



## Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

Sexetc.org

answer  
sex ed, honesty

RUTGERS  
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### Lesson: Sex 411: Answers to Your Most Common Questions about Sex

**(Facilitator’s Note:** One of the most popular features of our Web site is the section “Ask the Experts.” Hundreds of teens write to us every week with their most personal questions about sexuality. A panel of adult health and sexuality experts responds to every question within a couple of days. While sometimes explicit, those questions reflect what teens really want and need to know. We have used some of their most frequently asked questions in this lesson and recognize that not all schools or organizations will be able to use it, for just that reason. We feel it is important to help teens get the information they need in order to make informed and responsible choices about their sexuality.)

#### Learning Objectives

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

1. Describe at least two sources of accurate, honest information about sexuality that students can access to get answers to their questions.
2. Describe at least three of the most common types of questions teens have about sexuality.

#### Materials

- Copies of “**Sex 411: Answers to Your Most Common Questions about Sex**”
- Question Box (a decorated cardboard box with an opening for questions)
- Index cards or scrap paper
- Pens or pencils
- Pre-labeled signs
- Masking tape

#### Preparation

Read handout “**Guidelines for Using an Anonymous Question Box**” as background information for this lesson. Label each sign with one of the following:

**A1)** Can I get pregnant if...

**A2)** How do I know if I’m ready to have sex?

**B1)** How can I keep from cumming/ejaculating too fast?

**B2)** How can I make my penis bigger?

**C1)** Sex hurts—what can I do to make it stop hurting?

**C2)** How can I have an orgasm?

Tape the cards A1, B1, C1 on top of each other so that A1 is showing on top and can be removed easily to expose B1 and then C1. Do the same on the other side of the room for cards A2, B2, and C2.

### Procedure

1. Explain that since teens have so many questions about sex, and don't always have teachers or parents who teach them about sexuality, the Internet can be another source of good information to help answer their questions. *Sex, Etc.*, a national magazine written by teens, for teens, is not only a national magazine, but also a Web site.

One of the most popular features of this site is the "Ask the Experts" section where teens can e-mail their private questions to a panel of adult sexuality experts and receive a confidential reply within three days. These experts include doctors, counselors, social workers and teachers who have been trained extensively in human sexuality. Every week, the *Sex, Etc.* panel of experts responds to approximately 300 questions and on the Web site there are over 200 frequently asked questions and answers posted. In 2002, they responded to more than 17,000 questions from teens about sexuality.

2. Tell the group that you are now going to give them a chance to think of what kinds of questions teens might have about sexuality and vote on which type of question is:

- most common overall,
- most common among guys and
- most common among girls

3. Point out the signs on either side of the room and tell students that you will read the category and they are to move to the side of the room that represents their vote about the correct answer. Read the first category: "Most commonly asked question overall" and then read the two answers "A1—Can I get pregnant if..." or "A2—How do I know if I'm ready to have sex?" Have participants move to the side of the room that represents their choice. Ask participants to talk to other people on their side of the room about why they feel that is the most commonly asked question by teens. Give participants two or three minutes to discuss.

4. Next ask two volunteers from each side to report to the whole group why they believe their guess is correct. (**Facilitator's Note:** It can be helpful to start with the side of the room that has the least number of participants to make all voices feel valued.) After you have heard from both sides, tell participants that the correct answer is A1—Can I get pregnant if... (**Facilitator's Note:** Add any other reasons why "Can I get pregnant if..." is the most common overall question that have not already come up in discussion, such as: lack of basic knowledge about how pregnancy occurs, little sex education in schools or at home, peers spreading misinformation about pregnancy prevention, spontaneous intercourse with no planning for birth control use, influence of drug/alcohol use during intercourse, etc.)

5. Next read the category for the next question, "What is the most commonly asked question from guys," and ask a student on each side to take off the A1 and A2 signs to reveal B1 and B2 and read to students—"B1—How can I keep from cumming/ejaculating too fast?" and "B2—How can I make my penis bigger?" Repeat same procedure as with first category and give answer to group. (Answer is B2.) (**Facilitator's Note:** Add any other reasons why "How can I make my penis

bigger?” is the most common question from guys that has not already come up in discussion, such as: lack of basic knowledge about normal penis size, shape and appearance; belief that larger penis makes you a better lover; myth that penis size is related to being a “real man”; ethnic/cultural myths related to penis size; connection between larger penis size and more satisfying sex life, etc.)

6. Repeat with last category, “What is the most commonly asked question from girls,” and read signs to students—“C1—Sex hurts—what can I do to make it stop hurting?” and “C2—How can I have an orgasm?”. Repeat procedure. (Answer is C1.) **(Facilitator’s Note:** Add any other reasons why “Sex hurts—what can I do to make it stop hurting.” is the most common question from girls that has not already come up in discussion, such as: lack of basic knowledge about sexual response cycle, too little foreplay to get vagina lubricated, don’t know about hymen, try to have penetration before girl is relaxed and lubricated, stress making her tense and anxious, not using contraception, afraid to have sex, etc.) At the end of discussing the third category, have students take their seats again.

7. Distribute article “**Sex 411: Answers to Your Most Common Questions about Sex**” and read together as group.

8. Ask group why someone might not want to ask a question about sexuality in front of others? (Reasons might include too embarrassed, personal or private question, worried about seeming stupid, worry about being the only person with that question, etc.) Tell participants that it’s important for people to get answers to their questions, but in a way they feel comfortable with. Introduce the concept of the anonymous question box by telling group that it’s a place where people can submit their questions and the adult can answer them for the whole group. Usually if one person has the question, more than one person wants to know the answer.

9. Distribute index cards and have each student, using the same color pens or pencils, write down a question they have about sexuality. If they can’t think of any questions, have a student write: “I do not have any questions at this time.” That way all students are writing at the same time. Have participants insert their question into the question box when they are done.

10. **(Facilitator’s Note:** It is HIGHLY recommended that the educator review the questions before they attempt to answer them in front of the group. This will allow time to prepare answers and handle any shocking questions that may arise.) Tell group that you will review all of their questions, prepare responses and answer their questions the next time you meet. Remind students that if they have burning questions they feel cannot wait, one place to go in the meantime is the *Sex, Etc.* Web site (Sexetc.org). Brainstorm other places that people could get answers to their questions. Answers might include:

- [www.teenwire.com](http://www.teenwire.com)
- [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- [www.iwannaknow.org](http://www.iwannaknow.org)
- [www.itsyoursexlife.com](http://www.itsyoursexlife.com)
- [www.goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu)
- [www.scarleteen.org](http://www.scarleteen.org)

11. The next time the group meets, begin by answering the questions from the anonymous question box that you have reviewed and prepared for. Time will vary depending on group size and number of questions they submit. **(Facilitator’s Note:**

When you do get to answer the questions, make sure you prepare by reviewing all of the questions and crafting answers that are medically accurate, balanced and age-appropriate. If you're not sure, look at some sample answers to frequently asked questions from Sexetc.org (<http://www.sexetc.org/faq>). You can also refer students to their parents/guardians or faith community for questions about values related to sexuality. For questions that you don't feel qualified or capable of answering, refer students to medical/health professionals or Web sites with those kinds of resources available.)

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*This Discussion Guide lesson was written by Nora Gelperin, M.Ed. For additional lessons, go to [http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/lesson\\_plans](http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/lesson_plans).*

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## GUIDELINES FOR USING AND ANONYMOUS QUESTION BOX

**USE IT**—After decorating and introducing your box to your group/class, don't just leave it in a corner hoping someone will put a question in it. Be sure to take time each day or every couple of days to give them a chance to submit a question. Instruct them to either write a question or write, "I do not have a question at this time." That way, everyone will be writing at the same time and no one will know who is submitting a question and who is not. Set aside a specific time to answer questions each day or each week, and then really stick to the time and answer their questions.

**DON'T BE BLINDSIDED**—Often facilitators collect questions and start answering them on the spot. This is not likely to be the most effective use of the question box. It gives the facilitator no time to prepare responses and allows the group too much control over what issues get covered and when. Take the questions out of the box each day and preselect the questions you will answer. Doing so gives you time to formulate an answer or do research you need to answer the question. It can also help you to introduce or supplement a given topic area, with their questions related to that topic.

**PROVIDE FACTS**—Do your best to answer the question that was asked. Then, even if the question does not necessarily ask for a specific fact, do not miss an opportunity to remind people how sexually transmitted infections are spread, or that it is always okay to say no or choose to wait or stop doing specific sexual behaviors.

**BE TRUTHFUL**—Never lie or tell half-truths. You can choose not to respond to a question, but if you are going to answer, give them the complete and truthful response. Teens can see through a lie and if you get caught in a lie, you will lose your credibility. It is even better to say, "I will lose my job if I answer that question," than to lie about it.

**DON'T TRY TO BE "COOL"**—No matter what you do or say, you will NEVER know what it is like to be a teenager today. Trying to make them think you are cool or that you "get" them is likely to backfire. Acknowledge that you cannot possibly know what the pressures and issues are today and ask them to help inform you. They will be more likely to respect the information you can provide if you maintain some distance from them. And don't worry if they "like" you or not.