

Fundamentals of Teaching Sexuality

CORE CONCEPT

Sexuality is a central, complex, and lifelong aspect of being human.

RATIONALE

How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?

- When exploring the definition of sexuality with students, sex educators should bring a holistic, inclusive, sex-positive lens.
- It is important for educators to recognize that many students have had negative, even traumatic experiences related to sexuality. Therefore, sex education must incorporate trauma informed practices.
- People deserve access to complete, accurate and skillfully delivered information about all aspects of sexuality.
- One useful model that helps to conceptualize sexuality is the Circles of Sexuality model. This model breaks sexuality into 6 individual, yet overlapping aspects. The aspects are: Sensuality, Intimacy, Sexual Identity, Sexual Health and Reproduction, Sexual Behaviors and Practices, and Sexual Power and Agency.ⁱ
- It is important to emphasize that contrary to popular belief, humans of all ages experience sexuality throughout their lifespans.

TALKING POINTS

What do we say?

- Sexuality is complex. It encompasses much more than whether someone is sexually active or who they are attracted to.
- People have sex for many different reasons including reproduction, pleasure, expression of affection, curiosity, and stress relief. Body image, gender identity, gender expression, sexual health, feelings of power or lack of power, sensual pleasure, relationships and intimacy are all parts of sexuality. All these aspects of sexuality change over time from infancy through our entire lives.
- Sexual orientation and gender identity are independent aspects of a person's sexual identity.
- Sexual orientation refers to who a person is romantically, emotionally and physically attracted to. Examples of sexual orientation are gay, bisexual, heterosexual, pansexual and asexual.ⁱⁱ
- Gender Identity is who a person is. It is independent from the body parts they have. Examples of gender identities are male, female, gender queer, non-binary and transgender

KNOW THE FACTS

FACT: Sexuality is a part of life through all the ages and stages. Babies, elders, and everyone in between can experience sexuality.

FACT: Sexual identity and sexual behavior are independent aspects of sexuality. In other words, a person of any orientation can engage in any sexual behavior, including sexual abstinence.

FACT: Comprehensive sex education does not lead to earlier sexual debut.ⁱⁱⁱ

COMMON QUESTIONS STUDENTS HAVE ABOUT SEXUALITY

How do gay people have sex?

This is an important question. There is no one way that any person, regardless of sexual orientation, has sex. All people discover the sexual behaviors and activities that they prefer. This is one of the reasons it's so important that people consent to the behaviors they engage in, that they know about any risks involved, and that they protect themselves and their partners.

What counts as sex?

I appreciate this question because the truth is that different people define sex differently. Many people believe that if there is genital to genital, or mouth to genital contact, that "counts" as sex. So, this would include anal and vaginal intercourse, and oral sex. Some also include hand to genital contact. How you define sex is ultimately up to you. It's most important that people are informed about the potential risks involved with different sexual behaviors, and ways to reduce those risks.

How many genders are there?

I really appreciate this question. We all have a gender identity. For some of us, it matches the sex that we were assigned at birth. For example, someone might be assigned male at birth and identify as a boy/man. For others, they may not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, someone assigned male at birth and might identify as a woman. It's important that we are respectful of everyone's identity, including using the pronouns that they use for themselves.



Fundamentals of Teaching Sexuality

ⁱ Dailey, D. *Sexual expression and aging*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981.

ⁱⁱ "What is sexual orientation?" *Planned Parenthood Federation of America*, 2019, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/sexual-orientation>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Comprehensive Sex Education: Research and Results." *Advocates for Youth*, 2009, <http://www.futureofsexed.org/compsexed.html>.