

Uncovering RSE and Exposing Harms

Anal Sex

Website: <https://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/anal-sex/>

Aims: “Brook provides free resources which can be used to supplement relationship and sex education (RSE) lessons.”¹

Age/Audience: Not specifically targeting any particular age group but under 16s are included: “You can also buy your condoms, even if you’re under 16...” Under 16s are signposted to pharmacies, petrol stations, slot machines, supermarkets and online sellers. Included as part of Brook’s free RSE supplementary resources.²

Production: Brook (charity).

Year of Publication: Undated but current.

Main Concerns & highlights:

- Anal sex includes “any type of sexual activity involving the anus”: insertion of a penis, sex toy or finger, and touching or licking.
- Drawing on the National Survey of Attitudes and Lifestyles, anal sex is presented as normal and healthy: “many” people are said to “enjoy” anal sex, with rates of those engaging in this activity having apparently increased.
- Rimming (oral contact with the anus) is suggested as another activity to perform.
- A warning is issued: “Be careful not to touch the vulva after touching someone’s anus without washing your hands first, because small traces of faeces can cause an infection in the vagina or in the urinary tract. You could use gloves to touch the anus as a precaution.”

Harmful Messages

The warning about the medical dangers of anal sexual activity is but one part of the health hazards involved. All anal sex, whether involving the active or receptive partner, or oral-anal contact, involves risk of medical harm.³ The receptive partner is 13 times more likely to get infected than the one active one.⁴ Brook’s health warning is marginal in content and omits the true scale of risks and harms.

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The only “safe” message about anal sex is for it to be avoided in all circumstances.

The way in which anal sex is discussed is clearly permissive and seeks to present it as normal. According to figures cited by Brook, there’s been an increase in this activity among heterosexuals. The apparent rise in practice of anal sex is presented as suggestive of its general safety and potential desirability. Brook urges readers to: “Explore our advice on anal sex covering everything from how to have it, staying safe and dealing with pressure.”⁵ Anal sex is said to be “pleasurable for many people, whatever their sexuality.”

References

¹ See this statement at the head of the page: <https://www.brook.org.uk/resources/> (Accessed 21 September 2020).

² See this statement at the head of the page: <https://www.brook.org.uk/resources/> (Accessed 21 September 2020).

³ According to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), anal sex “carries the highest risk of transmitting HIV if either partner is HIV-positive.” For male and female risks of contracting HIV, the CDC states: “The vast majority of men who get HIV get it through anal sex. However, anal sex is also one of the ways women can get HIV.” The receptive partner in anal sex is at the most risk of HIV: “Receptive anal sex is much riskier for getting HIV. The bottom partner is 13 times more likely to get infected than the top...Using condoms or medicines to protect against transmission can decrease this risk.” Apart from HIV, “a person can get other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like chlamydia and gonorrhoea from anal sex without condoms. Even if a condom is used, some STDs can still be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact (like syphilis or herpes). One can also get hepatitis A, B, and C; parasites like *Giardia* and intestinal amoebas; and bacteria like *Shigella*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *E. coli* from anal sex without a condom because they’re transmitted through feces.” <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/ analsex.html> (Accessed 21 September 2020).

The American Cancer Society states: “Receptive anal sex also increases the risk of anal cancer in both men and women. Because of this, men who have sex with men have a high risk of this cancer.” <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/anal-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html> (Accessed 21 September 2020).

The NHS advises that “Penetrative anal sex has a higher risk of spreading STIs than many other types of sexual activity.” It explains: “This is because the lining of the anus is thin and can be easily damaged, which makes it more vulnerable to infection.” The STIs listed by the NHS that can be passed on through anal sex are: chlamydia, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea, hepatitis B, HIV and syphilis. <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/sexual-health/does-anal-sex-have-any-health-risks/> (Accessed 21 September 2020)

Uncovering RSE and Exposing Harms

The NHS further states that: “Some infections caused by bacteria or viruses can be passed on through oral-anal sex, such as hepatitis or E. coli.” It is explained that: “It’s also possible to pass on an STI by inserting a finger into someone’s anus.” <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/sexual-health/does-anal-sex-have-any-health-risks/> (Accessed 21 September 2020)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/anal-sex/>