

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

The Case For Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Most young people spend a majority of their upbringing at school, making it an influential and critical space for development. In the U.S., more than 95% of young people ages 7–17 are enrolled in school and will spend over six hours in a classroom each weekday during the most formative years of their lives. Schools are uniquely positioned to not only provide formal sex education, but also improve the health and well-being of young people.¹

Sex education provided in schools is instrumental in preventing negative health outcomes. Sex education that is comprehensive offers young people the strongest opportunities to make lifelong, healthy decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.² This type of education is free of stigma and shame and is inclusive of all young people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or ethnicity.

LGBTQ Rights Include Access to Sex Education

Describing **cisgender*** and heterosexual identities and relationships as the "norm" in classrooms has a real impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) young people. Outright anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and language that reinforces the gender binary can have a severe psychological impact on a person who identifies as LGBTQ, but an absence of LGBTQ inclusivity can similarly promote stigma and harmful stereotypes. Unfortunately, when it comes to sex education in schools, LGBTQ youth experience both.

Only seven states require that sex education and HIV/AIDS instruction in schools be culturally appropriate, or inclusive of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, disabilities, socioeconomic status, gender identity/expression, or sexual orientation.³

Similarly, only four states require health education instruction to affirmatively recognize different sexual orientations and gender identities. This impacts young LGBTQ people and, even more so, young LGBTQ people of color, who are both less likely to have sex education that meets their needs and more likely to experience sexual health disparities.³

*cisgender (adj.): refers to an individual whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth (sometimes referred to as "biological sex.")

- **Lesbian and bisexual young women are two to ten times more likely to experience an unintended pregnancy than heterosexual young women.**⁴
- **18% of LGB students who identified as multi-racial and 15.5% of white LGB students reported having been forced to have sex, compared to 9.3% of straight students who identified as multi-racial and 5.1% of white straight students, respectively.**⁵
- **81% of new HIV diagnoses in 2015 were among gay and bisexual young men ages 13-24 and disproportionately among Black and Latinx GB young men.**⁶
- **78% of transgender students in grades K-12 report having been exposed to harassment, 35% to physical assault, and 12% to sexual assault.**⁷

If you care about LGBTQ rights...

Then you should care about SEX EDUCATION.

By Advancing Sex Education, You Are Advancing LGBTQ Rights

Most sex education curricula ignore the needs of LGBTQ youth by only discussing sexuality within the confines of heterosexual marriage. At least 30 states are required by law to stress abstinence during instruction in sex education and only 16 states are required to cover contraceptives.⁸ At least seven states have laws that are explicitly anti-LGBTQ.⁹ In fact, a 2015 GLSEN study found that less than 6% of students reported having sex education classes that showed LGBTQ identity in a positive light.

Educators set the tone by creating inclusive and welcoming environments.

Sex education can be one of the few sources of reliable information on sexuality and sexual health for youth. Schools' tendencies to perpetuate negative or "othering" attitudes towards LGBTQ people place them at greater risk of violence and create significant sexual and reproductive health disparities – particularly among young LGBTQ people of color. **Only 11% of LGBTQ youth of color believe their racial/ethnic group is regarded positively in the United States.**¹⁰ Additionally, for LGBTQ youth of color, the challenges are exacerbated by the lack of health educators and programs that relate directly to their experiences with LGBTQ- and race-based discrimination.

68% of LGBTQ youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBTQ from elected officials.¹¹

Sex Education that is inclusive of LGBTQ young people:

- Affirms young people's right to bodily autonomy
- Ensures LGBTQ young people have a safe and supportive environment that affirms who they are
- Centers the voices and experiences of LGBTQ youth of color
- Rejects abstinence-only-until-marriage programs which promote shame and reinforce stigma
- Reduces experiences of negative mental health outcomes due to prejudice and other biases¹¹

If You Are An Advocate or Policymaker:

- Read **A CALL TO ACTION: LGBTQ YOUTH NEED INCLUSIVE SEX EDUCATION** to take immediate, concrete steps.
- Advocate for comprehensive sexuality education programs that honor and respect the rights of young people, providing them with the tools they need to live healthy lives.
- Support federal legislation such as the **Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (REHYA)** and the **Youth Access to Sexual Health Services Act (YASHS Act)**.
- Move beyond asking whether a strategy will serve everyone to focusing first on whether it will effectively address the needs of those most likely to be in need (i.e. LGBTQ youth of color).
- Form coalitions with parents, educators, and policy makers to improve sex education in your state and school district.
- Develop sex education policies that align with the **National Sexuality Education Standards**.
- Eliminate funding and/or support for harmful and ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

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 4 7 Reasons Abortion Rights Should Matter To Everyone In The LGBT Community Kristina Marusic - <http://www.newnownext.com/roe-v-wade-anniversary/01/2017/>
 5 Adolescent and School Health. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed June 26, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/smy.htm>
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 11 Growing up LGBT in America HRC Youth Survey Report Key Findings. Report. Accessed June 28, 2018. https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Growing-Up-LGBT-in-America_Report.pdf.