

Section IV: Instructional Strategies and Resources

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

Rights, Respect, Responsibility was designed to be used either as a sequential curriculum, or in parts, according to the needs of the educator. While the curriculum can be used in its entirety (and when presented this way meets the *National Sex Education Standards*, Second Edition, 2020), we recognize that very few schools have sufficient time allotted to sexuality education to be able to use every lesson. Educators may decide when a lesson or series of lessons might fit into their preexisting curriculum. Educators may use one grade level, one topic strand, or an individual lesson to supplement their existing materials, as needed.

A Note About Supplemental Lessons

In 2021, supplemental lessons were added to *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* to align with the *National Sex Education Standards*, Second Edition, 2020. These lessons cover topics that did not explicitly exist in the original 3Rs, such as racial justice, sex trafficking, biomedical advances for HIV/STI prevention and pregnancy prevention, etc. Any of the supplemental lessons in 3Rs can be embedded into the original sequence of the original lessons. For example, teachers could create a unit plan consisting of both original and supplemental lessons based on topics required by their standards or policies. For the elementary and middle school lessons, a specific grade is suggested, and the high school lessons can be used in any grade in high school.

Using the indicators from the *National Sex Education Standards*, we have provided a [recommended sequence](#) for implementing *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* in the “Educator Resources” section of the 3Rs website.

CURRICULUM FORMAT OVERVIEW

Lessons are 40 minutes long in grades K-5 and 50 minutes in grades 6-12. The front page of each lesson includes the *National Sex Education Standards* the lesson aligns with, the learning objectives, the required materials to teach the lesson, and any advance preparation required by the teacher. Most lessons in grades K-9 have family homework activities to facilitate ways for students and their parents/caregivers to have important conversations. “Notes to the Teacher” guide novice instructors by providing tips for implementing sexual health education.

FOSTERING RESPECT IN THE CLASSROOM

Rights, Respect, Responsibility is designed to involve young people in discussing personal, sometimes sensitive, topics. To do this effectively, it is important to create and maintain a safe, respectful environment in which participants can share freely. You can create and maintain a safe, respectful environment by introducing and reinforcing ground rules. Engage all participants in creating, understanding, agreeing to, and respecting the ground rules. Post the ground rules on a wall or create a digital version that is at the start of every slide deck for every session. Remind students, when necessary, that everyone has agreed to abide by the ground rules.

USING GROUND RULES WITH THIS CURRICULUM

Establishing ground rules, which are shared guidelines about how everyone—teachers and students—will interact during lessons, is an important step in creating a sense of trust, support, and safety among students and teachers. Ground rules help to increase comfort and facilitate learning for everyone in the classroom. This is especially important because the lessons in this curriculum often include discussion of personal topics, such as values and sexuality. Ground rules, and the methods by which they are created and introduced, will vary at different grade levels.

In Grades K-5, existing classroom rules may be used for this purpose. While such guidelines are often posted in the classroom throughout the year, it can be helpful to give a gentle reminder to students about these rules before a lesson or unit on sexuality. Alternatively, the teacher may ask students if they can think of any rules they would like to have for working together in a group. Their suggestions may include not interrupting, raising hands to talk, etc.

In middle school and high school, it is important to create a separate set of ground rules to specifically discuss sexual and reproductive health. In these grade levels, teachers should emphasize ground rules for sharing personal stories and asking personal questions and about using appropriate and inappropriate language. They should clarify the extent to which shared information can be kept confidential.

ADDRESSING CONFIDENTIALITY IN GROUND RULES

Most lists of group agreements or ground rules include a rule related to confidentiality, which has often been described as “what is said in this room stays in this room.” This is not an effective description of confidentiality for a classroom for a few reasons. First, it can raise anxiety among parents and other adults in the community who may be concerned that the teacher is trying to keep whatever is discussed about sexuality secret from them.

Second, it is inaccurate. As teachers and other youth-serving professionals know well, there are situations in which confidentiality cannot be guaranteed or must be broken. As mandated reporters, teachers are required to report situations in which a student is at risk to hurt themselves or others. Therefore, telling students that the discussions will be confidential becomes problematic if their confidentiality must be broken. Finally, true confidentiality is impossible to enforce. Believing that what is shared will be kept confidential may lead a student to share something deeply personal that may likely get “leaked” by someone in the class.

Thus, while it is important to write something simple in the ground rules about “aiming to ensure confidentiality to the extent possible,” an effective way a teacher can include this is to write it in the ground rules and also explain aloud, ***“To keep something confidential means that it’s kept private or secret. I certainly don’t want you to keep the information we talk about here private from anyone. In fact, the more you talk with your friends about it, the better! What is important, however, is that we all agree not to share anything personal that someone in the class may have shared. That’s disrespectful and unfair to that person. Instead, you can simply say, ‘I know someone who...’ if you want to share a good point someone made. Also, as you may already know, there are some things that I, as a teacher, cannot keep private. If a student were to come to me and say that someone is hurting them, or that they were thinking of hurting themselves or someone else, I’d have to tell someone about it, so that this student could get some help.”***

OPTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES

At the middle and high school levels, it can be useful to involve students directly in the creation of shared ground rules, thereby increasing their sense of ownership and “buy-in” to the rules. The teacher may start this process by asking students, ***“What might make it difficult for us to feel comfortable as we talk about sexuality?”*** After a list of barriers is generated (possible responses might include embarrassment, being made fun of, not knowing what to say, not wanting other people to know what we talk about, etc.), the teacher can then write “Ground Rules” on newsprint or the board and ask, ***“What are some rules we can establish in our class that will help us feel more comfortable learning about this topic and that will help ensure that no one feels put down or disrespected?”***

With that question, the teacher invites students to generate a list of agreements about how the class will operate and how students and the teacher will interact. The ground rules should be established through agreement by the group. The teacher should write down students’ ideas and then suggest any important basic rules that students did not include.

Depending on time availability, other options for establishing ground rules are for the teacher to present a pre-written list and ask for student feedback, as well as additional suggestions. The teacher may also wish to make a game out of presenting ground rules by introducing them Pictionary style (using diagrams to represent the ground rules and having students guess what they are) or by acting them out or having students act them out as in the game Charades, and having other students guess.

The teacher should list the agreed-upon ground rules on a piece of chart paper and hang the list on a wall where it can remain, so that students and the teacher can refer to them at any time. As many classrooms shift into digital environments, it may also be appropriate to create a list of digital ground rules and have them appear at the start of every slide deck.

In some classes, once the ground rules have been established, the teacher may ask every student to agree verbally to the ground rules and/or to sign the ground rules or a contract, as a way of sharing authorship and responsibility for enforcing the rules.

Once agreed-upon ground rules are established, they can be revisited at any time and revised to meet the needs of the class. Additionally, it is important that students feel empowered not only to follow the ground rules themselves but to monitor one another’s adherence to them and to ensure that they are being followed.

To support teachers in creating ground rules at the start of the curriculum, 3Rs has created “Climate Setting” lessons for each grade band, which include establishing ground rules as an activity within the lesson. [The 3Rs “Climate Setting” lessons can be downloaded here.](#)

FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES IN TEACHING SEX ED

In 2018, the [Sex Education Collaborative](#) released the [Professional Learning Standards for Sex Education \(PLSSE\)](#). These standards outline the content, skills, and professional disposition needed to implement sex education effectively. As you prepare to teach 3Rs, take note of the content and skills that you feel confident in, and those in which you could use additional learning, by completing the [PLSSE self-assessment](#). There are numerous avenues to receive free professional development in sex education, many of which can be found at the links below:

- [Racial Justice in Sex Education](#) e-learning modules from Advocates for Youth
- [Sex Ed To-Go for Teachers](#) from Planned Parenthood
- [The Teacher's Guide to Sex Ed](#) from Healthy Teen Network

A short video that outlines foundational skills for teachers to increase their comfort to teach sexual health can be found [here](#).

ANSWERING STUDENTS' QUESTIONS

Rights, Respect, Responsibility encourages students to ask questions, whether in class during specific activities or through the use of an Anonymous Questions Box (further details provided under the subheading "Anonymous Questions" below). For the teacher, a foundational skill is being able to provide clear, accurate answers to these questions in a non-judgmental manner. It is also important to know which questions you should not answer and how best to respond when those questions come up.

There are different ways that students may ask questions in the classroom. How questions are asked often depends on the procedures put in place by the teacher and may include:

- During class with other students present
- One-on-one with the teacher outside of a regular lesson
- Anonymously on an index card or through an Anonymous Questions Box

While many of the lessons in *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* include time for students to ask questions, some teachers like to provide additional opportunities for students to ask questions that may arise outside of a particular lesson and/or that they may want to ask anonymously because of fear or embarrassment. For many teachers, preparing a lesson plan and leading activities is the easy part of the job. It is those spontaneous comments or questions from students that can cause the most anxiety.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

Before answering any question, it is important for the teacher to try to ascertain, as well as possible, what information the student seeks and/or the purpose of the question. Sometimes students ask forthright questions; at other times, questions seem a bit murky and the real "question behind a question" may not be apparent. Below are several types of questions and challenges, and some suggestions for responding to them effectively.

1. Knowledge or Skills Questions

Usually, these questions are very straightforward and have specific factual answers. These include:

- How does a baby get out?
- What is the most common sexually transmitted disease?
- How does a condom work?
- What does "oral sex" mean?
- How does PrEP prevent HIV?
- Can anyone buy Opill at a pharmacy?

Knowledge or skills questions often appear to be the easiest to answer, since they ask for concrete information rather than being about feelings, attitudes, or behaviors. Yet, students still need guidance along with the facts. These questions offer opportunities to reinforce the Rights, Respect, Responsibility values and to provide guidance for positive, healthy behaviors. Sometimes, however, a question will challenge the limits of the teacher's own knowledge, or it will be unclear whether it's appropriate to answer given the parameters of the school's sex education curriculum and/or policy governing certain content.

Keep in mind:

- It's okay not to know something, and to be honest about it.
- Any moment can be an educational opportunity to model that no one should be embarrassed at not knowing everything.
- Ask the class if anyone knows more.
- If the question contains slang that you don't know, ask to be educated (this will help build rapport between you and the students).
- Promise to get the answer—and follow through!
- When a topic is difficult to explain, check in to be sure the class understood your answer.

2. Values Questions

Some teachers worry about responding to questions about their personal values concerning issues such as sexual behavior, abortion, and sexual orientation ("Do you think it's wrong to...?"). Some schools do not allow teachers to answer such questions; teachers are to refer students to parents/caregivers and/or faith leaders for guidance. When allowed, however, teachers should facilitate a discussion that encourages students to explore their own and others' attitudes and feelings about these issues without the teacher sharing their own values.

Teachers can then refer students to parents/caregivers and faith leaders, if the students require more input. When discussing values related to sexuality, the teacher's goals are to: 1) increase awareness among participants of their personal values; 2) promote the value of respect for differing opinions; 3) model and teach how to engage in respectful discussion; and 4) promote universal values (e.g., human dignity, respect for oneself and others, honesty, fairness).

Tips:

- Do not impose your personal values.
- Explore a range of values. For example, *"Some people believe this about abortion while other people believe this about abortion. You should figure out what you believe by talking with trusted adults in your life."*
- Use the "reporter technique." Give the facts and "report" examples of views on both sides of the issue. Then ask the group to discuss the matter.
- When a strong opinion is stated, ask for responses from the group.
- If the group seems to be discussing one point of view, make sure other possibilities are explored. Ask the group if there are alternative points of view or state them yourself.
- Be careful about putting people on the spot for their personal opinions. It might be less threatening to ask *"Why might some people choose to...?"* rather than *"What do you believe...?"*
- Encourage discussing sensitive matters with the moral authorities in the learners' lives: parents/caregivers, faith leaders, other trusted adults.
- Know your "hot buttons" ahead of time. When those topics arise, breathe!

3. Am I Normal? Questions

Young people, especially preteens, need and seek a great deal of reassurance that their bodies, feelings, and behaviors are normal. (They may ask: "What is the average age that a girl's breasts start to show?" "All my friends' voices have changed, when will mine change?"). Many of these questions seeking reassurance begin with "I have a friend who..." or "I heard about someone who..." These questions usually end with "Are they normal?" The proper response is to calmly normalize the issue in question while providing information, or, when appropriate (for example, in response to a question such as "If a 17-year-old girl still hasn't gotten her period, is that okay?"), calmly suggest a student may want to seek input from a health care provider or other adult with relevant expertise.

Tips:

- Remind the group that human beings are each unique and that individual variation is definitely normal—in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.
- Suggest a range of differences in the specific issue raised.
- Point out, when appropriate, that a student might talk with a parent/caregiver, health care provider, or other trusted adult about specific concerns.

4. Personal and Permission– or Advice–Seeking Questions

Sometimes teachers are asked to disclose their experiences (“Have you ever...?”); or something about their personal identities or lives (“Are you straight?” “Do you have kids?”). They may be asked to give advice (“What do you think I should do?”) or permission (“Is it okay for a 16-year-old to...?”). The teacher’s responses to these questions have implications about their role in the lives of their students. The teacher should carefully deliberate beforehand how they will approach requests to share personal information or advice. In the moment, they should take extreme care, erring on the side of non-disclosure. And, in many cases, schools or districts have established Codes of Conduct or other policies that may have restrictions or guidelines for what personal information teachers can or cannot share. Make sure to check and follow this guidance if it exists. Extensive guidance on a teacher’s choice to self-disclose is shared below.

Tips:

- It is usually preferable to not answer personal questions.
- You always have the right to not answer a personal question.
- Never discuss personal sexual behavior.
- If you make an exception and share personal information, it should always be done for a specific positive reason—to demonstrate empathy, to model appropriate sharing, etc.
- You should never share personal information to meet your own needs (just to get your students to like you or laugh at your jokes, etc.).
- Consider setting a ground rule ahead of time—in which you announce that you won’t answer personal questions. Explain, *“It’s just as we’ll respect anyone’s right not to share personal information.”*
- When asked to “grant permission” or share advice, generalize the issue: explore a range of options; discuss pros/cons; share a variety of viewpoints.

Further guidance is offered below in “Guidelines for Teacher’s Personal Disclosure to Students” and “Crisis, Legal Matters, and Student Disclosures.”

5. “The Heart” and Other Complicated Questions

“How do you know when you’re in love?” “Why are guys always grabbing themselves?” “Should everyone report it if they’re raped?” Some questions are asked as “factual,” but there just isn’t a straightforward answer. A helpful approach here is to facilitate a discussion rather than give an answer. Extensive guidance on a teacher’s choice to self-disclose is shared below.

Tips:

Bounce the question back: “What do you all think?” If only one or two students give a response, check in to see if there are other thoughts on the matter.

- Explore various possibilities: *“What do you think would happen if...?” “How might a person feel if their partner...?”*
- If you wish, give a few possible answers and qualify them as your educated guesses. For example, in response to a question of how you know when you’re in love, you might say, *“That is a tough question, and it might be different for different people. Some of the things that come to mind that I think might be important are that when you think about this person it makes you happy; you miss this person when you’re apart; you like them and like being with them; it is important to you that your friends and/or family like them; you are happy for them when they achieve something or do something special, even if you don’t do that same thing.”*
- Ask, *“What are some other possible signs that you might be in love that other people can think of?”* and take responses from the students.
- Check in to see if the questioner feels the question was answered adequately. When questions do not have straightforward answers or may have more than one possible response, it is useful, when a student asks a question publicly, to ask them if your answer addressed their question appropriately. If the question is asked anonymously, you can finish your response by saying, *“I’m not sure if I’ve interpreted the question correctly or if I’ve given a sufficient answer. If I haven’t, I hope the person who asked the question will ask it again and maybe give me some more information so I can give them a better answer.”*

6. Shock-Value Questions

Teachers usually recognize questions instantly that are asked in order to shock or entertain. Nevertheless, anyone can be caught off guard, particularly if a question touches on a personally sensitive issue. In this situation, the teacher may decide to raise the issue of the question having been asked in order to shock or get a reaction as a way to lessen the impact. To defuse shock-value questions and to retain credibility with the students, the teacher might decide to give a calm, factual answer after they have pointed out that the basic intent of the question was simply to shock or upset others. It is also important to keep in mind, however, that not all shocking questions are asked for shock value. In other words, even though the question may be shocking to the teacher, it may be an honest question. If so, it deserves a calm, honest answer.

Tips:

- If you're "unshockable," any purposeful behavior on the part of the questioner will become unsatisfying.
- Option one: answer the question at face value, as if it were sincerely asked.
- Option two: say, *"Here's a question dealing with xx, but I'm not sure the person really wants an answer—it may be just for a laugh. For now, I'm going to move on. If I've misunderstood your question, feel free to see me afterward and I'll be happy to answer it."*

SOME ADDITIONAL GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Pay attention to the way you answer a question beyond just your words. Think about your body language, tone of voice, level of calmness, etc. In addition to imparting information and skills, the teacher's job is also to:
 - Normalize and demystify
 - Reduce discomfort
 - Affirm learnersThis means that the emotional content of your answer is as important as the informational content. How you say something is as important as what you say. Work to avoid non-verbal cues such as wrinkled brows or frowns that may imply judgment, disapproval, etc.
2. Convey gratitude for the questions and comments that arise. Use the exercise to underscore the idea that discussing these topics is a good thing.
3. Use the third person ("*a person's...*," "*someone who...*," "*two people...*") as the subject in your sentences rather than the pronoun "you" when answering students' personalized questions in a group setting.
4. Use gender-neutral and sexual orientation-neutral language when describing behavior, people, and relationships.
5. Be truthful. Never lie or tell half-truths. You can choose not to respond to a question, but if you are going to answer, give them the complete and truthful response. Young people especially can see through a lie, and if you get caught in a lie, you will lose your credibility. It is even better to say, "*I will lose my job if I answer that question*" or "*Unfortunately, I'm not allowed to answer that question*" than to lie about it.
6. Keep a sense of humor and a little perspective. Being able to laugh at yourself and with your students can go a long way to building trust and comfort. Also, keep in mind that if you are unhappy with the way you respond to a particular question, you can usually get a second chance. During the next lesson, you can always say, "*Yesterday, when I was responding to a question about _____, I don't think I did a very good job of conveying some important information*" or "*I forgot to include something really important*" or "*I don't think I did a very good job answering this yesterday and I think it is an important question, so I want to try to answer it a different way.*" Students will not hold it against you that you are imperfect. If anything, it will make you seem more human to them, only improving your relationship with them.
7. It's okay to feel embarrassed—most educators will, at some point. Being calm and matter-of-fact is the overall goal, because that demeanor helps to normalize talking about sexuality and can make students feel more comfortable. If you feel embarrassed, it's an opportunity to model, "*What should we do when we're embarrassed by this topic?*" (the answer: keep discussing anyway!)

ANONYMOUS QUESTIONS

If the teacher would like to provide additional opportunities for students to ask questions anonymously, there are a few options. One way is to periodically pass out index cards or paper and give students time to write any questions they may have on a particular topic that they may not want to ask aloud.

These questions will then be placed in an Anonymous Questions Box. An Anonymous Questions Box can be part of a specific lesson or placed in a spot in the classroom where students can access it whenever they wish. As classrooms are using more digital devices, many teachers have opted to use a digital Anonymous Questions Box—for example, a QR code students can scan that links them to a Google form where they can anonymously submit their questions.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHER'S PERSONAL DISCLOSURE TO STUDENTS

Teachers disclose personal information about themselves every day, whether they are aware of it or not. Disclosure of some personal information (e.g., ethnicity, style preferences, regional accents) people have no control over. Ultimately, though, everything teachers disclose, deliberate or not, affects how students learn. Therefore, disclosures of a personal nature over which teachers do have control should only be made deliberately and after thorough consideration. In sexuality education, teachers are often confronted with the decision about whether or not to disclose personal information about themselves to students. The decision one makes may ultimately depend on a number of factors, including:

- **The purpose of the disclosure**—It is critically important, when considering whether or not to share a piece of personal information, to ask yourself, “Why would I want to do this?” Only valid educational rationales should be used to support the decision to disclose. The rationale for disclosing certain personal information with elementary and middle school students is described below. With older students, sharing that families can be created in many ways—for example, choosing to share that you have two stepchildren with whom you’re very close—can help students expand their understanding of and respect for diverse family constellations.
- **The age of your students**—In younger grades, children tend to be curious about their teachers’ private lives, and teachers often find that sharing some personal information builds rapport and closeness with students, which can enhance comfort and learning. Information such as whether you are a parent, how many siblings you have, and where you grew up are pieces of information that, for the most part, are benign and yet can strengthen relationships between students and teachers. Even in middle school, students often remain interested in these types of details about teachers. From middle school and into high school, however, this information may not have the same educational impact. Once a teacher discloses one piece of personal information, students may seek additional information a teacher may not be ready to give, putting them in an uncomfortable and awkward position of having to set what appear to be uneven boundaries, which can undermine, rather than increase, class cohesiveness.
- **The type of disclosure you are considering**—For example, that you are the parent of young children or that you are a fan of a particular baseball team vs. your sexual orientation or some personal sexual experience you have or have not had.
- **Policies or guidelines in your school or district**—Policies set forth by your school district regarding personal disclosure must take precedence over a teacher’s inclination. If no such policy exists, ask your supervisor for guidance on how to manage this issue and/or recommend that such a policy be created for your district.

While some people believe that disclosing personal information will help to build a sense of trust with young people, others are able to make strong connections with students without doing so—or, by maintaining clear boundaries about what topics are and are not off limits. This approach can keep the learning focused on the students and eliminates the risk of information being repeated out of context and/or misconstrued.

Every teacher must make the decision of whether or not to disclose personal information—and how much to disclose—for themselves. The following are some issues teachers may wish to consider when making these important decisions:

When you might choose to disclose:

- Only with a student or class with whom you have established a strong relationship in which there is a lot of trust.
- Only when it enhances students’ learning, and the example makes a good educational point that is consistent with the goals of the lesson or the curriculum.