

What Research Says about Comprehensive and Inclusive Sexuality Education

In many communities, there are debates about the content of sexuality education. There is a strong body of research to inform decision-making about sexuality education. Twenty years of research shows that abstinence-only education fails to delay sexual activity or reduce risky sexual behaviors. In conservative states, spending on abstinence-only education is linked to higher birth rates.¹⁻⁷ Comprehensive sexuality education, which goes beyond an abstinence focus, covers a broad range of issues related to the physical, biological, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality and reduces risky sexual behaviors and can delay sexual activity.⁸

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Characteristics of effective sexuality education:

- Curricula that go beyond abstinence-only sexuality education reduce risky sexual behaviors and can delay the onset of sexual activity.⁹
- Sexuality education that begins earlier is more effective for education and intervention.¹⁰⁻¹²
- Curricula that target the risky behaviors and sexual beliefs of teens reduce risky sexual behaviors.¹³⁻¹⁴

Research about parents' perspectives on sexuality education shows three clear patterns:

- Most parents prefer more than abstinence-only sexuality education for their children (even in conservative states like Texas).¹⁵
- Parents typically do not know what is included in “abstinence” or “comprehensive” curricula. When informed about curricular content, most parents want more than abstinence-only education, and want information included about sexual identity.¹⁵
- Most parents want sexuality education to be taught earlier in schooling rather than later (e.g., middle school vs. high school).^{15, 18}

Sexuality Education that is inclusive of LGBTQ youth:

- Reduces behaviors that put LGBTQ youth at risk of HIV, including sex without a condom and sex under the influence of substances.¹⁶⁻²⁰
- Increases the number of LGBTQ youth tested for HIV.²⁰⁻²²
- Increases both sexual health knowledge and communication with partners (e.g., openness, perspective-taking, conflict resolution skills).^{18,23}
- Reduces stress caused by stigma and prejudice towards LGBTQ youth.²³

Texas Statistics:

- Texas ranks 4th highest in the United States for teen births.²⁴
- Texas has the highest rate of congenital syphilis in the nation, accounting for 25% of all national cases (congenital syphilis in fetuses can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, or death shortly after birth).²⁵

- Similar to the national average, 40% of Texas high school students (9-12) report having had sexual intercourse.²⁶
- Nearly 25% of Texas high-school students report not having used any pregnancy prevention method during their last sexual intercourse (versus national average: 14%).²⁷
- Similar to national trends, rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis in Texas are rising; rates of STIs are highest among people ages 15-24.²⁶⁻²⁷
- 1 in 10 new HIV diagnoses in Texas is among youth ages 15-19.²⁷

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