teaching sexual health.ca

Teacher's Guide:

Preparing to Teach Sexual Health Education

The content in this Teacher's Guide provides background information for teachers and is not for classroom use.

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Primary Care Alberta

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This teacher guide provides Alberta teachers with evidence-based information to support the human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation outcomes of the Alberta curriculum.

The background information in this guide is intended to build teacher knowledge and confidence. It is not meant to be delivered directly to students.

Self-Reflection

Before you teach human sexuality, it's important to understand your own values and biases, and the impact of your own experiences. The way you teach sexual health is as important as the information itself. When sexual health is taught in a way that emphasizes risk and fear, it can result in increased silence, shame, and stigma. A balanced approach that combines the positive, relationship-enhancing aspects of sexuality with the knowledge and skills to prevent negative outcomes empowers students to protect and enhance their own sexual health. Reflecting on your own comfort, assumptions, and attitudes is the first step to creating that kind of learning environment.

Visit the Your Values page on TeachingSexualHealth.ca to learn more.

Inclusive Approach

Inclusive sexual health education contributes to a safer school environment for all students. Creating a safe and caring environment is the foundation for a great sexual health class.

In the learning activities and accompanying material, you will notice that body parts and processes are not labelled as male or female. While it is fine to use the terms boy/girl/male/female when talking with or about individuals, the goal is to not assume that all boys or girls have certain anatomy, and to consistently use inclusive language. Learning to discuss anatomy without gendering people, parts or processes is a shift for many people, but it is safer and more accurate as not everything about students' identities or bodies is known. For example, not all people who menstruate are girls, and not all sexual activity is heterosexual. These activities use language that can help you and your students make this shift, so that everyone, including people of all sexual orientations, people who are intersex and gender diverse individuals, are included and feel seen.

To learn more about inclusive language practices in sexual health education visit Inclusive Language | Teaching Sexual Health

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Keeping all students together for sexual health education builds empathy, normalizes conversation, prepares students for the future, and reduces misinformation. When students feel included, they are more likely to engage, ask questions and retain information. Research shows that teachers who are knowledgeable and confident are best equipped to build trust with students. When students feel comfortable asking questions and exploring accurate information, they are more likely to develop healthy relationships, self-confidence, and respect for others.

Group Agreements (Ground Rules)

Establish group agreements (ground rules) before beginning this unit. The most effective group agreements are co-created as a class. Privacy, confidentiality and the right to pass (not answer) are important elements of group agreements for sexual health lessons that may not be as prominent in your everyday classroom rules. Review the group agreements briefly at the start of every sexual health lesson.

Question Box

The question box is a best-practice tool that can be used in the classroom to support teachers. It can help you identify what your students are curious about and want to learn. A question box enhances learning by allowing students to ask questions anonymously. Using a question box gives time to review the questions to make sure that you know the answers and that you're comfortable answering them appropriately for the grade you teach.

To use a question box effectively, consider these tips:

- Have every student write a question on identical slips of paper for anonymity.
- If someone doesn't have anything to ask, they can write a comment about the lesson or just write "no question" on their slip of paper.
- Read through the questions after class and prepare to answer them during the next lesson.

When answering questions, consider these tips:

- Group similar questions together.
- Paraphrasing questions can help maintain anonymity.

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- Refer to class group agreements as needed. For example, if you received questions asking about your personal sexual experience, remind everyone of the group agreements made on the first day about not discussing personal experiences
- Define words, including slang, using the scientific terminology as you answer the question, and continue using the scientific terminology.
- Assume all questions, even shocking ones, are genuine requests for information and answer with facts.
- Provide only the information that was asked.

Teachers frequently ask about responding to student questions that are not in the curriculum. Before teaching this unit, consult with your school administration regarding their preferred approach to these questions. In addition, consider:

- Directing the student to ask a supportive adult in their life.
- Pointing out when the material will be covered in subsequent grades, if applicable.

Refer to the Education Act to understand the exemptions to notification and consent for incidental or indirect references to gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality.

Being Prepared for Disclosures and Distress

This topic can be distressing to students, including those who have been involved in or witnessed an assault or abuse. Dealing with sensitive issues encourages students to examine their own beliefs and experiences.

To maintain both student safety and engagement, it is helpful to be familiar with trauma informed practice, to use inclusive language and to acknowledge feelings and stories. Some things to consider:

- Respect and reinforce confidentiality and sensitivity in the classroom.
- Anticipate where discussions could lead in order to protect students from revealing inappropriate personal information.
- Before starting these lessons, talk to your school counsellor so they are aware there may be disclosures of abuse.
- Ensure your students understand that disclosures of abuse cannot be kept confidential.

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- Disclosures are the first step to get help for a student who is experiencing abuse. Share with students what they can expect if they disclose abuse, such as redirection to discuss further outside of class and connecting them with support.
- The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act has requirements regarding the reporting of abuse of a young person to Child and Family Services or Delegated First Nation Agencies. You can locate your local office by visiting Children and Family Services offices | Alberta.ca

For more information, see Report child abuse | Alberta.ca or Recognizing, Reporting and Responding to Abuse in Schools and refer to your school division's guidelines about disclosures and reporting.

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