

Tips for Working with Parents

When you are in a school system, you will know the best way to approach this topic. Since it is a sensitive topic, you may want to review the process you will use for getting consent. Some schools send home letters letting parents know what topics will be taught for the sexuality education unit and it is just to inform the parents. Others send home a letter asking parents to “opt out” of the class, meaning they have to get back to the teacher and say “No, thanks, I don’t want my child attending this class”. Others schools send home a letter asking parents to “opt in” to the class, meaning they have to get back to the teacher and say “Yes, I want my son or daughter to be part of this class”.

Some parents are very supportive and appreciative that you will be covering this topic with their son or daughter, but others will be very resistant to having their sons or daughter in the sexuality education unit.

Here are some tips for working with parents:

1. Many parents think of their child as still a child even though they may be in high school. They often will say, “He doesn’t need this information because he has a cognitive age of 5 years old”. What you can say is that their body is changing just like everyone else’s and they will need the same information that other students without disabilities in high school need. The topics to cover are based on the biological age of the child, not the cognitive age. The only difference is how you teach the topic, not what topics you teach.
2. Some parents worry that if you talk about sexuality, it will caused them to become interested and possibly become sexually active. You can tell parents that studies show that young people who receive comprehensive, medically accurate sexuality education are more likely to wait to have sexual intercourse and, if they do decide to have intercourse, are more likely to use protection. Talking about sexuality doesn’t make them become sexual, it informs them and protects them.
3. Another issues that can arise is the idea that you will be teaching my child how to have sex. You can tell the parent that the class covers many topics including public and private places, behaviors, and conversations. It covers relationships issues like what is a healthy or

unhealthy relationship, how to become friends, and what to do if you are in an unhealthy relationship. It also has general skills like communication and decision-making.

4. One issue that parents bring up is that “you will be teaching my child values and what if they aren’t the same values as my values”. You can tell parents that you don’t teach values about when it is okay to have sex. You will teach general values about respect, responsibility, and consent. You will give them information and have them reflect on their values.
5. Provide additional resources for parents to learn more about this topic and how to discuss sexuality with their own children. Here are some possible resources to give to parents:

GULP! Talking to Your Kids about Sexuality: Special Edition for parents of young and grown children with developmental disabilities.
www.plannedparenthood.org/ppnne/files/Northern-New-England/developmental_disability.pdf

Sexuality Resource Center for Parents (SRCP)
SRCP is for parents of children with typical development, parents of children with developmental disabilities, and parents of children with physical disabilities.
www.srcp.org

6. It is also recommended that you have a parent night to explain the curriculum and the topics you will be covering. This gives parents a chance to meet you and get more comfortable with you teaching this topic.