

HEALTH EDUCATION

Answering questions commonly asked about sex education by secondary students

A Teacher's Guide

A Guide for Teachers: Answering Commonly Asked Questions about Sex Education

In sex education instruction, it is a challenge to respond appropriately to questions from students. In considering responses, teachers must keep in mind Utah law and policy, as well as local district and charter school guidelines. This document is a guide to answering commonly asked questions. Teachers need to remember that if they are uncomfortable with a question, they are not *required* to respond.

Utah Law: Teachers may respond to spontaneous student questions for the purposes of providing medically accurate data or correcting inaccurate or misleading information or comments made by students in class.

Utah law prohibits teachers from answering questions concerning sexual techniques, including intricacies of sexual stimulation or erotic behavior. Some districts and charter schools may place additional restrictions on what may and may not be answered, and teachers must have a clear understanding of district and charter school policy regulating sex education instruction.

Utah Code: [53G-10-402](#)

Utah Administrative Code: [R277-474](#)

Types of Questions

Factual Information

If you know the answer, provide the information within Utah law, district/charter school and Utah Core guidelines. There is nothing wrong with teachers stating they do not know, that they will have to check resources, or that they are prohibited by state law from providing a response to a particular question. Teachers may also refer students to textbooks, glossaries, and specific websites and/or community resources that they have previewed and have been approved by school.

Physical and Emotional Changes

Students at both the middle school and high school levels may have questions about physical and emotional changes they or others are experiencing. Students need to be comfortable about discussing these changes, and teachers need to indicate that the questions are common among adolescents. If the questions are concerned with values, refer student to parents or guardians, clergy, counselors, or local community resources.

Validating Activities/Behaviors

Students may seek validation/approval for certain behaviors or activities affecting their sexuality. They may ask whether a teacher considers a behavior/activity okay, or whether the teacher experienced the same thing when he/she was younger. They may also ask whether something is normal and common for most adolescents.

In response, avoid using the term *“normal,”* as this will vary from one value system to another. Present medically accurate information addressing legal issues, risk factors, and consequences of behaviors students may be suggesting. Reinforce the value of asking questions as a means to learn about making healthy decisions and keep responses as brief and concise as possible. Teachers should never include personal biases or past experiences.

General Guidelines for Answer Questions

1. Establish and reinforce ground rules with class. These may include:
 - Teachers are not at liberty to answer all questions. Some questions may not be answered because they are either inappropriate or do not meet the state, district, or charter school guidelines.
 - Questions must be within Utah law and district or charter school guidelines (review parent consent form with students).
 - Questions must be asked and answered using medically accurate terminology – no street slang.
 - Technique or “how to” questions will not be answered.
 - Students may not ask questions about the teacher’s personal experiences.
 - Ridiculing or making fun of students who ask questions is not allowed.
 - Allow students to participate in other rules or agreements.
2. Precede responses with phrases that help students feel at ease and encourage class discussion. Examples are:
 - “Many students probably wonder about this...”
 - “Thank you for asking this very relevant question...”
 - “I appreciate your question. Can you tell me a little more so I can provide a complete answer?”
 - “That’s a good question, but I am not permitted to answer. Your parents or your counselor might be able to provide that information to you.”
3. When answering factual questions, make sure you are:
 - Providing medically accurate information.
 - Within the Core Standards, Utah State law, and district or charter school guidelines.
 - Considering the age/maturity level of your students.
 - Objective, brief, and concise in your response.
4. For answers to questions that might cause embarrassment, consider the following introductions:
 - “Many times adults as well as students are embarrassed by questions like this, but it is important to discuss...”
 - “I feel a bit uncomfortable with this question and do not feel I can answer it for you.”

5. For answers to value questions (right or wrong), consider the following responses:
 - “This is a question concerning values that vary from person to person or group to group depending on personal background.”
 - “Consult your parents, guardians, or other trusted adults for an answer to this question.”

Commonly Asked Questions and Responses

The following questions have been frequently asked of teachers in Utah classrooms. Answer are italicized.

Diseases

1. What is the difference between sexually transmitted disease (STD) and sexually transmitted infection (STI)? *Sexually transmitted disease (STD) and sexually transmitted infection (STI) are two terms that often mean the same thing, but the “D” stands for disease”, while the “I” stands for infection. Medically, infections are only called diseases when they cause symptoms, and many STIs don’t have symptoms.*
2. From what body fluids can you get HIV? *Blood, semen, vaginal fluids, anal fluids, and breast milk are the fluids from which someone can contract HIV.*
3. Will the use of a condom prevent sexually transmitted diseases or infections? *Abstinence is the only 100% sure method of preventing STDs and STIs. The CDC has indicated that condoms do offer protection against the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and infections when used correctly and consistently.*
4. How do you know if you have an STD or STI? *STDs and STIs show different signs, but many do not display symptoms at all. People in doubt should be checked.*
5. Can herpes be passed by having oral sex? *Yes, oral and genital herpes can be contracted through kissing or oral sex, and there is no cure.*
6. Can you get an STD or STI if you have never had sex? *Most STDs and STIs are transmitted by having vaginal, oral, or anal sex, but some are spread through genital contact, infected blood on hypodermic needles, pregnancy, and childbirth.*
7. Can you get an STD or STI if you only have oral sex? *Yes, many STDs and STIs can be transmitted by giving or receiving oral sex.*
8. Are STD’s and STIs different for boys and for girls? *No, the diseases are the same, but the symptoms may differ. Especially in women, some STDs or STIs show no symptoms at all.*
9. How do lesbians get HIV? *Lesbians get HIV through contaminated blood or vaginal fluids or through contaminated needles.*

10. I have heard that people can get HIV from getting tattoos or body piercings. Is this true? *HIV and Hepatitis B or C, all dangerous diseases, can be contracted from body piercing or tattooing if the instruments from the procedures are not sterilized or disinfected between clients.*
11. Is it possible to get an STD or STI from a toilet seat in a public restroom? *This is highly unlikely, as most STDs and STIs are spread through fluid exchange or by the use of contaminated needles.*
12. Can I get an STD or STI from kissing? *In open-mouth kissing it is possible, but not probable. If your partner's mouth is infected with an STD or STI, he or she may be able to pass the infection to your mouth if you have an open sore.*

Menstruation

1. Why is there bleeding when a girl is on her period? *Menstruation is the shedding of the uterus lining through the vaginal opening.*
2. I have heard that tampons can be dangerous to use. Are they? *Using a tampon incorrectly can cause a rare but serious condition called Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). Package instructions should be followed carefully.*
3. Can a girl get pregnant while she is on her period? *Yes, if a girl has sexual intercourse on her period she can get pregnant.*
4. Can you lose your virginity by using a tampon? *People define virginity in different ways, but most define a virgin as one who has never had sexual intercourse. Using this definition, you cannot lose your virginity by using a tampon.*
5. Is it true that you cannot get an STD or STI if you have sex during your period? *No, you can get an STD or STI any time you have sex with an infected person. Abstinence is the only true preventative measure.*
6. If my friend has missed her period and thinks she is pregnant, what should she do? *Your friend needs to talk with her parents or guardians. If this is not possible, she can talk to a school counselor or another trusted adult who can assist her in arranging to talk with her parents.*

Puberty

1. Is it normal for a boy to have swollen breasts, sometimes with discharge? *This is a common happening during puberty, almost 50% of all boys will experience swollen breasts with or without a discharge fluid. It will go away over time and is not something unusual or to be worried about.*
2. Is there a purpose for pubic hair? *Hair helps to protect our bodies and regulate body temperature.*

3. When do girls' breasts start to develop? *This is a common concern for girls. Usually, breasts start to develop somewhere between the ages of 9 and 15. You should not compare yourself with others, as there is not set schedule for breast development.*
4. What is a wet dream? *A wet dream is an involuntary release of semen during sleep. It is more formally referred to as a nocturnal emission and is common among boys during puberty.*
5. What is an erection? *It is when the penis becomes engorged with blood.*

Sex

1. Can girls get pregnant if they have sex standing up? *Girls can become pregnant regardless of the position or the location they are in when they have sexual intercourse.*
2. What is oral and anal sex? *Oral sex is mouth to genital or mouth to anus contact; anal sex is penis to anus contact.*
3. Is oral or anal sex really sex? *Yes, they both involve contact with the genitals and is a mode of transporting sexually transmitted diseases or infections.*
4. Can a girl become pregnant without penetration? *Yes, seminal fluid containing sperm can enter the vagina without penetration.*
5. Can a girl become pregnant if she only has anal intercourse? *The only way a girl can become pregnant from anal intercourse is when any sperm comes in contact with the vagina. STD's and STI's can be spread through anal intercourse.*
6. What is a girl's cherry? *"Cherry" is a slang or street term for the hymen, a thin fold of skin that goes across the vaginal opening that is usually present at birth.*
7. How do you put on a condom? *This is a technique, or how to, question and I am not permitted answer. Please refer to the package instructions.*
8. Can you get pregnant from having oral sex? *No, but you can transmit or receive STDs or STIs.*
9. Will I be a better lover if I have more partners? *No, the more partners you have the more you are putting yourself and your partners at risk.*
10. If I use two condoms will I be better protected against HIV and other STDs or STIs? *No, they produce friction which can cause them to break.*
11. What is "blue balls"? *"Blue balls" is a slang term for male arousal without ejaculation. It sometimes causes temporary pain due to constricted blood vessels that naturally goes away with time.*
12. What is an orgasm? *An orgasm is a series of contractions of the pelvic muscles occurring at the peak of sexual arousal.*

13. How do gay people have sex? *This is a technique question, but as with heterosexual couples, intimate behaviors shared by homosexual couples need not be discussed.*
14. Is masturbation dangerous or bad? *There is no scientific evidence that masturbation is dangerous. In some communities, some families, or religions, masturbation is labeled as morally wrong or "bad". What might be right or acceptable for one person is not necessarily right or acceptable for another. It is important to accept others personal values and boundaries.*
15. I hear less and less about AIDS. Is there an AIDS vaccination to protect people? *No. Although medications have been developed to manage the disease and ensure a longer life for those having it, AIDS creates many complications. There is no vaccination for HIV and there is no cure for AIDS.*
16. Isn't AIDS a gay disease? *No. AIDS has always affected people of all sexual orientations. HIV/AIDS is currently growing fastest in the heterosexual populations and is affecting the 18-25 age group the most.*
17. How do girls/boys masturbate? *This is a technique question that I am not permitted to answer.*
18. What is date rape? *Date rape is when someone you know or have gone out with has sexual intercourse with you against your will.*
19. If a guy ejaculates over a girl's underwear or over her clothing, can she become pregnant? *It is less likely than with penetration, but anytime sperm gets near a girl's genitals there is a chance she can become pregnant or be exposed to STDs or STIs.*
20. What is "plan B one step" or the "morning after pill", and how does it work? *This medication is sometimes called emergency contraception. It is a medication to stop the release of an egg from the ovary. It may prevent sperm from fertilizing the egg. If fertilization does occur, this medication may prevent a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus. The medication works best the sooner it is taken, it can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected or unwanted intercourse to prevent pregnancy. It offers no protection from STDs or STIs.*
21. Can drinking alcohol during pregnancy harm a baby? *Yes, drinking alcohol or using other substances puts a baby at risk for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), which may cause brain damage and numerous other birth defects.*
22. How do you define having sex? *Having sex may include more than sexual intercourse. It can include genital touching, oral, and anal sex.*
23. What is a dental dam? *A dental dam is a piece of latex used for dental procedures. Some people also use it as an STD/STI preventative with oral sex.*

24. Can I still be a virgin if I only have oral or anal sex? *People define virginity in different ways, but most define a virgin as one who has never had sexual intercourse. Please remember you are still putting yourself at risk for STDs and STIs, including HIV.*
25. What is the most effective method of birth control? *Abstinence is the only 100% effective method of birth control. All others fail to some extent.*
26. Did you have sex before you were married? *I'm sorry, but as I indicated in the ground rules, I do not answer questions about my personal experiences.*
27. Can I become sterile from masturbating? *There is no evidence of this.*
28. What is masturbation? *It is self-stimulation of the genitals.*
29. What is an abortion? *The termination of pregnancy by various means, including medical surgery, before the fetus is able to sustain independent life.*