

SEX EDUCATION

Americans, Britons and Canadians Disagree on Sex Education

Americans focus more on family, Britons think courses were not useful, and Canadians want schools to begin teaching sex education at an early age.

[NEW YORK - Nov. 30, 2011] - People in the United States, Britain and Canada hold differing views on the topics that should be addressed in sex education courses at school, a new Angus Reid Public Opinion poll has found.

In the online survey of representative national samples, a majority of respondents in the three countries believe the parents or guardians should be primarily responsible for teaching sex education to children and teens. Two thirds of Canadians (69%) and Britons (67%) agree with this notion, as well as four-in-five Americans (81%).

When to Start Teaching Sex Education

Canada is definitely different from the United States and Britain on the question of when to start sex education in school. While only 13 per cent of Americans and 17 per cent of Britons would begin these courses at age 9 or earlier, one-in-four Canadians (24%) believe this is the ideal age to begin. About a third of respondents in the three countries believe the best time to start teaching sex education at school is between the ages of 12 and 13.

Almost one-in-ten Americans (9%) believe that schools should not teach sex education to students—a view shared by only three per cent of Canadians and two per cent of Britons.

KEY FINDINGS

- **81% of Americans, 69% of Canadians and 67% of Britons think parents or guardians should be primarily responsible for teaching sex education to children and teens**
- **54% of Canadians, 52% of Americans and 43% of Britons say they found their sex education courses as school useful to learn more about sex when they were teenagers**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

From November 7 to November 21, 2011 Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,005 Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panellists, 1,004 American adults who are Springboard America panellists, and 2,004 British adults who are Springboard UK panellists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1% for Canada and the United States, and 2.2 per cent for Great Britain. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure samples representative of the entire adult population of Canada, the US and Great Britain. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

The Curriculum

Practically nine-in-ten respondents in the three countries believe topics such as pregnancy and birth control, venereal diseases, sexual abuse, and bullying should be “definitely” or “probably” discussed in a sex education course. However, there are some stark contrasts in other topics:

- Abstinence: Canadians and Americans (both at 89%) are more likely to favour this topic than Britons (81%).
- Intercourse: Canadians (91%) and Britons (89%) more likely to favour this topic than Americans (77%).
- Non-penetrative sex: Canadians (82%) are more likely to favour this topic than Britons (74%) or Americans (66%).
- Abortion: Canadians (84%) and Britons (78%) are more likely to favour this topic than Americans (68%).
- Homosexuality: Canadians (86%) more likely to favour this topic than Britons (76%) and Americans (63%).
- Sexual Pleasure: While a majority of Canadians (69%) and Britons (62%) would like to see this topic discussed, less than half of Americans (46%) concur.

What We Learned

Respondents were asked to look back to the time when they were teenagers, and describe how useful several sources were in enabling them to learn more about sex. By far, the largest proportion of respondents in the three countries (74% in Canada, 67% in Britain and 63% in the United States) said that conversations with friends were “very useful” or “moderately useful.” The next reputable source was the media (television, books, movies, magazines), mentioned by three-in-five Britons (65%) and Canadians (62%) and more than half of Americans (54%) as useful.

There are some striking differences in the final two sources. While half of Canadians (54%) and Americans (52%) found their sex education courses at school to be useful, only 43 per cent of Britons share the same view. And while more than half of Americans (57%) say conversations with family were useful, only 49 per cent of Canadians and 35 per cent of Britons had the same experience.

The gender analysis provides an additional layer of study, with American men more likely to find conversations with family useful (59%, compared to 48% for Canadian men and 33% for British men), and only 50 per cent of American women finding the media useful (compared to 63% of Canadian women and 64% of British women).

Analysis

By a large margin, Americans believe the main source of information for children and teens should be the family. The United States also holds the largest proportion of respondents who disagree with sex education at school. Practically three-in-five Americans say that the conversations they had with family

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were useful to learn about sex in their teenage years, far higher than in the other two countries. However, Americans were clearly restrained about discussing the topic of sexual pleasure in the classroom.

Britons appear largely disappointed with their sex education courses, with less than half believing that they were actually useful when they were teenagers. Britain also sees a particularly low level of discussions about sex with family, and the highest proportion of respondents who found the media useful to learn more about sex.

Canadians are unquestionably more open about discussing controversial topics in the classroom—such as pleasure and homosexuality—than Americans and Britons. In addition, Canadians are also more likely to call for sex education courses to begin at an earlier age.

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About Angus Reid Public Opinion

[Angus Reid Public Opinion](#) is a public affairs practice headed by Dr. Angus Reid: an industry visionary who has spent more than four decades asking questions to figure out what people feel, how they think and who they will vote for. A team of talented and experienced practitioners with a unique and profound understanding of global issues conduct high quality research throughout the world on a daily basis for corporations, governments, academic researchers, and non-profit organizations.

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- 30 -




**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

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Sex Education

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about sex education. All things considered, who do you think should be primarily responsible for teaching sex education to children and teens in your country?

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	GREAT BRITAIN 
The parents or guardians	69%	81%	67%
The schools	24%	12%	23%
Not sure	7%	6%	10%

Sex Education

In your view, what is the ideal age for schools to begin teaching sex education to students?

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	GREAT BRITAIN 
Age 7 or younger	8%	4%	5%
Ages 8-9	16%	9%	12%
Ages 10-11	33%	27%	33%
Age 12-13	31%	34%	33%
Age 14-15	6%	9%	9%
Age 16-17	1%	2%	1%
Age 18 or older	0%	1%	1%
Never—schools should not teach sex education to students	3%	9%	2%
Not sure	2%	4%	4%




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Thinking about the topics that a sex education course in school may discuss, do you think each of the following topics should be discussed or not discussed in a sex education course? –

“Definitely should be discussed” and “Probably should be discussed” listed

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	GREAT BRITAIN 
Intercourse	91%	77%	89%
Non-penetrative sex	82%	66%	74%
Sexual abuse	97%	88%	87%
Abortion	84%	68%	78%
Sexual pleasure	69%	46%	62%
Abstinence	89%	89%	81%
Venereal diseases	97%	91%	92%
Pregnancy and birth control	95%	88%	94%
Homosexuality	86%	63%	76%
Bullying	95%	89%	92%




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Looking back to the time when you were a teenager, how useful were each of the following in enabling you to learn more about sex? –

“Very useful” and “Moderately useful” listed

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	GREAT BRITAIN 
Conversations with friends	74%	63%	67%
Television/books/movies/magazines	62%	54%	65%
Sex education courses at school	54%	52%	43%
Conversations with my parents/guardians/family	49%	57%	35%




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Male Respondents – Looking back to the time when you were a teenager, how useful were each of the following in enabling you to learn more about sex? –

“Very useful” and “Moderately useful” listed

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	GREAT BRITAIN 
Conversations with my parents/guardians/family	48%	59%	33%
Sex education courses at school	52%	53%	39%
Conversations with friends	72%	66%	68%
Television/books/movies/magazines	62%	58%	67%




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Sex Education

Female Respondents – Looking back to the time when you were a teenager, how useful were each of the following in enabling you to learn more about sex? –

“Very useful” and “Moderately useful” listed

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	GREAT BRITAIN 
Conversations with my parents/guardians/family	51%	55%	36%
Sex education courses at school	57%	51%	45%
Conversations with friends	76%	60%	66%
Television/books/movies/magazines	63%	50%	64%

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