

Human Development and Sexual Health

Teaching Tips – Grades 1-8

Classroom management

- Ensure that students are aware that if they disclose personal information that indicates they are at risk for harm, then that information cannot be kept confidential because teachers have legal reporting responsibilities for cases of sexual abuse and assault.
- Keep parents and guardians informed about all aspects of their Healthy Growth and Development program. Example: Information letter sent home.
- Establish ground rules for discussion and a classroom climate that is open to free inquiry and respectful of everyone's point of view.

These ground rules or classroom discussion/presentation guidelines should include appropriate listening and speaking skills, respecting students who are reluctant to share personal information in group settings, and agreeing to maintain confidentiality if sharing of personal information occurs.[See above note about confidentiality]

- Actively promote critical thinking and open mindedness, and refrain from taking sides on one point of view.
- Set a positive classroom climate in which students feel comfortable learning about and discussing human development and sexual health topics.

Classroom teaching tips

- **Practice talking about Human Development and Sexual Health:**

It may turn out to be useful for the teacher to practice speaking about sexual health with people close to him/her before presenting a workshop in front of a class.

To establish a good line of communication with the students the teacher must avoid making the following mistakes:

- ***Openly criticizing any students' opinions.*** This attitude may lead the student(s) to become aggressive and will shut down any further communication.
- ***Lecturing.*** For example: "In my day we would not have thought/done those kinds of things!"
- ***Laughing at an opinion or a comment,*** even if it is naïve or amusing.

- **Be sincere**

A sincere attitude will make any communication easier. The teacher should be able to express his /her reservations about certain topics.

- **Express discomfort**

The teacher should not be afraid to express any discomfort. Expressing it will create a more relaxed atmosphere.

- **Know how to listen**

Listening is an essential part of authentic and efficient communication. The teacher must impart his/her knowledge while being attentive to students' questions, lack of understanding, concerns, worries and thoughts.

- **Have an open mind**

The teacher must show an open attitude so that the students feel comfortable expressing themselves more freely. The teacher should, for example, accept to hear students' opinions, value the students and be aware that their opinions can change over time.

- **Respect privacy**

The teacher must specify that he/she intends to discuss facts and opinions, and not his/her own experiences or those of any other student.

- **Remain calm**

The teacher must calmly listen to the students as they express their opinions, even if he/she does not agree with their statements. Don't cut them off mid-sentence.

- **Ask for the students' opinion**

The teacher should ask the students to express their opinions on a topic not ask for confessions.

- **Answer questions**

It is preferable that the teacher answer questions as they arise. Should the teacher, however, be unsure of the proper answer he/she should look it up rather than give out the wrong information.

General tips on answering questions

- **Reinforce the ground rules**

Inform the class that you will be asking yourself if all student questions are appropriate or related to the classroom discussion. When establishing ground rules, establish parameters such as "If a question is asked which I choose not to answer, it is not because it is a bad question. I may feel that it is not of interest to *all* students, or related to the class discussion. If you asked a question that was not answered, then please see me at the end of the class, and I will try to answer your question."

- **Validate students' concerns about asking questions**

Give affirmation to the student who asked the question

"Thanks for asking..."

"That's a good question. Tell me more about what you'd like to know."

Consider every question to be a valid question.

Don't assume you know what's being asked. Questions indicate the student's thoughts not necessarily actions. To clarify without causing embarrassment, try these cues:

"Sounds like you've got a real concern; can you tell me more about what's on your mind?"

'Normalize' the question.

"Many students probably wonder about this..."

- **But Don't Use the Word Normal.**

Avoid the use of the word "normal" when answering questions. Normal for some is morally "improper" for others. Present the facts such as what is known medically, the legal issues, and risk factors and consequences. Always give positive reinforcement that seeking information and discussing issues is an important way for students to learn about making healthy decisions.

- **Answer every question as best you can.**

Assess whether the question is related to information, feelings, values, or a combination:

- Answer the factual information part of the question first.
 - Consider the following: Curriculum relevance, content and knowledge background of student, age appropriateness etc.
 - The most simple and straightforward way is usually the best way to answer the question.
- Address feelings that may arise from a question.
 - "I'm a bit uncomfortable with this"
 - "We all are embarrassed sometimes, but it is important to discuss..."
- Identify the value component of the question and if necessary refer students to family or clergy for help with decision making.
 - "This question relates to personal decisions and may vary from individual to individual; so I cannot give you a definite answer. It's best for you to get all the information you can by discussing this with your _____."

- **Be honest about your information or your lack of information.**

All teachers may have difficulty with a question. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know I'll have to check." Ensure that you follow through. If you say you'll get information or a booklet, do it.

Types of student questions and possible answers

Student questions about sexuality can usually be grouped into four broad overlapping categories:

1. Requests for information
2. "Am I normal?" questions
3. Permission seeking
4. Shock questions

1. Request for Information

If you know the answer, provide information within curriculum guidelines. If you do not know the answer, it is okay to say "I don't know". You can either refer the student to an appropriate source or find out the answer through other sources of information.

2. "Am I Normal" Questions

These questions generally focus on adolescent concerns about their bodies and the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing. Validate their concern, e.g.: "Many young people worry that ..." and provide information about what they can expect to happen during the adolescent years. Refer them to parents, clergy, family physician, nurse, community resources, school resource teacher or counsellor for further discussion, if appropriate.

3. Permission Seeking Questions

These questions come in two common forms, both seeking permission to participate in a particular behaviour, e.g.: *Is it normal to...? Or Did you.. when you were growing up?*

Establish ground rules related to discussion of personal behaviour, such as: "We won't be discussing personal behavior during class." If you get a question about personal behaviour, remind students of this ground rule. Refer students to parents and clergy for further discussion of moral/religious questions.

4. Shock Questions

These questions may be raised due to embarrassment about the topic, an underlying concern, or simply to divert attention from the topic. Assume positive intent seemingly "silly" questions are a means by which more sophisticated questions can be formulated. Remind students of the ground rules related to appropriate questions for classroom discussion.

Reword the vocabulary or slang to diffuse the question, especially if you have previously established ground rules related to vocabulary. For example, a question such as, "Should your balls hurt for days after being hit?" could be addressed by saying, "First, the correct term for balls is testicles. Testicles are very sensitive, and do hurt when hit. Pain which lasts for more than a day is cause for concern. If your testicles are sore for more than a day, you should see your doctor to rule out any problems."

Try to address the underlying concern or use a segment of the question for discussion. E.g. "It sounds like you are asking a question about respect in relationship"

If you are uncomfortable with any question, defer it until you have time to think about how to address or reword it.