



Sex Education Is a Reproductive Justice Issue

What is Sex Education Anyway?

Sex health education (“sex ed”), is teaching and learning about a broad range of topics related to sex and sexuality, exploring values and beliefs about those topics, and gaining necessary skills to make decisions about one’s own health, life, and relationships.ⁱ Sex ed can be implemented in many settings including in K-12 schools, at home, higher education, peer education, or community programs.

What Should Sex Ed Include?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), high-quality sexual health education should provide students with the skills and knowledge needed to be healthy and that covers topics such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and unintended pregnancies.ⁱⁱ Quality sex ed should be medically accurate and developmentally appropriate and have culturally relevant content and skills that target key behavioral outcomes and promote healthy sexual development as well as be consistent with scientific research and best practices.ⁱⁱⁱ

Often, advocates will refer to these necessary categories and requirements as “holistic” or “comprehensive” sex ed. Programs deemed as “Abstinence-Only” or “Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage” or categorized as “Sexual Risk Avoidance” programs are not considered “holistic” or “comprehensive” because these programs only discuss abstinence as well as withholds sexual health information from young people. In fact, an expert review concluded that these programs are in fact harmful to young people.^{iv} They often provide information that is medically inaccurate, withholds information, and does not affirm young people who are LGBTQIA+.

What's Reproductive Justice?

Reproductive Justice was coined by Black women in 1994 and is a human rights framework that aims for a world where all people have bodily autonomy and can live and thrive in safe and sustainable communities.

How is Sex Ed Related to Reproductive Justice & Racial Justice?

Reproductive Justice & racial justice cannot be realized if we live under the systems of white supremacy, xenophobia, and anti-Blackness. Reproductive Justice will be achieved when we can make decisions free from stigma or barriers and live and thrive in safe and sustainable communities. That cannot happen if young people are being denied the information, tools, and skills needed to make these decisions, which is what happens when we are denied comprehensive sex ed.

Though laws that aim to prevent young people from receiving comprehensive sex ed, as well as the full range of sexual health services, may seem like a new thing, it's not. These barriers didn't appear out of thin air but are a manifestation of centuries of oppression throughout our history. In fact, communities of color and LGBTQ+ folks have always had to live under these systems of oppression and have always had to push back against policies that aim to deny necessary information, resources, and that actively perpetuate violence and harm against us.

For example, the so-called "[Father of Gynecology](#)" J. Marion Sims, experimented on and perpetuated bodily harm against Black women who were enslaved. Sims who has been memorialized as a trailblazer in gynecology and the American medical community, worked to perfect surgical techniques but did so by experimenting on enslaved Black women often without anesthesia.

There is a long history in the U.S. of eugenics and of the government forcefully sterilizing Black, Indigenous, Latina/Latino/Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other folks of color, as well as people with disabilities and people with low incomes. Because the U.S. has a long history of white supremacy, heteronormativity, ableism and anti-immigrant sentiments and policies, it's no surprise that these specific communities were the targets of state sanctioned violence such as [forced sterilization](#) and [medical research without consent](#).

Can Sex Ed Be Anti-Racist?

Yes. We can work to ensure that practitioners of color are centered, critically analyze and update sex education curriculum and more! We can work to ensure that sex ed curriculum is not only responsive to individual needs and identities, but also ensure that it acknowledges our past and how it impacts young people now. These are just a few ways we can work to achieve sex education that is medically accurate, affirming, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, *and* anti-racist.

What Actions Can I Take?

It's going to take a lot of work and time to achieve the sex ed of our dreams that lives up to the values of Reproductive Justice and racial justice. Here are some actions you can take as we work towards this goal, together:

- ★ Contact your federal legislators and ask them to cosponsor the Real Education & Access for Healthy Youth Act ([REAHYA](#)) which if passed would provide federal grants to entities providing comprehensive sex education and sexual health services.
- ★ Research and find out what the standards for sex education look like in your state, city, and/or school district.
- ★ Check out some amazing orgs working to provide comprehensive sex ed to all young people such as:
 - ❑ [Women of Color Sexual Health Network](#)
 - ❑ [SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change](#)
 - ❑ [Advocates for Youth](#)
 - ❑ [Planned Parenthood Federation of America](#)
 - ❑ [American Sexual Health Association](#)

ⁱ Parenthood, P. (n.d.). *What is Sex Education?: Sex Ed Definition and QA*. Planned Parenthood. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/for-educators/what-sex-education>.

ⁱⁱ CDC. (2020, February 3). *What Works: Sexual Health Education*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/whatworks/what-works-sexual-health-education.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ CDC. (2020, February 3). *What Works: Sexual Health Education*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/whatworks/what-works-sexual-health-education.htm>.

^{iv} *Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs Are Ineffective and Harmful to Young People, Expert Review Confirms*. Guttmacher Institute. (2017, August 22). <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2017/abstinence-only-until-marriage-programs-are-ineffective-and-harmful-young-people>.