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WEBINAR HOSTED DECEMBER 3, 2020

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN CANADA: INSIGHTS FROM YOUTH ACROSS THE COUNTRY

**ERIN LAVERTY, MSC (SHE/HER)
RACHEL MACLEAN, MPH (SHE/HER)
SHIREEN NOBLE, MSPH (SHE/HER)**



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WELCOME!



CPHA's office is located on the original, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people. They have been the guardians of this land for millennia and CPHA is grateful for the example their stewardship provides.



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THE PROJECT



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PREVENTING YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN CANADA

- Project Objective: Adapt, implement, and evaluate the Centre for Sexuality's *Relationship and Sexual Health Education* program as an intervention for youth dating violence
- To help inform our project, we gathered perspectives and experiences of youth living in Canada today



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OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS





DATA COLLECTION



Focus groups

- Discussions approx. 1 hour in length
- Led by a researcher and took place at various schools and community settings
- Youth were invited to sign up by someone working at each setting (e.g. teachers, counsellors)



Online survey

- Self-report questions
- Participants responded on a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone
- Recruitment included paid advertisements, social media posts, physical posters, and sharing between networks



YOUTH IN CANADA: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

12 Focus Groups (*n* = 66)

Ages 12-19 (*M* = 16.5 years)

-
- 54% heterosexual/straight, 20% bisexual/pansexual, 9% lesbian, 8% gay, 3% questioning, 6% other
 - 52% female, 35% male, 13% TGNCNB+
 - 41% Caucasian/white, 18% Asian, 17% Mixed, 9% BIPOC, 15% No Response
 - Alberta (4), British Columbia (4), Ontario (3), and Quebec (1)

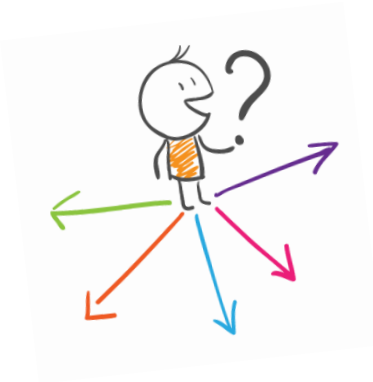
Online Survey (*n* = 1,202)

Ages 16-19 (*M* = 17 years)

-
- 41% heterosexual/straight, 34% bisexual/pansexual, 6% lesbian, 5% gay, 4% asexual, 4% queer, 4% questioning, 2% other
 - 65% female, 21% male, 14% TGNCNB+
 - 75% Caucasian/white, 6% Mixed, 5% Asian, 4% BIPOC, 1% Latinx, 9% No Response
 - Canada wide (~70% from Alberta, British Columbia, or Ontario)



YOUTH IN CANADA: **RELATIONSHIPS**



If you were to guess...

**What percentage of youth ages 16-19
in Canada have ever...**been in a
romantic and/or sexual relationship?****



YOUTH IN CANADA: **RELATIONSHIPS**

...been in a romantic and/or sexual relationship?

80% (ever) and 40% (currently)

Focus group participants ($n = 56$), ages 16-19

75% (ever) and 60% (currently)

Online survey participants ($n = 1202$), ages 16-19



YOUTH IN CANADA: SEX AND RELATED BEHAVIOURS



If you were to guess...

**What percentage of youth ages 16-19 in
Canada have ever engaged in ...**

Oral sex?

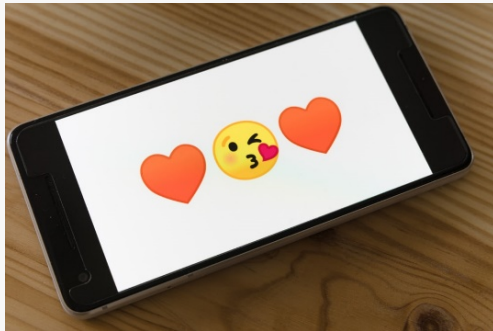
Anal sex?

Sending a sexual/naked picture?

Penis-vagina sex?



YOUTH IN CANADA: SEX AND RELATED BEHAVIOURS



Oral sex 59%

Anal sex 16%

Sending a sexual/naked picture 47%

Penis-vagina sex 48%

Based on sample of online survey participants ages 16 – 19 (n = 1202)



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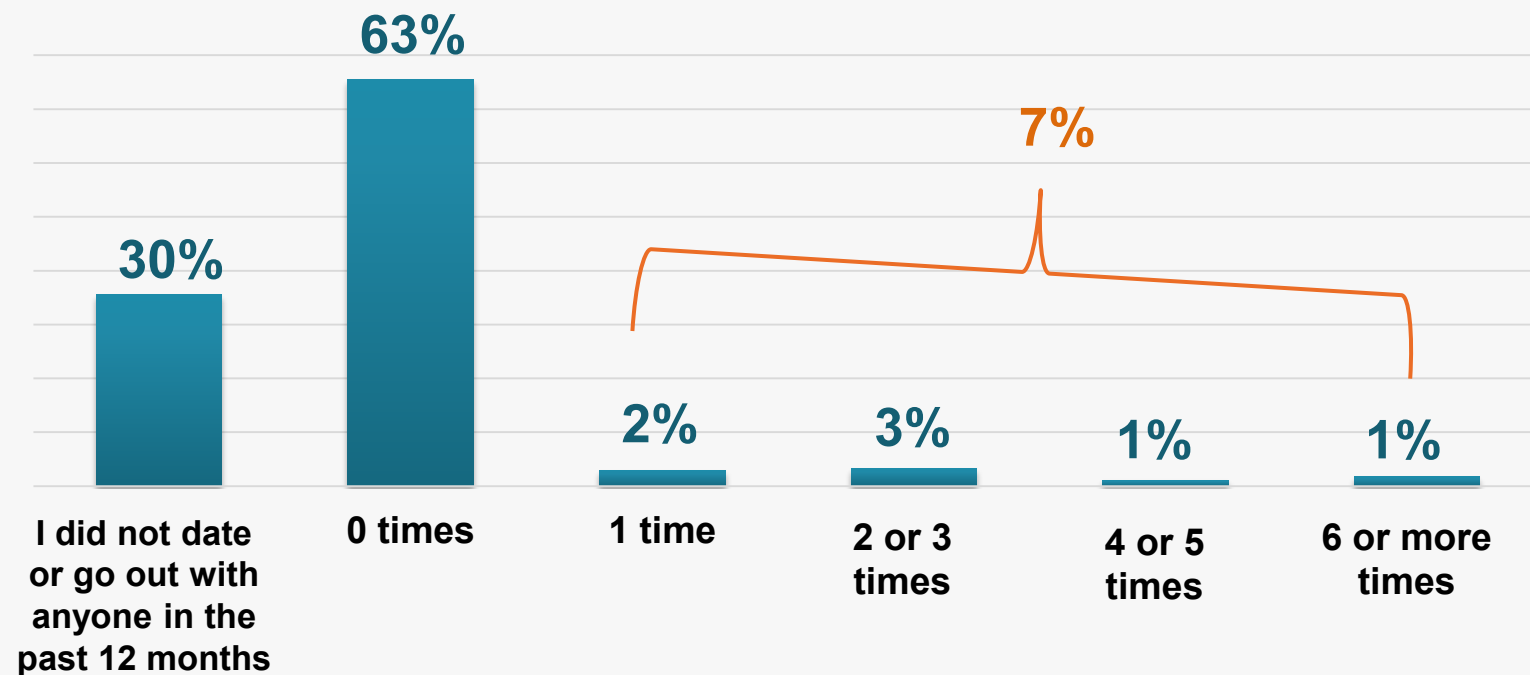
YOUTH DATING VIOLENCE





YOUTH IN CANADA: DATING VIOLENCE

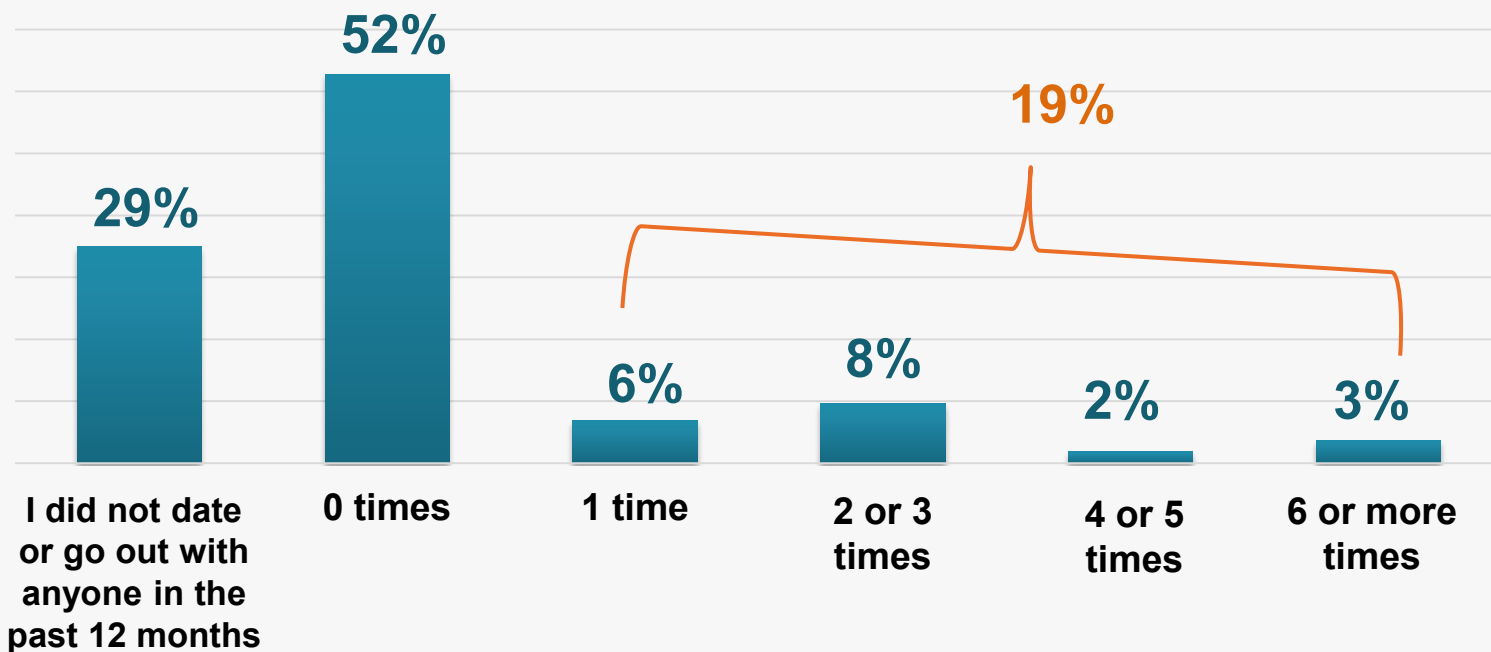
During the past 12 months, did someone you were dating or going out with **physically hurt you on purpose?** (Count things such as being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon.)





YOUTH IN CANADA: DATING VIOLENCE

During the past 12 months, did someone you were dating or going out with **force you to do sexual things that you did not want to do?** (Count such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.)





YOUTH IN CANADA: DATING VIOLENCE

Have you experienced abuse (which may include emotional, physical, sexual abuse) in a romantic and/or sexual relationship?

- **Ever?** 33% ($n = 401$) said yes.

- In the past year? 14% ($n = 174$) said yes.

62% ($n = 108$) received emotional support (e.g. someone to talk to)

33% ($n = 57$) received professional support (e.g. counselling, hotlines)

7% ($n = 13$) legal support (e.g. police, social services)

76% ($n = 133$) left the relationship and/or made efforts to distance themselves

47% ($n = 81$) did not disclose this abuse



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SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

LEARNING EXPERIENCES & PREFERENCES





YOUTH IN CANADA: LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- **Most (93%)** survey respondents reported having ever received at least one sex education lesson or workshop (e.g. in a group setting, such as a school or community organization)

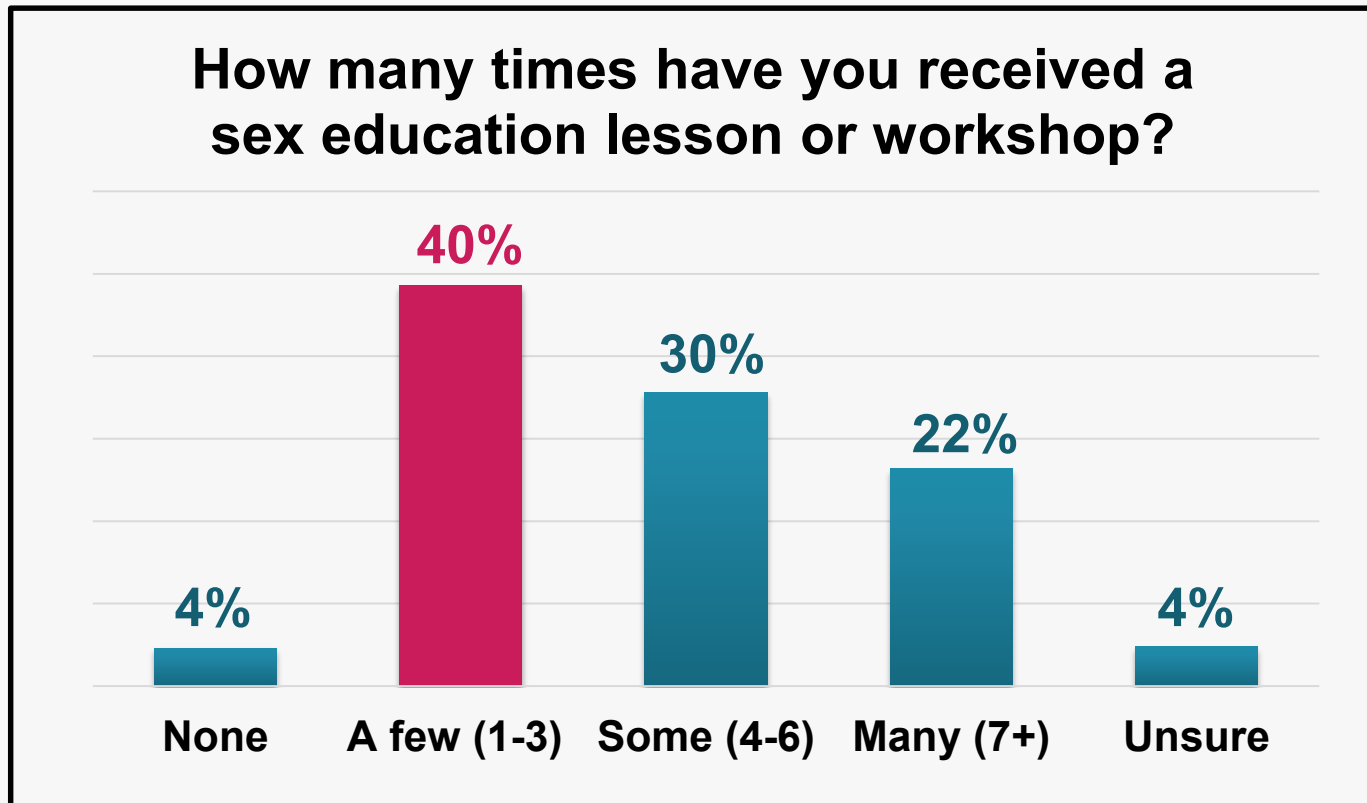
Where?

- **87%** Elementary school
- **76%** High school
- **8%** In a community setting





YOUTH IN CANADA: LEARNING EXPERIENCES



Based on sample of online survey participants (n = 1202)



YOUTH IN CANADA: LEARNING EXPERIENCES

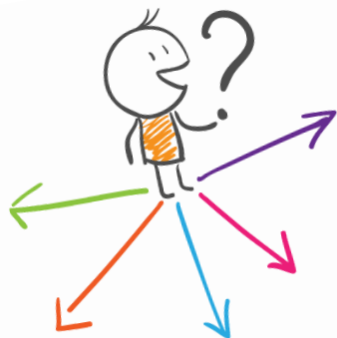
Percentage that agreed/strongly agreed with the statement...

| | |
|------------|---|
| 63% | The person who taught was open and receptive to any questions. |
| 46% | The sex educator made me feel comfortable (i.e. you did not feel especially tense, worried, or unsafe) |
| 43% | I felt safe asking any questions. |
| 27% | I felt comfortable asking any questions. |



**Did these findings surprise you?
If yes, what about them are the most surprising? Why?**

Discussion questions



Percentage that agreed/strongly agreed with the statement...

| | |
|-----|--|
| 63% | The person who taught was open and receptive to any questions. |
| 46% | The sex educator made me feel comfortable (i.e. you did not feel especially tense, worried, or unsafe) |
| 43% | I felt safe asking any questions. |
| 27% | I felt comfortable asking any questions. |



YOUTH IN CANADA: SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

LEARNING PREFERENCES: DELIVERY

Where would you like to receive sexual health education?

- high school (89%)
- elementary school (65%)
- community setting (23%)
- online (10%)

Focus group #2 participant:

“It should be legally required for schools”

From whom?

- sex education professional (87%)
- nurse or healthcare provider (73%)
- gym teacher (25%)
- other teacher (18%)

Focus group #1 participant:

“Someone that makes people comfortable”



**What topics do you think youth (e.g. ages 16-19)
want to learn about as part of their
sexual health education?**



YOUTH IN CANADA: **SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

SEXUAL HEALTH TOPICS

Learning experiences

For which of the following of topics did you receive information and/or knowledge?

Learning preferences

On which of the following topics would you like to receive more information and/or knowledge?

Please select all that apply.

- HIV/AIDS
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Communication/talking about sex
- Pregnancy and birth control options
- Healthy relationships
- Sexual coercion and/or dating violence
- Sexuality, diversity, and/or sexual orientation
- Sexual assault and/or rape
- Physical anatomy and/or puberty
- Sexual pleasure
- Sexual consent
- Other (please describe):
- Prefer not to answer



YOUTH IN CANADA: **SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

SEXUAL HEALTH TOPICS

| TOPICS LEARNED ABOUT | YES | ... & want to learn more | NO | ... & want to learn |
|-----------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| STIs | | | | |
| Puberty/Anatomy | | | | |
| Pregnancy/Birth Control | | | | |
| HIV/AIDS | | | | |
| Consent | | | | |
| Communication | | | | |
| Dating Violence/Coercion | | | | |
| Sexual Assault/Rape | | | | |
| Sexuality and Diversity | | | | |
| Healthy Relationships | | | | |
| Pleasure | | | | |

Based on sample of online survey participants (n = 1202)



YOUTH IN CANADA: **SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

SEXUAL HEALTH TOPICS

| TOPICS LEARNED ABOUT | YES | ... & want to learn more | NO | ... & want to learn |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| STIs | 1105 (94%) | 504 (46%) | 74 (6%) | 61 (82%) |
| Puberty/Anatomy | 1065 (90%) | 423 (40%) | 114 (10%) | 73 (64%) |
| Pregnancy/Birth Control | 960 (81%) | 483 (50%) | 219 (19%) | 186 (85%) |
| HIV/AIDS | 889 (76%) | 321 (36%) | 288 (25%) | 213 (74%) |
| Consent | 774 (66%) | 388 (50%) | 405 (34%) | 331 (82%) |
| Communication | 687 (58%) | 365 (53%) | 492 (42%) | 416 (85%) |
| Dating Violence/Coercion | 558 (47%) | 268 (48%) | 621 (53%) | 475 (77%) |
| Sexual Assault/Rape | 498 (42%) | 237 (48%) | 681 (58%) | 531 (78%) |
| Sexuality and Diversity | 440 (37%) | 223 (51%) | 739 (63%) | 564 (76%) |
| Healthy Relationships | 440 (37%) | 435 (57%) | 739 (63%) | 362 (86%) |
| Pleasure | 235 (20%) | 123 (52%) | 944 (80%) | 732 (78%) |

Based on sample of online survey participants (n = 1202)



YOUTH IN CANADA: **SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

SEXUAL HEALTH TOPICS

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YOUTH IN CANADA: **SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

SEXUAL HEALTH LESSONS

What would you say if you could give advice to your younger self (e.g. when you were in high school, or 2-3 years ago if still in high school)? In other words, **what do you know now that you wish you knew then?**

Wish I knew...

“Masturbation is ok”

“Never force sex on anyone”

“Sex isn’t just a penis going into a vagina. It can be what you want it to be.”

“More about LGBTQ”

“It’s okay to like girls”

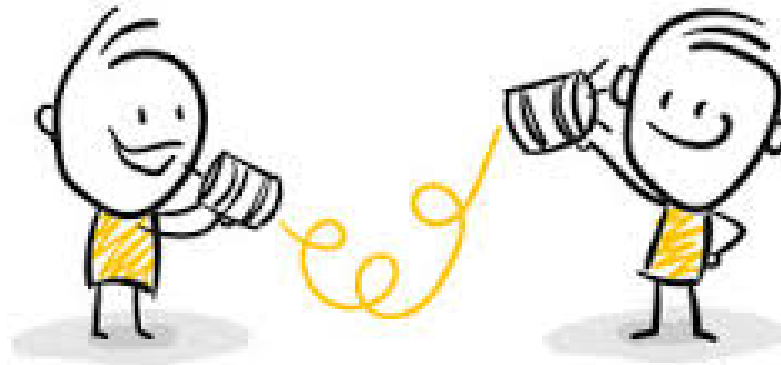
“Sexual violence is NOT normal and you do NOT deserve it”



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5 KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR STUDIES





1. THE VALUE OF SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Access to sexual health education was seen as valuable and important by youth due to the significant implications it can have on them and their peers.



1. THE VALUE OF SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Focus group #2 participant:

“I know that I probably wouldn’t have known all this stuff that I do now, and it will probably become important in the future. That’s why I believe it’s important.”

Focus group #4 participant:

“I think it’s really vital to our mental wellbeing and general and physical health, like it is very important and I think it should be prioritized.”



1B. THE VALUE OF SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION (UN)HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

When talking about the value of sexual health education, many youth spoke about the importance of learning about (un)healthy relationships.



1B. THE VALUE OF SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION (UN)HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Focus group #2 participant :

“I knew jack shit about healthy relationships and stuff like that in school and I learned nothing about it. I end up in my first relationship it was extremely abusive and I had no clue it was extremely abusive.”

Online Survey Participant (age 17):

“in schools, students need to be taught more about abusive relationship and how to deal with them and get out of those situations.”



2. INDIRECT AND IMPLICIT MESSAGING (RECOGNIZING BIAS AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES)

Youth learning experiences are influenced not only by *what* information is shared, but also by *how* that information is shared.

How information is shared, often through indirect or implicit messaging, influences youth learning experiences and can at times serve to perpetuate stigma and impact their understanding of what is considered “normal” in the context of sexuality and relationships.



2. INDIRECT AND IMPLICIT MESSAGING (RECOGNIZING BIAS AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES)

Focus group #6 participant:

“...we were basically being told we shouldn’t be ready for sex.”

Focus group #6 participant:

“And like the adult in the room is the authority and like giving the information, so they way that they’re presenting it very much informs the way that you feel about it.”



3. INCLUSIVITY

Youth recognize the importance of participating in sexual health education that is inclusive, particularly with respect to sexual and gender identities.



3. INCLUSIVITY

Online survey participant (Age 17):

“Be more inclusive of genders/sexualities in giving information, often people in these groups have to turn to other sources for information.”

Focus group #2 participant:

“I was born intersex and I learned literally nothing about it in school.”



4. BALANCED CONTENT THAT ENCOURAGES INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Youth spoke about the importance of balanced information that highlights both the positive aspects of sexuality and relationships and the prevention of possible negative outcomes.

Youth also expressed that they want access to information that encourages informed decision-making, as opposed to rigid instructions that dictate the decisions they should make.



4. BALANCED CONTENT THAT ENCOURAGES INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Focus group #2 participant:

“We don’t want situations like [the teacher in the movie Mean Girls, who taught]: *“Don’t have sex, because you will get pregnant, and die”.*”

Online Survey (age 17):

List out all options and give out pros and cons of each option”



5. THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING A BALANCE AS A SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATOR

Youth would like their sexual health educator to be balanced in their facilitation/delivery approach.

Youth appreciate when educators are personable, engaging, comfortable, and approachable, while still maintaining a level of structure and professionalism.



5. THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING A BALANCE AS A SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATOR

Online survey participant (Age 16):

“Try to be approachable without pushing it too hard or trying too hard to be relatable to "the youth". It's a fine balance but don't try to push people to come to you/open up to you.”

Online survey participant (Age 16):

“Be casual while being professional. If we learn from an educator who is comfortable discussing these topics, we'll feel more comfortable learning about it!”



6. ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Youth expressed a desire for more opportunities to participate in sexual health education.

This included receiving formal sexual health education over a longer period of time, and also more opportunities to learn about the resources and services available in the community.



6. ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

**Online survey
participant (Age 18) :**

“Make sexual health
its own class; not just
2 weeks of gym class.”

Focus group #11 participant:

“Honestly, some people don’t even
know to go to the clinic, like we’re not
really informed about that unless we
have a problem and we speak to a
counsellor that directs us to the clinic.”



ONGOING LEARNING & RESOURCES

Here are a few excellent resources:

- **The Sex Education and Information Council of Canada**
<https://sieccan.org/>
- **Action Canada**
<https://www.actioncanadashr.org/>
- **The Centre for Sexuality**
<https://www.centreforsexuality.ca/>
- **Sex & U** <https://www.sexandu.ca/>
- **About Sex**
<https://gem.cbc.ca/season/about-sex/season-1/e4b809ed-4e24-43b6-9f7f-cffc94583db9>





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DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Providing sexual health education is important, and so are the nuances in terms of how and when this information is delivered, by whom and in which settings.

Our findings show that youth have important insights on sexual health education in Canada, and that their perspectives need to be prioritized when considering changes to curricula or delivery processes.





THANK YOU



- **Financial support** - The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) for funding this project
- **Community partner** - The Centre for Sexuality for reviewing drafts of our data collection tools
- **Logistical support** - The staff at schools and community organization who volunteered their time and efforts to help support our focus group planning and set up
- **Study participants** - The youth who attended focus groups or completed the online survey



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THANK YOU

ANY QUESTIONS?

CONTACT US: YOUTHRS@CPHA.CA