



Preparing To Teach About Sexuality

Now that I know more, how do I prepare to teach my students?

Teachers are often apprehensive when they are asked to teach students about sexuality. In an effort to help educators increase their comfort-levels, this guide includes a description of the ways one might prepare to teach sexuality education. It involves a number of important tips for educators. When teachers take the time to prepare themselves for the task, they normally find their classes run very smoothly.

What can I do to make this experience easier and more enjoyable?

Talking with students about sexuality can be difficult for many teachers. Since sexuality is intimately connected to personal values, family backgrounds and spiritual beliefs, it can be a sensitive issue. Sexuality education specialists recommend the following advice to teachers who wish to teach sexuality education in a way that makes the experience more enjoyable for both teachers and students.

Increase Your Comfort Level

- Try to develop a healthy attitude towards your own sexuality.
- Identify your own values and possible reactions toward different subjects on sexuality.
- Read, think, plan and familiarize yourself with the topic. Read through the information provided on pages 5-12. The more you know, the more comfortable you will be with the topic of sexuality.
- Prepare yourself for students' questions. Practice answering questions before you do so in front of your class.
- Spend some time thinking about your feelings, ideas and values regarding sexuality. Think about the messages you want to send to your students. Consider which of those are private and personal, and which are appropriate to share with your students. Basic principles of human rights and courtesy dictate that you must be respectful to your students. For further information regarding the appropriateness of certain topics for certain grade levels, you may wish to consult the Ontario Ministry Guidelines for grade nine physical and health education or the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.



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Be An Open-Minded Facilitator

- Acquire a basic knowledge of sexuality so that your class may benefit from your expertise. Yet, remember that *your knowledge* is less important than *your attitude* towards sexuality. Creating a classroom in which students feel safe and free to ask questions is very important.
- Be student-centred and address different learning styles.
- Be sensitive to non-verbal communication and react positively to questions.
- Ask participants about what they would like to learn.
- Encourage self-confidence and decision-making skills.
- Use humour to ease embarrassment and create a comfortable environment.

Establish A Healthy Classroom Environment

- Create an atmosphere of trust in which all students can be themselves.
- Be sensitive towards the attitudes, values and feelings of others.
- Respect the values and beliefs of people from all cultural communities.
- Communicate with warmth and sincerity. Share positive feedback with students whenever possible.
- Be capable of discretion should students decide to confide in you.
- Do not be afraid to express discomfort.
- Listen carefully to your students' questions, concerns, worries and thoughts.
- Value your students' opinions and realise they may change over time. Avoid criticising students' opinions.
- Answer questions honestly when you know the correct answer.
- When you do not possess accurate information regarding a topic, research the answer and report back to your students at a later date.



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Be Prepared

The best thing you can do before teaching your students about sexuality is to adequately prepare yourself for the task. As with most things, proper preparation makes a big difference. With it, you can make this experience much more enjoyable - for you and for the students. Focus on giving your students the information they need and want to know. Stress the interconnectedness of the physical, emotional and social components of adolescent development.

Ask For Help, If You Need It

There are tremendous resources available to you. For more information on sexuality, please feel free to visit our website at www.peelregion.ca. Search for “Healthy Sexuality”. For further support, or to have *your* questions answered, please call Health Line Peel at 905-799-7700 and ask for Sexual Health. A Public Health Nurse will be happy to answer your questions between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Remember Your Important Role As A Sexuality Educator

Teens are very curious about sexuality - and knowledge satisfies this curiosity. Young people will continue to ask questions as long as they feel they need answers. Teachers are extremely important sexuality educators. You can provide some of the most relevant and helpful information to your students – helping them to grow into confident and sexually healthy adults.



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Resources:

Health Canada. (2003). *The Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*.
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/cgshe-ldnemss/cgshe_index.htm.

Ontario Ministry of Education, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (1999).
Health and Physical Education, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10.
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/health/healful.html.

Planned Parenthood Federation Of Canada (2001). Beyond The Basics: A Sourcebook on Sexuality and Reproductive Health Education. Ottawa: Author.