

If/Then

*If You Care About LGBTQIA+ Rights,
Then You Should Care About Sex Education*



INTRODUCTION

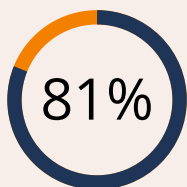
Most young people spend the majority of their upbringing at school, making it an influential and critical space for development. In the United States, over 95% of young people ages 7–17 are enrolled in school and will spend over six hours in a classroom each weekday during the most formative years of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

Three decades of research has found that sex education provided in schools is instrumental in preventing negative health outcomes. Sex education that is evidence-based, medically accurate, age and developmentally-appropriate, and LGBTQIA+-inclusive 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.

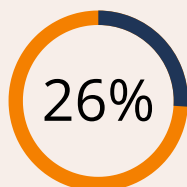
LGBTQ+ RIGHTS INCLUDE ACCESS TO SEX EDUCATION

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

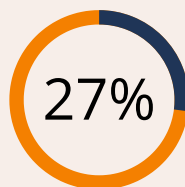
Only ten states require that sex education and HIV/AIDS instruction in schools be culturally appropriate, or inclusive of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, disabilities, socioeconomic status, gender identity/expression, or sexual orientation. Similarly, only nine states require health education instruction to affirmatively recognize different sexual orientations and gender identities.³ This impacts young LGBTQIA+ people and, even more so, young LGBTQIA+ people of color, who are both less likely to have sex education that meets their needs and more likely to experience sexual health disparities.⁴



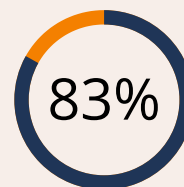
OF NEW HIV DIAGNOSES in 13–24 year olds were among gay and bisexual young men and disproportionately among Black and Latinx sexual minority men.⁵



OF TRANSGENDER YOUTH have been forced to have sex, compared to only 7.2% of cisgender youth, with 49.5% of Asian and Pacific Islander trans youth having experienced forced sex.⁶



• OF TRANS MEN undergo routine gynecological screening compared to 43% of cisgender women, placing populations at increased risk of undetected and untreated cervical cancer.⁷



OF LGBTQ+ STUDENTS in grades 6–12 reported experiencing verbal or physical harassment or assault at school.⁸

BY ADVANCING SEX EDUCATION, YOU ARE ADVANCING LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS

Most sex education curricula ignore the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth by only discussing sexuality within the confines of heterosexual marriage and explaining human development exclusively through a binary lens. At least 30 states are required by law to stress abstinence until marriage during instruction in sex education and only 19 states are required to cover contraceptives.⁹

In addition to the issue of abstinence-focused, heteronormative sex education, many students do not receive instruction on gender identity and expression. Not only does this perpetuate stigma against transgender, nonbinary, two-spirit, and intersex young people but also deprives them of affirming and potentially life-saving education. Only 10% of transgender and gender-expansive youth reported they received sex education in school that they found personally relevant.¹⁰

EDUCATORS SET THE TONE BY CREATING INCLUSIVE 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 LGBTQIA+ people place them at greater risk of violence and create significant sexual and reproductive health disparities – particularly among young queer and transgender people of color. Only 11% of LGBTQIA+ youth of color believe their racial/ethnic group is regarded positively in the United States.¹¹ Additionally, only 20% of Black LGBTQIA+ youth¹² and 13% of Latinx LGBTQIA+ youth reported that they received safer sex information in school that they found personally relevant.¹³ For queer and transgender youth of color, the challenges are exacerbated by the lack of health educators and programs that relate directly to their experiences with LGBTQIA+ and race-based discrimination.

At least seventeen states have laws that restrict discussions of LGBTQIA+ people or issues throughout school curricula.¹⁴ In fact, a 2022 GLSEN study found that less than 7.4% received LGBTQIA+ inclusive sex education, which included positive representations of both LGB and transgender and nonbinary topics.¹⁵ As states continue to pass dangerous legislation that is increasingly hostile to queer and transgender young people, it is more important than ever that we advocate for sex education that helps keep some of our most marginalized young people safe.

25%

As of April 2024, 184 bills have been introduced that explicitly restrict LGBTQIA+ student and educator rights.¹⁶ 93% of transgender and nonbinary youth have worried about being denied access to gender-affirming medical care due to state or local laws.¹⁷

***If You Care About LGBTQIA+ Rights,
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QUALITY SEX EDUCATION WORKS

- ✓ Affirms young people's right to bodily autonomy, especially for gender-expansive and gender-nonconforming young people
- ✓ Includes evidence-based, medically accurate information that's relevant and appropriate for young people of all sexualities and genders
- ✓ Ensures LGBTQIA+ young people have a safe and supportive environment that affirms who they are
- ✓ Centers the voices and experiences of LGBTQIA+ 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 heteronormativity while reinforcing stigma¹⁸

IF YOU'RE AN ADVOCATE

- ✓ Read A Call to Action: LGBTQ+ Youth Need Inclusive Sex Education to take immediate, concrete steps
- ✓ Advocate for medically accurate, evidence-based, and inclusive 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 and Access for Healthy Youth 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. LGBTQIA+ youth of color)
- ✓ Form coalitions with parents, educators, and policymakers to improve sex education in your state and school district. To get involved in local advocacy efforts, contact EducateUs
- ✓ Develop sex education policies that align with the Rights, Respect, Responsibility, a LGBTQ-inclusive sex education curriculum by Advocates for Youth
- ✓ Eliminate funding and/or support for harmful and ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, also known as "sexual risk avoidance"

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