

## Successful Virtual Sex Education

Educators ask many questions about how to teach puberty and sex education via learning from a distance. They wonder how to manage students' questions and ensure privacy. They cite concerns about younger siblings hearing the content, and parents listening in when other students ask questions. They ask questions such as:

- What are other schools doing?
- Do you have any ideas on how to manage this?
- Is it allowable to teach sex ed only to students attending class in person?

After conversations with these educators, the following collection of tips and strategies have been useful to educators in resolving some of the challenges faced when teaching sex education to students in their homes.

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Schools are providing quality education under challenging circumstances. This includes teaching remotely, face-to-face, and in a hybrid model. Educators are experiencing stress as they rise to the challenge of multiple preps using multiple platforms to meet multiple needs. Ensuring that all students receive a full educational opportunity regardless of learning platform is an equity issue.

When it comes to teaching sex education, educators might feel even more anxious about making it work. Some even ask if they can omit sex education rather than teaching it virtually. Because so much of sex education is about Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), this subject can help students and teachers make stronger connections and provide needed support, even at a distance.

Schools can encourage teachers to continue teaching their sex education lessons by supporting their 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 better prepare and make arrangements for the residents in their home.
- 2. Include parents/caregivers in ground rules.** Tailored ground rules 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 the [Puberty the Wonder Years](#) blog post for more [ground rules for distance learning](#).
- 3. Embrace listening parents.** If parents/caregivers choose to listen to the sex ed lessons, this can feel intimidating to teachers who are not used to having other adults listening in 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 and continue discussions following the lesson. If they don't like what their child is learning, they can 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 others overhearing the lesson.

- 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 the Puberty the Wonder Years 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 do not 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 the Puberty the Wonder Years blog 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, it is important that school districts implement their board-approved sex education programs no matter what delivery method is used: face-to-face, hybrid, virtual. Teachers who are feeling overwhelmed and intimidated by using unfamiliar technology can be supported by professional development that increases their knowledge and skills:

- Training and technical assistance are provided by your [Regional School Health Coordinator](#) who is typically housed at an intermediate school district.
- The Michigan Department of Education has compiled additional resources for learning at a distance in this [Google doc](#) and this [MDE web page](#).
- Puberty the Wonder Years offers an [online training course](#) for teachers.

Students continue to have questions when it comes to normal body changes, forming healthy and respectful relationships, and accessing information and services. During and after the pandemic, sex education is more vital than ever.

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*This resource was adapted with permission from a post written by [Wendy L. Sellers](#).*

*For more information on HIV/STI and sex education in Michigan public schools, go to the MDE web site, [www.michigan.gov/hived](http://www.michigan.gov/hived). Questions should be directed to [Laurie Bechhofer](#), MDE HIV/STD Education Consultant.*