

**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.
- People deserve access to complete, accurate and skillfully delivered information about all aspects of sexuality.
- 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.
- One useful model that helps to conceptualize sexuality is the Circles of Sexuality model. This model breaks sexuality into 6 individual and overlapping aspects: Sensuality, Intimacy, Sexual Identity, Sexual Health and Reproduction, Sexual Behaviors and Practices, and Sexual Power and Agency.<sup>1</sup>
- It is important to emphasize that 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.
- Sex positivity refers to supporting individual's choices around sexual activity, provided it is consensual sex and is free from judgement and stigma.
- 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. These may be related for some people or independent from each other, it is complex and depends on the person.
- 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.<sup>2</sup>

**KNOW THE FACTS**

**FACT:** Sexuality is a part of life through all the ages and stages. Anyone at any stage 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 or abstain from sexual behavior.

**FACT:** Comprehensive sex ed does not lead to earlier sexual experiences.<sup>3</sup>

**COMMONLY ASEKD QUESTIONS ABOUT SEXUALITY**

**When do most people start having sex?**

*This is a commonly asked question. It is important to recognize that having sex is a personal choice that requires consent to be freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific. Determining the time depends on the individual and their values. More than half of the population engages in sex after the age of 18.*

**What counts as sex?**

*I appreciate this question because the truth is that different people define sex differently. Many people believe 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 communicate with sexual partner(s), 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. There is no set number of genders because each person experiences gender in their own way. For some of us, it matches the sex that we were assigned at birth. In this instance, 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 they use for themselves.*

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

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

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