

Q & A: Successful Virtual Sex Ed

Dear Puberty Lady,

The 4th- and 5th-grade teachers are concerned about teaching the upcoming sex ed unit. We are currently in a hybrid model, teaching some students in person and others at home. Teachers are concerned about younger siblings hearing the content and parents listening in when other students ask questions. What are other schools doing? Do you have any ideas on how to manage this? The teachers are asking to only teach sex ed to those students in person. I'm trying to think of alternatives, but....

Sincerely Stumped

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### Dear Sincerely Stumped,

Schools are providing quality education under challenging circumstances. This includes teaching remotely, face-to-face, and in a hybrid model. When it comes to teaching sex education, educators feel even more anxious about making it work. Some even suggest omitting sex education rather than teach it virtually.

After conversations with many educators, I've collected ideas have been useful to educators in resolving some of the challenges faced when teaching sex education to students in their homes. I encourage schools to continue teaching their sex education lessons by supporting teachers' efforts. Just as teachers find ways to adapt math lessons and language arts lessons for a virtual platform, teachers can successfully adapt sex education lessons. Students need this instruction as much as ever. Parents and caregivers rely on their school partners to help teach sex education. These 10 tips and strategies can help.

#### **1. Communicate with parents/caregivers.**

Let the families of your students know what to expect. Using your school communication system, texts, emails, or phone calls, tell parents and caregivers how sex ed will be taught and when. That way, the adults in the home can make whatever arrangements they want for the residents in their home.

#### **2. Include parents/caregivers in ground rules.**

Special ground will ensure that virtual sex ed goes smoothly. These ground rules are for the student and for their parents. Ask parents to agree not to take screen shots, photos, or recordings of the sex ed lessons. Ask them to be responsible for providing their child with privacy and reducing distractions from younger siblings. Read my blog post for more [ground rules for distance learning](#).

#### **3. Embrace eavesdropping parents.**

If parents/caregivers choose to listen to the sex ed lessons, this can be intimidating to teachers who are not used to having other adults eavesdropping on their classes. However, this situation also creates some benefits. Many adults did not have a good sex education, so they might be curious about this topic. Parents/caregivers who know what is taught in sex education can become your biggest allies. If they don't like what their child is learning, they have the right to exempt their child from these classes.

**4. Encourage use of earbuds or headsets.**

If possible, encourage students to use earbuds or headsets for their sex ed lessons. This will help them focus as well as eliminate eavesdropping by others.

**5. Select a private location.**

If possible, encourage students to find a private location during their sex ed lessons. Brainstorm locations that might be the most private for students who cannot be alone in a room.

**6. Sit with back to a wall.**

Remind students that they will have more privacy if they sit with their back to a wall so others cannot see their screen. It dampens the sound so others will not be able to hear as well. It also prevents the camera from picking up other members of the house who might not want to be seen on camera by their whole class.

**7. Submit questions in writing.**

Ask students to submit their questions in writing if you are concerned about others overhearing questions being asked. Read my blog post to learn how to [adapt the question box strategy](#) for distance learning.

**8. Allow parents/caregivers to manage their home situation.**

Remember that the home is the responsibility of the parents/caregivers. Teachers cannot control what happens there. If parents are concerned about younger children overhearing the sex ed lessons, they will find a way to avoid that if you let them know when the lessons will be taught. If parents don't mind younger children overhearing the sex ed lessons, that is their decision, too. Teachers are responsible for what happens in the classroom, but not what happens in the home.

**9. Understand child development.**

If a younger child in the home overhears a conversation or lesson about sex, it will go over their head if they aren't ready to learn about it. If they are ready to learn about it, they will ask questions that their trusted adults can answer in a developmentally appropriate manner. Read my post on [Typical Childhood Sexual Development](#) for more details.

**10. Sex ed is learned in many ways.**

In many countries around the world, children are not sheltered from learning about puberty and sexuality. They learn from a young age by observing and listening to what goes on around them. Many schools in other countries begin age-appropriate sex education in kindergarten.

To summarize, I encourage schools to ensure that all students receive their sex education lessons no matter what platform is used. Puberty doesn't wait for anyone. Fluctuating hormones and emotions are ongoing and can be baffling to students who aren't taught about these typical changes. Relationships are of utmost importance during adolescence. Students need the social-emotional skills to form healthy, respectful relationships and avoid abusive ones. During the pandemic, sex education is more vital than ever.

Sincerely, The Puberty Lady

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