

Answering Student Questions



Answering questions about sexual topics can be challenging, but it is important to answer student questions accurately and nonjudgmentally. Use these tips to understand the types of questions students ask and to practice responding in an appropriate way.

Types of Questions The types of questions students usually ask can be broken down into a few different categories.

Requests for Information

Some examples of requests for information are... Where do babies come from? Can you get STDs from kissing? What does 'oral sex' mean?

- These types of questions are factual, and are usually easy to answer directly.
- **It's okay to not know all the answers.** If you don't know the answer to a factual question, tell the learner that and promise to get back to them with an answer- and follow through!
- Answer in an age-appropriate way, and avoid technical jargon. If the answer is complicated, make sure to check that you fully answered the question.

"Am I Normal?" Questions

When is it too early to get your period? When will I start to grow facial hair?

- Youth, especially pre-teens, tend to have a lot of concerns about their bodies, and they often need reassurance that the changes they're going through are normal.
- When a specific issue is raised, remind students that there are a range of different experiences that are healthy.
- When possible, **refer them to other resources** that might be helpful, like the school nurse, a parent or trusted adult, or their physician.

Questions About Personal Values

Do you think it's wrong to masturbate? Do you think abortion should be legal? How do you feel about transgender students?

- **Help students explore their own values without imposing your own.** Let them know about the range of values about a particular issue, while **reinforcing universal values.**
- Establish boundaries ahead of time through a group agreement or class contract; this can give you something to fall back on if a values question comes up.
- Try to answer the factual part of the question if possible.

Shock-Value Questions

What's the best sex position? What happens when you get blue balls?

- If it is clear that a student asked a question for shock value, try to answer calmly- this lets the asker know that they can't get a rise out of you.
- If the question is hurtful or derogatory, remind students to adhere to group agreements and universal values.
- **It may be that the asker meant the question sincerely.** Be careful not to dismiss questions completely if this might be the case. Reword the question if necessary and answer factually, making sure to check that you answered the intended question.
- **If slang is used in a question, address it in your answer** to validate the learner. If you do not know what the slang word means, ask the students as this can build rapport.

Permission-Seeking or Advice Questions

Is it okay for a 16 old to have sex? What do you think I should do if I have an STD? Did you do this at my age?

- **Avoid answering questions about your personal values and beliefs.**
- Set group agreements that establish boundaries around personal questions.
- Discuss the range of options if a particular issue comes up, and reinforce universal values.
- Refer the asker to a parent or other trusted adult they could talk to.

Examples of Universal Values

Everyone deserves respect
Everyone deserves to be healthy

It is not okay to force or coerce someone into sex
It is not okay to knowingly spread disease

Strategies for Answering Student Questions

Use the Reporter Technique

If a controversial issue comes up, use this technique to report the facts, explain the range of opinions on the issue, and open the question up for discussion. *For some... For others... For you?*

Stop, Drop, & Roll

Use this technique for hot button issues- stop talking and think about the question you've been asked; drop your opinions, judgments, and personal values; and roll the question into a discussion topic for the group.

Hang with Slang

Youth often use slang to discuss topics related to sex. While we might want youth to use correct terminology in the classroom, meeting them where they're at can increase their comfort and ultimately help them feel validated and affirmed. Some slang words are never okay; if derogatory or hurtful words are used, address them immediately.

Be Yourself

It's okay to be embarrassed by some questions! If you laugh, blush, or need to take a minute- that's okay. You are human! Even if you're embarrassed, try to answer the question honestly and calmly. Answering calmly sends the message to students that it is normal and healthy to discuss sexuality, and it helps reduce discomfort that students might be feeling.

The Anonymous Question Box!



Set up a way for students to ask questions anonymously. Hand out blank index cards or slips of paper. Collect student questions at the end of class, review them, and then respond at the beginning of the next class. This will give you a time to research an answer and think about a response.

Use Google Classroom?



Try setting up an anonymous question Google Form so that students can ask questions electronically while you teach!

Other Suggestions...

- **While answering questions, use the opportunity to model inclusivity & respect!**
- **Use current events or hot topics to facilitate respectful discussions, help students identify their own values and expectations, and correct misinformation.**
- **Using real-life examples will also engage students more effectively with issues relevant to them.**