



Questions and Answers on Sexuality Education

Q I heard that teaching students about sex only encourages them to have sex. Is this true?

A No. Sexuality education is not narrowly focused on how to have sex. It includes a focus on values, decision-making, biology, emotions, gender identity, and sexual feelings. It also presents abstinence, delaying first sex, limiting the number of partners and safer sex.

A World Health Organisation literature review concluded there is 'no support for the contention that sex education encourages experimentation or increased activity. If any effect is observed, almost without exception it is in ... postponed initiation of sexual intercourse and/or effective use of contraceptives.' (Grunseit A, Kippax S. *Effects of Sex Education on Young People's Sexual Behaviour*, Geneva, World Health Organization, 1993, p.10.)

Sex education does not lead to earlier or increased sexual activity.

Baldo (1993), Franklin (1997), Kirby (2007).

Q Does teaching about sex in schools take it out of the home?

A Studies have found the opposite is true. Sexuality education programs result in increased parent-child communication about sexuality. (Alford, S. 'Parent-Child Communication: Promoting Healthy Youth', *Advocates for Youth*, September 1995.)

Q Why can't schools just teach their students not to have sex? Schools should promote abstinence.

A It is government education policy that all schools include a focus on abstinence. School education is about preparing young people for healthy, fulfilling adult lives. Providing comprehensive sexuality education ensures this. Comprehensive sexuality education promotes postponement of first sex (with one sexual partner and safer sex considered as next best alternatives). School programs that have been most effective in helping young people to abstain discuss both abstinence and contraception.

Sex education may delay initiation of sex.

Baldo (1993), Kirby (2001), Kirby (2007).

Q Isn't it true that condoms are not very effective in preventing pregnancy and sexually transmissible infections, like AIDS and chlamydia?

A Repeated studies show condoms used consistently and correctly offer a high degree of protection against pregnancy and sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Using a condom is 10,000 times safer than not using one. The most common cause for failure is improper or inconsistent use. That is why including condom instruction in sexuality education is so important.

Q If I don't feel comfortable talking to my students about sex, isn't it best to say nothing?

A It is quite common to feel uncomfortable talking about sex. However, we should not let this stop us from educating our students. Talking about facts is an effective way to combat apprehension.

Q I didn't have much sex education when I was young and it didn't affect me. Isn't it best to let kids pick up what they need to know in their own time?

A Young people constantly pick up sexual messages, many of them ones that do not promote healthy sexuality, including commercial messages that are in the interest of advertisers, and misinformation from their peers. Avoiding talking about sexuality only teaches young people to feel uncomfortable about sexuality.

Q Isn't it true that if you talk to kids about sex they will experiment?

A Children who are well informed and comfortable in talking about sexuality are the least likely to have intercourse when they are adolescents. Lack of information poses greater risks.

Sex education is likely to decrease the number of sexual partners.

Kim (1997), Jemmott and Jemmott (1998), Schaalma (2004).

References

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