Creating a Safe Learning Environment

When teaching sexuality education, setting a safe learning environment is the first step in ensuring students will be engaged and ready to learn. Comfort and inclusivity for all students, regardless of their personal experiences or beliefs, will allow them to focus on the content of the lessons and respect differences among each other.

**Group Agreements** As an educator, it's important to establish general rules of conduct for your group or classroom. Students are more likely to follow these agreements when they have a hand in creating them. Group agreements help each person feel valued and models collaboration, while establishing a clear understanding of expectations.

**Tips for setting group agreements:**

- Start with a list of what you consider the bare essentials.
- Work with your students to create a set of agreements expressed in their language.
- Make sure your group agreements are visible to everyone. This document is ever changing, and should be adjusted as issues of concern arise.
- Consider using visuals to represent the agreements so all types of learners feel included.
- Need some help? Check out our list of sample group agreements and add your own!

If you already have classroom or group agreements in place... Take a moment to revisit them before starting the sexual health lesson

Review or redefine them as they relate to discussing sexual health

Add new agreements that you think will be important throughout the lesson

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Being LGBTQ Inclusive

Notice assumptions. Gender Identity and sexual orientation are not always obvious based on name or appearance. Being aware of our assumptions can keep us from using pronouns for someone whose identity we don’t know.

Use examples that include a range of identities and orientations or exclude gendered language all together. Try using “partner” instead of gendered words like “boyfriend” or “girlfriend. This allows for everyone to feel equally represented!

Get down to science. Talking about bodies doesn't have to be gendered. Language like “boys and girls” or “men and women” isn’t always necessary. When talking about anatomy, try using terms like “penis owner” or “person assigned female at birth”.

Being Trauma Informed

Consider the language, images, or models you use. Folks entering your space have had many experiences prior to your class. How might your sexual health content trigger a past traumatic event for someone and what can you do to avoid this?

Take note of behaviors. Trauma may show up in a variety of ways including acting out, withdrawing from the group, changes in mood, depression, loss of interest, or difficulty focusing.

Check in privately if someone is always passing or not participating in group discussions or activities. They may have concerns problems that require additional support.

Establish the go-to people in your school or organization, such as the school counselor, nurse, or other staff. Share their names with the group, as well as local organizations or hotlines that student can access or share with someone else.

Disclosure Policy

Tell your participants if you are bound by law to report any disclosures of harm to oneself or others. While you want youth in your group to be open and participate freely, they should know it’s your job to make sure they are safe.

Be ready to involve others when a serious situation is presented that involves safety, the law, or child welfare.

Get informed of your school or organization’s mandated reporting/disclosure policy prior to any lessons. What steps will you take and who else needs to be involved if a report needs to be made?

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Need Help Getting Started?
Try These Group Agreements!

✓ It’s OK to Feel Embarrassed
We don’t tend to talk about these topics, so it’s normal to feel embarrassed. Just because we feel embarrassed doesn’t mean we should stop talking, but it’s good to recognize any feelings of discomfort.

✓ One Person Speaks at a Time
Practicing good listening skills is important! Jot down your own thoughts to share rather than interrupting others. Everyone should have a chance to be equally heard during discussions.

✓ Laughing is OK (unless it gets in the way)
It’s common to laugh or think something is funny when we are embarrassed or feeling awkward. However, it is not okay to laugh at someone, embarrass someone, or distract others from learning.

✓ Respect Each Other’s Ideas and Opinions
Each person is different. Our bodies are different; our family values are different. We may not agree with each other and that’s okay. Remember it’s important to listen to others and respect these differences.

✓ Use Correct Terms
We may not know the correct names for everything, but we will do our best to use these terms once we learn them. Everyone should feel equally safe and comfortable, and agreeing to use the same language when possible helps!

✓ Questions are Welcome and OK
You can ask your questions in class or through the anonymous question box! If you have a question, probably others in the class do too.

✓ No Personal Stories
This means not asking personal questions of a peer or the teacher. If you have a personal story or someone else’s story that you think is important to share, you could say, “I’ve heard that...” or “I know someone who...” instead of saying ME, I or an individual’s name.

✓ It’s OK to Pass!
Everyone has their own perspective and comfort level. You may have past experiences that make you sensitive, defensive, or even triggered by certain topics. If you are ever uncomfortable with an activity or discussion, or simply would rather not take part, you can pass or sit that one out.
Everything You Wanted to Know about the Middle School Sexual Health Scope & Sequence and How to Use It!

Maine Family Planning's 2018 Middle School Sexual Health Scope & Sequence provides a framework for implementing comprehensive and sequential sexual health education for middle school students. The Scope refers to the depth at which the topics are covered and the Sequence refers to the order in which the content should be taught for the best learning at each grade level.

Based on feedback from middle school educators, Maine Family Planning's education team designed this Scope & Sequence for students in grades 6-8 to meet the Maine Health Education Standards and align with the National Sexuality Education Standards. In Maine middle schools, there is a wide variation in how and when health topics are delivered. This Scope & Sequence offers up-to-date lessons and resources from trusted sources that can be easily adapted by middle school educators to meet the specific needs of their students within their unique timeframe, schedule, and learning environment.

Combined, the Middle School Sexual Health Scope & Sequence offers a total of twenty-seven lessons deemed essential - seven in 6th grade, ten in 7th grade, and ten in 8th grade. These lessons cover five primary topics:

- Puberty and Adolescent Development
- Identity
- Healthy Relationships and Communication
- Personal Safety and Consent
- Sexual Risk Reduction

For each learning objective there are one or more related lessons with additional resources and supplemental videos. They are designed, in a developmentally-appropriate and sequential way, so that lessons in each grade build upon ones from previous grades. The Scope & Sequence offers the opportunity to use some lessons as a review if the topic has previously been taught.

Consider the following steps as you refer to the Scope & Sequence to plan and implement sexual health education for your students. These suggestions can help prepare you as well as involve your administrator, additional school staff, and parents. This is not an exhaustive list, and you may identify additional steps that to ensure a successful program.

For additional support, reach out to Maine Family Planning's Prevention Program. Find out what we do and how we can support you on the For Educators page of our website, or contact education@mainefamilyplanning.org.
Plan with your building administrator.
Your principal's support of sexual health education is fundamental to its success. Comprehensive sexuality education is part of Maine education standards and law. While most parents are supportive of their child receiving sexual health information at school, oftentimes administrators are concerned about getting calls and concerns from parents, so plan ahead.

Involve parents.
Follow your school or district procedures if parents need to be informed that you are teaching sexual health. You may want to offer an information session or send out a letter so parents know what you are teaching. Provide resources to parents on talking with their children about sexual health and ideas on how to get the conversation started.

Notify and include other staff in your school.
Youth should have multiple trusted adults they can go to, if and when needed. If possible, involve the school nurse or counselor in some of the education. If a student needs to leave the room during the lessons, designate a person or place where they can go for support.

Become familiar with the Middle School Scope and Sequence sexual health topics, the lessons and additional resources.
For each grade level, review the topics, learning objectives, and lesson suggestions. Determine which lessons, additional resources, and supplemental videos best fit for your students' needs.

Assess what your students already know.
Simply asking your students a few questions to gauge their knowledge level can help you determine your focus. Talking with educators who had your students in prior grades may provide information to assist you in planning what you need to cover or review.

Make and use classroom agreements.
On the Maine Family Planning website, a tip sheet provides steps for building a safe learning environment, including sample agreements and background on why this is an important part of your sexual health education.

Offer students a way to ask anonymous questions.
Discuss with your students how you will answer questions and provide an anonymous question box in the classroom. Refer to Maine Family Planning's tip sheet on answering student questions.

Assessing Student Learning.
Assessment examples are included in the Middle School Scope and Sequence tables for each learning objective that you can use or tailor to meet your school or district requirements. If you have an assessment you use and would like to share, tells us about it!

Promote and model an inclusive classroom.
Your words, along with posters or signs displayed in the classroom, show tolerance and understanding of differences and let students know they are learning in a safe place. Use language that is inclusive of all genders and identities. We want all youth to feel seen and heard. Maine Family Planning's Prevention Program can offer resources on creating an inclusive classroom and links to organizations that can assist you in this area.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Puberty &amp; Adolescent Development</strong></td>
<td>Describe the reproductive system, including body parts and functions. Maine Family Planning’s Puberty Happens, Changing Bodies-Unit 2, or Teaching Sexual Health (Gr 5), Male &amp; Female Reproductive Systems * If the reproductive system has been taught prior to 6th grade, a review is recommended. Describe the physical, social and emotional changes of puberty. Advocates for Youth 3 R's (Gr 6, Lesson 1), Change is Good</td>
<td>Describe the reproductive system, including body parts and functions. Teaching Sexual Health -- Gr 7, Reproduction or Advocates for Youth 3 R's (Gr 7, Lesson 3) Reproduction Basics * If the reproductive system has been taught in 6th grade, a review is recommended. Describe the physical, social and emotional changes of puberty. Teaching Sexual Health, Puberty Review</td>
<td>Describe the reproductive system, including body parts, functions and how a pregnancy happens. Advocates for Youth 3 R's (Gr 7, Lessons 1 &amp; 2), Everybody’s Got Body Parts or Maine Family Planning’s Best Practices in STDs/HIV and Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Supplemental Sexual Anatomy Review Describe how the changing brain can affect sexual decision-making. Maine Family Planning’s Best Practices in STDs/HIV and Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Lesson 2- Supplemental Activity- The Developing Brain</td>
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<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td>Identify stereotypes around gender roles and the influences that impact one’s attitudes around gender. Advocates for Youth 3 R’s, Gender Roles Gender Expectations (Gr 6, Lesson 2), or Advocates for Youth 3 R’s, Blue is for Boys, Pink is for Girls: Or are they? (Gr 7, Lesson 7)</td>
<td>Differentiate between gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. Advocates for Youth 3 R’s, I Am Who I Am (Gr 7, Lesson 6)</td>
<td>Develop a plan to promote dignity and respect for all people. Advocates for Youth 3 R’s, Creating a Safe School: Celebrating All (Gr 8, Lesson 1), or Teaching Sexual Health, Sexual and Gender Diversity</td>
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<td><strong>Personal Safety &amp; Consent</strong></td>
<td>Develop a plan to stay safe when using social media. Advocates for Youth 3 R’s Being Smart, Staying Safe Online (Gr 7, Lesson 11) Understand consent and communicate boundaries. MFP Prevention Program Introducing Consent</td>
<td>Demonstrate effective ways to communicate personal boundaries and show respect for boundaries of others. Advocates for Youth 3 R’s, Understanding Boundaries (Gr 6, Lesson 3) Understand consent and have the tools to express what they do and do not want in their relationships. Teach Consent</td>
<td>Identify situations and behaviors that constitute sexual harassment and abuse. Advocates for Youth 3 R’s, Warning Signs: Understanding Sexual Abuse &amp; Assault (Gr 8, Lesson 7) Identify and apply the elements of consent, and demonstrate verbal consent communication. MFP Prevention Program Understanding and Applying Consent</td>
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# Middle School Sexual Health Scope and Sequence, 2018

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<td><strong>Healthy Relationships &amp; Communication</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrate effective ways to communicate that foster healthy relationships. (Gr 6, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Describe a range of ways people express affection within various types of relationships. (Gr 7, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Compare and contrast the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. (Gr 8, Lesson 3)</td>
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<td>Advocates for Youth 3 R's, <strong>Being Clear with Your Friends</strong> (Gr 5, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Advocates for Youth 3 R's, <strong>Liking and Loving – Now and When I’m Older</strong> (Gr 6, Lesson 6)</td>
<td>Identify red flags in a relationship and ways to seek help. (Gr 8, Lesson 3)</td>
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<td>Analyze the similarities and differences between friendships and romantic relationships. (Gr 6, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Demonstrate skills for conflict resolution and open communication. (Gr 6-8)</td>
<td>Identify effective communication skills in sexual decision-making. (Gr 8, Lesson 5)</td>
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<td>Advocates for Youth 3 R's, <strong>More than Friends: Understanding Romantic Relationships</strong> (Gr 6, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Discovery Education, <strong>Resolving Conflicts</strong> (Gr 6-8)</td>
<td>Advocates for Youth 3 R's, <strong>We Need to Talk</strong> (Gr 8, Lesson 5)</td>
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<td><strong>Sexual Risk Reduction</strong></td>
<td>Define abstaining from an activity and identify personal goals and boundaries. (Gr 6, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Define STDs and how they are transmitted. (Gr 7, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Define STDs and how they are transmitted. (Gr 8)</td>
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<td>Maine Family Planning, <strong>Introducing Personal Boundaries and Abstinence</strong> (Gr 6, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Advocates for youth 3 R's, <strong>Protecting your Health: Understanding and Preventing STDs</strong> (Gr 7, Lesson 5)</td>
<td>Identify behaviors that put someone at risk for STDs. (Gr 8, Lesson 8)</td>
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<td>Developing communication and decision-making skills to be abstinent. (Gr 7)</td>
<td>Teaching Sexual Health, <strong>Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections</strong> (Gr 8)</td>
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<td>Teaching Sexual Health, <strong>Decision Making</strong> (Gr 7)</td>
<td>Describe methods to prevent pregnancy and STDs. (Gr 8, Lesson 8)</td>
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<td>Define sexual abstinence and ways to be abstinent. (Gr 7)</td>
<td>Advocates for Youth 3 R's, <strong>Birth Control Basics</strong> (Gr 8, Lesson 8), or Teaching Sexual Health, <strong>Birth Control</strong> (Gr 8)</td>
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<td>Teaching Sexual Health, <strong>Abstinence</strong> (Gr 7)</td>
<td>Demonstrate knowledge of proper condom use. (Gr 8, Lesson 9)</td>
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For additional resources:

https://mainefamilyplanning.org/for-educators