Let’s Talk About Sex Ed

Arizona youth were asked about their sex-ed experiences. “Let’s talk about Sex Ed” is the video they produced in response.

Learning Objectives

Talk! This guide is intended to promote dialogue around human sexuality within and between diverse communities of youth and adults.

Listen! This guide is designed to promote deep listening - the kind that allows schools, youth-serving organizations, and broader communities to learn directly from youth about their needs, interests and desires around sex, gender, and sexuality education.

Act! This guide is intended to provide pathways to the knowledge and information desired by and relevant to youth.

How To Use this Study Guide

We prepared this guide with several different audiences in mind - parents, teens, teachers, peer facilitators, community organizers, etc. We understand the video and the accompanying discussion guide and activities to be of possible use to a wide range of audiences - both in age and in experience with discussing topics pertaining to sex, gender, and sexuality. As such, when you review this study guide for your own use, feel free to tailor the questions, resources, and readings in order to generate the richest conversation for your own group. In general, we recommend the framework below as a climate setting tool for conversation; for some, this might mean going a step further, increasing the capacity to respond privately or anonymously (for example, using 3x5 cards or slips of paper to write responses on instead of sharing responses out loud with the group).

Tell us what you think

We would love to hear your opinion: How did you use this study guide and video? Within what organizations and groups did you find the guide useful? What was most useful? What could we make better? We appreciate your feedback! Please write to the Crossroads Collaborative: aclicona@email.arizona.edu
Considering the Video

To whom are the students in the video addressing their concerns? How can you tell?

Who do you believe needs to hear from youth regarding their opinions and concerns about the sex ed they receive?

Generally speaking, what would you describe as the goals of a sex ed class? Do you think your answer to this question is different from what your parents’ might be? Your teachers’? How so, and why

What do you want from a sex ed curriculum? What are the things you need to know to feel prepared for the future? Were there things you weren’t prepared for by your sex education?

Do you believe your sex ed curriculum is more relevant to some students than others? Which students? How so?

What are some definitions of “sex” being used around you? Are these definitions the same as or different from your own definition of “sex”?

Is “sexual identity” a topic of discussion among you and your friends? At school? With your parents? With your partner(s)?

What would it look like if young people were in charge of sex ed curricula? What if youth of color, specifically, were in charge? Youth with disabilities? LGBTQ youth?

What would a feminist sex ed curriculum look like? What would be different about sex ed if it included feminist perspectives? Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?

Remixes

The students in the video use a couple of interesting techniques to communicate their message. Discuss the impact and significance of the following choices:

Although first-person narrative is used to detail the limitations and also the failings of Arizona’s abstinence-only sex ed, these narratives are read and voiced by multiple students, not necessarily the student who is being quoted. This strategy is a kind of remix. Why do you think the students in this video remix bodies, voices and stories here? What can a remix of stories accomplish? How do you react to that choice as an audience member?

Can you imagine a time when you might remix stories with other youth to advocate for rights? If so, when?

Throughout the video, a handful of statistics are used to bolster the students’ complaints about the limitations of their sex ed curriculum. These statistics are both spoken by various narrators and drawn on students’ bodies. What impact does seeing this writing on their arms, legs, etc. have on you? Is the impact of seeing these statistics different for you from the impact of simply hearing them spoken, or seeing them written?
A handful of specific populations are named as having been “failed” by absti-nence-only sex ed: Latina women, straight feminist women, trans warriors, lesbians, survivors of domestic violence, and black males.

◊ Why have these particular identities been focused on in this video? Do you think sex ed has been a failure for each of these populations? What, if anything, do these populations/identifications have in common?

◊ Are there groups of people and identities not named here that are also failed by abstinence-only sex ed?

◊ Are there identities that are positively served by abstinence-only sex ed? If so, who are they and why do they benefit from abstinence-only education?

Sex Ed Across the U.S.

The students in the video refer specifically to their location (Tucson, AZ) when discussing the failures of abstinence-only sex ed. What, if any, is the relationship between where youth live and the sex ed that they do or don’t receive?

• Is sexual education political? Why or why not? Should it be?
• What role, if any, have your parents, family or guardians had in your sexual education? Have your friends and/or partner(s) played a role?

Do you feel that your own sex education experiences prepared you fully enough for your sexual life? Do you feel you had the chance to learn about issues related to...

• your body
• healthy romantic and sexual relationships
• non-heterosexual (LGBTQ) relationships
• non-monogamous romantic or sexual relationships
• dating abuse
• HIV/AIDS
• the spread and prevention of various sexually transmitted infections
• pregnancy and pregnancy prevention
• sexual pleasure
• consent

What are the variety of ways in which young people might be impacted by abstinence-only sex ed? Might the impacts be different for different groups and individuals? How so?

Do you believe that there are reasons that sex education should be comprehensive? Abstinence-only? Who do you believe should be in charge of these decisions?

What kind of sex ed curriculum would make it truly “comprehensive” (covering a broad enough range of topics) in your eyes? Are there particular topics that you believe should be covered in your sex ed curriculum? Are there particular topics that you believe shouldn’t be covered, or don’t need to be covered, in your sex ed curriculum? Why?
Talking & Listening: Climate Setting

Because “Let’s Talk About Sex Ed” prompts discussion around sensitive, sometimes unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable topics, it is important to lay the groundwork for a respectful conversation. While it is always challenging to account for the needs, attitudes, and sensibilities of all participants, the following the following acronym, PROCESS*, helps to facilitate respectful conversations that include many voices, interests, questions, and viewpoints.

- **Participate**: Everyone’s voice matters in these conversations - don’t hide yours away!
- **Respect**: Treat others as you would like to be treated, regardless of your similarities or differences.
- **Open** and honest communication: This means being honest about when someone’s words are hurtful to you (regardless of intention) and also owning when one’s own words are hurtful to another.
  - *Oops! (I offended you) and Ouch! (You offended me)*
- **Confidentiality**: Anything said in the (class)room stays in the classroom
- **Engage** in new ideas: Don’t be afraid to talk about and learn something you’ve never encountered before.
- **Space**: Be aware of how much “space” you occupy in discussion. Consider stepping back from conversation if you notice that others are not stepping forward. Allow for silences.
  - *Step up (if you tend to be quiet) and step back (if you tend to speak a lot)*
- **Self-care**: If at any point, the discussion becomes uncomfortable for you, or the discussion or the space begin to feel unsafe, feel free to excuse yourself. Consider speaking with a teacher/facilitator you trust.

*adapted by Casely E. Coan from Chelsea Fullerton and Andy Cofino (April 2014)

Activity #1: Gathering discussion topics of interest to your participants

Note: This activity will be particularly helpful with groups less comfortable or familiar with talking about these topics.

After watching the film, put up poster board or large pieces of paper with each of the following broad topics on them: sexual orientation, gender identity, sexuality education, sexual risk taking, sexually transmitted infections, and teen pregnancy.

Invite students to walk around the room, writing down (anonymous) specific topics of interest they would like to discuss or conversations they would like to have regarding each of the poster’s broad topics.

Alternative: Pose a question from the study guide, such as “What would need to be included in a sexuality education curriculum that was relevant to you and meet your needs?,” and provide poster boards upon which students can write down interests or concerns (perhaps categorized by, for example, Anatomy & Physiology, Relationships, Identity, Sexual Health, and Values & Attitudes).
Activity #2: Remixing stories and voices
Provide each student/participant with 3 different colored pieces of paper

On one color, invite everyone to complete the following phrase: As a _________ (insert relevant identity or characteristic)

On the second color, invite everyone to select either “comprehensive” sex ed or “abstinence-only” sex ed (depending on the curriculum they experienced)

On the third color, invite everyone to complete the following phrase: failed me because __________/didn’t prepare me for ________________.

In the end, everyone will have written the following sentence: “As a __________, comprehensive/abstinence-only sex education failed me because __________/didn’t prepare me for ________________.”

After collecting everyone’s pieces of paper, new sentences will be created from the various pieces of each person’s original sentence. In this way, the group collectively “remixes” their individual stories and opinions, and are invited to think about the ways in which their own experiences with sex ed are similar to or different from their friends’, peers’ and even mentors’.

This allows people both to share deeply personal experiences without making themselves vulnerable in front of their peers/teacher and to see the results of seeing their points of view mixed with others’.

Readings and Resources
Below are some readings and resources we think might be helpful as you and your community tackle the issues discussed in the video. Which resources do you rely on in your own community? Which resources would you like to see made available to young people for information on issues of sex and sex education?

- Houston, James. 2011. Let’s Talk About Sex (film)
- Wood, Elizabeth Ann. 2014. Still Harmful to Minors (blog post)
Glossary

Here are the definitions we’re thinking of when we use the bolded words above. These glossary definitions are drawn in part from the websites of Planned Parenthood (http://www.plannedparenthood.org) and Sex, Etc. (http://sexetc.org). Are these the definitions that you would use?

Gender:
• Refers to socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes of a person
• Refers also to a particular individual’s identity and expression of masculinity, femininity, both or neither; these may be expressed through mannerisms and/or pronouns and/or clothing, etc.

Sex (distinct from gender but sometimes confused with gender): can refer to the biological and physiological characteristics most often described as “male” or “female”

Sex: (see above) Can also refer to any voluntary sexual behavior, alone or with others

Sexuality: Refers to the set of desires, attractions and/or preferences specific to a particular person’s sexual interests

Abstinence-only Sex Ed: Sex education that only addresses abstinence and doesn’t share resources on condoms or other birth control or safe sex practices

Comprehensive Sex Ed: Sex education that considers sex a natural activity. The intent of this kind of curriculum is to prepare young people for safe, healthy sexual relationships and considers this the best way of protecting them from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Topics such as sexual identities, sexual pleasure and healthy relationships are often covered in these curricula.

Non-monogamous: A type of sexual and/or romantic relationship in which sexual and/or romantic practices or partners are not limited to or contained within a two-person partnership. Types of non-monogamous relationships might include polyamory and/or “open” (non-exclusive) relationships between women, men, or women and men.

(Self-)Identify: To name oneself as belonging to, relating to or feeling kinship with a particular group of people (racial identity, sexual identity, gender identity, etc.)

First-person Narrative: The telling of a story in which someone is speaking for and about her/his/their self

Remix: We use the term “remix” to describe how youth in the video interviewed one another and then scrambled their stories so that sometimes they were telling their own story(ies) and expressing their own ideas and opinions and at other times they were narrating the story/ideas/opinions of another youth

Feminism: Pertains to the social and political movement(s) and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending a state of equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights among genders; many employ the term to extend beyond gender-based rights into a movement to eradicate prejudice and oppression among all people, regardless of identity

LGBTQ: This acronym is an umbrella term referring to the community of people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*/transgender, or queer and their allies. This group may also include other identities, such as intersex, genderqueer, two-spirit, questioning, asexual and/or pansexual

* We use an asterisk with the term trans (trans*) to refer to any person or groups of people who don’t identify with the “gender binary” – the idea that individuals’ genders are either male or female.

Referenced in this video
• Crossroads Collaborative at the University of Arizona
• Eon Youth Program a program of Wingspan, Southern Arizona’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center
• Our Whole Lives
• Planned Parenthood
• Sex, Etc.
• Southern AZ AIDS Foundation