



Self

The Activity Book

RISK TO
REASONS

Activity Book 01 | Self



Presented by ViiV Healthcare

Self

The Activity Book

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*This content is intended for
people aged 18 years or older.*

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Welcome to
Self: The Activity Book —
we're glad you're here.

This may be your first time exploring this series, or you may be returning to it with a friend, a partner, your healthcare provider, or simply yourself. There is no "right" way to engage – these activity books are designed to be completed as a series, one book at a time, or activity by activity, depending on what works best for you.

This series is all about pleasure, and how pleasure and intimacy are real reasons for self-care and HIV prevention. It's about reframing how we look at health and wellness – putting pleasure at the top as a reason and a way to support your health.

Inside each activity book, you will find interactive exercises, games, and prompts to explore everything from discovering your own desires to navigating conversations with your healthcare provider. As you move through each one, please keep in mind that nothing is an instruction – it is simply an invitation to reflect, learn, and have fun.

Now let's get started!



WHO

ARE

YOU?

What three words
would you use to
describe yourself?

1

2

3

What
makes
you_____?

(insert full name here)

Describe yourself below

The question on the previous page might be one you've been asked directly, you've asked others, or you've overheard at some point in your life.

Maybe the answer to this question is easy for you, so you can answer confidently. Maybe you've entered a new chapter in your life and it's time to revisit this question. Maybe the thought of diving into this question scares you because it requires you to go deeper within yourself than you are comfortable with. Maybe you don't have an immediate answer, but you want to take the time to reflect on it. Whatever your perspective may be, there is no right or wrong way to answer or think about this question because understanding oneself is complicated.



You know, I think there are few things more powerful than allowing people to define themselves and allowing people to define themselves on their own terms. You know, a lot of times we clamor for people to be what we want them to be when we want them to be that person. And that's incredibly suffocating. And so I hope that Black women will always have the opportunity to be human and to contain multitudes and to challenge the dominant cultural narratives we have about Black womanhood, because there are a lot of very toxic, negative narratives about Black women. And a lot of times when people see us, all they see is that narrative. And they have very low expectations for us. And we don't have to internalize that nonsense. And we don't have to have low expectations for ourselves. We don't have to settle, we don't have to lower our standards.

- Roxane Gay, *Being Seen* Podcast (Season 3)

Download **Being Seen** here



Even if you grew up with the tools and guidance that taught you about connecting and loving yourself, everyone's journey to knowing themselves is different and can happen in different stages of life. It can take people years, decades, or a whole lifetime to get comfortable with the ins, outs, who's, what's, why's, and how's of their inner selves - and that is okay because the best things take time, right?

This activity book was developed to be a tool that you'll always have access to while embarking on your journey toward self discovery - at any life stage.

That journey is not always easy, so remember to be gentle with yourself and to remain open, honest, and compassionate along the way. The following activities are an opportunity for you to discover your body, your desires, and your pleasures - on your terms.

Now let's explore.

Instructions:

Before you begin, please answer the questions below. Once you finish the activity, revisit them to see what, if anything, has shifted.

How would you describe your relationship to your body?

What is something related to your body that you need to prioritize?

Do you feel connected to yourself?

DISCOVERING



YOUR

BODY



While on this journey of discovery, the first stop is going to be the body. Understanding your body and building a strong connection with it aren't topics that we were often taught in school, at home, or through pop culture.

Wild, right?

This activity offers you an opportunity to reflect on the history of your body. For Black women, the power, beauty, and potential of the body has been exploited or ignored for centuries, often forced into being seen as an object. Black women's bodies have been portrayed as animalistic, a fetish, and not even our own. Black bodies in general have inherited so much trauma and pain from generation after generation.



The burdens of Black womanhood, the burdens of Black motherhood, the necessity of carrying not just your own life in your hands, but the life of your children, and your family and your community, in your hands. And there are so many cutting contradictions that stem from that reality. On the one hand, it is an awe inspiring thing that Black women have managed to carry these burdens. On the other hand, they have carried these burdens at a high cost to themselves.

- Tiya Miles, *Being Seen* Podcast (Season 3)



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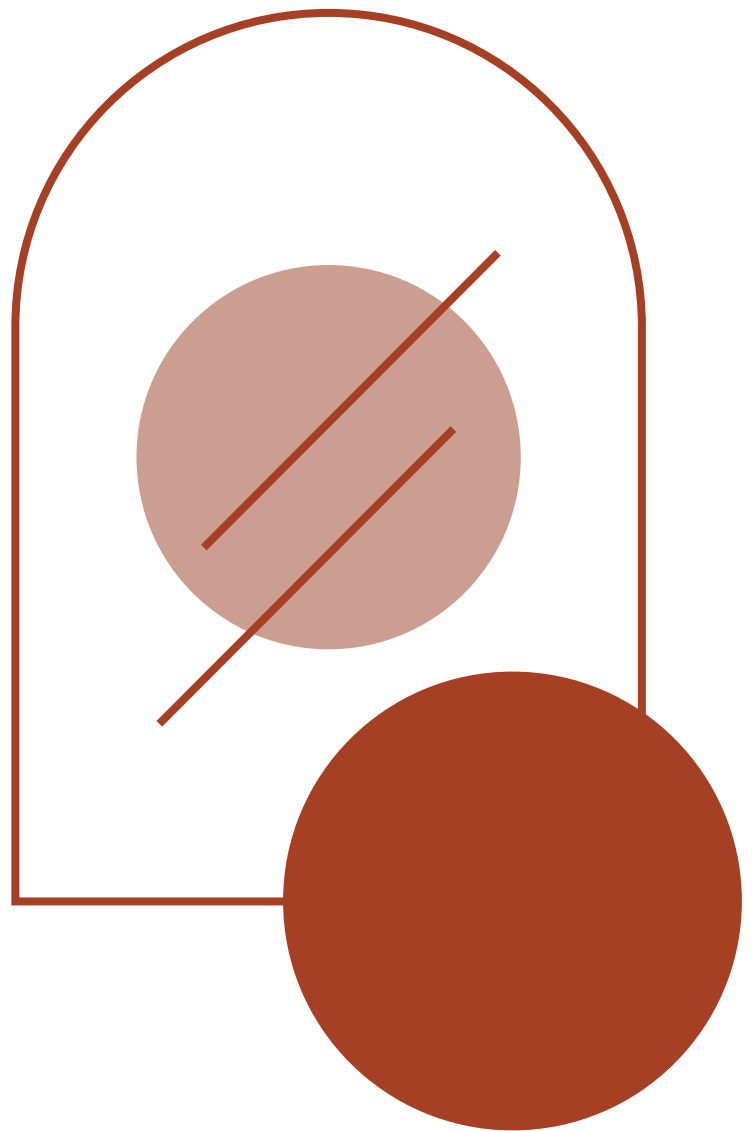
Activity Self Reflections

For many women, it can be important to take the time to heal and unlearn how you may have been taught to see your body, so things can become clearer. To understand what ownership of your body can look like through sexual health and wellness. To apply the tools of self-care to your daily routine and pass those on to future generations, so that trauma around self is no longer passed on. This moment is a powerful time to start having open, honest, and educational conversations around bodies, pleasure, and sex, so the dialogue is out there for our whole community to access.

Why strengthen the connection to the body?

Because there's power in knowing your body, loving your body, protecting your body, and speaking up for your body. Because learning to advocate for your body is a powerful way to participate in HIV prevention.

In this exercise, you will be invited to re-introduce yourself to your body through a mirror exercise, followed by a few questions.



Prompt:

For this activity, you'll need to find or create a space that makes you feel safe and comfortable being vulnerable. This space could look like a bathroom, a bedroom, or even a set-up outside. All you'll need is a mirror, a pen, this activity book, and if you want to do a little more work, a notebook to keep track of any thoughts (good and bad) that come to mind during the activity.

Our body changes constantly and so does our relationship to it. Because of that, this is an exercise you are welcome to use at any stage of your life. Whether your body is changing due to hormones, pregnancy, surgery, stress, birth control, exercise, etc., it's important to show love to yourself every day.

Now, turn your phone off or on "Do Not Disturb" because for the next ten minutes you are going to be checking in with yourself. If you want to explore angles from the front, back, sides, or sitting on the floor with your legs spread eagle, do it. This is a judgment-free space.

While you're exploring your body, pay attention to what you like, what you find fascinating, and something you never noticed before.

Here's how you can turn this activity into a new part of your daily routine:

On the next page you are going to write one sentence showing up for your body daily. You have control over how long you do it. The only rule is no repeats allowed. You are honoring the body's journey one day at a time.

Activity: Self Reflections

Sample:

Today I noticed that one leg might be longer than the other. This could explain why my back hurts, and I think in that way I'm like my mother.

Today I loved my little tummy. It reminds me of where I carried my kids.

Today I realized I never really look at my feet and that I don't think I have an arch.

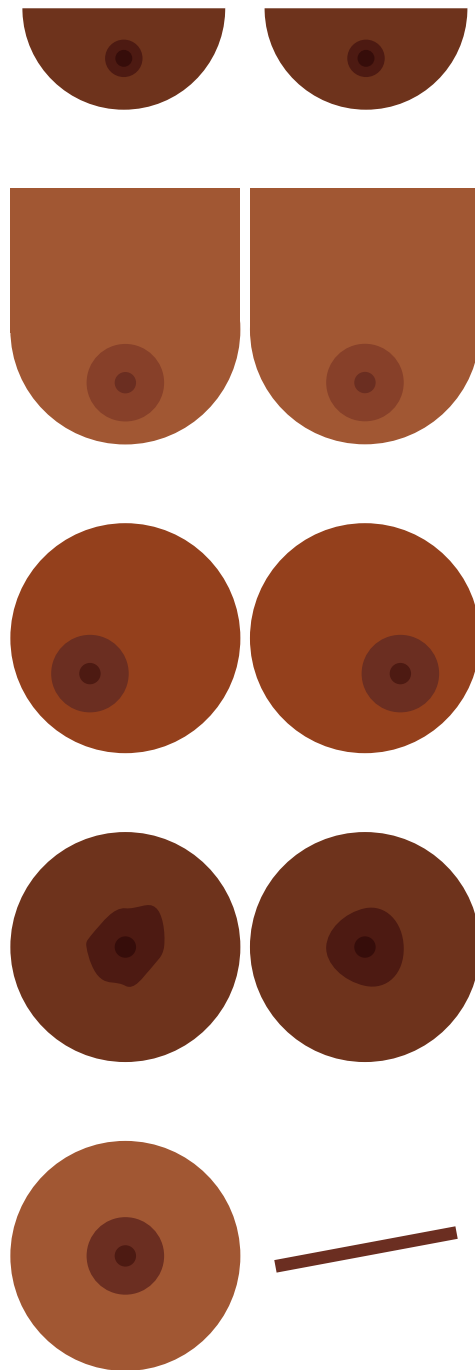
Today I loved the angle on my butt. High to the sky.

Today:

Activity: **Self Reflections**

What's Normal?

This section is a reminder that there is no "normal" and an invitation to explore how we all exist on a spectrum – we have different bodies, different needs and desires, and different reasons for HIV prevention. Understanding and embracing these differences will help us better evaluate and support our whole health.

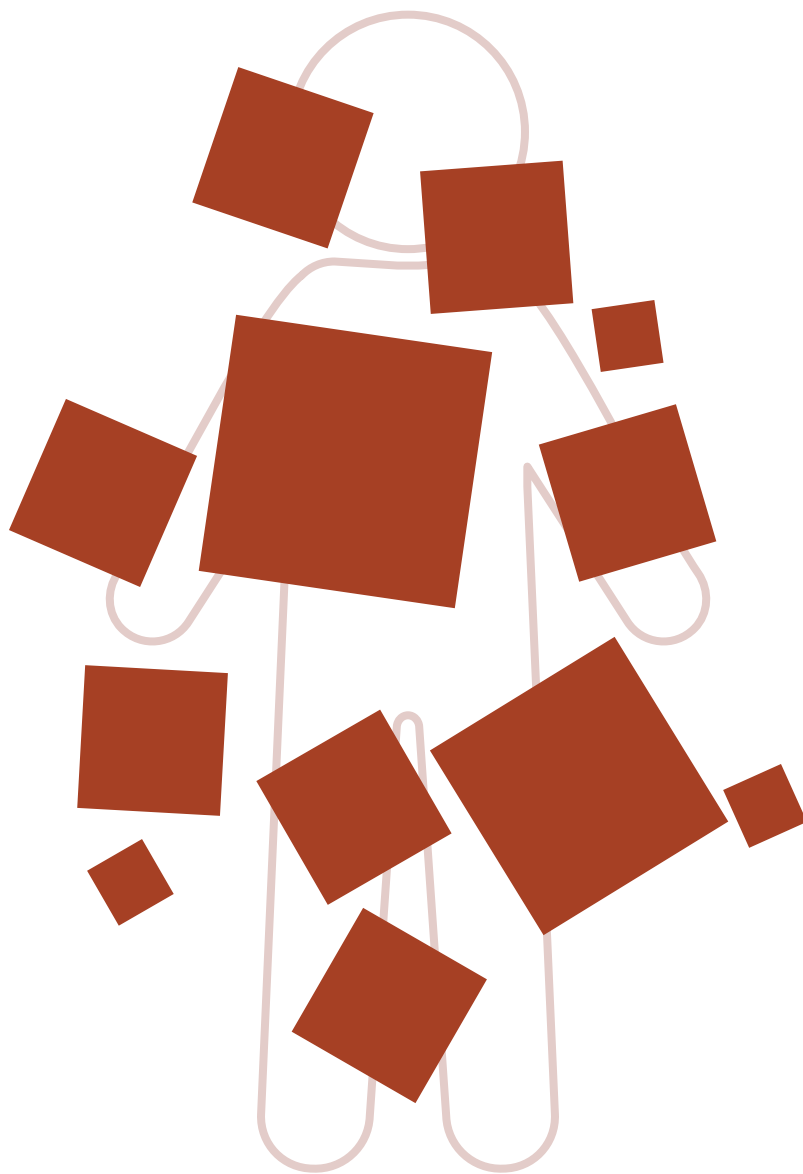


There is no such thing as the perfect body. Pop culture, the porn industry, and society have altered the idea of what a desirable body looks like for decades. The ideal body has shifted dramatically over the years.

As we evolve, our bodies change, and they are all unique. Maybe you have a scar from where your belly button was pierced – embrace that scar. Maybe your areolas are large, embrace it. As the breasts grow, it's normal for the areolas to get bigger. Maybe you are postpartum and your vulva doesn't look or feel like it used to, embrace it. Your body went through a natural process and is healing and changing.

All bodies go through changes, so it's important to keep an open mind through the process – releasing the negativity, shame, judgment in order to nurture yourself. Your body is sacred. Pay attention to it and monitor what it needs because what's normal for one body isn't normal for everybody.

Activity Draw Yourself



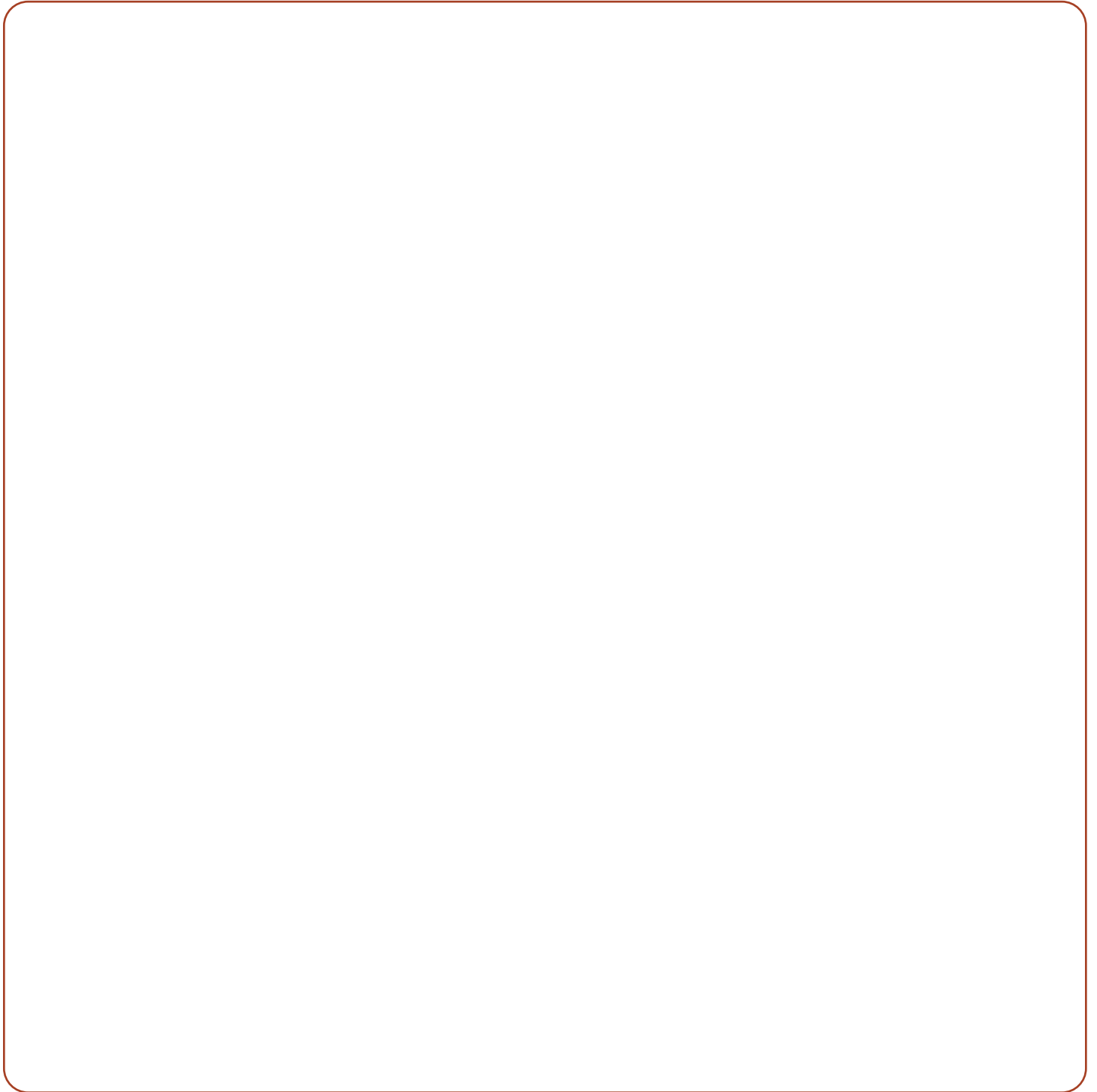
Prompt:

In this activity, you are going to draw yourself twice. The first time, draw yourself from memory. Sit somewhere for a few minutes and as accurately as you can try to sketch what your body looks like. Then find a mirror that allows you to see as much of yourself as possible. Or take a photo of yourself and use that. Sketch yourself again based on what you see in the mirror/picture.



Activity: Draw Yourself

From memory



Activity: Draw Yourself

Using a photo/mirror



Activity: Draw Yourself

Supporting Questions

1

What are the biggest differences between the two drawings?

2

Why do you think you see those parts of your body differently in your mind versus what is captured by a photo/mirror?

3

What parts were the hardest for you to draw?

4

What parts gave you the biggest joy to draw?

5

How do you think the way you see your body affects the way others see you?

Write a love letter to your body.

It might not be "perfect." It might be a work in progress. You might be evolving it into something that feels more authentic to you. But it's yours. It's carried you here and it's going to carry you further. It's helped you love. Taken you to new places. Held you together and carried ideas, burdens, mysteries, dreams.

EXAMPLE:

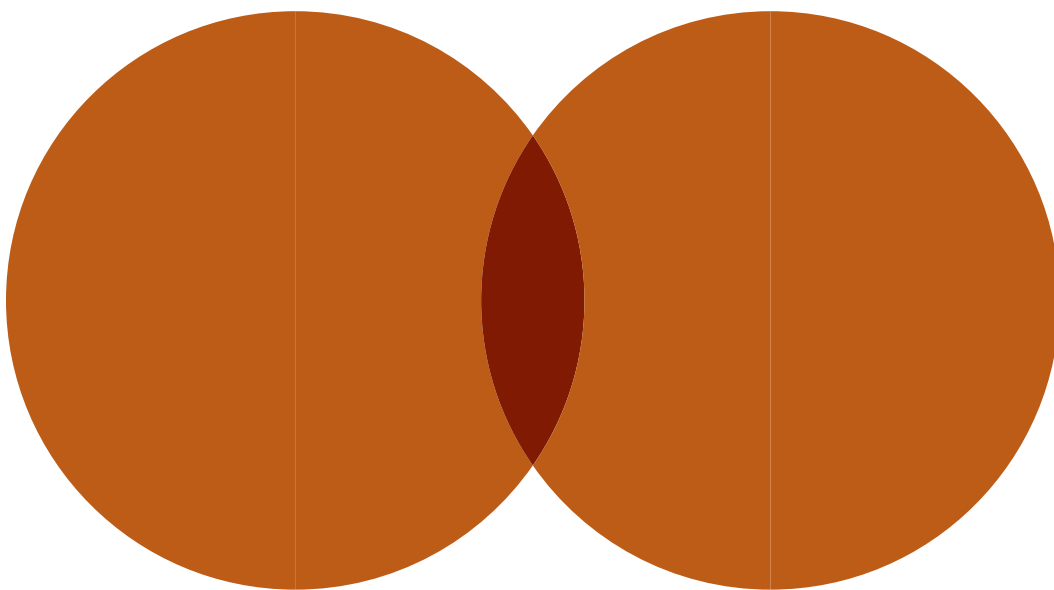
DEAR HEART, THANK YOU FOR EVERY TIME YOU'VE HEALED WHEN I THOUGHT IT WASN'T POSSIBLE. AND TO MY LEGS, YOU HAVE CARRIED ME TO SO MANY PLACES I THOUGHT I WOULD NEVER SEE. EVEN WHEN I WAS SO TIRED, MY ARMS, YOU HAVE HELD MORE THAN ANYONE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT POSSIBLE. MY LOVE, MY TUMMY, TOGETHER WE HAVE MADE TWO BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN.

Dear _____,
thank you for _____.
And to my _____
you have _____.
Even when I was _____
_____, my _____,
you have _____.
My love, my _____,
together _____.

Self Check-In

This exercise helps us remember key points at which we may need to check in with our bodies, and offers resources and techniques we can use to do that.

Checking in with our bodies allows us to better understand how we're feeling and what we need – a critical step towards learning to advocate for ourselves.



When was the last time you checked up on your body?

This could look like going to a doctor's appointment for a routine check-up, meditating every morning, giving yourself a big hug when you are feeling low, working out, or journaling. There are so many enjoyable and intimate ways to check-in with yourself.

Think about that last time you did a check-in to make sure your body was okay.

When was it?

If you can't remember the last time you did a check-in, that's okay, because you are about to give it a go.

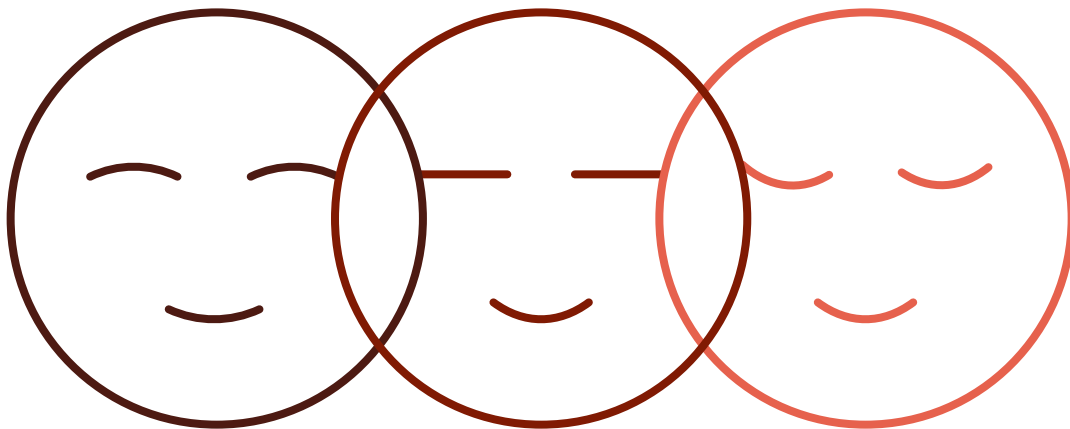
How did you check-in?

As our lives get busier with work, family, and the highs and lows in life, it's easy to look over making time to check-in with oneself mentally, physically, and emotionally. Unfortunately, this wasn't something most folks were taught to do in school, at home, or even through the media. We've always been taught that the time to pay attention to our bodies is when they feel bad, sick, ill, or hurt, when the narrative should be to wake up and check-in whether you feel good, bad, or a little in the middle.

How did your body feel?

The 10 Minute Check-In

- 1 Take five breaths to help reset your nervous system.
- 2 Breathe in for a count of four. Pause at the top of your inhale.
- 3 Breathe out for a count of four and pause at the bottom of the exhale.
- 4 Repeat five times.



Spend a few minutes (or however long it takes) to acknowledge anything about this day, or this moment, that is difficult or challenging and remember to be compassionate with yourself. Imagine the person who loves you the most – maybe yourself – and what they would say/do for you in this moment.

What can I notice about my body right now?

What feels good?

What feels different?

Does anything feel painful or "off"?

If so, how long have I been feeling this way?

How often do I feel this way?

Is this something that I need to note for my next provider visit?

Activity Provider Questions



Prompt:

For this activity, you are going to write a list of questions you have for a doctor or an expert focused around your body. Sometimes going to the doctor can be nerve wracking, maybe you are so nervous you forget the questions you had planned to ask. The goal of this exercise is to create a space for ALL your questions about your body to be safe. Think of it like the notes section of your phone. You could even put this in the notes section of your phone, so you can add on to it without having to take this activity book around with you everywhere.

Sample Questions:

Why is my vagina dry?

Why do I have trouble experiencing pleasure during sex?

Should I be thinking about HIV prevention?

Why aren't you testing me for HIV and other STIs? (Hint: You need to.)

Activity: Provider Questions

Write your questions below:

Quick Reminder:

The goal of all these exercises is to check-in with yourself and remember you hold the power to having your body's wants and needs met, even if it doesn't always feel like you do.

Advocating for those wants and needs can be a powerful form of HIV prevention, empowering you to prioritize pleasure while also protecting your health.



Activity

Managing the "What ifs"?

Sometimes when there is something going on with our bodies, we decide we don't want to know. That is the most normal feeling in the world. The unknown is scary and we've been taught to fear so many things about our bodies, or things that could happen to our bodies. The "what ifs" can paralyze us and prevent us from doing things to protect ourselves, keep ourselves healthy, and access all the great tools we have to manage our health.

There is so much stigma that exists around infections that are connected to sexual activity. When we get a cold it doesn't have any implications for "who we are as people," however when we get very common viruses or infections that are related to our vaginas, anuses, or penises, then suddenly it triggers assumptions about our value systems, who we love, who will love us, and our value as people.



Now let's tackle that "what if"

If I happen to test positive for a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV, and anyone (including myself) tries to tell me that I am somehow "less" because of it, I will tell myself:

EXAMPLE:

Your assumptions about me are all you. They have nothing to do with me and I refuse to allow you to affect how I see myself and how the people who actually matter see me.

Instructions:

Remember we said we would be returning to this point to see what, if anything, has shifted. Please complete the below without looking at the answers you previously provided.

How would you describe your relationship to your body?

What is something related to your body that you need to prioritize?

How connected do you feel to yourself?



DISCOVERING



YOUR

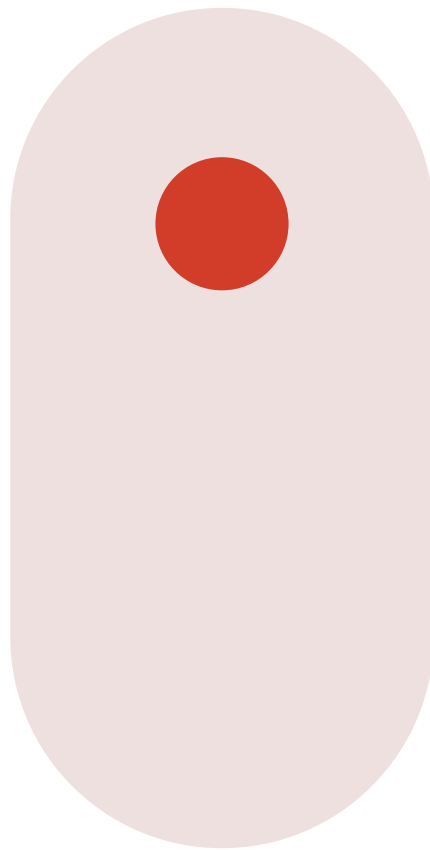
DESIRES



What is Desire?

Desire is a strong feeling of wanting or wishing for something to happen. Think of it like a craving. What have you wanted or wished so badly for lately? Maybe it's a vacation, a summer fling that gives 2000s romantic comedy vibes, a chocolate ice cream cone dipped in sprinkles, or maybe it's something more intimate like learning how to tie someone up or getting more comfortable with butt play.

We have different desires, and desire can be a reason for HIV prevention. Many women engage in prevention because they want to feel safe exploring their desires, increasing pleasure, and deepening intimacy – all while protecting their health.



Name Your Desire

This is a tool to help identify what you desire, specifically define it, and think about the ways in which it can be expressed.

The language of our desires is endless. There are too many to name – combinations, positions, dynamics, tools, toys, techniques – and the list goes on. But we can't have what we can't name. We need a language, both spoken and physical, to express what we want and what feels right for us.

The first part of naming our desires is discovering them. The second part is finding the right language and context within which we can express them.



Activity Discovering Desire

Looking at the list of potential activities on the next page, use the key code to mark how interested you are in each activity. If there is something you'd like to try that is not on this list, feel free to add it in at the bottom.



Activity: Discovering Desire



No.



I tried this and hated it.



I have no interest in trying this.



I have no clue what this means.



This is a maybe.



Embarrassed to talk about it but interested.



I've tried this and would do it again.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES	INTERESTED?
Nipple Play	
Anal Sex	
Punishment	
Bondage	
Edging	

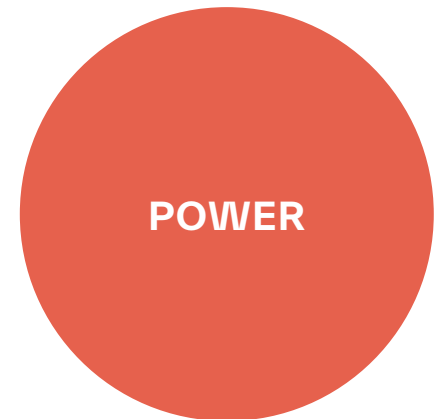


Houses of Desire

There are lots of places to explore when it comes to desire and pleasure. Within each area are a lot of different methods, techniques, and tools. And why shouldn't we explore trying new things and figuring out what we like? Sex is something that many of us will spend a significant amount of time doing throughout our lives. We deserve for it to be interesting, exciting, fulfilling, or whatever it is that we want/need it to be.

Where there is sex, there is often stigma. There are stories that others tell us, or that we tell ourselves, about what kind of sex is "normal" and what that "other kind of sex" says about who we are as people. That's all made up. How we experience pleasure does not define our value as people any more than someone who enjoys an afternoon hike versus someone who would prefer a quick swim.

Pleasure is powerful, pleasure is possible, and pleasure is one of many reasons for HIV prevention.

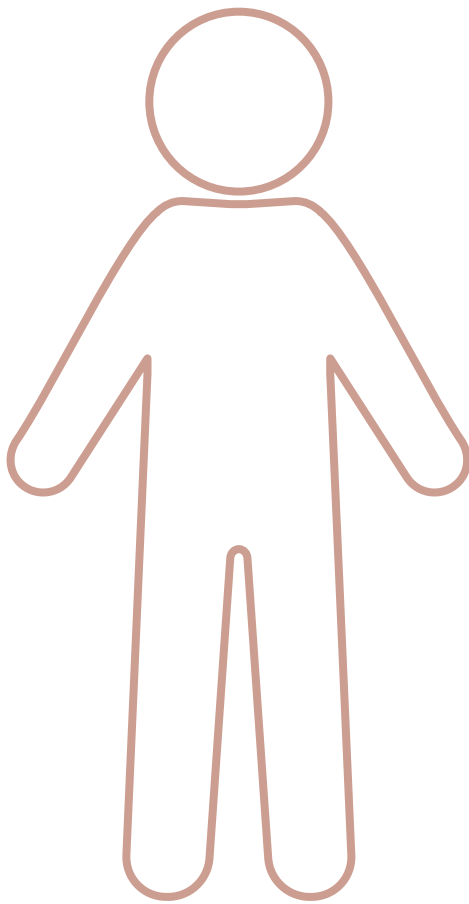


In Your **SKIN**

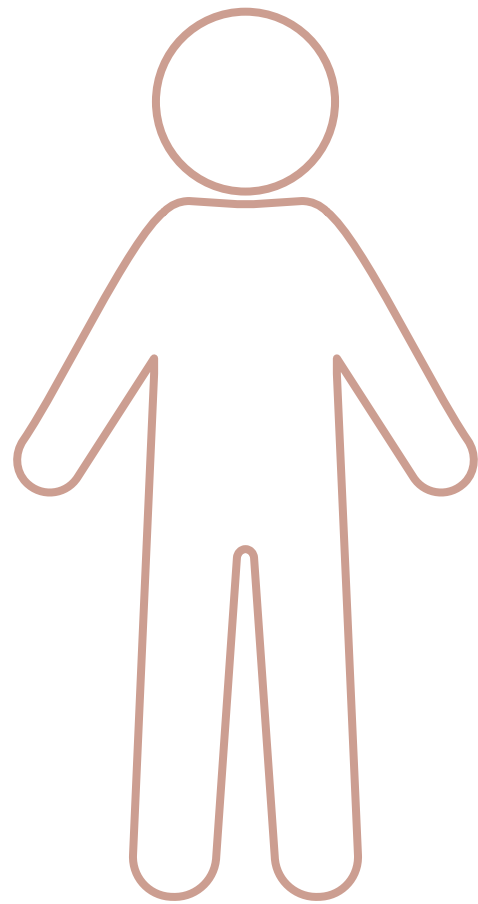
Our skin is the largest and one of the most amazing organs in/on our body. It also houses the vast majority of our pleasure receptors. The ways in which we can stimulate our skin are endless – particularly in the context of sex and pleasure.

Circle the places where you know you like to be touched. Start the places where you want to be touched more and cross the places where you want to be touched less.

*You can do this for yourself, or you can do it with an intimate partner



Front



Back

In Your **SKIN** (cont.)

What kind of sensations do you like on your skin?

Circle all that apply

Wet

Smooth

Dripping

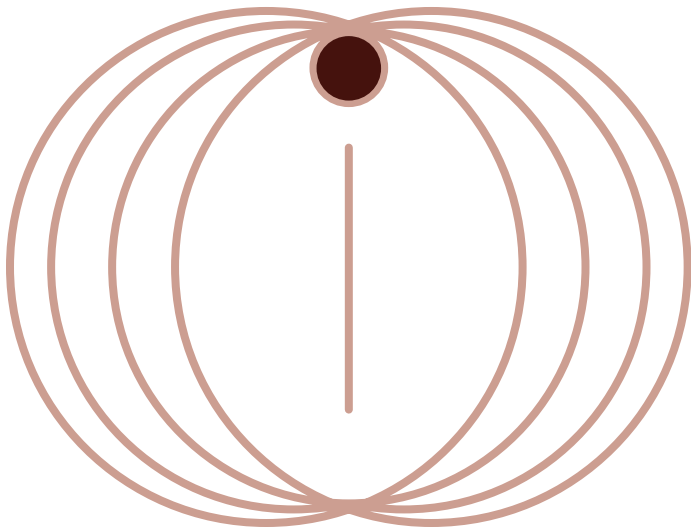
Pressure

Pain

Hot

Cold

What are some
additional sensations
that you like to experience?



Playing With **POWER**

We often talk about power and sex in the context of consent - and that type of power is absolutely critical. Especially when you are trying new things, consent needs to be constant, always present and consistently discussed.

But when it comes to sex and power, there are other kinds of power to consider that can be connected to how we experience pleasure.

Power Plays

Edging: This is basically taking you to right before the orgasm wave breaks and then backing off - repeatedly. For some people this increases the intensity of the orgasm, for others the control they can exert on their partner's body or have exerted on them feels good. And there are many other reasons that it can be enjoyable, maybe you will discover your own.

Bondage/Restraint: For some people, feeling restrained is a powerful way for them to intentionally give up control to someone they trust. It's cathartic, it's a turn on, it's many things. And there are many different ways to be restrained or to restrain - ranging from simple scarves to the intricate knot tying of shibari.

There are many other interesting and fun ways to negotiate and play with power in sex and intimacy. But to access them so that you have both pleasure and protection, you have to be with someone you trust, you have to be able to articulate your own desires, and you have to know yourself. All that can be a lot of work - but the reward is the pleasure and all the things you can experience/try/discover that exist on the other side.

Pop Quiz:

Do you like to be worshipped during sex? _____

Do you like to feel overpowered? _____

Do I have someone I trust to try these things with? _____







Do I feel confident in my ability to articulate what I want? _____

Do I know what to do / say if something is happening that I don't want? _____

PENETRATION (or not)

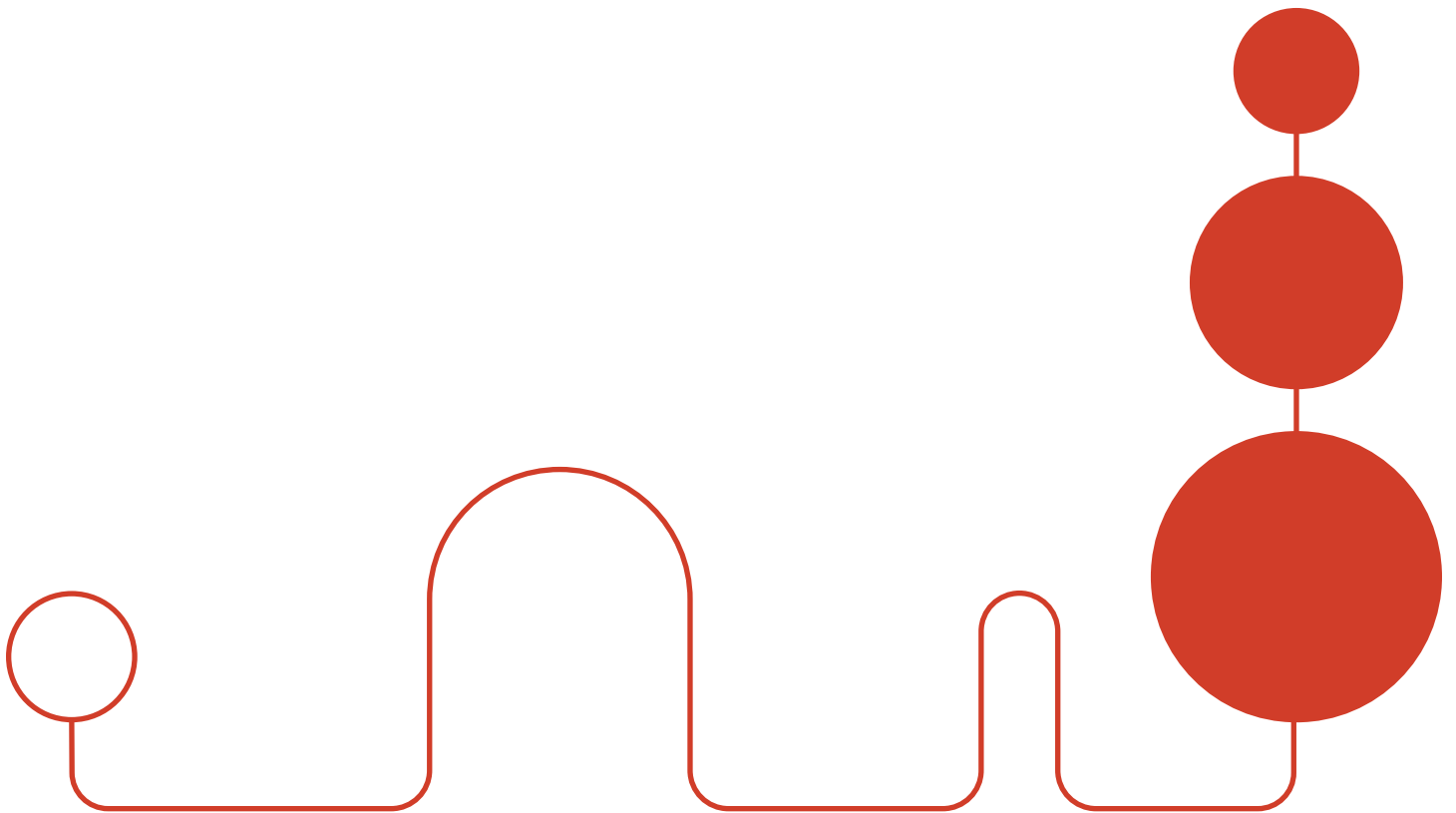
If we want others to be okay with us liking expansive kinds of penetration, we need to accept it for them too.

What penetration can look like:

ACTIVITY	INTERESTED?	THOUGHTS?
 <p>A woman having sex with a man who is using a dildo with her</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </p> <p>Nope. Not sure. Yes!</p>	<p>Replace?</p>
 <p>A woman having sex with a man when she is penetrating him</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </p> <p>Nope. Not sure. Yes!</p>	<p>Replace?</p>
 <p>A man who enjoys having his mouth filled during sex</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </p> <p>Nope. Not sure. Yes!</p>	<p>Replace?</p>
 <p>A woman who enjoys having her mouth filled during sex</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </p> <p>Nope. Not sure. Yes!</p>	<p>Replace?</p>
 <p>A man who enjoys anal penetration while having vaginal sex</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </p> <p>Nope. Not sure. Yes!</p>	<p>Replace?</p>
 <p>A woman who enjoys anal penetration while having vaginal sex</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> </p> <p>Nope. Not sure. Yes!</p>	<p>Replace?</p>

There are so many interesting combinations and there is no value associated with any of them outside of the ways we let others stigmatize them.

It's simply what we like, what our bodies react to.



SELF



PLEASURE

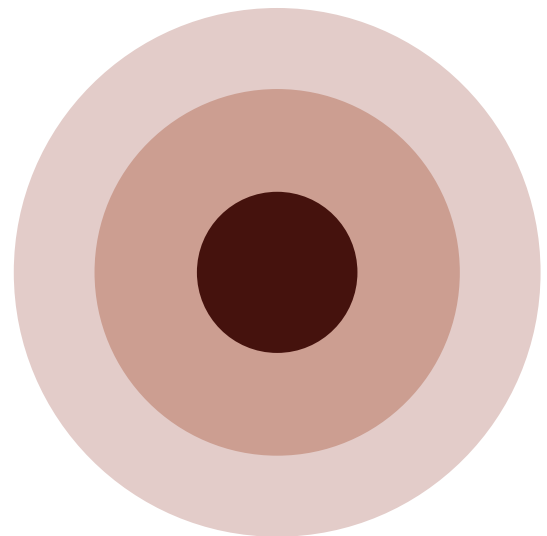


Now that you've unlocked your desires, it's time to feel the joy that comes from embarking on that deep journey with yourself, self-pleasure.

The first thing you should know is that pleasure does not have to be performative or sex-driven. Pleasure is a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment. You can feel pleasure through eating a grilled cheese, making your bed everyday, drinking water or green juice, meditating, participating in HIV prevention and more. You can experience it through sound, through penetrative and non-penetrative sex, and alone using your hand.

The point is that pleasure is a feeling that should be experienced by everyone as consistently as possible. In this section, you will be invited to unlock the power of pleasure, explore your own pleasure rituals, and learn how to prioritize pleasure in your daily life.

The following activities are all about combining the three P's: power, play, and pleasure.



Activity: A Starting Point

Let's discuss how you masturbate! The following questions are for masturbators of all levels to reflect on and come back to. Have you ever sat down to think about your masturbation process? Do you usually think to yourself "wow, that was great," and then immediately move on to the next thing on your to-do list? Well, right now, you are thinking long and hard about your relationship with masturbation, and how it connects to your sexual health.

How often do you masturbate?

What time of day? Where?

Do you call it masturbation or something else?

When masturbating do you use porn or audio erotica? If so, what's the source?

Do you create your own visual narratives? If so, what's your go-to scenario?

Do you ever masturbate with a partner? How does that feel? Does it turn you on watching your partner masturbate?

Have you ever masturbated over the phone? i.e. phone sex, sexting, video call. How did that feel?

Do you own any sex toys?
If so, what do you have?

Do you use lube? Always, or just
sometimes? What brand?

Have you ever masturbated to a
fantasy or image that made you feel
uncomfortable? If so, what was it?

Does anal stimulation or penetration play
a role in your masturbation? Is vaginal
penetration part of your masturbation?

Do you masturbate only when you are
single, or do you also masturbate when
in a relationship?

What do the people look like in your
masturbation fantasy?

Think back on the three words you used to describe yourself at the beginning of this activity book. What has changed when it comes to your sense of self, your relationship to and with your body, your understanding of desire and the power it holds?

This is just the beginning.



**And that's a wrap! Take a deep breath
and thank yourself for being here.**

It's important to remember that we all have different reasons for engaging in HIV prevention. One reason could be to increase pleasure and deepen intimacy while feeling more protected. This is just one tool to help you explore the landscape of intimacy/sex, desire, and pleasure – and to develop the language to talk to your partners and healthcare providers.

**HIV prevention starts here.
This is just the beginning.**

HIV prevention is pleasure.

HIV prevention is intimacy.

HIV prevention is desire.

HIV prevention is protection.

HIV prevention is _____.



This collection of activities and exercises exist as part of a series.

Scan the code to explore the full collection, download digital copies, access HIV prevention information and connect to resources.

Explore the collection here.



#RISKTOREASONS

We want to hear from you!
Share your thoughts on this activity book by scanning the code below and taking 2 minutes to fill out our short reader survey.



Take the survey.



1

Self

The Activity Book

RISK TO
REASONS

Activity Book 01 | Self



Presented by ViiV Healthcare