

Fundamentals of Answering Questions Core Concept

The goal of answering participant questions is to provide factual information, guide decision making, and encourage open discussions.

RATIONALE

How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?

- Participants deserve opportunities to ask questions and receive answers that are accurate, unbiased, age appropriate, and non-judgmental.
- Anonymous question forums ensure participants have a chance to access the information that is most relevant to their lives. Even in a group full of participants quick to speak up, there are still those uncomfortable asking certain questions aloud.
- Every person with a question deserves an answer. When someone in the room asks a question, they are usually listening closely for an answer. If a question is not answered or acknowledged, it sends the message that it is only okay to ask certain kinds of questions and not others.

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

What do we say and what do we do?

- Create a safe space to ask questions. Providing specific time for anonymous questions can help maximize participation and foster an environment of learning and respect.
- Read questions verbatim if possible and appropriate (but offensive slang or disrespectful language should be rephrased), so participants can recognize their questions.
- Misinformation and misconceptions often circulate regarding sexual health topics. Allowing students to ask questions about “things they’ve heard” can help dispel these myths.
- Some questions may be triggering for participants or the educator. Think in advance about ways to maintain composure and effectively respond. In some states educators are mandatory reporters, and it is important participants are aware at the beginning of instruction and prior to answering questions.
- Addressing questions is an excellent opportunity for educators to model clear, respectful boundaries. Educators are never under any obligation to divulge personal information, and self-disclosure should be rare in a sex ed setting.
- How an educator answers questions is equally important to the actual information given. It is an opportunity to normalize sexual health, reduce shame and stigma, and model respect, inclusivity, and caring.

AIM FOR EXCELLENCE

AIM provides a framework for answering most participant questions and stands for Affirm, Inform, and Make Sure/Referral. For example: *Can teens get condoms?*

Affirm the asker.

- That’s an important question.

Inform – Answer the question.

- The answer is yes, people of any age can get condoms. Condoms can be purchased from a grocery store, pharmacy, or gas station, and are also available for free at Planned Parenthood and other community clinics.

Make sure you answered the question or make a referral.

- Does anyone have a follow-up question about where teens can get condoms?

ADDRESSING COMMON TYPES OF QUESTIONS

FACTUAL: Validate and answer.

These questions are seeking factual information, so validate and answer the question.

SLANG: Define, reword, and answer.

For slang, read the full question (if appropriate) then provide the medically accurate terminology and answer the underlying question. It is important for teens to know the definitions of common slang words, as well as the rationale for using medically accurate terminology.

SHOCK: Deflate, reword, and answer

Sometimes shock questions are used to throw off the educator or get a laugh. Diffuse by rewording and answering the question.

SEXUAL TECHNIQUE: Define, validate, stress communication and personal differences, and refer to resources.

PERSONAL: Be cautious about sharing personal information

Use personal questions as an opportunity to model and teach healthy boundaries.

VALUE: Use the [FLASH Values Question Protocol](#), which is explained in the Answering Values Questions Fact Sheet.

To learn more, take the

[Spark*ED Teaching Sexuality and Answering Questions self-paced course](#)