
Appendix: Glossary: Sex Education Terms

This Glossary is intended to assist those teaching sex education or those involved in designing sex education curricula and lesson plans, not necessarily young people or students of sex education in a K–12 classroom setting. All language is constantly evolving; new terms are introduced, while others fade from use or change their meaning over time. This remains true for the terms and definitions included in this Glossary.

Ableism

The intentional or unintentional individual, cultural, and/or institutional beliefs or practices that systematically devalue, discriminate against, and/or exclude people with physical, intellectual, emotional, and/or psychiatric disabilities.

Abstinence

Choosing to refrain from a behavior. Sexual abstinence refers to refraining from certain sexual behaviors for a period of time. Some people define sexual abstinence as not having penile-vaginal intercourse, while others define it as not engaging in any sexual behaviors.

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

Programs that present abstinence from all sexual behaviors outside of marriage as the only acceptable and morally correct standard for human behavior. They present abstinence as the only completely safe option outside the context of heterosexual marriage and, if contraception or disease-prevention methods are discussed, these programs typically emphasize the methods' failure rates.

Adolescence

A transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (age of majority). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person ages 10 and 19. This age range falls within WHO's definition of young people, which refers to individuals ages 10 and 24.

Adoption

The process by which a legal and permanent parent-child relationship is created through a court process.

Age Appropriate

The age level at which it is suitable to teach concepts, information, and skills based on the social, cognitive, emotional, and experience level of most students in that age range.

Age of Consent

The age a person is legally able to consent to sexual behaviors. It varies from state to state, but ranges from 14 to 18 years of age in the United States.

Agender

A person who does not identify with any gender. (See also Gender.)

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

A collection of symptoms that results from a person's immune system being severely weakened, making them susceptible to other infections and illnesses. AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and may occur if HIV is untreated. People do not die from AIDS but from an infection their body acquires as a result of their weakened immune system. (See also HIV.)

All Students

Every student regardless of race/ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, size, or religion.

Anal Sex

Sexual behavior involving penetration of the anus by a penis or sex toy.

Androgynous

A person who identifies and/or presents as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

Asexual

A person who does not experience sexual attraction but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual and/or emotional).

Biological Sex

The sex of an individual as determined by chromosomes (such as XX or XY), hormones, internal anatomy (such as gonads) hormone levels, hormone receptors, and genes, and external anatomy (such as genitalia). Typically, individuals are assigned the sex of male or female at birth. Biological sex is also known as natal sex or the preferred terminology "sex assigned at birth." Those who present with ambiguous genitalia at birth and who are generally later confirmed with genetic testing to have chromosomes different from XX or XY at birth are often referred to as intersex. (See also Intersex and Sex Assigned at Birth.)

Biomedical Approach

A manner of addressing illness that focuses on purely biological factors and excludes psychological, environmental, and/or social influences.

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to more than one gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree. A bisexual sexual orientation speaks to the potential for, but not requirement of, involvement with more than one gender. This is different from being attracted to only men or only women.

Bodily Autonomy

An individual's right to make decisions regarding one's own body, including deciding at any point who may or may not touch their body in any way, also referred to as bodily sovereignty.

Body Image

How people physically experience or feel in their own body, including beliefs about their appearance, which is influenced by life experiences, media representations, stereotypes, assumptions, and generalizations. This may or may not match a person's actual appearance.

Bullying

Physically, mentally, and/or emotionally intimidating and/or harming an individual or members of a group. These actions are done repeatedly in-person, through technology, and/or through social exclusion with the intent of being hurtful or threatening.

Child Sexual Abuse

A form of child abuse that includes sexual behaviors with a minor; however, child sexual abuse does not need to include physical contact between a perpetrator and a child. Some forms of child sexual abuse include: exhibitionism or exposing oneself to a minor; fondling; intercourse; masturbation in the presence of a minor or forcing the minor to masturbate; obscene phone calls, text messages, or digital interaction; producing, owning, or sharing pornographic images or movies of children; sex of any kind with a minor, including vaginal, oral, or anal; and sex trafficking.

Cisgender

A person whose gender identity is aligned with their biological sex or sex assigned at birth. (See also Biological Sex, Gender Identity, and Sex Assigned at Birth.)

Classism

The intentional or unintentional institutional, cultural, and/or individual set of beliefs and discrimination that assigns differential value of worth and ability to people according to their real or perceived socio-economic class. Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen dominant class groups.

Climate Setting

The practice of intentionally creating a space that ensures students are physically and emotionally safe and ready for learning.

Community Violence

Exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. Common types of community violence that affect youth include individual and group conflicts (e.g., bullying, fights among gangs and other groups, shootings in public areas such as schools and communities). Although some types of trauma are accidental, community violence can happen suddenly and without warning, and is an intentional attempt to hurt one or more people and includes homicides, sexual assaults, robberies, and weapons attacks (e.g., bats, knives, guns).

Comprehensive Sex Education/Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Programs that build a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. Ideally, school-based comprehensive sex education should at least start in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade. At each developmental stage, these programs teach age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally responsive information that builds on the knowledge and skills that were taught in the previous stage. (See also Age Appropriate, Culturally Responsive, and Medically Accurate.)

Conscious Bias

The attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level. This includes being aware of personal prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way that is considered to be unfair. An individual, group, or institution may hold conscious biases, which are also known as explicit biases.

Consent

Informed, voluntary, and mutual agreement between people to engage in an activity. Consent cannot be given when an individual does not have the capacity or legal ability to consent (e.g., legally considered a minor, intoxicated by alcohol or other substances, other conditions that affect one's ability to understand and/or agree to engage in a behavior). An example of sexual consent is an agreement that occurs between sexual partners about the behaviors they both give permission to engage in during a sexual encounter. Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create clear permission regarding willingness to engage in the sexual behavior. This may also be referred to as affirmative consent.

Contraception

Any means used to reduce the risk of pregnancy, including, but not limited to, abstinence, barrier methods (e.g., external condoms and internal condoms), hormonal methods (e.g., pill, patch, injection, implant, IUD, and ring), and other nonhormonal methods (e.g., sterilization and nonhormonal IUDs). Contraceptive methods may also be known as birth control methods, though the former is the preferred term.

Cultural Competence

Teaching that relates to, recognizes, and includes aspects of students' ethnic culture, race, socio-economic status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexual experience, ability, faith, educational status, physical appearance and/or youth popular culture.

Culturally Responsive

Teaching that embraces and actively engages and adjusts to students and their various cultural identities.

Cycle of Violence

A model developed to explain the complexity and coexistence of abusive behaviors with loving behaviors within relationships. There are three phases in the cycle of violence: (1) tension-building phase, (2) acute or crisis phase, and (3) calm or honeymoon phase. Children who witness or experience violence often incorrectly learn that violence is appropriate for conflict resolution in intimate interpersonal settings. These children may replicate the cycle in their own relationships.

Dating Violence

Controlling, abusive, and/or aggressive behavior within the context of a romantic and/or sexual relationship. It can include verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse, be perpetrated against someone of any gender, and happen in any relationship regardless of sexual orientation.

Disclosure

Actively or passively sharing information, generally of a personal nature, that may not have been known previously.

Disproportionate Risk

The phenomena of a person being at higher risk than generally predicted because of the systemic inequities and oppression they face as a result of certain characteristics, especially race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexual experience, ability, faith, and/or educational status.

Domestic Violence

A pattern of abusive behavior in a relationship by one individual to gain or maintain control over another individual, if those individuals live in the same domestic setting. This may include verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse as well as control, intimidation, threats and/or stalking. It can happen to individuals who are married, living together, dating, or sexual or intimate partners, as well as to children and other family members, regardless of socio-economic background, race, age, sexual orientation, religion, gender, or gender identity.

Emergency Contraception

A safe, legal, and effective way to reduce the risk of pregnancy up to five days (120 hours) after unprotected sex and/or failed contraception. Commonly referred to as “the morning-after pill,” some brands of emergency contraception can be sold over the counter in pharmacies. Emergency contraception may be less effective for individuals with a higher body mass index.

Experiential Learning Cycle

An approach to teaching developed by David A. Kolb that encourages student learning by doing, reflecting, interpreting, and exploring questions of how experiences could be different in the future.

External Condoms

A sheath of latex or polyurethane that is worn on the penis to reduce the risk of pregnancy, and/or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) when one is engaging in sexual behavior. External condoms are also called male condoms.

Fact

A provable, accurate statement based on scientific, medical, legal, sociological, or psychological research or the opinion of most experts in a field. Hypotheses and theories can count if they are identified as such. The following is an example of a fact relevant to sex education: Youth who receive comprehensive sex education are not more likely to become sexually active or experience negative sexual health outcomes.

Family Structure

The manner in which members of a family are interrelated and linked through blood, affinity, or co-residence. Family structures are diverse and can include but are not limited to: biological parents, single parents, same-gender parents, adoptive parents, grandparent-headed households, stepparents, and foster parents. Families can be created in a number of ways, which include but are not limited to: adoption, birth (including those resulting from assisted reproductive technology), and marriage.

Gay

An umbrella term used for people who are romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender, although most commonly associated with a person who identifies as a man who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other men.

Gender

A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles—typically attached to a person’s sex assigned at birth and codified as feminine or masculine—that are assigned to people based upon the interpretation of their bodies and, more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Gender is socially constructed, and it is, therefore, possible to reject or modify the assignment made and develop something that feels truer to oneself. (See also Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Gender Role.) Examples of gender include but are not limited to: male, female, transgender woman, transgender man, agender, gender expansive, genderqueer and nonbinary.” (See also Transgender, Agender, Gender Expansive, Genderqueer and Gender Nonbinary.)

Gender Binary

A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories—male and female—in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people.

Gender Expansive

Refers to a person who broadens their own culture's commonly held definitions of gender, including expectations for its expression, identities, roles, and/or other perceived gender norms. Gender-expansive individuals include those with transgender and nonbinary identities, as well as those whose gender expression is in some way seen to be stretching society's notions of gender. (See also Gender, Gender Nonbinary, and Transgender.)

Gender Expression

The manner in which people outwardly express their gender through, for example, clothing, appearance, or mannerisms.

Gender Identity

How an individual identifies based on their internal understanding of their gender. Gender identities may include male, female, agender, androgynous, genderqueer, nonbinary, transgender, and many others, or a combination thereof. (See also Androgynous, Agender, Genderqueer, Gender Nonbinary, and Transgender.)

Gender Nonbinary

A person who embraces a gender identity along a continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions, often based on the rejection of the gender binary's assumption that gender is strictly an either/or option based on sex assigned at birth. (See also Gender Binary and Sex Assigned at Birth.)

Gender Nonconforming

A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth nor to prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate for their gender. People who identify as gender nonconforming may or may not also identify as transgender. (See also Sex Assigned at Birth and Transgender.)

Gender Pronouns

The pronoun or set of pronouns a person uses to refer to themselves when they are not being addressed by name (e.g., she/her/hers; he/him/his; and they/them/theirs).

Gender Roles

The cultural or social expectations of how people should act, think, and/or feel based on the gender they are perceived to be.

Genderqueer

A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.

Gender-Based Violence

Any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is directed at an individual based on their sex assigned at birth and/or gender identity and is based on gender norms and/or unequal power relationships. It encompasses threats of violence and coercion and can include verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse, threats, coercion, whether occurring in public or private life, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services. (See also Gender Identity and Sex Assigned at Birth.)

Harassment

Unwelcome or offensive behavior by one person to another that can be sexual or nonsexual in nature. Examples include making unwanted sexual comments or jokes to another person, sending unwanted sexual texts, sexual gestures, bullying, or intimidation.

Healthy Relationships

A relationship between individuals that consists of mutual respect, trust, honesty, support, fairness/equity, separate identities, physical and emotional safety, and good communication.

Heterosexual

A person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of a gender different from their own.

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

A virus that, if left untreated, can weaken a person's immune system so that the person cannot fight off many everyday infections. HIV can be transmitted through exposure to the blood, semen, vaginal fluid, or breast milk of a person living with HIV. HIV medicine (called antiretroviral therapy or ART) can make the viral load of the person living with HIV so low that a test cannot detect it (called an undetectable viral load). When "undetectable status" is achieved and sustained, HIV becomes untransmittable. HIV, if left untreated, may lead to AIDS. (See also AIDS and Undetectable Viral Load.)

Homophobia

Prejudice against individuals who are or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or queer.

Incest

Sexual contact between persons who are so closely related that marriage between those two people would be considered illegal (e.g., a parent/stepparent and a child or siblings).

Inclusive

Activities, curricula, language, and other practices in the educational environment that ensure every student's entitlement to, access to, and participation in learning is anticipated, acknowledged, and taken into account. This includes all students, regardless of race/ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, size, or religion.

Induced Abortion

A medicinal or surgical procedure that ends a pregnancy. Medicinal abortion, also called medication abortion, most often involves the use of a prescription medication called Mifepristone, which is also known as RU-486, and is used in combination with misoprostol. These medications are often called "the abortion pill." Abortion medication should not be confused with Emergency Contraception, a medication that reduces the risk of pregnancy when taken shortly after unprotected sex. Surgical and medication abortion are legal, but subject to various federal and state laws in the United States. (See also Emergency Contraception.)

Institutional Value

A value that is agreed upon and often represented in the policies of a school or organization. The following is an example of an institutional value that is relevant to sex education: All students deserve to learn in a safe and inclusive environment.

Internal Condoms

A polyurethane pouch that is inserted into the vagina when one is engaging in sexual behaviors to reduce the risk of pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Some people also use internal condoms in the anus to protect against STDs during anal sex. Internal condoms are also called female condoms.

Interpersonal Violence

Violence between individuals that is subdivided into domestic and intimate partner violence and community violence. The former category includes child maltreatment; dating violence, intimate partner violence; and elder abuse, while the latter is broken down into acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions. Interpersonal violence includes sexual violence. (See also Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and Sexual Violence.)

Intersectionality

A term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, JD, LL.M. to describe the way that social categorizations, such as race, class, and gender, do not act independently of one another, but create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise. Intersectionality looks at the relationships between multiple marginalized identities and the way that multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with multiple marginalized identities.

Intersex

General term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive and/or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical, binary definitions of female or male. Intersex conditions are not always discernable at birth or the awareness of internal anatomy present at birth may not be known to the person until puberty, if it is known at all. A derogatory term previously used for intersex individuals is hermaphrodite.

Intimate Partner Violence

Physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, violence, or aggression that occurs in a close relationship. It includes threats of violence and coercion and can include verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse, and violation of individual rights. Intimate partner violence is defined by abusive behavior and can occur in all types of intimate relationships regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation and does not require sexual intimacy. (See also Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence.)

Lesbian

A person who identifies as a woman who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other women.

Lived Experiences

A collection of events that have been experienced firsthand by an individual.

Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC)

Contraceptive methods that can remain in place for several years. They are the most effective forms of reversible contraception and include, but are not limited to, IUDs and implants.

Masturbation

Touching one's own body for sexual pleasure. This may include stimulation of one's own genitals and commonly results in orgasm.

Medically Accurate

Information relevant to informed decision-making based on the weight of scientific evidence; consistent with generally recognized scientific theory; conducted under accepted scientific methods; published in mainstream peer-reviewed journals; or recognized as accurate, objective and complete by mainstream professional organizations and scientific advisory groups.

Miscarriage

The spontaneous or natural loss of a fetus before the 20th week of pregnancy. (Spontaneous or naturally occurring pregnancy loss after the 20th week is often called a stillbirth). Miscarriage, which may also be called a spontaneous abortion, is a naturally occurring event, unlike an induced abortion, which is also known as a medicinal or surgical abortion. (See also Induced Abortion and Spontaneous Abortion.)

Oral Sex

Sexual behavior that involves a person using their mouth to sexually stimulate the genitals of another person.

Pansexual

A person who has the potential to be romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people, regardless of their gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.

PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis)

Medication prescribed to a person who has been potentially exposed to HIV that may prevent them from acquiring the virus. Treatment must be taken within 72 hours.

Power

Access to resources (social power) that enhance one's chances of living a relatively more comfortable, productive, and safe life. Wealth, whiteness, citizenship, patriarchy, heterosexism, and education are a few key social mechanisms through which power operates.

Pregnancy Options

The alternatives a person who is pregnant may select: parenting (giving birth and raising a child), abortion (taking medication or having a medical procedure that ends the pregnancy), or adoption (giving birth and placing your child with another person or family permanently). (See also Abortion and Adoption.)

PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

Daily medication that people who are HIV negative and at high risk for HIV may take to prevent acquiring the virus.

Privilege

Unearned access to resources (social power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership. Privilege is advantage or immunity accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society (e.g., housing, government, education, media, business, healthcare, criminal justice, religion) to all members of a dominant group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it.

Professional Boundaries

The limits placed between teaching professionals and students, given that educators are entrusted to care for students, responsible for ensuring student safety, and in a position to exert a measure of authority and control over students.

Puberty

A stage of human biological development during which adolescents become sexually mature and capable of reproduction. This occurs when the pituitary gland triggers production of testosterone, estrogen, and/or progesterone resulting in physical and emotional changes. Physical changes may include hair growth around the genitals, menstruation, sperm production, breast growth, and much more.

Queer

An umbrella term often used by people who do not conform to dominant societal norms to express fluid sexual orientation, gender identity, or sexual identity. While often used as a neutral or even a positive term among many LGBT people today, “queer” was historically used as a derogatory slur.

Questioning

Refers to people who are exploring what their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression might be.

Racial Justice

The systematic fair treatment of people of all races and the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes for all.

Racism

The intentional or unintentional individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs or practices that systematically result in the negative treatment and subordination of members of racial or ethnic groups that have a history of targeted discrimination and social subordination.

Rape

A type of sexual assault that involves vaginal, anal, or oral sex using a body part or an object without consent. Rape is a form of sexual assault, but not all sexual assault is rape. (See also Consent and Sexual Assault.)

Reproductive Justice

A term coined by 12 Black women to define the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. In addition, reproductive justice demands sexual autonomy and gender freedom for every human being.

Safe and Affirming Learning Environments

A place where all students feel physically and emotionally safe, welcomed, and cared for. These environments are intentionally created through group norms, role modeling, and other strategies.

Safety Plan

A personalized and practical plan that can help a person in an unsafe relationship know the best way to respond when they are in danger including, but not limited to, how to get out of the relationship.

Self-Concept

An individual's attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and cognitions about who they are as a person.

Self-Esteem

A person's overall opinion of themselves and how they feel about their abilities and limitations. For example, high self-esteem may result in someone feeling good about themselves whereas someone with low self-esteem may place little value on their own opinions and ideas.

Sex Assigned at Birth

The sex that the medical community labels a person when they are born, which is typically based on their external genitalia. Sex Assigned at Birth is also known as natal sex. (See also Biological Sex.)

Sex Positive

Teaching that recognizes that sexuality and sexual development are natural, normal, and healthy parts of our lives and refrains from using shame and fear to motivate students to be abstinent.

Sex Trafficking

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, provision, or obtaining of an individual who under threat, force, coercion, fraud, deception, or abuse of power is sexually exploited for the financial gain of another. Considered a form of modern-day slavery, it does not have to have some form of travel, transportation, or movement across borders. For minors, consent is irrelevant, and the element of means (e.g., force) is not necessary.

Sexism

Discrimination or prejudice against people based on their sex, gender, and/or perceived characteristics thereof.

Sexual Abuse

Any sort of unwanted sexual contact, including but not limited to, force, threats, or taking advantage of an individual, often over a period of time. A single act of sexual abuse is usually referred to as a "sexual assault." (See also Sexual Assault.)

Sexual Agency

Agency is the ability to act in a way to accomplish your goals. To have agency in an area of life is to have the capability to act in a way to produce desired results. Sexual agency includes: the ability to give consent to participate in and/or decline sexual behaviors; to choose whether or not to engage in sexual behaviors in a specific way, with a specific person, and/or at a specific time and place; the ability to choose safer sex practices, including contraception; and the right to choose to define one's sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender.

Sexual Assault

Any unwanted sex act committed by a person or people against another person. Examples include, but are not limited to: nonconsensual kissing, groping or fondling; attempted rape; forcing someone to perform a sexual act; and rape.

Sexual Behavior

Acts that include, but are not limited to: vaginal sex, oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, genital rubbing, or masturbation. (See also Anal Sex, Masturbation, Oral Sex, and Vaginal Sex.)

Sexual Exploitation

Actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual misuse of another. Sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse and can happen in person or online. (See also Sexual Abuse.)

Sexual Harassment

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Sexual Identity

A person's self-identity based on their understanding of and/or ability to outwardly express their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Sexual identity evolves through a developmental process that varies depending on the individual. Issues such as religion, culture, one's family values, etc. may impact a person's sexual identity. No one else can determine what a person's sexual identity is; only the individual can decide what identity is right for them. (See also Sexual Orientation.)

Sexual Intercourse

Sexual intercourse may mean different things to different people, but could include behaviors such as vaginal sex, oral sex, or anal sex. (See also Anal Sex, Oral Sex, and Vaginal Sex)

Sexual Orientation

A person's romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientations include, but are not limited to, asexual, bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, pansexual, and queer. (See also Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Heterosexual, Lesbian, Pansexual, and Queer.)

Sexual Response Cycle

The sexual response cycle refers to the sequence of physical and emotional changes that occur as a person becomes sexually aroused and participates in sexually stimulating activities, including intercourse and masturbation. The Masters and Johnson sexual response cycle has four phases: desire (libido), arousal (excitement), orgasm, and resolution. (See also Masturbation, Sexual Behavior, and Sexual Intercourse.)

Sexual Risk Avoidance

A rebranding of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors outside of heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable standard for human behavior. (See also Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs.)

Sexual Violence

An all-encompassing, non-legal term that refers to any completed or attempted sexual act that occurs when consent is not obtained or not freely given. It includes sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and intimate partner violence. (See also Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Rape.)

Sexuality

The components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual practices, sexual fantasies, attitudes and values related to sex. Sexuality describes how one experiences and expresses one's self as a sexual being. It begins to develop at birth and continues over the course of one's lifetime. (See also Biological Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation.)

Sexually Explicit Material

Any printed, electronic, or computer-generated matter, picture, sculpture, or sound recording which presents sexual content without deliberate obscuring or censoring and can reasonably be construed as being produced for the purpose of stimulating sexual excitement, arousal, or gratification. Also sometimes referred to as pornography.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Common infections caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites that are transmitted from one person who has the infection to another during sexual contact that involves exchange of fluids or skin-to-skin contact. STDs are often referred to as sexually transmitted infections or STIs in an effort to clarify that not all sexually transmitted infections turn into a disease.

Social Justice

The view that everyone deserves to enjoy the same economic, political, and social rights and opportunities, regardless of race, sex, gender, gender identity, socio-economic status, sexual identity, ability, or other characteristics.

Socio-economic Status

Social group membership based on a combination of factors including income, educational attainment, occupation, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class in the community, such as contacts within the community, group associations, and the community's perception of the family or individual. Socio-economic status can encompass quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society.

Spontaneous Abortion

A naturally occurring termination of pregnancy before the 20th week of pregnancy. (Naturally occurring pregnancy loss after the 20th week is often called a stillbirth). Spontaneous abortion, which may also be called a miscarriage, is a naturally occurring event, unlike induced abortion, which is also known as medicinal or surgical abortions. (See also Induced Abortion and Miscarriage.)

Student Centered

An approach to teaching that prioritizes the needs and learning styles of students.

Teaching Strategies

The intentional use of different modalities that enable students to learn desired content and skills.

Teasing

A social exchange that can be friendly, neutral, or negative. The perpetrator may assert they do not intend for their actions to be hurtful to the victim. Teasing does not include making fun of someone's ability, ethnicity, faith, or other characteristics that are out of the person's control. Teasing can be meant in good fun, but if repeated over and over again, continuing after a person asks that it stop, or with harmful intent, teasing can become bullying or harassment. (See also Bullying and Harassment.)

Transgender

A person whose gender identity and/or expression is not aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a large number of identities related to gender nonconformity. (See also Gender Nonconforming.)

Transphobia

Prejudice against individuals who are or are perceived to be transgender.

Trauma (Individual)

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.

Trauma (Systemic)

The contextual features of environments and institutions that give rise to trauma, maintain trauma, and impact posttraumatic responses. This conceptualization of trauma considers the influence of environments such as: schools, religious institutions, the military, workplace settings, hospitals, jails, and prisons; agencies and systems such as incarceration, foster care, immigration, federal assistance, and disaster management; conflicts involving war, torture, terrorism, and refugees; and dynamics of racism, sexism, discrimination, bullying, and homophobia.

Trauma Informed

An approach to teaching that recognizes the influence of individual and systemic trauma on students and assesses the implications on instruction and cognition to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment.

Trusted Adult

A person to whom a student can turn to in a time of need who can offer support and guidance.

Two-Spirit

A contemporary umbrella term used by Native, Indigenous, and/or First Nations people whose gender identity encompasses both male and female energies. Often recognized as a third gender since it falls outside of the two-gender binary, two-spirit people may or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or gender nonconforming. Please note that most Indigenous communities have their own unique words for describing people who defy gender norms and in many Nations, being Two-Spirit carries both great respect and additional commitments and responsibilities to one's community. (See also Bisexual, Gay, Intersex, Lesbian, Gender Nonconforming.)

Unconscious Bias

Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing, often as the result of historical context. Unconscious bias is also known as implicit bias.

Undetectable Viral Load

When the amount of HIV in the blood is too low to be detected with a viral load test. A person's viral load is considered "durably undetectable" when it remains undetectable for at least six months after a first undetectable test result. Antiretroviral drugs may reduce a person's viral load to an undetectable level; however, that does not mean the person is cured. Some HIV, in the form of latent HIV reservoirs, remains inside cells and in body tissues. (See also Viral Suppression.)

Universal Values

Values that are agreed to by the consensus of people in a society. The following are examples of universal values relevant to sex education: honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, respect for self and others, and freedom from coercion/exploitation.

Vaginal Sex

Sexual behavior involving penetration of the vagina by a penis or sex toy.

Value

A belief or opinion about the morals or ethics of an issue—right and wrong, good and bad, and/or the relative importance or what one should or should not do. The following is an example of a value relevant to sex education that a person might hold: Sexual behaviors between two people should be loving, pleasurable, and equitable.

Viral Suppression

When antiretroviral therapy (ART) reduces a person’s viral load to an undetectable level. Viral suppression does not mean a person is cured; HIV still remains in the body. If ART is discontinued, the person’s viral load will likely return to a detectable level.

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- Advocates for Youth
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- American Psychological Association
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- Anti-Defamation League
- Center for Disability Rights
- Center for Young Women’s Health, Boston Children’s Hospital
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Class Action
- Cleveland Clinic
- Conference for Community and Justice
- Crime Victims’ Institute
- DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Brandeis University
- Division of Adolescent and School Health
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- GLSEN
- Hall Health Center, University of Washington
- HIV.gov
- Human Rights Campaign
- Intergroup Resources
- Intersex Society of North America
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- Planned Parenthood Federation of America
- Race Forward
- Racial Equity Tools
- RAINN
- Rickie Solinger
- Sexual Violence Research Initiative
- Shelter for Help in Emergency
- SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change
- Simply Psychology
- Sister Song
- Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- The Vanier Institute of the Family
- Trans Student Educational Resources
- Tribal Law and Policy Institute
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Women for Women International
- World Health Organization