

Delivering Human Development & Sexual Health Information to Students - Tips

General Tips for Teaching Sexual Health

- Acknowledge your own feelings about sexuality. Teaching about sexuality and relationships may cause embarrassment or anxiety for students and teachers. Simply acknowledging these feelings can help make them more manageable.
- Take some time to think in advance about your own personal boundaries.
- Create a positive and relaxed learning environment.
- Approach questions with an open mind and a sensitivity to sexual orientation and lifestyles that may differ from your own.
- Use inclusive language such as “partner”, instead of “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”. One in ten students may be struggling with their sexual identity. Using inclusive language may increase the comfort level for students who do not identify as heterosexual.

Set Ground Rules

It is essential to establish what is and is not appropriate to discuss in the classroom setting. Having boundaries in place can help to reduce inappropriate comments and create a safe environment where students feel free to ask questions.

Ground rules may include:

- No personal questions.
- No one will be forced to participate in a discussion.
- Meanings of words will be explained in a sensible and factual way.
- Correct names for body parts will be used.
- Everything that is confided to a teacher or facilitator will remain confidential with two exceptions: a disclosure of suicidal thoughts, or a disclosure of abuse by a caregiver.
- It is okay to disagree with another person's point of view, but every person's opinion/answer should be respected.

Refer to Ground Rules During Discussions

- If a question is too personal, remind the student of the ground rules and/or refer to a more appropriate source (e.g., school social worker, school public health nurse).
- If you do not know the answer, it is important to acknowledge this and suggest that the question be researched by the students/teacher.
- If a question is too explicit or inappropriate for others in the class, acknowledge the question and attend to it later, in a discreet manner.
- If there is a concern of sexual abuse, follow your school board policy and procedure.

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Challenge Negative Attitudes

Help students challenge negative attitudes by asking some of the following questions to the entire group:

- Does anyone have a different point of view?
- What do you think about that message?
- Summarize and give challenging examples such as, 'So has every woman who wears sexy/provocative clothes been sexually assaulted?' or "Have women who have not worn sexy/provocative clothes been sexually assaulted?"

Use Distancing Techniques

To avoid embarrassment and protect student's privacy, always depersonalize discussions. Remind students not to use names of people (even referring to themselves) to keep the discussion neutral and avoid potential embarrassment on behalf of other students – even if they aren't in the class. Use interactive teaching techniques such as:

- Age appropriate educational videos from your media center
- Role playing
- Case studies
- Information in the form of puzzles or games

Use Reflection Techniques

Help students to reflect by asking questions such as:

- What was it like having this discussion today?
- What did you learn from others who had a different experience or opinion than you?
- What else do you think you need to learn about?