



Healthy Teen Network

B-HEALTHY CHEAT SHEET



BUILD GROUP AGREEMENTS

You probably already have ground rules for behavior in your classroom.

It's useful to develop group agreements specifically for sex ed because this subject is sensitive and often brings up emotions. With sex ed, there's also extra potential for violating anti-bullying/harassment policies. You can refer back to these policies when someone makes an inappropriate comment.



DEFINE HURTFUL COMMENTS

Teachers need to give examples of **hurtful comments** to help students avoid offending others unintentionally. One example is saying "that's so gay" to refer to something that is dumb or bad. Sometimes students don't realize that these kinds of comments are hurtful. Some teachers educate students about hurtful comments by asking students to think about whether they would be comfortable making the statement if it applied to a particular racial group.

If you need additional examples, ask your students privately for suggestions.



ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS

Use an anonymous question box, and ask everyone to put something in the box even if they don't write a question. This way, no one is stigmatized for using the box. By making the effort to give good responses to questions, you'll encourage more questions. Sometimes you may get so many questions that you run out of time to complete the lesson. When you get a question on a topic that will be covered later, it's OK to say so and make a note of the question, so you can address it when you cover the topic.

It's also OK to give a short answer and invite the person asking the question to talk with you later if they want to know more.



ACKNOWLEDGE DISCOMFORT AND LIMITS TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The bottom line is that you are not going to know everything, and that's OK. It helps students feel comfortable when you admit you don't know something. And it's also OK to be uncomfortable talking about a topic and admitting that.

If you do acknowledge that you're uncomfortable and tell students you are going to talk anyway because this information is so important, you will be setting a great example for communication.



LEAVE OLD ASSUMPTIONS AT THE DOOR

While you probably know a lot about your students, you cannot assume to know about the experiences, values, and sense of identity they bring to the classroom when it comes to sexuality. Make sure the language you use when you teach takes into account this diversity.

Assume every class includes someone who:

- Is LGBTQ
- Has had a traumatic sexual experience
- Does not identify as their assigned gender
- Knows somebody that is HIV Positive
- Had an STI or partner with one

Also, check your assumptions about who might be exerting sexual pressure. Boys can be pressured just as girls can.



TAKE CHARGE WHEN GROUP AGREEMENTS ARE VIOLATED

Take charge, stay calm, and set a serious tone when you respond to hurtful comments. Think about how you will respond even if you're not sure what to say or don't have much time. If you don't know what to say, talk to your colleagues.

Know the curriculum, so you can point out opportunities to reinforce respect. This helps you avoid a prolonged discussion when a comment is made.

In some cases, you might need to remove a student who keeps making hurtful comments. Be aware of your school policies if this situation arises. Also, you may want to offer support to the student privately in case there are underlying issues prompting the behavior.



HUMOR IS OK (SOMETIMES)

If it works with your style, don't be afraid to laugh. But make sure you only laugh at yourself, not others!

And tell students that it's OK if they laugh sometimes too, as long as they are not making fun of someone else.

Be careful with sarcasm—not all students understand it, and it can lead to some uncomfortable situations.



LEAVE YOUR STORIES AND VALUES OUT OF THE DISCUSSION

Deciding what to share about yourself or not can be challenging.

Some teachers decide to share to engage students, build rapport, increase credibility, or illustrate a point.

There are some disadvantages to sharing about ourselves.

- Students might take information out of context,
- The information can never be erased,
- It could put your job at risk, or
- It can be stigmatizing.

Disclosing information about yourself can be risky when it comes to sexuality and reproductive health. Share only information that you would be comfortable sharing with parents and administrators or seeing online.