

Principles for Sex Education

Streetwise to Sex-wise, First Edition was the first publication by The Center for Sex Education to articulate these principles in 1993. While the principles have evolved, they have become a foundation of all CSE resources. *Streetwise* remains as faithful to them today as in 1993. It is important for educators using this edition to recognize these principles and act upon them, since they illustrate basic philosophical and pedagogical approaches to comprehensive sexuality education.

1. All participants need and deserve respect.

This respect includes an appreciation for the difficulty and confusion of addressing sexual issues and a recognition of the constellation of factors that contribute to those issues. It means treating all persons, both young people and adults, as intelligent individuals who are capable of making decisions in their lives.

2. Participants need to be accepted where they are.

This means listening and hearing what people have to say, though we as educators might sometimes disagree. In general, we are much better off helping individuals explore the possible pitfalls of their attitudes rather than telling them what they ought to believe.

3. Participants learn as much or more from each other as from the educator.

Often, if we let people talk, allow them to respond to each other's questions and comments, and ask for others' advice, they feel empowered and take responsibility for their own learning. It is much more powerful for a participant to challenge a peer's belief or attitude than for the educator to do so.

4. Honest, accurate information and communication about sex is essential.

For most of their lives, participants may have received messages suggesting that sex is hidden, mysterious, and something not to be talked about in a serious and honest way. Limiting what individuals can talk about and using vague terminology perpetuates the unhealthy "secrecy" of sex. Sexual information needs to be presented in an honest, accurate way.

5. A positive approach to sex education is the best approach.

This means moving beyond talking about the dangers of sex and acknowledging in a balanced way the pleasures of sex. It means associating things open, playful, and humorous with sexuality, not just things that are grave and serious. It means offering a model of what it is to be sexually healthy rather than focusing on what is sexually unhealthy.

6. All sex education must be rooted in the concept of consent.

Consent is a bedrock of all relationships, especially romantic and sexual relationships. The assumption of consent is woven into all quality sex education and it should also be taught deliberately and directly. This is especially important to counteract gender role socialization that sets the conditions for sexual violence to occur and a media culture that sends mixed messages about what comprises sexual consent.

7. People have a fundamental right to sex education.

They have a right to know about their own bodies and how they function. They have a right to know about any sexual changes that are occurring now and any others that may occur during their lifetimes. They have the right to have their many questions answered. People who have explored their own values and attitudes and have accurate information are in the best position to make healthy decisions about their sexual lives.

8. Gender equality and greater flexibility in sex-role behavior help all people reach their full potential.

This manual strongly advocates the right of all people—regardless of their gender—to achieve their full human potential. Strict adherence to traditional gender-role behavior limits people's choices and restricts their potential.

9. All sexual orientations and gender identities must be acknowledged.

The inclusive nature of these lessons recognizes that there are diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, and some participants may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or questioning. It is important to create an environment that recognizes the needs of these often isolated and invisible individuals. Teaching frankly about diverse identities can benefit everyone, as participants may have concerns or fears about their feelings and perceptions of their gender and/or sexual orientation.

10. Sex involves more than sexual intercourse.

Acknowledging this concept reminds participants that not only are there many ways to be sexual with a partner besides vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse, but also that most of these other behaviors are safer and healthier than sexual intercourse.

11. Sex education must be sensitive to the needs of participants with histories of trauma.

Experiences of trauma, including sexual trauma, are very common in the US population, so it is likely that any sex education group will have participants that are trauma survivors. Sex education can be healing or re-traumatizing for survivors. Trauma-informed sex education aims to create a climate and teach knowledge that contradicts the exploitive dynamics of trauma. See section on Trauma-Informed Sexuality Education.

Qualities of a Sexually Healthy Adolescent

Directions: Complete the handout considering these three questions about the listed qualities.

1. How much did you have this quality when you were 16?
2. How much do the youth you work with have this quality?
3. What is one thing adults could do to help youth develop this quality?

Rating scale

0 ----- 5
Not at all Very much

| | A sexually healthy adolescent... | You, at age 16 | Youth you work with | To help youth develop this quality, I could... |
|-------------------|--|----------------|---------------------|--|
| HUMAN DEVELOPMENT | 1. Appreciates his/her own body. | | | |
| | 2. Can get information about reproduction if s/he needs it. | | | |
| | 3. Knows a person can choose not to have children or not to have intercourse. | | | |
| | 4. Treats both genders with respect. | | | |
| | 5. Understands his/her sexual orientation and respects others' sexual orientation. | | | |
| | 6. Understands his/her gender identity and respects others' gender identities. | | | |
| RELATIONSHIPS | 1. Shows love and intimacy in appropriate ways. | | | |
| | 2. Builds meaningful relationships. | | | |
| | 3. Avoids harmful relationships. | | | |
| | 4. Decides with his/her partner about whether (or when) to become a parent. | | | |
| | 5. Knows how to make his/her relationships better. | | | |
| PERSONAL SKILLS | 1. Lives according to his/her values. | | | |
| | 2. Takes responsibility for his/her own behavior. | | | |
| | 3. Can make good decisions. | | | |
| | 4. Can think critically. | | | |
| | 5. Can communicate well with family, friends, and partners. | | | |

Streetwise to Sexwise

| | A sexually healthy adolescent... | You, at age 16 | Youth you work with | To help youth develop this quality, I could... |
|---------------------|---|----------------|---------------------|--|
| SEXUAL BEHAVIOR | 1. Enjoys and expresses her/his sexuality throughout her/his life. | | | |
| | 2. Holds true to her/his values when sexually expressing her/himself. | | | |
| | 3. Enjoys sexual feelings without necessarily acting on them. | | | |
| | 4. Knows the difference between life-enhancing and harmful sexual behaviors. | | | |
| | 5. Respects the rights of others. | | | |
| | 6. Gets new information to improve her/his sexuality. | | | |
| | 7. Has sexual relationships that are consensual, honest, pleasurable and protected against disease and unplanned pregnancy. | | | |
| SEXUAL HEALTH | 1. Gets regular checkups and does breast or testicular self-exams. | | | |
| | 2. Uses contraception to avoid unplanned pregnancy. | | | |
| | 3. Avoids getting (or giving someone) STIs, including HIV. | | | |
| | 4. Acts in line with her/his own values when dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. | | | |
| | 5. Gets prenatal care if needed. | | | |
| | 6. Prevents sexual abuse. | | | |
| SOCIETY AND CULTURE | 1. Respects people with different sexual values. | | | |
| | 2. Advocates for sexual issues in government. | | | |
| | 3. Thinks about how different sources of sexual information affect her/his sexual thoughts, feelings, values and behaviors. | | | |
| | 4. Examines the world around them for biases based on gender, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity and race. | | | |
| | 5. Stands up for the rights of all people to get accurate sexuality information. | | | |
| | 6. Does not express prejudice or bigotry. | | | |
| | 7. Rejects stereotypes about the sexuality of others. | | | |
| | 8. Teaches others about sexuality. | | | |

Chart adapted with permission from Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (2004). *Guidelines for comprehensive sexuality education: Kindergarten–12th*

Asking For Consent

"Remember we talked about this? Is it still ok?"

"Is this good for you?"

"Can I try that?"

"Are you comfortable with this?"

"Should I slow down?"

"Do you like this?"

"How are you doing with this?"

"I'm loving this. You?"

"You seem not sure. What's up?"

"How does that feel?"

"Are you still liking this?"

"You seem quiet. Are you okay?"

"I feel good. Are you feeling good?"

"Am I going too fast?"

"Can I touch you there?"

"How are we doing?"

"Mmm...that feels good. Can I do that to you?"

Pornography: What It Includes and What It Leaves Out

Directions: For each of the items listed below, check **YES** if it can be learned from pornography, **NO** if it cannot be learned from pornography, and **MAYBE** if it might be learned from pornography. If you don't know the answer, make a best guess based on what you know about sexuality and about pornography.

| | Yes | No | Maybe |
|---|-----|----|-------|
| 1. Possible ways of achieving sexual pleasure. | | | |
| 2. How to talk in advance about sex with a partner. | | | |
| 3. Various types of sexual behavior. | | | |
| 4. What to do when first starting a sexual relationship with someone. | | | |
| 5. How to say "no" to unwanted sexual behavior. | | | |
| 6. How people get turned on and orgasm during sex. | | | |
| 7. What most people's bodies and sexual parts look like. | | | |
| 8. Safe sex practices for preventing pregnancy and STIs. | | | |
| 9. How people can share sex equally. | | | |
| 10. Sex involving an emotional connection to another person. | | | |
| 11. How long sex takes. | | | |
| 12. How sexual violence like rape can impact victims. | | | |
| 13. How to be a good sexual partner. | | | |
| 14. How to be in a healthy, caring, romantic relationship. | | | |