

Dear Patricia

Your brother-in-law is lying about tradition. In Shona and Ndebele culture, *chiramu* or *sibale* is a playful teasing friendship between a girl and her brother-in-law. It does NOT mean that she should sleep in the same room as him or have sex with him; this is not accepted in our cultures. You definitely have the right to say 'no' when adults try to harm you.

Ask your aunt, a family friend or another sympathetic adult for help – it will be easier to deal with this situation with support. Try to talk to your sister too.

It is illegal in Zimbabwe for anyone to have sex with a girl or boy under the age of 16. Any adult who does this can go to prison. It is illegal to force anyone of any age to have sex. This is rape and should be reported to the police. The chances of getting pregnant or being infected with an STI (including HIV) make it even worse.

Our culture is wonderful and keeps us together as families and communities. People should never use 'our culture' as an excuse to treat people – especially young people – badly.

Auntie Stella

ACTION POINTS

- Many traditional cultural practices in southern Africa relate to young people and sex, such as sexual initiations, virginity testing, wife inheritance and others. Make your own list. Then discuss what you like and dislike about these traditions. For example, which of them prevent and which encourage the spread of HIV?
- Does your traditional culture treat girls and boys equally? If not, how do you feel about this? What can you do about it?
- How can you work with traditional leaders and elders to change practices that are harmful to young people today? Who else can help you?
- Every community is influenced not only by our traditions, but also by new ideas that come from outside. Draw a picture (or make a list) to show what you like best about traditional AND non-traditional modern culture. Can you take the best from both cultures to guide you through your life?