

Rights. **Respect.** **Responsibility.**




Dear Educator:

Advocates for Youth envisions a society in which all young people are valued, respected, and treated with dignity; sexuality is accepted as a healthy part of being human; and youth sexual development is recognized as normal. In such a world, all youth and young adults would be celebrated for who they are and provided with the economic, educational, and social opportunities to reach their full potential. Society would recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health education and provide confidential and affordable access to culturally appropriate, youth-friendly sexual health education and services, so that all young people would have the opportunity to lead sexually healthy lives and to become sexually healthy adults.

Quality education about sex, sexuality, and relationships is a vital step toward realizing this vision. Thirty-five years of public health research demonstrates that comprehensive sex education can provide young people with the essential information and skills they need to reduce their risk for unwanted pregnancy and STDs, including HIV. When done well, it can also help young people navigate puberty, understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, assist them to develop a healthy body image, promote good communication and decision-making skills, help them to understand the importance of consent, and teach them to navigate the health care system.

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Quality sex education goes beyond the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and disease to something much more lofty—it can provide a life-long foundation for sexual health. Sex education can help shift a culture of fear, shame, and denial and in its stead begin to create one in which sexuality is accepted as a normal, natural, healthy part of being human; one in which young people are valued and celebrated for who they are, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression; and one in which sexual development is recognized as an important aspect of childhood and adolescence, and education about sexuality is valued over the promotion of ignorance. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Sexuality Education Curriculum* unites decades of research and lessons learned with a clear vision for the future of sex education.

More than 20 years ago, Advocates for Youth first sought to provide schools and communities with a curriculum for teaching students about growth and development, sexual and reproductive health, and healthy relationships. Life Planning Education and When I'm Grown, Advocates' groundbreaking curricula first introduced in 1994, gave educators tools to lay the groundwork for good sexual health throughout students' lifetimes.

Over the next two decades, the climate around sex education in the United States altered. Even as more and more research emerged affirming the effectiveness of programs which teach young people about both abstinence as well as contraception and condoms, abstinence-only programs began to dominate the sex education landscape, with more than \$1 billion in funds allocated for these ineffective and often fear- and shame-based programs. Meanwhile, even effective, medically accurate programs tended to only focus on disease and pregnancy prevention rather than preparing young people with all the information they need about growth and development, sex and sexuality, and healthy relationships. And too often, programs were not culturally relevant and neglected the needs of LGBTQ youth.

In 2012, the Future of Sex Education Initiative, of which Advocates for Youth is a founding member, along with Answer, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), and 40 other experts in health, education and youth development, created the *National Sexuality Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12*. The goal of the National Sexuality Education Standards is to provide clear, consistent, and straightforward guidance on the *essential minimum, core content and skills* for sex education that is developmentally and age-appropriate for students in grades K–12. As school districts around the nation began adopting the standards, it became clear that there was a need for a curriculum available to help schools meet the standards.

Advocates for Youth took on the task of creating a new curriculum: one that takes the easy-to-use and thoughtful approach of its popular Life Planning Education curriculum, pairs it with updated information and adherence to the National Sexuality Education Standards, to create 80 new lesson plans. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* continues the tradition of evidence-informed, easily adaptable lesson plans, tailored for a new generation. It builds on 30 years of research into effective sex education programs, while respecting young people's right to the information they need to protect their health and make responsible decisions. It follows the National Sexuality Education Standards for what students should learn and be able to do at each grade level, and it is inclusive of learners of all genders and sexual orientations. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* is intended for use with students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. Its lessons are scaffolded, and age-appropriate, beginning with basic lessons about friendship and safety, and introducing more complex concepts as students age. We hope that using *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* will be an informative and fulfilling experience for both you and your students.

Sincerely,

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