

**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?*

- People deserve access to complete, accurate and skillfully delivered information about all aspects of sexuality.
- When exploring the definition of sexuality with students, sex educators should bring a holistic, inclusive, sex-positive lens.
- 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 six individual and overlapping aspects: Sensuality, Intimacy, Sexual Identity, Sexual Health and Reproduction, Sexual Behaviors and Practices, and Sexual Power and Agency.<sup>1</sup>

**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 conveys sexuality as a natural and healthy part of life; focusing on the potential positivity, not just harm, that can come from sexuality. It supports the concept of an individual's consensual choices around sexual activity 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, 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.
- 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.

**FACT:** Sexual identity and sexual behavior are independent aspects of sexuality. A person of any orientation can engage in or abstain from sexual behavior.

**FACT:** Everyone deserves sex education and young people have the right to information and skills that are essential to protect their health. Comprehensive sex ed correlate to delay of first sexual experiences for adolescents along with a reduction in frequency of sexual intercourse, reduction in the number of partners, and an increase in condom usage.<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.

### Why do people have sex?

- There are many reasons people choose to have sex: for pleasure, for reproduction, to express affection, for curiosity, or for stress relief. When it comes to having sex, it's important that partners discuss what sexual behaviors they are comfortable with, how they will communicate during sex, and how they will protect themselves from STIs and unintended pregnancy.

### What counts as sex?

- That is a great question! Different people define sex differently. Some people believe that only genital to genital "counts" as sex. Other people include mouth or hand to genital as sex. This would include anal and vaginal intercourse and oral sex. Some also include hand to genital contact. The way you define sex is ultimately up to you. It's important that people communicate with sexual partner(s) about what they are and are not comfortable doing, and 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.

To learn more, take the  
[Spark\\*ED Teaching Sexuality self-paced course](#)

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

2 [What is sexual orientation?](#) Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

3 [The Importance of Access to Comprehensive Sex Ed](#), American Academy of Pediatrics.