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SEXUALITY TOOLKIT

FOR YOUTH WORKERS



SEXUALITY TOOLKIT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction: What Is This Toolkit?	Page 1
Chapter 2: Creating a Safe Space	Page 4
Chapter 3: How to Respond to Disclosures	Page 6
Chapter 4: Gender-Inclusive Sex Education	Page 8
Chapter 5: Consent at Every Level	Page 10
Chapter 6: A Sex-Positive Approach	Page 13
Chapter 7: A Focus on Pleasure	Page 15
Chapter 8: Sex Ed and Identity	Page 17
Chapter 9: When Sex Isn't Going as Expected	Page 19
Chapter 10: Difficult Questions	Page 22
Chapter 11: Information and Resources	Page 26

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YWCA Minneapolis is a trusted social justice organization with a 130-year history of advocacy for women and children. Through equity-centered programs and advocacy focused on racial justice, education and wellness, we create leaders, spark positive change and improve the health of our community for all.

Our afterschool programs equip youth with the skills and experience to nurture their confidence, relationships and power to be leaders in their lives and communities. Contact Plus is a program of YWCA Minneapolis that engages with youth around holistic sexual health education and self-empowerment to be informed and active agents of their health, continue cultivating positive relationships and be leaders in their communities.

Learn more at ywcamppls.org

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What Is This Toolkit?





How to Use This Toolkit

You are the driver in this toolkit journey. Start where it feels right. There are various interactive activities to support you connecting your own work to the information presented and it is encouraged that you utilize the exercises to connect more deeply to the content. You can use this toolkit individually or as a group. You may find that some information is more relevant to what you are seeking than others. Use this toolkit to get what you need.

A Moving Document

Information and concepts are constantly evolving. This toolkit aims to be fluid in its content, being updated and edited to more deeply reflect what is important to know in sexuality education.

Questions? Please contact
ContactPlus@ywcampsls.org.

Finally, this toolkit is operating out of the assumption that sex education is: gender-affirming, pleasure positive, welcoming and open.

First, it is important to start with ourselves...

We created this toolkit as a resource for youth workers who include sexuality education into their programming. Regardless of experience, this toolkit provides support for educators who want to create an inclusive sexuality education experience for young people ages 11-18.

Sexuality education is about so much more than just sex. This toolkit aims to help you work within the complexity of sexuality education and embrace how it is connected to our experiences as individuals, and to the wider systems we exist in. It is meant to be an interactive process with various activities included for your own self-reflection and program development.

This toolkit also acknowledges that no idea or concept exists on an island – they are grown out of many past and present ideologies.

Before Sex Ed

Before teaching about sexuality and health, it is important to start with ourselves and look inward to understand what messages we've internalized or biases we have. Most of us have not grown up with the open, unbiased sex education we all deserve. Dedicate some time to answer these questions honestly. The more self-awareness we have, the better we can guide others.

Self-Awareness Activity

Part 1: Take some time to write about your own upbringing in relation to sex education.

1. What were the attitudes about sexuality from your family, school, peers and community?
2. What were your own attitudes about sexuality when you were young?
3. What were messages you remember receiving about gender? Where did you receive these messages?
4. What were messages you received about having sex or not having sex? Where did these messages come from?

Part 2: Now write about your minefields in regards to sexuality.

1. What are your triggers?
2. What are concepts or ideas that make you uncomfortable?
3. What strategies do you have to deal with your triggers and discomfort?

Part 3: Write about who you think you would be without external influences or responses.

Creating a Safe Space





Within a group setting, there are different values, comfort levels and knowledge about sexuality topics. Take some time to brainstorm ways that you can create a group setting where young people feel safe and supported in talking about sexuality.

Here are some questions for your consideration that you can write about or discuss:

1. How do you model upholding safe and healthy boundaries in a group?
(Example: Be clear with students that shaming will not be tolerated in the group.)
2. How do you cultivate a sense of mutual respect between young people and yourself?
(Example: Ask young people for their input and feedback.)

Consent can also be a tool for creating cohesive groups for programming. Here are some things to explore with this concept:

1. How does practicing consent in groups increase youth voices?
2. How can incorporating consent at all levels increase feelings of respect for young people and facilitators?

Questions to discuss with colleagues:

1. What are resources and support that you need to create a positive group setting for facilitating sexuality conversations?
2. What is already being effectively done to cultivate a safe group setting for your programming? Are there any things that you would change about the group setting when introducing sexuality education into the group?

How to Respond to Disclosures





Pre-Reflection

What is your current understanding of mandated reporting? Has your program had a discussion about mandated reporting?

It is always possible that a certain subject, activity or discussion will result in a young person disclosing personal information regarding potential harm or abuse. If that is the case, it is important to provide a safe space for a student to do so.

Helpful steps to take to feel prepared for disclosures:

1. Identify your organization's process for dealing with a disclosure or what steps you are required to take if a young person discloses information to you.
2. Share information about your role to the group. This can be done when you create group agreements. For example, "What is said here stays here... except if I learn about someone being hurt by someone, hurting someone else or hurting themselves."
3. Research what your state defines abuse and mandated reporting roles:

[Resource Guide for Mandated Reporters of Child Maltreatment Concerns](#)

4. Educate yourself on the different impacts that reporting and Child Protective Services (CPS) systems can have on different communities and bias in reporting:

[Race and Poverty Bias in the Child Welfare System: Strategies for Child Welfare Practitioners](#)

[Black Families Matter: How the Child Welfare System Punishes Poor Families Of Color](#)

5. Take time to review strategies for supporting a young person who is disclosing potential abuse to you:

[Reporting Abuse](#)

While not all disclosures may be about abuse, it is helpful to have resources on hand to be able to hold the appropriate space for students, be clear and honest with students on how you need to proceed after the conversation, and think deeply about any assumptions you may have as you make decisions.

Gender-Inclusive Sex Education





Many topics in sexuality education are broken down by sex. For example, lessons around puberty often describe changes that happen in boy versus girl bodies, or birth control lessons describe use for males versus females. This type of description erases people who have genders that do not align with their assigned sex (i.e., someone who identifies as a man, but is born with a uterus, or someone who uses they/them pronouns with a penis).

Luckily, there is a very easy fix to ensure that all identities can be included in these conversations.

Here are some examples:

"Can everyone share their name, their preferred pronoun and what their favorite food is?" If someone does not feel comfortable sharing their preferred pronoun, that is their choice. You can also refer to someone's name instead of using a pronoun.

"The IUD can be used by someone with a uterus as a tool to prevent pregnancy."

"Some bodies may have penises and testicles, and some bodies may have vaginas and ovaries."

"When a person gets their period, it is the result of their uterus shedding its lining."

"A body with a penis may be impacted differently by sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than a body with a vagina. It is also common that someone may not show any symptoms."

"A person who has a penis can use an external condom to help prevent pregnancy and STIs, while a person who has a vagina can use an internal condom to help prevent pregnancy and STIs."

Creating an Inclusive Environment

Another aspect of gender-inclusive

sexuality education to consider is how to create an environment where students can talk about body parts without experiencing dysphoria. One way this can happen is by opening up anatomy conversations to allow students to think about names of body parts that feel right for their identity (ex: a vaginal opening may be called a front hole).

There are many different terms that people use to describe their identity, expression or sexual orientation. It is helpful to familiarize yourself with these terms and provide resources for students to be able to learn, too. Just like everything else, terms change often and do not apply to everyone's experience. You can use this list to learn about some different terminology, but note that this is not a complete list of language someone may use:

[PLAG National Glossary of Terms](#)

**Consent at
Every Level**



There are many different models out there that describe what consent is. Planned Parenthood's FRIES model (freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, specific) is one model that is clear and easy to remember. However, consent is something that is often talked about only in the context of sexual interactions or permission forms. But what about all of the different levels where consent exists? Consent can help to create safe groups, develop respectful relationships, have deeper and more honest conversations about our lives, and uplift healthy relationships dynamics in general. So what does this look like?

A Self-Reflection Activity

What are your personal boundaries?

- Create a list of interactions with others and reflect on whether they are actions that you feel comfortable or don't feel comfortable doing. Give each a "yes, no or maybe." (Example: Hugging a friend, giving a high five to a teacher, etc.)

- Think about your values around sexuality. Do your values support young people making decisions for themselves? Why or why not?
- Reflect on where you see consent show up in relationship with someone else (Example: Asking to hug someone or asking if a student is interested in leading an activity)
- Think about how you see consent being modeled or not modeled in your community. (Example: Police members violating the consent of/harassing community members)
- What are values that larger society upholds that violate consent? (Example: Patriarchal, classist and white supremacist structures show up in policies and actions: abortion restrictions and lack of family planning; public funding violating decisions and rights of people who are pregnant; racist prison systems violating the dignity of human lives)

Next, we'll reflect on how the different levels of consent apply to creating a group that centers student voices.

1. What opportunities exist for students to shape how programs or groups look?

Examples:

- Developing group agreements together
- Student voices being included in the activities that are planned
- Creating a question box

2. What opportunities exist for facilitators to model consent?

Examples:

- Checking in with where youth are at and getting feedback after an activity to see how they felt about it
- Young people given options of activities or ways to participate that they can choose from
- Giving space for young people to share their boundaries and ways they feel respected

How Does Power Have an Impact on Consent?

Living in this world means that there are various power dynamics to navigate that may complicate everyone being able to use consent in different spaces. These power dynamics may be a result of race, gender, age, job position, language, ability and more.

What are examples of things that may make it riskier for someone to uphold their boundaries? How can someone who has a lot of power work to create a space where consent is regularly practiced?

Consider the following examples:

A student brings a concern to a group leader about having their preferred pronouns used, but the group leader belittles the student's concern. This leaves the student feeling unsafe and uncomfortable with freely giving consent about anything in the group.

A facilitator does not give students any space to share their ideas, and punishes students who do not do things their way. Because of this, students cannot practice authentic consent because the facilitator is engaging in coercive behavior by forcing students to do things their way.

A teacher takes the time to listen to students' ideas and concerns with respect and openness, and works with students to create a safe and comfortable environment. Because of this, when the teacher introduces activities, students are willing and able to practice consent because they trust that their teacher will respect them.

Being intentional about incorporating consent into our everyday interactions takes consistent and intentional work. This resource is meant to be one among many that can support youth counselors in taking steps toward a consent-filled system.

A Sex-Positive Approach



Pre-Reflection

Can you think of a time when you were younger and a teacher or adult tried to scare you with information? Was it effective? How did it make you feel?

What are things that help you stay engaged in learning? What are things that a facilitator does that makes you feel connected and interested in the content?

What are ways to facilitate sex education in an open and positive way?

1. Providing medically accurate information
2. Highlighting one's right to look after their own sexual health (Example: Students researching youth-friendly clinics)
3. Honoring and celebrating different gender identities and attraction
4. Creating space for people to share how a topic connects to their own cultural identity
5. Empowering students to be confident in their decision-making skills
6. Encouraging questions
7. Including various abilities
8. Uplifting the vast range of sexuality experiences
 - Including: bodies, attraction, puberty, relationships and more
 - Combatting the expectations that are created by porn by creating an alternative, more accurate picture of sexuality

- Being inclusive of different familial structures, values, etc.

Respecting the process of peer education and peer support in groups

- Example: Students working together to think of helpful questions to ask a doctor or students supporting each other when they share something personal

Sex-Positive Resources for Your Exploration:

- [Scarleteen.com](https://www.scarleteen.com)
- [Sexpositivefamilies.com](https://www.sexpositivefamilies.com)
- [Plannedparenthood.org](https://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- [Guttmacher Institute](https://www.guttmacher.org)
- [Amaze.org](https://www.amaze.org)

Post Reflection

1. What are sex-positive concepts that you are already including in your groups?
2. Was there anything that you thought of that was not included in this list?

**A Focus On
Pleasure**



One goal of sexuality education is to highlight the role of pleasure. This means thinking about the pleasure that people can get from safely engaging in consensual (agreed on) sexual behavior, and the importance of feeling good in friendships, your body and the world.

Pre-Activity: *Create a list of different parts of your life where pleasure shows up.*

What can pleasure-focused sexuality education look like?

- 1. Consent:** Finding pleasure in having boundaries respected
- 2. Identity:** Highlighting the value of taking pleasure in and celebrating the intersecting aspects of one's identity
- 3. Healthy relationships:** Feeling good and safe about the people in our lives
- 4. Healthy communication:** Learning what kind of communication feels good to you and building skills to effectively communicate with others to work toward positive interactions that...
FEEL GOOD!
- 5. Body image:** Brainstorming tools or practices that can support you feeling good in your body
- 6. Gender identity:** Supporting and uplifting yours and others' gender identity work toward making a community that takes pleasure in the wholeness of each other
- 7. Anatomy:** Including information about how certain body parts can feel good (for some) with touch (either sexual or nonsexual); allowing for people to label their body parts in ways that are affirming to them
- 8. Contraception:** Naming the difference of engaging in sexual activity for pleasure vs. reproduction and how contraception can support increasing pleasure as well as safety
- 9. STIs:** Noting the value of getting tested and being on top of your sexual health can increase pleasure (with less worry)

This is not a full list of how to incorporate pleasure into different topics in sexuality education. A common theme that you may notice is the reframing of certain activities or information into more of a positive lens.

Post Reflection

1. Can you think of ways that you are already incorporating a framework of pleasure in your work?
2. Do you have any new ideas of ways to include this framework into your sexuality education component?

Sex Ed and Identity



How to connect sexual health concepts to students' own values and identities

Pre-reflection: Take some time to write about how your identity drives the decisions you make about your sexuality.

Sexuality topics are not only about the health of the body and mind — they include the relationship someone has with themselves and their community, as well as how these interactions are influenced by societal messages. With this in mind, creating opportunities for young people to connect the sexual health information that they are receiving to the context of their own lives can be valuable. This works toward uplifting a young person's ability to make healthy and informed decisions for themselves. Many of these practices of providing space to celebrate cultural identities are likely present in your programming.

So how can you build upon and connect these elements to sexual health? Here are some examples:

- Include more broad aspects of sexuality such as: healthy relationships, communication styles, body image, navigating conflict and consent. This will help to lead up to sexual health topics and provide self-reflection points that students can refer back to.



- Include discussion questions that help bridge different topics together. For example, if you are talking about menstruation, you can have youth think about what products would work best for them based on the information they just received, and their values around it.
- Give students space to examine the different sources that messages about a topic are coming from (the media, family, community, religion, friends) and support them in identifying what is healthy and important to them. Some reflections students may think about:
 - o What cultural norms are you navigating regarding sexuality, relationships, body image, etc.?
 - o What expectations do your family, friends, media and community have for you? Which expectations do you identify with and which do you not?
 - o What do you believe in?

Having opportunities to incorporate activities and discussions around these topics can naturally create a bridge to have students evaluate what these topics look like for them, and how these experiences tie to sexual health topics.

When Sex Isn't Going as Expected





It is natural for people to have different sexual concerns arise throughout their lives. Young people are no exception to this. Included is a list of some sexual concerns that may come up and information to help you address them:

Ejaculation (It's happening before I want it to)

Some people may feel concerned about ejaculating before they would like during a sexual encounter. It is not unlikely that a person with a penis will experience premature ejaculation during some sexual encounters. If someone notices that they are experiencing premature ejaculation during most sexual interactions, they may want to see a doctor.

Learn more:

[Premature Ejaculation](#)

Erections (Am I having too many? Why can't I get them?)

Erections can happen as a result of feeling aroused/turned on. Erections also happen as a result of the body oxygenating the penis. This is a natural function that supports healthy blood flow and happens multiple times throughout the day.

Erectile dysfunction is when someone struggles to get an erection. This can be a result of physical and/or psychological factors. There are many things a person can do to address erectile dysfunction from medical attention to lifestyle change.

Learn more:

[Erectile Function](#)
[Erectile Dysfunction](#)

Orgasms

Both the body and mind play a role in orgasms. With this in mind, people can struggle to achieve orgasm for various reasons involving the body and mind. Some reasons include:

a change in someone's health, sexual interactions that are not stimulating in the right way for someone, anxiety over being able to have an orgasm, mental health, medications, past trauma, a person not knowing how they like to be touched, general stress, etc.

Some of these reasons can be addressed through relaxation activities, open communication with a sexual partner, incorporating different toys and tools (like lube), redefining what pleasure means to you and/or self-exploration.

Different types of therapy can also support people through any trauma, mental health concerns, and unwanted pain.

Learn more about how orgasms work and resources for people who struggle to get orgasms:

[Orgasms for People with Vulvas](#)
[Orgasmic Dysfunction](#)

Knowing when the “right time” to have sex is

Many young people wonder when the “right time” to have sex is. There is no universal right time to have sex. Everyone is different. For some people, they may never have any interest in engaging in sexual activities. For others, there are a few things that can indicate that you are ready to have sex:

- You have a desire to have sex
- You and your potential sexual partner(s) have talked about having interest in and consented to engaging in sexual interactions
- You and your potential partner(s) have talked about what protection tools you are going to use and you know where you can access them
- You and your potential sexual partner(s) feel like you can have open and honest conversations about your wants, needs and boundaries

Have students brainstorm anything else they think is important to have in place before engaging in sexual activities with another person.

Sexual Desire (Am I having too much/not enough?)

Desire is fluid, so it may not feel the same at every moment for various reasons. Some people may feel less desire around sexual interactions in general, while others may have more desire. There is no right or wrong level of sexual desire. There are also many things that can impact desire such as: stress, mental health, energy, safety, physical changes and more.

Learn more:

[Libido](#)

Pain During Penetration

Unwanted pain during sexual penetration can be due to a number of different things:

- Lack of warm up: Some people may find that they did not have the chance to build their arousal through foreplay, resulting in the vagina not lubricating itself
- Friction: For some, there may be too much friction happening due to dryness. Lube is a great tool to help reduce friction to make sexual intercourse more pleasurable

- Tight muscles: Some people may notice they feel pain with vaginal penetration or orgasm. This could be a result of having high tone pelvic floor muscles (pelvic floor muscles that are too tight). This high tone tightness can be due to athletics or physical training. There are different resources, exercises and tools that can support a person with relaxing their pelvic floor muscles. A pelvic floor therapist or medical professional can support a person with finding the right tools for them. Some of these tools include, lube, dilators, breathing and relaxation exercises

- Vaginismus: Some people with vaginas may experience pain during intercourse due to their body responding to psychological shame or fear around sexual interactions. Therapy is a great resource for addressing this, as well

There may be other reasons not listed above for why someone is experiencing unwanted pain during penetration.

Learn more:

[Pain During Penetration](#)

Difficult Questions



Pre-Brainstorm: *What kinds of questions do you think could be asked by a student when talking about sexuality? Are there any questions you can think of that would make you uncomfortable to answer?*

When facilitating activities and conversations around sexuality and sexual health, you are sure to get all sorts of questions from students. This is a helpful guide breaking down how to answer those questions, based on the frameworks from [FLASH Sexual Health Curriculum](https://flashsexualhealth.ca) and teachingsexualhealth.ca.

Most of these questions can be broken down into a few categories:

1. Asking for information

Example: “How does a menstrual cup work?”

- These questions are looking for accurate and straight-forward responses.
- You can always get back to the student if you are not sure of the answer and need to do some research. (Example: “I am not sure of the answer but I will look it up and let you know the answer next time.”)



2. “Am I Normal?” questions

Example: “Are people supposed to get more hair?”

- Students are going through all sorts of changes and there is often an element of wondering if what they are experiencing is what other people are going through.
- Affirm concerns: “A lot of people wonder about this...”
- Provide factually correct information regarding the question (“During puberty, many people experience hair growth in different parts of their body...”)
- Highlight that there is a variation of experiences that people have.

3. Permission-seeking and values-related questions

Example: Is abortion okay? Did you have sex when you were a teen? Is it okay to masturbate?

- These questions come from trying to understand what behaviors are “okay” to participate in
- Uplift that everyone has different values and opinions about certain behaviors or topics (there is no “normal”)
- Respond with factually correct information/encourage students to do their research on factual info
 - You can provide youth-friendly websites for students, i.e., amaze.org, scarleteen.com or sexetc.org
 - Have student brainstorm trusted adults they can ask
- If you are asked a personal question about yourself, you can highlight the importance of boundaries and how this is a boundary for you to not share
 - You can also set up group agreements around sharing personal behaviors and sexual activities

4. Attempting to shock

Example: “Why does it hurt to have your dick hit?”

- These types of questions may be due to embarrassment or shame around a topic, or done for attention

- If slang terminology is used, be sure to respond to the question with the medically used term: "A penis has a lot of sensitive nerves which is why it may be painful if it is hit."
 - It is okay for students to use the words they have learned to describe certain body parts or concepts. As you respond with the medical terminology, this will help to increase the association between slang terms and medical terms.
 - The only time you will want to interrupt slang terminology is if it is an offensive term, one that is harmful to someone's identity.
- If you notice that there may be an underlying theme behind questions, you can redirect the question to address the theme.
 - Example Question: "I heard that if you bleed through your clothes when you're on your period, it means you aren't a virgin. Is that true?" Response: "It sounds like you have questions around menstruation. Everyone has their own experience with getting their period. Let's talk more about what can happen when someone is menstruating..."
- You can also redirect a question back to a student or the whole group
 - Example: "What does respect look like to you? Why do you think it is important to learn about contraception?"
 - A benefit to redirecting a question to the group is that it can highlight what other people are also thinking about the question.
 - Keep on the lookout for any shaming language or "shoulds." This could be a great opportunity to examine where that may come from and redirect them to something more positive.
- You can always put a question on hold and return to it when you have had time to think about how you want to respond.

Helpful Tip:

You can create an anonymous question box to allow students to ask questions they may be embarrassed about, as well as to give you more time to think about how you would like to answer them. You can also use the question box to put in questions that you want to discuss in a group.

Find more [in-depth information](#) regarding answering student's questions.

Information and Resources



Here are some helpful resources to support your holistic and comprehensive sexuality programming:

Where to find relevant, up-to-date sexual health information:

CDC: The CDC has current information about many reproductive health topics.

www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/contraception/index.htm

American Sexual Health Association: Find updated and accurate information about a vast range of sexual health topics. Has resources for teachers and parents.

www.ashasexualhealth.org

STI Project: Site devoted to breaking down the stigma of STIs. Has great information about STIs.

www.ashasexualhealth.org

Planned Parenthood: Find a vast range of accurate reproductive health resources.

www.plannedparenthood.org/learn

Guttmacher Institute: Resource to stay familiar with current reproductive health policy.

www.guttmacher.org

Sex Ed Lecture series: Up to date information about various sexuality topics.

www.sexedlectures.org/upcoming-lectures

Center for Sex Education: Find current lessons and up to date sexual health information.

www.sexedcenter.org

AASECT (American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists):

Resource to connect with other educators and find up to date sexuality information.

www.aasect.org

Teaching Safer Sex Resources

1. FLASH Curriculum
2. Our Whole Lives Curriculum
3. Center for Sex Education
4. Be Proud Be Responsible

Where to find developmentally appropriate sexual health content for youth:

Amaze.org: Find information and tools that can be used to support your facilitation of sexual health topics with young people. Their videos are particularly helpful with conveying inclusive and medically accurate information.

amaze.org

Scarleteen: Youth friendly sexuality website that contains various topics and accurate information.

www.scarleteen.com

Sex, Etc.: By teens and for teens, this site has a plethora of information ranging from policy to health.

sexetc.org

Advocates for youth: Find explainers on different sexual health topics and youth activism.

www.advocatesforyouth.org

Minnesota specific sexual health resources:

Minnesota Department of Health: Use this site for more local information about sexual health and policy.

www.health.state.mn.us/people/sexualhealth/index.html

Teen Friendly Clinics: Learn about what teen friendly clinics there are in Minnesota from ACLU Minnesota.

www.aclu-mn.org/en/teen-sexual-health-rights

Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA): MNCASA holds a host of information about sexual violence from resources to advocacy efforts.

www.mncasa.org

Corner House: Resources to support young people who have experienced abuse.

www.cornerhousemn.org/about-1

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