

## Who should I tell?

Most sex workers are concerned from time to time about whether or not they should disclose to others that they are working in the sex industry. This is a very personal decision and opinions vary greatly among individuals. Some sex workers are very open about their work, while others will only disclose this information to a few select and trusted people.

Whether or not you disclose your work depends on the situation and your personal feelings. For example, it is one thing to disclose to a doctor that you have worked in the sex industry, and quite another to tell your partner. This fact sheet explores different situations such as telling family and friends, government departments, health workers and banks about your profession and outlines some possible options.

### YOUR FAMILY

Most people have concerns about whether or not they should tell their family about their work. To help you decide you may like to consider the following:

- How will telling this person affect my relationship with them?
- How do I think they will respond?
- Am I prepared for this?
- Is this someone I can trust not to use the information against me?
- How important is it to me that this person knows the truth?
- Why?

As each relationship is different, each situation may need to be handled differently.

### Existing partners

Perhaps the most difficult decision to make is whether or not to tell your partner you are working in the industry, or are thinking about working in the industry. You may want your partner to know but be afraid about how they will react.

Sometimes it helps to test the water a little by finding out how your partner feels about sex work and how he/she generally feels about sex in terms of personal relationships. It can also really help to discuss your fears with someone you trust.

Keep in mind that everyone responds to situations differently. If you decide to tell your partner about work, they may be very supportive or it may take them some time to get used to the idea, and even then there may be times when it may place pressure on your relationship. Try and keep communication open and talk about concerns as they arise. You may also want to consider seeing a relationship counsellor together if you continue to have problems. Sometimes you need to make a choice – work or the relationship.

If you decide not to tell your partner, it's important to keep in mind that if a condom breaks or you pick up an infection at work, you may be placing your partner at risk if you're not practicing safe sex. In addition, if your partner finds out you're working and you haven't told them, they may feel betrayed and it may take some time for trust to return to the relationship. Try and resolve things with your partner in an understanding and honest manner, and if things become difficult, you may both benefit by seeking some objective professional advice.

### Starting a new relationship

If you are starting a new relationship, you may like to wait and see how things develop before exposing your profession. If you find yourself in a moral dilemma, consider "taking a break" from work while you wait and see where the relationship is heading.

# Fact sheet for sex workers

## Children

Most workers do not discuss their work with young children. However, older children may become suspicious and start asking questions. Deciding whether or not to tell older children depends a great deal on your relationship with your child, their maturity and how you feel about working. If you are uncertain what to do, seek professional advice from a counsellor who is experienced with working with children.

## Other family members

Whether or not to discuss work with other family members varies with each individual. Some workers may tell a sister or their Mum, but not feel comfortable sharing this information with other family members. Be guided by what feels right for you. Remember it's your life and no one has the right to dictate how you lead it.

## YOUR FRIENDS

A word of caution – only tell friends you know you can trust, and if in doubt – don't! Time and again, workers have confided in friends only to have this information passed on as "gossip". This can be absolutely devastating. Many workers refrain from telling their non-working friends that they're in the industry, and instead share their experiences with other workers. Again, it depends on your relationships and the degree of trust you have in your friends.

## GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Many workers are concerned about the ramifications of disclosing their work to government departments such as Centrelink and the Australian Tax Office.

Workers are often concerned about telling Centrelink where they work when they wish to adjust social security payments.

Workers can also be concerned about declaring their work to the Australian Tax Office, particularly when applying for an ABN as details may be made publicly available.

If you are concerned about this, you can request a suppression of your work details from the public record.

## DOCTORS AND HEALTH WORKERS

You are under no obligation to disclose your work to health workers, but keep in mind that medical information remains confidential unless otherwise ordered by the courts. Whether or not you tell your doctor may depend on whether or not your health issue relates to working – sometimes not telling may make it harder for you to receive good care, especially if you want a sexual health check. Alternatively, you may wish to visit a sexual health clinic where clinicians are familiar with the specific needs of sex workers.

## BANKS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Banks and financial institutions should only be interested in the stability of your income, your savings history and credit status. The type of work you do should not be a consideration, and if a financial institution refuses a loan or service on the grounds that you work in the sex industry, then they may be liable for action under the *Anti-Discrimination Act*.