



Tips for Answering Sensitive Sexual Health Questions

Questions Teens Ask...

1. Shock Questions

Can sperm choke you if you swallow during oral sex?

2. Am I Normal? Questions

One of my balls hangs lower than the other. Is that okay?

3. Permission Seeking Questions

When did you lose your virginity?

4. Information Seeking Questions

Can you get HIV from sitting on a toilet?

5. Value-based Questions

Is it "ok" to have sex before marriage?

Set Clear Boundaries and Expectations

Let them know personal questions are not appropriate

That's a good question, but this is one of those questions that I am not able to answer because we do not cover that in our lessons. You might want to talk to a trusted adult about that issue.

- Please do not share your personal beliefs with students
- Avoid sharing information about personal sexual practices
- If it's not covered in the curriculum, chances are, you shouldn't answer it!
- Refer students to a trusted adult for further discussion

Treat all Questions as Information-seeking Question

- Don't get rattled. Don't dismiss the question.
- Clarify the question and make sure you understand what the student is asking
- Offer medically accurate information that addresses the question
- Avoid using the words "normal" and "you" when at all possible
- If you are not comfortable with a topic you can always refer to a Nurse, Counselor, or another person better suited to answer the question
- Use a question box!

Shock Questions

- Sometimes questions seem shocking when youth use slang or inappropriate vocabulary
- Answer the question with medically accurate information, using correct or acceptable words.

Example: I'm afraid my coochy is too smelly to have oral sex. What should I do?

Every girl's vagina has a natural scent that is perfectly normal. A girl should follow a good hygiene practice of washing with mild soap and water every day. If a girl washes daily, and is still concerned, she should make an appointment with a health care provider to make sure she doesn't have an infection.

More importantly...it sounds like you are thinking about or having oral sex. You should also know that oral sex is a risky behavior that could put a person at risk for STDs.

"Am I Normal?" Questions

- These questions generally focus on adolescent concerns about their bodies and the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing.
- Validate their concern, e.g.: "Many young people worry that ..."
- Provide information about what they can expect to happen during the adolescent years.

Example: Is queefing normal?

First, let's get straight on the definition. Queefing is when air is released from the vagina. It can happen during vaginal intercourse or other physical activities like exercise. More importantly, if a person is having sex, they should be having protected sex, using birth control and/or condoms to reduce the risk of an unplanned pregnancy or an STD.

Permission-Seeking Questions

Permission seeking questions may be asking your permission to participate or not participate in a sexual behavior:

- Is it better to...
- Is it okay to...
- Is it safe to...

Guidelines for Answering Permission-Seeking Questions

- Avoid use of the word "normal" when answering the question
- Acknowledge that the question is a good question
- Refer students to trusted adult for further discussion

Example: Is it okay for me to have sex if I use a condom?

The only 100% way to avoid getting an STD or getting pregnant is not to have sex. If someone does choose to have sex, a condom will help reduce his/her risk of getting an STD or getting pregnant, but remember that condoms are not always 100% effective.

Value-based Questions

Universal values include:

- Forcing someone to have sex with you is wrong.
- Sex between children and adults is wrong.
- Knowingly spreading disease is wrong.
- Adultery is wrong.
- Taking care of your health is important.
- It is safest and healthiest for school-age kids not to have sex.

Non-universal values are those without consensus in the community, such as:

- Abortion
- Birth control
- Masturbation
- Sex outside of marriage/commitment
- Cohabitation
- What age/under what circumstances it's ok to start having sex

An educator should NEVER teach or express a PARTICULAR belief about non-universal values. Providing information about the spectrum of beliefs or facilitating discussion about the issues is best practice.

When working with and for public schools and other agencies, we have an ethical obligation NOT to side with one family, one religious perspective, or one child over another.

Although it's inappropriate to *teach particular values* on NON-UNIVERSAL issues, that does NOT mean one cannot *teach about the issues*. It means that it must be done with respect for the diversity of opinion within the community.

Values Question Protocol

The Values Question Protocol (VQP)¹ is an approach to answering questions that permits the educator to appropriately address the question, while respectfully addressing the spectrum of beliefs related to non-universal health topics. Remember... No matter what your personal belief is, your job is to be values-neutral when answering this type of question with your students!

First, determine if you can answer the question with medically accurate information alone OR if the Values Question Protocol (VQP) should also be used. If it is a values-based question:

- A** **Affirm the Asker.**
- N** **Note question as values-based.**
- S** **State the facts.**
- W** **What is the range of values/beliefs?**
- E** **Encourage talking to family, faith leaders and/or other trusted adults.**
- R** **Remain available & check if you answered the question.**

Example: What's the best age to start having sex?

A **Affirm the Asker.**

"That's a very interesting question. Lots of people your age have that question."

N **Note question as values-based.**

"That's actually a question that depends on someone's beliefs or values."

S **State the facts.**

"It's not possible to put an exact age on when a person should have sex. But, it is important to note that most adolescents your age ARE NOT having sex"*

W **What is the range of values/beliefs?**

"Some believe that sex is acceptable, as long as there is a mutual agreement between two consenting people, others believe that age, maturity level, partner health, commitment or marriage should be considered before having sex."

E **Encourage talking to family, faith leaders and/or other trusted adults.**

"This is a great question to ask your parents or other adult that you trust."

"Eventually, you will have to decide for yourself what you think is true."

R **Remain available & check if you answered the question.**

"I hope I answered your question."

*"If anyone has other questions about this topic, please let me know." *Add any facts for your age group and local statistics.*

Sample Questions and Answers

1. When did you first have sex?

We do not share these types of personal behaviors so this is not an appropriate question for me to answer.

2. If you have oral sex, does it mean you are still a virgin?

There are many different beliefs about what virginity means. However, the most important thing to remember is that oral sex is sex and can increase the risk for STD's and HIV.

3. Can I get pregnant if the guy pulls out?

Yes. Pregnancy is possible anytime sperm comes in close contact with the vagina. In this case, especially if a condom wasn't used during sex, it is important for the girl to get tested for pregnancy and for both people to get tested for STD's and HIV.

4. Is it okay to have sex with my boyfriend if I love him?

Even if two people love each other, it doesn't mean that they are ready or want to have sex. There are many different ways for people to express love for each other that does not involve sex. Remember, not having sex is the only 100% effective way of not getting pregnant or getting an STD.

5. My boyfriend and I used the same condom twice. Could I be pregnant?

Yes, you could be pregnant. A condom can only be used once to reduce the risk of pregnancy and STDs. After that it should be thrown away in the trash. It is important for you to get tested for pregnancy and STDs/HIV.

6. Besides vaginal sex, is there any other way a girl can become pregnant?

Pregnancy is possible anytime sperm comes in close contact with the vagina which can be during anal sex or sexual touching between the penis and vagina.

Summary

When answering questions:

- It's okay to say, "I don't know"
- Be simple and brief. Youth & young adults are concrete thinkers
- People remember the first and last thing that you say

ⁱ The Values Question Protocol was developed by Public Health — Seattle & King County for use with their Family Live and Sexual Health (FLASH) curriculum.