

CAMPAIGN FOR SEX POSITIVITY

WHAT IS SEX POSITIVITY?

Sex-positivity is the belief that consensual sexual expression is both healthy and essential in contributing to a safe and inclusive environment.

Sex-positivity is grounded in comprehensive sex education, exploring and deconstructing gender norms, and promoting body-positivity and self-love.

It fosters safe spaces in which different identities and sexual expressions are valued, and bodily autonomy is paramount. Sex-positivity transforms our relationship with ourselves, each other, and our communities and can impact policy.

BREAKING DOWN GENDER MYTHS

Gender roles are behavioral expectations placed on people in relation to the gender binary. It's important to remember that gender is a social construct and exists on a spectrum, not a binary system. Critically examining gender roles and participating in behaviors and expressions that make you happy is extremely sex-positive! It is also important not to limit others' gender and sexual expressions (or lack thereof), as everyone should be able to express their identity in a way that empowers them.

➤ CONSENT

Consent is the expression of a mutual desire between parties to participate in a sexual activity. Sexual activity without consent is sexual violence. Period.

Consent can be withdrawn at any time, and it is given without coercion: a “yes” to sexual activity because someone is too afraid to say “no” is not consent. Forcing someone to engage in a sexual activity that they previously agreed to but have since changed their mind about is also not consensual.

Consent isn't always spoken, but it should never be assumed. The absence of a “no” is not a “yes.”

Minors, people who are mentally incapacitated or unconscious, and people under the influence of drugs or alcohol are unable to give consent. Consent is fundamental in creating a sex-positive space.

➤ SELF-DEFINED SEXUALITY

Sex-positivity celebrates healthy sexual relationships, diversity within those relationships, bodily autonomy, and sexual empowerment.

You define what is right for you. There is no “right” way to engage (or not engage) in sexual activity, and there is no “right” way to express your sexuality as long as everything involves consent, empowerment, and respect.

SAFE SEX: COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION

Empowering people to take control of their sexuality begins with educating them on how their bodies work and how to keep them safe.

Sex-positive, comprehensive sex education does not intertwine sexual identities and choices with character and is supportive of students' safe and informed exploration of gender and sexual expression.

According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), comprehensive sex ed is characterized by teaching age-appropriate, medically accurate information on topics such as sexuality, human development, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention.

Comprehensive sex ed provides students with factual information on abortion, masturbation, and sexual orientation and encourages students to explore their values, goals, and options. These curriculums also cover consent, healthy relationships, communication skills, and bodily autonomy.

COMPREHENSIVE SEX ED IS NOT ...

- **Abstinence-Based:** Programs that emphasize the benefits of abstinence but also include information about contraception, disease prevention, and sexual behavior other than intercourse.
- **Abstinence-Only:** Programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors and don't include information about contraception or disease prevention.
- **Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage:** Programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors outside of heterosexual marriage, often presenting marriage as the only morally correct context for sexual activity; if contraception or disease-prevention methods are discussed, failure rates of these methods are typically emphasized.
- **Fear-Based:** Abstinence-centered programs that use fear, shame, and guilt via negative messages about sexuality, distorted information about condoms and STDs, and biases about gender, sexual orientation, marriage, family structure, and pregnancy to control young people's sexual behavior (SIECUS 2008).

Comprehensive sex ed has been proven time and time again to lower rates of unprotected sex, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

According to the Journal of Adolescent Health, teens aged 15-19 who received comprehensive sex ed were **50% less likely** to experience pregnancy than those receiving abstinence-only sexual education (Koher et al. 2008).

Despite tremendous evidence that comprehensive sex ed leads to a healthier youth population and that abstinence-only programs are ultimately ineffective, the federal government has invested billions of dollars in abstinence-only programs over the past 21 years (Weed et al., 2019).

Only 26 states and the District of Columbia require sex education in public schools to be medically accurate (Guttmacher Institute). 34 states require sex education to cover abstinence. A study published by Guttmacher found that adolescents were less likely to report receiving sex education on key topics in 2015–2019 than they were in 1995.

In addition, only 14 states and DC “require either an inclusive view of sexual orientation,” and only ten states require “inclusive content with regard to sexual orientation” (Guttmacher Institute).

21 states and DC have policies on whether or how sexual orientation and gender identity may be discussed. 7 states require instruction that portrays sexualities other than heterosexuality and gender identities other than cisgender as *shameful, unacceptable or illegal*.

There has also been a rise in fake clinics and anti-abortion counseling centers that aim to dissuade women from getting abortions. They lack medical licenses and are funded by tax-payer money. 2,633 CPCs were operating in the U.S. in 2024.

FIGHTING RAPE CULTURE

“Rape culture” is a term that describes an environment in which sexual violence, sexual assault, and coercion are prevalent and normalized. These beliefs are perpetuated through misogynistic language, objectification, glamorization of sexual violence and aggression, and victim-blaming ideologies, both in the media and in our everyday lives.

“Rape culture” exists within and maintains a society that disregards the rights and safety of all people, blames victims and survivors, and sets sexual violence as a standard to be expected and ignored, rather than combated.

Sex-positivity fights rape culture by emphasizing consent, valuing bodily autonomy, and empowering people to make informed decisions. These elements work together to deconstruct slut-shaming and victim-blaming.

Sex-positivity ends the social cycle of guilt that people may experience when engaging in sexual activity and encourages people to view others as full humans with bodily autonomy.

FOSTER SELF LOVE

A critical element of sex-positivity is the practice of loving yourself holistically: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Body-positivity is about developing a healthy, loving relationship with your body, in all its uniqueness and perfect imperfections.

All people in our society are affected by the unrealistic and often restricted to conforming to heterosexuality, but young women who identify as LGBTQIA+ are increasingly disproportionately affected -- in all aspects of their lives.

For example, the LGBTQIA+ community is “more likely to experience social inequalities, such as food insecurity, homelessness, foster care, other unstable housing, and poverty” which contributes to overall mental and physical health (Salerno et al., 2020).

SEX-POSITIVITY ON CAMPUS

HOST A SEX TALK

Facilitate a conversation on your campus about sex and sex positivity with students and experts to debunk myths, share lived experiences, and broaden understandings of other experiences.

It may be helpful to seek out a sex-positive speaker to moderate a discussion where students can learn and bring their ideas to the table.

Reflect after these experiences on where to go next. What have you learned from facilitating these conversations? Are there ways that the administration at your university can support sex-positive ideas on campus? Arrange a meeting with your administration to work with them to advocate for sex-positive changes on campus!

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL CLINICS

Comprehensive reproductive health clinics typically provide not only much-needed care but also access to sex education and safe sex resources. You can build relationships with your local reproductive health clinic by volunteering, escorting, and interning.

Clinics can even come to your campus to help educate people about sexual health!

By working with your local clinic, you can also help de-stigmatize many people's relationships with seeking reproductive health care. For more ideas on how to support local reproductive health clinics, check out our Adopt-A-Clinic campaign.

SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE SEX ED

Locally appointed officials and school boards often shape sex education curricula; learn more about the curriculum in your community and propose a proposal for local decision-makers to improve it! Launch a petition and organize to raise awareness in your community about the proposal and attend local school board meetings to advocate for your changes.

GET SAFEZONE TRAINED AS A GROUP

SafeZone training is meant to develop, enhance, and maintain culturally competent and supportive environments for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Get your feminist group SafeZone certified and encourage your university community to do so!

HOST A SEX-POSITIVE GAME NIGHT

Ask for condoms and dental dams from your school's health center or a local reproductive health clinic, and host a sex-positive social event on your campus to educate and spread awareness while also demystifying STIs, contraception, healthy relationship practices, and myths about gender. Try downloading or making some condom bingo cards or hosting a sex-positive trivia night.

GLOSSARY

Gender: The socially constructed idea of categorizing individuals based on societally accepted ideals of “masculinity” and “femininity.”

Gender Binary: The social dichotomy that polarizes the masculine and feminine and allows for little gender variance or non-conformity in gender expression

Heteronormativity: The societal belief that privileges heterosexuality as the only normative, and therefore assumed sexual orientation

Cisnormativity: The societal system that privileges cisgender identity as the only normative, and therefore assumed, gender identity

Cisgender: someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth

Monogamy: a relationship practice in which people partner with only one person at a time

Polyamory: a relationship practice in which people may partner with multiple people in varying ways

Sex: the socially constructed idea that categorizes individuals based on sex characteristics (i.e., hormones, chromosomes, external and secondary sex organs, etc.)

Victim-blaming: making victims of crimes feel responsible for what they have experienced rather than believed or supported; this occurs frequently in conversations about sexual assault, in which others blame a survivor for the assault rather than the perpetrator(s)

LGBTQIA+ Spectrum: A range of sexual and gender identities; includes folks who are:

- **Asexual:** someone who does not typically experience sexual attraction
- **Bisexual:** someone who experiences attraction to people of one or more genders
- **Gay:** someone who experiences attraction primarily to a person of the same gender
- **Intersex:** someone whose sex characteristics at birth do not fit within typical definitions of “female” and “male”
- **Lesbian:** a woman who experiences attraction primarily to other women
- **Non-binary:** someone whose gender falls outside of the gender binary
- **Pansexual:** someone who experiences attraction to people of all genders
- **Queer:** a reclaimed term used by some members of the LGBTQ+ community to describe their sexuality or gender; it can also be used as an umbrella term to describe the community.
- **Transgender:** someone whose gender doesn't align with the sex they were assigned at birth; often used as an umbrella term to include genderqueer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and other genders