it's legal for you to consent to have sex from the age of 16. In Northern Ireland, you have to be 17. **Gay sex** is legal if you're both 16 or over in England, Wales and Scotland. In Northern Ireland it's 17. And 18 in Jersey. The law also says you must have sex in private. As long as girls are over 16 and both agree to it, lesbian sex is legal.

Even if you are under 16 you can get free and confidential advice about sex, contraception and abortion at anytime. Visit your local doctor or young person's clinic to find out more.

Why is it illegal to have sex under 16?

The laws on sex are there to protect young people from abuse or from having sex before they are ready. Different countries do have different laws, but in this country it is considered that people are not ready to have sex until they are 16. You might think it's unfair, but laws are there to protect you and not to try and spoil your fun. Think carefully before you have sex for the first time and whether it is really right for you as many people do regret having sex too young. If you do decide you are ready for sex then always use a condom to protect against unplanned pregnancies and STIs. And remember you can get free and confidential advice about sex, contraception and abortion even if you are under 16.

How old do you have to be to get married?

You have to be 16 or older to get married in the UK. If you're under 18 (or under 20 in Jersey), you'll need your parents permission in writing. The exception is Scotland where you can marry once you're 16 without your parents' permission. If you want to know more about marriage laws, check out www.adviceguide.org.uk

Will doctors show my records/information to my parents?

No. Doctors and nurses have a strict rule which says they have to keep all

patient records and information completely private, even if you are under 16. Even if they think you are in serious danger they must talk to you first.

If you're still worried about the doctor telling someone, or even about being seen at the clinic or surgery, there are lots of other options. The 'Find help in your area' section shows you all the places where you can get free, confidential help and advice on anything to do with sex and relationships, contraception and abortion.

What's the law on abortion?

For an abortion to be legal, you must be less than 24 weeks pregnant and two doctors must give their consent.

If you're under 16 and two doctors agree to your request for abortion, you can consent without your parents' involvement providing the doctor feels you understand the advice and the implications of the operation. However they will strongly encourage you to talk to your parents or an adult you trust.