

Then you should care about **SEX EDUCATION**.

Shared values of abortion rights & sex ed

All people have the right to make informed decisions about their body. This right includes access to the full spectrum of reproductive care, including contraception and abortion. Reproductive health, rights, and justice advocates fight tirelessly to make bodily autonomy a reality for all people.

Unfortunately, young people are often left out of conversations surrounding the right to bodily autonomy and, specifically, the right to access safe and legal abortion.

When young people are excluded from these conversations, they are denied the opportunity to understand that they have reproductive rights and options, too. Compounded by the myriad barriers to abortion access (including, but not limited to: cost, parental notification requirements, mandatory waiting periods, limited number of clinics available, language barriers, and the lack of accessible resources), this lack of information and education dramatically impacts young people's lives.

Additionally, there are many forms of oppression—economic, social, and political—that prevent young people from exercising their constitutional right. Abortion restrictions are designed to control reproductive freedoms and further oppress communities of color.

Ninety percent of all U.S. counties lack a clinic providing abortion care.¹ But almost all of these counties contain a school that can provide resources to young people through sex education. Sex education serves as a resource for young people to learn about their reproductive rights and pregnancy options, especially when they are unable to receive similar information from a clinic.

By advancing sex education, you are supporting abortion rights.

Sex education that covers all aspects of sexual health—including contraception, emergency contraception, and pregnancy options—is necessary for young people to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Teaching young people about all their options helps tackle the stigma and shame often associated with abortion.

Abortion is not a bad word.

- **The silence and secrecy around abortion causes many young people to not seek desired abortion care or to come across misleading or false information that may influence their decision. In fact, this is the exact hope of the anti-abortion movement: that stigma and shame around abortion will cause women to seek abortion less frequently.**²
- **Research finds that a majority of women believe they would be looked down on if others knew they had had an abortion, and more than 1 in 6 women think their healthcare provider would treat them differently if they knew.**³
- **This is compounded for communities of color who already navigate an inherently racist healthcare system.**
- **The more abortion is discussed and understood, the less likely attempts to stigmatize and shame it will be successful.**
- **Abortion empowers women and people who can become pregnant to make their own best decisions about whether, and when, to have children; build healthy families; and foster sustainable communities.**

Then you should care about **SEX EDUCATION**.

Sex education that is comprehensive works

- Sex education often serves as young people's first critical touch point for information regarding pregnancy options including parenting, adoption, and abortion.
- Utilizing sex education to accurately teach young people about abortion helps decrease the spread of false information and facilitates open and unbiased discussions that work to reduce the stigma affecting access to abortion care.
- Sex education clarifies myths about abortion, provides fact-based information about what abortion is (and is not), and covers where and how to access abortion care.
- Without sex education, young people are more likely to turn to the unreliable information on the internet or crisis pregnancy centers (whose main purpose is to discourage and prevent abortion care) for answers.⁴

What sex education can do vs. what it currently does

Most sex education curricula omit life-saving information about abortion care and **six states** outright prohibit discussion of abortion in the classroom. Currently, just 38% of high schools and 14% of middle schools in the U.S. provide all 19 topics identified by the CDC as "critical" sex education topics.⁵ Additionally, the latest data available shows that significant sexual health disparities exist among young people—including the fact that half of the nearly 20 million estimated STIs in the U.S. each year occur among people ages 15–24.⁶ Sex education must be comprehensive and inclusive to ensure young people have all of the information they need to lead healthy lives. Learning this vital information—which includes abortion—is their right.

Policy recommendations: Supporting abortion rights & sex education

- Advocate for sex education to require unbiased, age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally appropriate instruction on abortion and access to abortion care.
- Support federal legislation such as the **Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (REHYA)** (which requires instruction on abortion and access to services in sex education classes) and the **Youth Access to Sexual Health Services Act**.
- Work to remove state-level legal and policy barriers to sex education that is inclusive of the full range of sexual and reproductive health care options—including abortion.
- Support federal funding for the full range of reproductive health care services, including the Title X program as it was originally intended -- to provide individuals with comprehensive family planning and related preventive health services.
- Form coalitions with parents, educators, young people, and policymakers to improve sex education on the state and school district levels.
- Center the voices and experiences of young people of color within abortion access advocacy, paying special attention to parent notification barriers.
- Eliminate funding and/or support for harmful and ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

1. Jones, Rachel K. and Jerman Jenna. "Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2014." Guttmacher Institute, published March 2017. <https://www.guttmacher.org/journals/psrh/2017/01/abortion-incidence-and-service-availability-united-states-2014>.

2. Norris, Alison, Danielle Bessett, Julia R. Steinberg, Megan L. Kavanaugh, Silvia De Zordo, and Davida Becker. "Abortion Stigma: A Reconceptualization of Constituents, Causes, and Consequences." *Womens Health Issues* 21, no. 3 (February 12, 2011). Accessed July 23, 2018. doi:10.1016/j.whi.2011.02.010.

3. "Abortion and Young People in the United States." *Advocates for Youth*, accessed June 26, 2018. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/2296-abortion-and-young-people-in-the-united-states>

4. Altshuler, Anna L., Gerns Storey, Helen L. and Prager, Sarah W. "Exploring Abortion Attitudes of US Adolescents and Young Adults using Social Media." *Sciencedirect*, published March 2015. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010782414007811>.

5. Brener, Nancy, et al. "School Health Profiles 2016: Characteristics of Health Programs Among Secondary Schools." *CDC*. November 2017. Accessed May 30, 2018.

6. *CDC. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 2016*. September 2017.