

U Choose to Know

Talking about values in sexuality education

A lot of us have been told that we should stay away from any discussions about values during sex education. But the truth is that high-quality sex education is NOT values-free. We actually should be talking about values—for example, when we develop group agreements for how everyone should behave in the classroom, and when we talk about topics like healthy relationships.

The trick is to know when it's OK to share values, and when it's not. It helps to know the difference between a universal value and a personal value. Universal values are shared by the vast majority of people, and usually have a law or policy to back them up. Personal values, on the other hand, can be more controversial.



Examples of UNIVERSAL VALUES:	Examples of PERSONAL VALUES:
We should behave in a respectful manner toward all students.	Abortion is wrong.
No one should force another person to have sex.	Masturbation is acceptable.
People have a right to feel safe in their school.	Teens should not be having sex.
Knowingly infecting another person with a sexually transmitted disease is wrong.	Condoms should be offered in schools.

See the next page for what you can do when personal values come up in your classroom...



Want to read more? Check out the [FLASH Curriculum Guide](#) to answering students' questions. Especially check out "The Slang or Hurtful Language Question" on pages 5-6 and "The Question You Don't Understand" on page 7.

So what can you do when personal values come up in your classroom?

1 **Validate** the student's curiosity. It's natural for students to look to the adults in their lives for their opinions, and they might ask you before they remember any group agreements you have about not sharing personal information. Tell them it's OK to be curious.

ex. *"It's common for students to be curious about how their teacher feels about teens having sex, and it's normal to seek out opinions when you're trying to decide how you feel. But it's more important that you explore how you feel about it and learn how to decide for yourself."*

2 **Stick** to the facts. Every topic, no matter how controversial, has facts associated with it, and by not shutting down a topic completely, you are sending the message that their question is valid and worthy of discussion. Focus on facts related to laws or health implications, but make sure you are sure about the answer before you share.

ex. *"I won't share my personal opinion about abortion, but I can tell you that it's a medical procedure that ends a pregnancy, and it's legal in the United States."*

3 **Describe** the range of beliefs, focusing on people in general rather than the people in your classroom. De-personalizing the discussion helps students learn to acknowledge and tolerate the beliefs of others. Some people use the acronym SOY to remember this (for Some, for Others, for You).

ex. *"Some people believe it's OK to masturbate, and others believe it's always wrong. You'll have to decide what you think is right for you."*

4 **Ask** probing questions that encourage students to think and arrive at a conclusion for themselves. This is a key skill your students will need regardless of their plans in life.

ex. *"What are some downsides to going out with someone a lot older? What could happen? What do you think your (parent/caregiver) would want you to do? And why would they want you to do that? What advice would you give your best friend if they wanted to go out with someone a lot older?"*

5 **Help** them identify trusted adults, and have a list on hand of people you can recommend at school (like a school counselor or nurse). Remember to stick to the tips above in any private conversations you have with a student as a trusted adult.

ex. *"You should talk to a trusted adult if you need help deciding how you feel about using birth control. Who are some adults that people might be able to talk to? You can also talk to me alone if you want help finding a trusted adult."*

To see and interact with typical student questions and sample answers, check out "It's Not Just What You Say" and "Answering Sensitive Questions" in our e-learning course, the *U Choose Teacher's Guide to Sex Ed*.



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