

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

Talking Points

Introduction

To help school administrator and educators push back against possible attacks on sex education and the 3Rs curriculum, we have compiled messages that make the case for why comprehensive, inclusive sex education is a vital component of a young person's education and belongs in our public schools.


Audiences

You may find these talking points helpful if you are a school administrator tasked with defending the decision to implement the 3Rs curriculum. You may be asked to speak at a school board meeting or to meet with wary parents/caregivers who may not fully understand what is actually in the 3Rs or why it is the right approach. While you may not be able to change the minds of staunch opponents leading the pushback, we hope these messages can help you reach parents/caregivers and others who might be confused about the "controversy."

Recommended Messaging

Messaging that can be used by School Staff and Defenders of the 3Rs Curriculum

- As educators, it's our job to make sure students have the knowledge and skill they need to make healthy decisions. The curriculum we use, called 3Rs: Rights, Respect, Responsibility, was designed by experts to convey factual, age-appropriate information to help students navigate the many confusing aspects of puberty and growing up.
- Despite what you might have heard, sex education isn't controversial. The vast majority of parents/caregivers really do want their kids to have honest information and feel safe, welcome, and acknowledged at school. Inclusive lessons create a positive effect on all students and have been shown to reduce bullying, discrimination, and harassment.
- There's so much distracting misinformation floating around in the hallways. But hearing honest information from trusted sources can alleviate confusion students experience and give them the ability to concentrate on their future.
- The 3Rs curriculum has lessons that are age-appropriate, so we're giving young people information they need now and then layering it as they age to prepare them to make healthy decisions in the future.

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- Importantly, sex education (and the 3Rs) curriculum is respectful of the values parents are teaching at home, and we're sensitive to the fact that parents/caregivers want their kids to learn about these topics at the appropriate time.
 - We're not telling students what they should and shouldn't do – but giving them the information to help them stay safe and healthy as they make choices based on their own and their family's values.
 - The 3Rs is an important tool for teachers because it is inclusive and resonates with our students, including those who are LGBTQ and from communities of color. Young people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and backgrounds have a right to quality sexual health information that reflects their own experiences and therefore is meaningful to them.
 - There's an important role for schools. Historically, LGBTQ students have been excluded from discussions of pregnancy and STI prevention because abstinence-only programs and other curricula only use examples of heterosexual relationships. Instead of alienating kids, 3Rs supports them by acknowledging that LGBTQ students can and do become pregnant and contract STIs, and need to understand healthy relationships and boundaries – just as their heterosexual classmates do.
 - Sex education curricula like the 3Rs aren't intended to replace families' values. Instead, they help lay the groundwork for honest conversations. Informing young people about sexuality doesn't mean they'll choose to have sex—but it does open the door for important conversations between parents/caregivers and their kids. When whole families have the facts, it's easier to talk honestly about safety, consent, and contraception, long before young people need it. In fact, teens who receive comprehensive sex education generally choose to have sex later in life and have lower rates of unplanned pregnancy and STIs.
 - All too often in sex education policy, opinions get in the way of facts. But studies show that science-based comprehensive sex education helps students become healthier and more successful adults. It leads to lower STI rates, fewer unplanned pregnancies, better self-esteem, healthier relationships, and many more benefits.

Messaging for Wary Audiences

- Let's face it: talking about sex in school can catch parents/caregivers off guard, especially when it's a change from their own experiences or new for the school. We all want the best education for all kids, and that means giving students accurate information about the changes their bodies go through and how to tackle big issues like consent, puberty, bullying, and sexual feelings.
- The 3Rs is a modern sex education curriculum developed by top-tier educators and child development experts, with input from doctors, parents and young people. These lessons are designed to ensure the information clearly addresses questions young people have about their bodies and growing up, and that they learn this information in a way that's appropriate for their age. We encourage parents/caregivers to see for themselves – the curriculum is available online.
- From the American Academy of Pediatrics to the American Medical Association to the American School Health Association, experts agree that comprehensive, inclusive, medically-accurate sex education is critical for young people. The 3Rs fully meets the National Sexuality Education Standards and cover all 16 topics recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as essential components of sexual health education.
- Teaching kids age-appropriate sex education, even if it's uncomfortable to talk about at first, will help students disregard misinformation they may hear in the hallways—or encounter online. Like it or not, kids are hearing about sex much earlier in their lives than ever before, which is why it's critical to give them accurate information before they are exposed to bad information.

- Families play an indispensable role in preparing kids for the future and should complement the science-based sex education instruction their children receive in school, just as they might help them with math, science or history homework.
- It might be tempting to keep talk about sex, puberty, and safe relationships private—or not talk about it at all—but we can give our children the best chance to succeed at school if they're not confused by bad information which may lead to negative outcomes.
- An inclusive, comprehensive sex education curriculum like the 3Rs prepares young people to understand the complexities of adult relationships, including options like marriage and family, respect the diversity and traditions of the people they'll meet throughout their life, and confidently find their place in the world.
- Our communities are diverse, and all students—including our LGBTQ+ students—should see themselves reflected in sex education lessons. If our goal is to help young people make healthy decisions and be successful throughout their lives, sex education must be relevant to all young people. Everyone is better off when there is mutual respect and understanding.
- Despite all the evidence showing that comprehensive sex education, starting early, leads to the best outcomes for young people, it's true that some parents/caregivers still don't feel that it is right for their child. We respect that and honor parents'/caregivers' requests to opt their kid out. At the same time, we believe the opportunity to access high quality sex education should be available to as many young people as possible.

Responses to Tough Questions

1. Shouldn't parents have the final say on what their kids learn about sex?

Families play an indispensable role in preparing kids for the future and should complement the science-based sex education instruction their children receive in school, just as they might help them with math, science, or history homework. All these subjects help prepare students for higher educational achievements and healthy adult relationships, including options like getting married or having a family. We hope parents/caregivers discuss issues like puberty, consent, sex, gender identity, and healthy relationships with their children to help connect their studies with their family traditions and culture.

2. Is the curriculum culturally appropriate?

The curriculum highlights the importance of diversity, inclusivity, and respect, facts that are essential for every young person to grow up healthy. This knowledge, along with conversations with their families, helps young people make smart choices related to their sexual and reproductive health.

3. The curriculum includes information about LGBTQ relationships—isn't that bringing politics into the classroom?

Our schools are diverse, and all students—including LGBTQ students—should see themselves reflected in sex education lessons. Heterosexual students also benefit from a deeper understanding of their friends, future colleagues, and members of their community. If our goal is to help young people make healthy decisions and be successful throughout their lives, sex education must be relevant to all young people. Everyone is better off when there is mutual respect and understanding.

4. Isn't there a difference between telling kids about contraception and telling them where to get it? What about abortion?

Research show us that more information from trustworthy sources is always better. It's important to remember that talking about the resources available to young people does not mean that they are going to use them. And if they do, it's important to ensure they are accessing them from safe and trusted health care providers.

5. My child is not engaging in the types of behavior this curriculum addresses. Why do you need to teach kids how to have anal sex? It's all so graphic.

Without the facts, young people often repeat what they hear from friends or find on the internet, which may be inaccurate. This can cause confusion. Just because young people are learning about sex doesn't mean they're having it, but the lessons give parents/caregivers an opportunity to have honest conversations with their kids about staying safe and healthy as they encounter a variety of circumstances throughout life. Plus, young people who receive comprehensive sex education generally start having sex later in life and have lower rates of unplanned teen pregnancy.

6. Isn't middle school too early for kids to be learning this material?

The curricula are designed to be age appropriate. Studies show that this is the right time for honest, factual and comprehensive sex education so students aren't caught off guard by their changing bodies and are prepared for healthy relationships and safe sex when and if they're ready for those steps. With tailored, age-appropriate instruction, we can help young people grow into healthier and more successful adults.

7. Why teach sex education in elementary school? It seems unnecessary to me.

All of the lesson plans offered by the 3Rs are designed to be age appropriate for the grade levels at which they are taught. Studies show that elementary school is the right time to lay the foundation for important concepts that later will be linked to sex education in the middle and high school grades. Fundamental concepts that will help young people to develop healthy relationships later in life begin with non-sexual concepts such as mutual respect, asking before taking something (consent), the idea that everyone's body is their own (bodily autonomy), what makes someone a good friend (healthy vs. unhealthy relationships). Elementary school sex education focuses less on sex and sexuality and more on the social and emotional components of being a good person and a good friend, setting the foundation for sex education in middle and high school.

8. Why introduce concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity into sex education. I don't want my child to learn about this.

In our school, as in every school, some of our students identify as LGBTQ. In many places these young people experience bullying and often feel invisible. It's important to us as educators and parents/caregivers that all of our children see themselves reflected, supported and valued in this school. One way we do that is through inclusive sex education. This type of education also promotes respect for diversity. We are all better off when there is mutual respect and understanding.