

# IF/Then



*If you care about Abortion Access*

*Then you should care about Sex Education*



## Sex education that is comprehensive works



Sex education often serves as young people's first critical touch point for information regarding pregnancy options including parenting, adoption, and abortion



Utilizing sex education to accurately teach young people about abortion helps decrease the spread of false information and facilitates open and unbiased discussions that work to reduce the stigma affecting access to abortion care.



Sex education clarifies myths about abortion, provides fact-based information about what abortion is (and is not), and covers where and how to access abortion care.



Without sex education, young people are going to be uninformed or misinformed regarding HIV/AIDS testing, prevention, and treatment methods.



Without sex education, young people are more likely to turn to the unreliable information on the internet or crisis pregnancy centers (which perpetuate false information surrounding abortions, discourage abortion care, and shame people who seek abortions)

## If You Care About Abortion Access, Then You Care About Sex Education

All people have the right to make informed decisions about their body. This right includes access to the full spectrum of reproductive care, including contraception and abortion. Reproductive health, rights, and justice advocates fight tirelessly to make bodily autonomy a reality for all people.

Unfortunately, young people are often left out of conversations surrounding the right to bodily autonomy and, specifically, the right to access safe and legal abortion. When young people are excluded from these conversations, they are denied the opportunity to understand that they have reproductive rights and options, too. Compounded by the myriad barriers to abortion access (including, but not limited to: cost, parental notification requirements, mandatory waiting periods, limited number of clinics available, language barriers, and the lack of accessible resources), this lack of information and education dramatically impacts young people's lives.

Additionally, there are many forms of oppression—economic, social, and political—that prevent young people from exercising their right to bodily autonomy. After decades of relentless attacks and the ultimate loss of the federal constitutional right to abortion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, abortion access now vastly differs from state to state. In 14 states, bans on abortion at every stage of pregnancy have eliminated nearly all access to abortion. In two states, abortion is banned after the earliest stages of pregnancy. Furthermore, in five states, abortion is severely limited by bans between 12 and 18 weeks of pregnancy. In 26 states, the right to abortion is legally protected to varying degrees and more broadly accessible. Abortion restrictions are designed to control reproductive freedoms and further oppress communities of color.

Every state's education system should encourage young people to make their own decisions about their reproductive healthcare by providing them with medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education as it aligns with the National Sex Education Standards. Sex education serves as a resource for young people to learn about their reproductive rights and pregnancy options, especially when they are not able to receive similar information from a clinic. Additionally, a majority of Americans across the country support both sex education and the right to access abortion, so it is vital that both are protected.

## Policy recommendations:



Supporting abortion rights & sex education  
Advocate for sex education to require unbiased, age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally appropriate instruction on abortion and access to abortion care.



Support federal legislation such as the Real Education and Access for Healthy Youth Act (REAHYA) (which requires instruction complete sex education across the US and provides young people with access to reproductive services.



Work to remove state-level legal and policy barriers to sex education that is inclusive of the full range of sexual and reproductive health care options—including abortion.



Support federal funding for the full range of reproductive health care services, including the Title X program as it was originally intended -- to provide individuals with comprehensive family planning and related preventive health services.



Form coalitions with parents, educators, young people, and policymakers to improve sex education on the state and school district levels.



Center the voices and experiences of young people of color within abortion access advocacy, paying special attention to parent notification barriers.



Eliminate funding and/or support for harmful and ineffective Sexual Risk Avoidance programs.



## By advancing sex education, you are supporting abortion rights.

Sex education that covers all aspects of sexual health—including contraception, emergency contraception, and pregnancy options—is necessary for young people to make informed decisions about their health and well-being now and in the future. Additionally, teaching young people about all their options if they are involved in a pregnancy at any point in their lives helps tackle the stigma and shame often associated with abortion.

## What sex education can do vs. what it currently does

Most sex education curricula omit life-saving information about abortion care and six states outright prohibit discussion of abortion in the classroom. Just 44.6% of all high schools and 24.1% of middle schools in the US provide all 22 topics identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as critical sex education topics. Additionally, the latest data available shows that significant sexual health disparities exist among young people—including the fact that half of the nearly 20 million estimated STIs in the U.S. each year occur among people ages 15–24. Sex education must be comprehensive and inclusive to ensure young people have all of the information they need to lead healthy lives. Learning this vital information—which includes abortion—is their right.

## Abortion is not a bad word



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This is compounded for communities of color who already navigate an inherently racist healthcare system.



The more abortion is discussed and understood, the less likely attempts to stigmatize and shame it will be successful.



Abortion empowers women and people who can become pregnant to make their own best decisions about whether, and when, to have children; build healthy families; and foster sustainable communities.