Objectives

By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

• Understand and describe the concept of sex positivity;
• Understand and describe the concept of trauma-informed approaches to adolescent sexual health;
• Analyze both positive and negative sexual health messages conveyed to youth and practice seeing these messages through a trauma-informed lens;
• Identify strategies to develop and leverage partnerships with organizations that have divergent values about adolescent sexual health.
Trauma-Informed Sex Ed

Does Sex Negativity = Traditional Abstinence Messages?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Positivity:</th>
<th>Sex Negativity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Sex is healthy and positive</td>
<td>✓ Seeks to repress or control sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Sexual expression is essentially good and healthy</td>
<td>✓ Sees sex as problematic, disruptive, dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Sex should be consensual</td>
<td>✓ Many times has a religious element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Sex should be protected (pregnancy and STIs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive Sexuality includes:

- An understanding of sexuality as a natural and healthy aspect of human life;
- Knowledge of human sexuality and reproductive rights with which to make responsible choices;
- Respectful communication and exchange of personal thoughts and feelings between partners; and
- Practice of safe and mutually consensual sexual activity.

---


Traumatic Experiences

- Bullying
- Neglect
- School shootings
- Gang-related violence in the community
- Natural disasters
- Serious accidents
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Physical or sexual assault
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Domestic violence
- Wars and other forms of political violence

Defining Trauma

**Acute** – Single traumatic event

**Chronic** – Multiple traumatic events

**Complex** – Multiple traumatic events, usually caused by primary care giver causing more complex symptoms

Sexual Abuse and Trauma

- 1 in 4 girls have experienced sexual abuse
- 1 in 6 boys have experienced sexual abuse
- 1 in 5 female high school students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner
- Experts estimate at least 100,000 American juveniles are victimized through prostitution in America each year
- All of these stats are likely underreported
Implications of Trauma in the Classroom

- Behavioral issues
- Distracted from learning
- Bullying or being bullied
- Fear of confinement
- Absences
- Substance use
- Hyper-sexual
- Aggressive
- Re-traumatization
- Withdrawn

Typical Sex Education

- Trauma not considered in the design of most sex ed programs
- Our current approach to teaching/talking about sexuality with youth is steeped in shame, danger and risk
- Programs with an abstinence-only focus may be sex shaming
- Refusal skills focus on denying sexual advances, putting the responsibility and potentially blame on the person instead of a focus on consent
- Most sex education does not address LGBT issues, sexual assault, sex trafficking, porn or sexual harassment

Trauma-informed Strategies include:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Peer Support
- Collaboration and Mutuality
- Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Strategies for Creating Safety
• Group agreements and values
• Interrupt and address bullying
• Avoid shaming language
• Use LGBTQ inclusive language
• Clear and easy access in & out of the room
• Rituals
• Examine your own attitudes

Strategies for Creating Trust & Transparency
• Be up front about confidentiality and reporting
• Provide current, accurate medical information or search for reliable information with youth
• Let youth know what is coming up next session

Strategies for Creating Peer Support
• Give youth opportunities to pose discussion questions
• Help with tasks
• Let youth answer one another's questions
• Normalize the experience of trauma and associated feelings
• Provide resources and referrals
Strategies for Creating Collaboration & Mutuality

- View sessions as an ongoing conversation
- Allow time for Q&A (anonymous question box)
- Seek youth input and act on it
- Facilitate more than you lecture


Strategies for Creating Empowerment, Voice & Choice

- Recognize youth as experts
- Seek youth input and act on it
- Ask questions
- Explicitly address and define consent
- Allow youth to make decisions during the lessons


Strategies for Attending to Culture, History & Gender

- Consider youths’ choices
- Listen to and believe young people’s stories
- Understand social determinants of health
- Link youth to culturally proficient services
- Implement equity literacy in your classroom

Common Sex Ed Messages and Trauma

Avoid shaming language:

- “Most teen moms end up living in poverty.”
- “Experimenting with sex to satisfy curiosity is unhealthy.”
- “Abstinence shows that you are stronger than peer pressure.”
- “Abstaining may ultimately help people be better lovers; it allows them to explore a wide range of ways to express love and sexual feelings.”
- “Nearly two-thirds of teens who had sex say they wish they had waited longer.”

Specific Curriculum Examples

- Form small groups
- Review lesson to identify elements that are not trauma-informed
- How could you alter this lesson using a trauma-informed approach?

Fostering Partnerships

How can you use this information to foster partnerships with organizations that don’t necessarily see themselves as “sex positive”?

What successes and challenges have you seen in your communities?
References and Resources

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), Trauma-Informed Approaches and Trauma-Specific Interventions, https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions

Thank you!

Jill Farris, MPH
Director, Adolescent Sexual Health Training & Education
University of Minnesota
Healthy Youth Development – Prevention Research Center
612-626-7852
farrisj@umn.edu