

# U Choose to Know



## Why All-Gender Classrooms Work

Discussing gender in the classroom can be a difficult task for some teachers and staff. Here are some examples of challenging situations:

- A student's gender identity may be completely different than their gender expression (and their gender expression may change frequently)
- Students tease, sexually harass, and act violently toward students who are gender expansive
- Students of differing genders have different perspectives on subject matter

You may think to yourself, "It would be so much easier to teach sex education with boys and girls split up." But here's why you should consider having all-gender classrooms:

# 1

## Fosters Respect & Empathy

It is so important for students to learn respect and understanding for all of their classmates. Based on gender identity, expression, and sexual preferences, we all have different experiences that make up who we are as a person. Having space where students of all genders are present allows everyone to develop empathy and respect for experiences, thoughts, and opinions that do not mirror their own.

# 2

## Removes Stigma and Shame

"All girls are attracted to boys." "All boys are attracted to girls." "If Martin likes me then he must want to have sex with me." "Sarah is *promiscuous* because she's had sex and she's only 14." Have you ever heard statements similar to these before? These are statements that stigmatize a person based on sexuality and gender. These type of statements or assumptions may also come from adult staff too. Hearing these can make students feel a sense of shame, more reluctant to speak their truth, and tune out the lesson, thus not get the information that they need. This is why it's important to create a space that removes stigma and shame. One of the ways to do this is to have all-gender classrooms where every student learns the importance of accepting that reality looks different for every person and every gender.

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# 3

## **Builds Knowledge About All Bodies**

As an adult, have you ever had to explain to someone the basics of sexual anatomy, especially if it is different than the sexual anatomy they were born with? You may have thought to yourself, “Didn’t you learn this in health or sex ed?” Well, they may not have had a sex ed course that included a review of the anatomy of bodies that were different than theirs. That’s why it’s important to have all-gender classrooms, so students learn basic anatomy, terminology, and constructs related to all people, regardless of their sex, sex assigned at birth, and sexual identity. Also...

# 4

## **Ensures Transgender, Gender Expansive, Intersex, etc. People Are Included**

If we split up classrooms by sex assigned at birth—typically boys and girls—what happens to students who don’t fall into one of those two categories? To create inclusion, we have to acknowledge everyone. We have to demonstrate this to youth by teaching that all bodies, genders, expressions, and sexual preferences are worth learning about.

**We know it’s not always easy to teach sex education in all-gender classrooms. Here are a few ways to make things go more smoothly:**

Acknowledge giggling is okay sometimes. Yes, sex ed may be funny and amusing to young people. Remember they are learning new information and sometimes laughter is a sign of discomfort. They may be laughing to get through an intense learning curve.

Give students the opportunity to talk with you privately if they have a question. That gives them the chance to ask a gender-related question that they may not feel comfortable asking in front of the group.



Build your knowledge about ways to prevent challenging situations before they occur. In the U Choose to Know digest, “Regrouping, Refocusing, and Reengaging Your Students,” you’ll find advice on classroom management that can help you build a more comfortable climate for everyone.



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