



Answering the Tough Questions

Questions asked by students often can be placed under four main categories:

- Informational (definitions, general information, slang terms, etc.)
- Personal questions (which are often asked to find out if they are 'normal'),
- Permission seeking questions (should I do this activity; which activity is safer), and
- Silly or 'shock value' questions.

Some students will ask questions out loud. Sometimes it is simply because they are comfortable doing that, sometimes it may be to gain attention or laughter from the class or to see if they can 'shock' or 'stump' the teacher. Others may feel more comfortable using the anonymous 'Question Box' teaching method. This can be a very helpful tool given that many students are embarrassed to admit they don't know the information, uncomfortable with the words, or perhaps, because they don't want others to know or assume that the question is a personal one. Question boxes can be left out on an ongoing basis, used at the beginning of a unit for help with how to direct your teachings, or used at the end of a unit to provide information that wasn't covered.

Regardless of how a question is asked, it is important to try to answer them all. To do this, it is helpful to be prepared, but remember, you can not know everything. Every teacher gets stumped on questions. It is OK to say that you need to look up something and answer a question later; just make sure you do follow up with the answer in a subsequent class.

Inappropriate or Irrelevant Questions: If you are uncomfortable with a question (perhaps it is not within the curriculum guidelines, it is inappropriate for the age group*, or it is not related to your topic) you could always give students the reason you aren't answering the question, but say that you can answer it personally, after class or during lunch, for example. Referring them to someone else who can answer the questions may also be an option. Some teachers will get a health educator or nurse in specifically to answer the less related and more difficult questions. Having someone else answer non-curriculum related questions helps some teachers feel comfortable getting around that issue while still getting the questions answered.

*A note about age appropriateness: Some health educators feel that if the question is being asked, then the question is appropriate. Use your judgement to provide simpler answers for younger students and more involved answers for older students.



Here are some tips for answering questions:

- 1. Be Prepared.** Read as much as you can. Starting out is the most difficult, but each year gets easier and easier.
- 2. Seek Support from a Mentor.** This could be another teacher who currently teaches or has taught sex education, a public health nurse, the Sexual Health Centre health educator, etc.
- 3. Create a Safe Space.** Change the seating to facilitate discussions and question-asking (U-shape or circle), use icebreaker activities, use gender-neutral and inclusive language.
- 4. Set Ground Rules.** (Or review them if you've already done them) Involve the students. Include rules such as being respectful, not 'naming names', no name-calling, and no personal questions. Personal questions can be reworded into "What happens if someone...", "I heard that if...", or "I have a friend who..."
- 5. Address Feelings.** Yours and theirs. If you feel uncomfortable with a certain question or topic, then admit it but still try to answer the question. It is OK to ask for some time to figure out how you will answer the question. You may need a couple of days to formulate an appropriate response. Acknowledge that teachers and students may feel embarrassed or nervous with certain words or topics but remind them how important the information is.
- 6. Use Guest Speakers Wisely.** Guest speakers not only help educate your students - use them to train yourself. You might learn things you didn't know, and can learn various approaches to answering some tough questions. If using guest speakers to help answer questions, make sure they are invited at an appropriate time which complements your unit.
- 7. Validate and Normalize Questions.** Help students feel good about asking questions with statements like, "That's a good question...", "Thank you for asking that...", "A lot of people wonder about this...", "That's a question I get asked a lot..."
- 8. Answer Factually.** Provide simple and straight forward answers rather than opinions or judgments whenever possible. If the question involves values or beliefs, then it is important to acknowledge that (e.g. "This depends on what you believe. Some people believe 'a' and other people believe 'b' and still others think 'c'...", "Neither way is right or wrong, but it is important to know your own values and beliefs before making any decisions...", "...You might want to discuss that further with your family/doctor/etc....")
- 9. Refer Students** (when necessary). If you think a question is more involved than the basic answer you can provide, refer students to other appropriate places, such as parents, community resources, doctors, guidance counsellors, health centres, etc.
- 10. Avoid Questions About Your Sexual History.** Ask yourself whether the information is relevant or useful. Personal information might give students the 'excuse' to discount your knowledge or incorrectly assume that you hold certain beliefs. (e.g. If you tell them you were 13 when you first had sexual intercourse, they might think that 13 is appropriate for them too, because you seemed to have turned out OK; if you waited until marriage, they might think you are inexperienced or worry that you will be judgmental.) Use your discretion. Some information is OK and some personal stories can add humour or realism to certain topics, but most personal information is best left personal.



Other Sexual Health Resources

Local Resources

Sexual Health Centre for Lunenburg County (Bridgewater) 527-2868: (pamphlets, info, guest speaking, wellness events, counselling, pregnancy testing, pregnancy options counselling, condoms, lubricant, oral dams, sexual health glossary, professional training, library of books and videos)

Public Health 543-0850: Sexuality Education Resource Nurse or any nurse (SEX? Resource book, written information, professional training, policy development)

Teen Place 644-3430: Youth Health Ctr, New Germany residents only

Harbour House 543-3999: (guest speaking, information for healthy relationship and abuse issues, shelter, support groups)

Websites for teachers and professionals

www.teachingsexualhealth.ca

www.sexualityandu.ca

www.cfsh.ca (resources for Sexual and Reproductive Health Day, information, policy, finding your local Sexual Health centre, Beyond the Basics unit plans)
Beyond the Basics: A Sourcebook in Sexual and Reproductive Health Education (a set of lesson plans, approved by the N.S. Dept. of Education)

Youth-friendly websites

www.spiderbytes.ca

www.sexualityandu.ca

www.planetahead.ca

Books

More Speaking of Sex: What your children need to know and when they need to know it. by Meg Hickling, 1999. Northstone Publishing, Kelowna, BC, Canada. ISBN 1-896836-37-2



Sample Questions and Answers (real questions from Junior High students in Lunenburg County)

**Please note that answers will differ based on the person answering, the grade level or knowledge level of the students, etc. Simpler answers can be used for younger students. The more mature or knowledgeable the students, the more details you can provide. Use your discretion. Also, for space, and to avoid repetition, I have not included the initial validation response for each question.*

Why do some people have a bigger penis size? Penis size is just like body height and hair colour. It is a result of genes. We tend to inherit how we look and our body sizes based on our parents and grandparents.

What does 'pulling yourself' mean? This is a slang term for male masturbation. (may have to explain masturbation)

What is masturbation? Masturbation is when you cause yourself to become sexually aroused using your own body parts, usually your own hands.

(more info) an orgasm might or might not be involved.

(more info) There is another term called mutual masturbation. This can be either 2 people masturbating themselves at the same time, or it might refer to each partner touching the other partner's genitals. (more info...) sometimes this is also called giving each other a hand job.

Is masturbation bad for you? Masturbation is not bad for you. It does not harm your body in any way. The important thing is that you do it in private. Some people do not believe in masturbation and choose not to do it. It is ok if you masturbate; it is ok if you don't.

Can you choke someone with your penis? This must be referring to oral sex. Because you can't wrap a penis around someone's neck and choke them. (you can always add a little humour, but only if you are comfortable with it) Some people have really strong gag reflexes and if the penis is forced to the back of the partner's throat, yes, some people will cough or gag. However, a respectful partner would never 'force' their penis there.

(more info) Oral sex does not need to involve the whole penis going into the partner's mouth at one time, and is not usually the best method for a man to enjoy oral sex.

At what age should one have a solid idea on sexuality? If this refers to sexual orientation, this is a difficult question to answer, because everyone is different, but usually sometime during puberty, which is usually between 9 and 18 years old.

Can a man kill a woman with his penis? Not directly, but if he has HIV/AIDS and passes it on, then the answer could be yes.

(more info) In fact, some people in other countries have been convicted of murder, for having unprotected sex with someone and not informing them that they have the HIV virus.

What is lube? Lube is short for lubricant, which is a substance that helps reduce the friction between 2 things rubbing together. Lube is used in lots of mechanical devices. In sexual health, lubricant should always be water based, and not oil based

(more info) This is because oils don't break down as easily, so you can get an infection easier with an oil-based product, because it doesn't wash out of the body as quickly;

and because latex, which is what most condoms are made of, breaks down quickly when touched with oils.

What is a dildo? A dildo is usually a plastic or rubber object, usually shaped like a penis, which is inserted into the body for sexual pleasure. It can be used alone, or by couples. It is also called a sex toy. It is a personal choice to use them because some people enjoy using them and others do not.

(more info) Some come with extra pieces on them to stimulate the clitoris, some vibrate, and some are water proof. Ones that vibrate are often called vibrators. It is important to keep them clean, and not to share them with others.

Why are men so sexual? Well, I don't actually know that men are more sexual than women. We are all sexual beings, and you might be asking because boys your age are talking about it a lot. This might be because you are all in the midst of puberty and you have lots of hormones in your body, which makes both boys and girls feel sexually aroused a lot (also called 'horny'). This will calm down some as puberty winds down. Feelings of sexual arousal for some people, also wind down with age, but the ability to become sexually aroused often never stops.

Do condoms work? Condoms are about 97% effective for preventing pregnancy, when they are used properly, and used every time. They are only 86% effective otherwise. Also, they only cover a particular area and protect the areas they are entering. Some STIs are passed by skin-to-skin contact and during sexual activity; other areas of the genitals are still unprotected. So they do have limits. But they are better than using nothing.

Can you be pregnant when you are not going through puberty? Puberty is a part of your body's ability to get pregnant. When (and just before) you start your very first period, which happens during puberty, you have the ability to get pregnant. After that, about every month (sometimes it takes a while for your body to regulate) your body gets ready to be pregnant. If an egg does not get fertilized, then the lining of the uterus washes out. This is your period. This continues to happen, even when puberty is finished. Puberty finished around the age of 16 – 18 years, but your body can continue to get pregnant until 'menopause' happens, which is when your periods stop. This is usually sometime in your 50's.

Can women 'squirt' when they reach orgasm? Yes, some women, but a smaller percent, do squirt some fluid from their urethra while they are having an orgasm. This is not urine (pee). It is normal and OK if this happens to a woman, and it is normal and OK if it doesn't.

How do you have protected oral sex? To protect both partners from STI's during oral sex, since STIs can be transferred to and from the mouth, you can wear a condom (if it's oral sex on a guy) or an oral dam (if it's oral sex on a girl).

Is it possible to have ear sex? The ear is too small for anything, and it is dangerous to insert anything in the ear anyway. However, if the genitals are rubbed against an ear, and you get sexually aroused from that, and your partner is consensual, you could call that ear sex if you wanted.

STI or STD, what's the difference? STD is an older term that stands for Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Because not all the infections you can get are diseases, we started calling them Sexually Transmitted Infections. Some people still use STD. They both mean the same thing.

Can you have sex more than 3 times a night? If you can, and you want, and your partner is consensual, there is nothing wrong with it. It's also OK not to want sex at all.

(more info) Some people on the receiving end of vaginal or anal sex may find that they get sore or irritated with too much sex, simply because the friction irritates and chafes the skin. They may choose to use lubricant to help with that, or condoms, especially female condoms. Some men may find that they can't get another erection, or they may have to wait some time in between erections.

What is the chance of a defective condom? Condoms are 97% effective when used consistently (every time) and properly. That means that 3% of the time, the condom will slip or tear. I do not know the chance of getting an actual defective condom from the factory.

(More info) Keep in mind that the actual effectiveness rate with actual use is only 86%. So the main reasons condoms don't work are because people aren't using them properly and they aren't using them every single time they have sex.

What is a 6 to 9? I think you are probably referring to a 69 (sixty nine), which is a slang term for two people giving each other oral sex at the same time. The numbers represent the head and feet of two bodies. If there is a new term meaning something different out there, I don't know it yet.

How many different sex positions are there? There are hundreds. They are limited only by your imagination, your flexibility, your strength, and your willingness.

What happens if a woman takes Viagra? This hasn't been studied fully yet, but research is underway. It would work similarly to how it works for men, in that it would increase blood flow to the genitals. It is possible that she would get some swelling from extra fluid near the G-Spot area and possibly in the deeper areas of the clitoris. Some studies have also shown increased vaginal lubrication. It may or may not help women achieve orgasm. With females, the orgasm is so complex that it is assumed it will not work for all.

How do you get sperm in a sperm bank? Sperm banks are not like money banks where you can just walk up and take some out. Sperm banks are simply places where you can donate or store sperm safely, and where it can be tested to ensure its safety. They are often a service within a fertility clinic. There are actually very few sperm banks. There are 2 in Canada, both in Toronto. Other fertility clinics will order sperm from them for you. Men are given a private room to masturbate and collect a sperm sample and then it is tested and frozen to keep it safe until someone wants to use it. The sperm can be placed in a woman's uterus to help her get pregnant. In Canada it is illegal to buy sperm or eggs. In the United States, men can get paid for a sperm donation.

Do penis pumps work? Penis pump ads, and various other enlargement device ads can be found in junk email, on the web, and in magazines. There is no evidence that they work. The only things they make big are the companies' bank accounts.

(more info) A pump actually works as a vacuum and can temporarily increase the penis slightly, by forcing more blood into the penis. However, the pressure from the pump needs to be there, and as soon as the pump is taken away, the extra blood leaves. And think of it. Wouldn't it be more embarrassing for a man to take out a penis pump and do that right before sex than just being happy with the size of his penis?



Sample questions from high school students (in Lunenburg County):

Do all girls bleed the first time they have sex?

What is an orgasm?

Is it more pleasurable to have sex with a male who has been circumcised or not circumcised?

What is your G-spot?

My friend has sex with multiple people and I think it's because she's insecure about herself. I want to approach her about it but don't want to suggest that I think she's overly promiscuous.

Is using different kinds of candy or ice cubes bad to put near your vagina or to insert them into it to have a thing to move around?

How can you tell your parents you are sexually active?

My boyfriend likes to get violent during sex. Is this normal?

You hear all the people at schools and in the text books always promoting 'abstinence'! Why don't they give 'how to have good sex'? Now there is something we would like to know!

Is sex supposed to hurt all the time? Or is it just when the guy is really ruff?

If the girl likes different positions, and the guy does not, what should the girl do?

What can you do to make sex more interesting?

What is happening when girls squirt?

What is injected into your G-spot to have better orgasms?

