

Sex and Sexuality: Understanding the Difference

By Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ReCAPP) and ETR Associates

Objectives

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

1. distinguish the differences between the terms "sex" and "sexuality,"
2. explore the different components of their sexuality, and
3. identify different sources of sexual learning.

Time

45 Minutes

Materials

Flip chart paper, markers, index cards, pencils, tape

Procedure

1. Tell students that today they will be learning about the meaning of some very important words — words that they have probably heard of before. Write the word "SEX" on the board or on a piece of flipchart paper. Ask the students to share any thoughts ideas and/or feelings that come to mind. Record students' responses to this brainstorm activity.
2. Praise the students for sharing and helping you create such a big list. Tell them that you are going to ask them to do this activity again, but this time with another word. Write the word "SEXUALITY" on flip chart paper. Again, ask the students to share any thoughts ideas and/or feelings that come to mind. Record students' responses. Praise the students for sharing and helping you create this second list.
3. Hold a large group discussion with students around the following questions:
 - Do you think these two words mean the same thing? If not, how do they differ?
 - Where do we learn the associations we have for these two words? Ask students to give you specific examples.
 - How do these associations affect how youth feel about sex and sexuality?
4. Clarify for students that "sex" and "sexuality" are actually two different words. You may want to use the definitions below to explain the differences.

Sex refers to whether or not a person is male or female, whether a person has a penis or vagina. Many of you may have noticed on different forms you have completed for school or at the doctor's office that there is often a question on the form called "Sex." You are required to check either male or female. Sex is also commonly used as an abbreviation to refer to sexual intercourse.

Sexuality refers to the total expression of who you are as a human being, your femaleness or your maleness. Our sexuality begins at birth and ends at death. Everyone is a sexual being. Your sexuality is an interplay between body image, gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation, eroticism, genitals, intimacy, relationships, and love and affection. A person's sexuality includes his or her attitudes, values, knowledge and behaviors. How people express their sexuality is influenced by their families, culture, society, faith and beliefs.

Sources of Sexual Learning: These include parents, friends, religion, culture, media, environment, law, school, teachers, books, etc.

Educator's Note: You may want to have specific magazine clippings, a television spot, a written law or school policy, or book to provide examples of how we learn and are influenced about our sexuality.

5. Tell students that you will be asking them to think about some questions about sexuality. Give each student a large index card or piece of paper to write answers to the questions you will be asking them. Tell them they can respond to the questions with any ideas, places, feelings, people, etc. that enter their minds.
6. Read each question listed below and give students a minute or two to record their answers in one of the four corners of the index card. Students can write their names in the middle of the cards.
 - Where do young people like you learn about sexuality? Give at least three examples.
 - What are some of the early messages (from birth to five years old) you received about your sexuality?
 - In thinking about the definition we learned today about sexuality, name three ways that you are a sexual being. (These three ways should have nothing to do with sexual intercourse; remember sexuality encompasses much more than sexual intercourse).
 - What advice would you give to teens your age about sexuality?
7. After the students have completed their index cards, ask them to pair up and share their answers to any two of the four questions with a partner. Give the students about two to four minutes to discuss their answers. Elicit some of their responses to each question and record them on the blackboard. Clarify any misinformation. Make some generalizing statements based on student responses about:
 - where people learn about sexuality,
 - different ways that youth can be sexual, and
 - the types of advice (or messages) they would give to other youth.

Validate that everyone has different experiences and opinions. Reinforce that students will continue to learn and experience their sexuality throughout their lifetimes.

8. Ask students to think of one adult with whom they could share what they learned about today. Encourage them to explain what they have learned with an adult they trust. This assignment can turn into a homework assignment if appropriate. Students could ask a trusted adult the same four questions they answered in class and submit the adult's answers in writing.

Summary

Ask for volunteer(s) to summarize what was discussed in the lesson. Be sure the following points are reinforced:

- "Sexuality" is different from "sex." Sexuality is a much broader term, has many components, and includes much more than sexual intercourse. Everyone is a sexual being. Sexuality begins at birth and ends at death.
- People begin learning about sexuality from birth. People learn about sexuality from a variety of sources — their family, their community, their faith, friends, and the media — to name a few. It's important to question and think critically about the different messages we receive about sexuality, especially those messages from the popular media.
- People have different feelings and opinions about sexuality. We have seen that even when people grow up near each other and share a similar culture or faith, they may have different values about sexuality.
- Today's session helps us to be aware of the many differences we have about sexuality. It's important for each of us to show respect for people and opinions that are different from our own, particularly as we learn more about sexuality in the lessons ahead.
- Our sexuality is a normal and healthy part of our lives.