

# maine family planning Educator TIP SHEET

For answering student questions

## WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO MAKE TIME FOR STUDENT QUESTIONS

Student-centered sexual health education includes the opportunity for students to ask questions relevant to their lives.

1

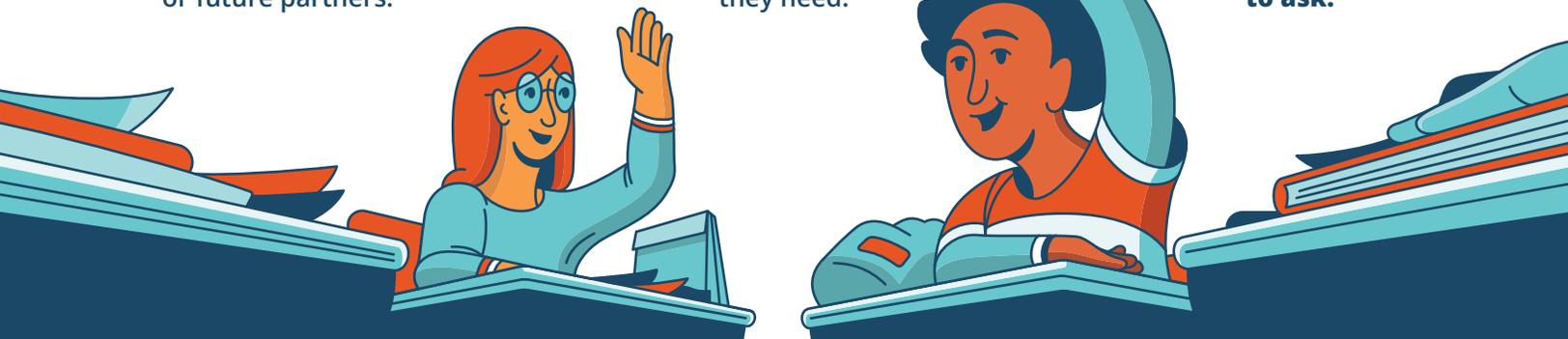
**Students build skills and confidence** so they are more likely to ask questions of their parents/guardians, healthcare providers, other trusted adults, and current or future partners.

2

**Allowing space for questions creates a safe and comfortable learning environment** where students know they can get the information they need.

3

**For every student that raises their hand to ask a question, there are others who have questions but are too uncomfortable to ask.**



## A FEW WAYS STUDENTS CAN ASK QUESTIONS ANONYMOUSLY

1

**Use an anonymous question box.**

This could be a shoe box, envelope or Google Form.



2

**Hand out sticky notes or index cards as exit slips.**

Encourage all students to submit a question. If they don't have a question, give them a prompt.



## **AFFIRMATIONS FOR ANSWERING STUDENT QUESTIONS**

Repeat these **positive affirmations** to build confidence in answering student questions and to remind yourself that you've got this!



### **I CAN ANSWER TOUGH QUESTIONS!**

If you're stuck on a particular topic or specific question, look it up, ask a colleague, or reach out to [education@mainefamilyplanning.org](mailto:education@mainefamilyplanning.org).



### **THERE IS NO 'RIGHT WAY' TO ANSWER A QUESTION.**

There are many ways to answer a question. If your answer is medically accurate, non-judgmental, and based on your classroom values, you will be fine!



### **I GIVE MYSELF PERMISSION TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AT ANOTHER TIME.**

If you need more time, put the question in the 'parking lot' and be sure to answer it later. Model to your students that we don't always have the answers, and it's okay to give sexual health some thought!



### **I CAN ALWAYS OFFER MORE INFORMATION LATER.**

Model positive communication by letting students know we don't always say the right words in the moment. Coming back to a question or discussion can help clarify or correct something you've said.



## **TRUSTED WEB RESOURCES**



Teens deserve access to **safe, inclusive, and accurate** places to go for answers to their sexual health questions. **Review these websites** to see the range of questions young people are asking and examples of **how to respond**. Refer students to these **trusted websites**:



[roo.plannedparenthood.org](https://roo.plannedparenthood.org)  
Sexual Health Chat bot for teens



[scarleteen.com](https://scarleteen.com)  
for ages 15+ to ask and view questions from other teens



[sexetc.org](https://sexetc.org)  
written for teens, by teens, with accessible and fact-based information

## STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING STUDENT QUESTIONS

Increase your **comfort, confidence, and skills** by practicing and utilizing **common strategies** to respond to questions. Remember, **there's not one 'right way' to respond** to a student question.



### TURN IT BACK TO THE STUDENTS

This strategy shows students that you value their knowledge, builds their confidence, and gives you time to think of key messages you want to communicate.

**QUESTION:** *Can you get an STI from kissing?*

**RESPONSE:** *Does anyone know the answer to that? or What do you all think?*



### ANSWER A QUESTION WITH A QUESTION

This strategy brings out a range of ideas, creates space for dynamic discussion, and allows students to problem-solve.

**QUESTION:** *Is it OK for a 16-year-old to have sex?*

**RESPONSE:** *What do y'all think? How can a person know when they are ready to have sex?*



### "FOR SOME...FOR OTHERS...FOR YOU"

This strategy demonstrates a range of values while remaining neutral to cultivate a classroom that is non-judgmental and allows students to consider their own personal and family values.

**QUESTION:** *Is it wrong to masturbate?*

**RESPONSE:** *For some people...masturbation may be uncomfortable or go against their religious or personal values. For others...it may be something they enjoy and is important to them. For you...each person can decide whether masturbation is right for them. (End with a fact-based message.) Masturbation is not harmful to your body and may even have some health benefits.*



### CONNECT STUDENTS TO TRUSTED RESOURCES

This strategy promotes students' awareness and ability to access medically accurate information and may include websites, organizations, professionals, or other trusted adults.

**QUESTION:** *What is the best birth control method?*

**RESPONSE:** *The best method depends on each person's situation and specific needs. Bedsider.org is a great resource for learning more about birth control methods. You can also talk to your health care provider.*

## STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING STUDENT QUESTIONS

Experiment with these strategies to see what works for you, your students, and your specific learning environment. This is your chance to fill in knowledge gaps, be inclusive, and reinforce important sexual health messages.

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### UTILIZE KEY MESSAGES

This strategy helps you highlight important takeaways such as safety, consent, and mutuality in relationships.

**QUESTION:** How do gay people have sex?

**RESPONSE:** There is no right way to have sex based on your identity. Through consent and communication, people can decide what sexual activities they want to do together.

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### SEXUAL HEALTH IS PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SOCIAL

This approach helps students understand the different layers of knowledge and can help you provide a thorough answer to simple questions.

**QUESTION:** What is the clitoris?

**RESPONSE:** The clitoris is part of the genitals of someone with a vagina (physical). It can feel sensitive or pleasurable to touch (emotional). Touching genitals is something people do in private (social).

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### TAILOR YOUR RESPONSE

Your answers will differ depending on the age and developmental stage of your students as well as the culture or community.

**QUESTION:** What is sex?

**RESPONSE:** (for younger ages): Sex is an activity that many adults and some older teens engage in, to feel good, connect with someone in a romantic way, or to make babies.

(for older ages): People define sex in different ways and may include oral, anal, and vaginal sex. It is always important to practice consent. People who engage in sex can use barrier methods (like condoms) or birth control to prevent sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy.