

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

The HPV vaccine Gardasil® is available at Campus Health. Call 621-9202.

Q. Does “Friends with Benefits” work?

A. First, a definition is in order. Friends With Benefits (FWB) means different things to different people. To most UA students, a FWB is someone whom you know (and perhaps trust) to have sexual relations with, without any strings attached. There is no commitment and no title like “girlfriend” or “boyfriend” (other than the possible term “f---buddy” or “sex buddy”). The FWB may be someone who is more of an acquaintance than someone in your circle of friends. And, it may be somewhat of a hush-hush or secret relationship that your closest friends don't even know about.

The advantages of having an FWB are primarily sexual. You have someone to conveniently “hook up” with, but without all the time, obligation, commitment, energy, and stress that may accompany a relationship. When you have an FWB, you are free to experiment or mess around and enjoy the pleasure without most of the pain; unless one of you develops feelings and emotions – which often happens.

Feelings seem to be the most likely disadvantage that may result. One partner may want a more emotionally intimate relationship. Another partner may develop a liking, even love, for their sex buddy. If the feelings aren't reciprocated, one partner can end up feeling used. Because FWBs are free to sleep with other people, it's not uncommon for feelings of jealousy to arise.

The disadvantages also include greater exposure to sexual risks. Some people feel safer with a FWB because they think they “know” them better than a stranger they just met at a party. Having a sex buddy doesn't guarantee safer sex. If your FWB has several other sex buddies (the ones they keep secret from you in order to spare all those potential feelings), you can expect more exposure to sexually transmitted infections such as herpes, chlamydia, genital warts, and more.

Having sex with an FWB only works well as long as both partners play by the same accepted ground rules: the “relationship” is about sex and convenience without any commitment or emotional intimacy. For many, however, these terms may feel like an unacceptable substitute for companionship. No matter what kind of relationship you are in, the best way to avoid hurt feelings and complicated emotions is to be clear about your expectations from the start.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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