R29 SEX
RE-EDUCATION
We fielded an online survey to our proprietary insights communities, VICE Voices and Mad Chatter, throughout March & April 2021. This survey explored where traditional sex-ed has fallen short, how young people get information about sex and sexual health now, and the questions they are still seeking answers to.

**OBJECTIVE**

N=1,425

- 52% MALE
- 43% FEMALE
- 5% NON BINARY

**COMPOSITION**

- 20% GEN Z (18-24)
- 34% YOUNG MILLENNIAL (25-34)
- 27% OLDER MILLENNIAL (35-40)
- 19% GEN X+ (41+)

**MARKETS**

- US, Canada, & UK

**APPROACH**

Reimagine the future of sex education.
SEX ED: THE SHORTCOMINGS
Sex ed is often the first place young people learn about sex and sexual health.

Q: Where did you first learn about sex/sexual health?

#1 Sex Ed in School (45%)

2. Friends (44%)
3. TV & Movies (31%)
4. Parents (27%)
5. Pornography (26%)
6. Siblings/other family (11%)
7. Google (11%) ▶ 29% CA; 9% UK; 8% US ▶ 17% Gen Z; 9% Millennial
8. Articles/videos from trusted publishers (8%)
9. Social media (7%) ▶ 27% CA; 6% UK; 3% US ▶ 13% Gen Z; 2% Millennial
10. Medical professionals (4%)

80%

Of young people received a formal sexual education in middle/high school or college.
But sex-ed did not equip them for the real world.

Only 5% of young people say: “Sex ed prepared me fully for the real world.”

1 in 2 say, “Sex ed just barely prepared me for the real world, if at all…”

Less than 1 in 4 felt “Informed” after sex ed.
Sex-ed did not speak to all sexual and gender identities

“There was no LGBTQ+ contraceptive advice. I didn’t learn about dental dams until I was out of high school.”
- Gen Z Woman, UK

“[It didn’t address] the opposite sex and their anatomy (the only sex ed class I took was separated into girls and boys groups and only discussed puberty and pregnancy).”
- Gen Z Non-binary, US

“[The most misleading thing I learned was] that sex is very binary and restrictive in its definition - always taught as only heterosexual sex, no mention or discussion of oral/manual/anal sex, or LGBTQ+ sex.”
- Gen Z Woman, UK

“[There was] little or misleading information on lesbian sex.”
- Gen Z, Non-binary, UK

“We had nothing on LGBTQ sex (I am a lesbian) so I had no idea what to do and how to feel safe.”
- Millennial Woman, UK

“I was told in school that gay people didn’t exist. Also incorrect information regarding gender, being told that intersex people and chromosomal variations didn’t exist.”
- Gen Z Man, US

80% say their sex-ed didn’t cover sex as it relates to the LGBTQ+ community.

89% UK; 82% US; 58% CA
Sex-ed did not address pleasure, especially for women

“Why didn't they bother focusing on women's pleasure? (We know why). There was plenty of talk about what a man’s orgasm looks like. I thought I was broken for YEARS because I couldn't climax. I don’t think any of my formal in-school sex ed was “wrong” necessarily, but they sure as hell didn’t tell us nearly enough, or make us feel safe enough to ask.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“[I learned] false information about women (non-existence of female orgasm, teachings that women shouldn’t enjoy sex), false medical information about sex and arousal.”
- Millennial Man, US

“[The least useful thing I learned was] sex being a simple means for procreation only, or the idea that women do not desire sexual relationships or pleasure.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“I wouldn’t say anything [I learned] was wrong or misleading, but there was a definite lack of information around consent, pleasure or same sex relationships.”
- Millennial Woman, UK

“I didn’t really have a strong insight or understanding that the typical female sexual response was different compared to my sexual response. I was too embarrassed to start doing anything like speaking to girls about orgasm at the time.”
- Millennial Man, UK

72% say their sex-ed didn’t cover the topic of pleasure.

76% US; 74% UK; 44% CA
Sex-ed did not cover consent and all of its nuances

“Many adults feel that sex-ed did not cover consent and all of its nuances. 52% say their sex-ed didn’t cover the topic of consent.

58% UK; 54% US; 29% CA

“[I did not learn] much or anything on consent and how to enjoy/be safe/explore sex and sexualities.”  
- Millennial Man, US

“[The most misleading thing I learned was] that if you’re in a relationship with someone you automatically give them consent.”  
- Gen Z Woman, UK

“Would have liked more info about consent and sexual harassment.”  
- Millennial Woman, UK

“[There were] inconsistent explanations for consent.”  
- Millennial Man, US

“[We were] never taught about consent properly, we were just told ‘just say no’.”  
- Gen Z Woman, UK
Fear took precedence over confidence

Q: What information has not proven useful, or even been wrong?

ONLY

7%

felt “CONFIDENT” after sex ed

22% CA
5% US
4% UK

“STDs

My middle school sex ed teacher literally told us sex with a condom was like playing Russian roulette; you may not get AIDS today, but some day you will because that’s just how useless and ineffective condoms are.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“I remember my sex Ed teacher telling us getting Pap smears were very painful, which kind of dissuades folks from getting a Pap smear. She took out a speculum and said “doctors use this to crank you open.” I’m 24 and I’ve never had one because that really freaked me out.”
- Gen Z Woman, US

“STDs were way, way over-emphasized, and not even in a “you should get tested before sexual encounters” way, but rather “if you have any type of intimacy with anyone you will get a life-long, disgusting, painful, untreatable STD.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“STDs will destroy you, and no one will want to sleep with you.”
- Millennial Man, US

“Sex will hurt and be bloody the first time, and that hymens are indicators of virginity. I was actually terrified to “lose my virginity” but thought I just had to get through it.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“[My teacher] pulled a condom over her arm and said “girls if anyone says the can’t wear one because they don’t fit they are lying”. This made me feel like something was wrong with me. I had no idea you could get XL ones that would help this issue.
- Millennial Man, UK

Pain

“I always thought if you have sex without birth control, almost guaranteed you get pregnant. I feel like the fertility window was not thoroughly explained, and in conversations with my husband, he feels the same.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“[The most misleading thing I learned was that] sex mostly just leads to pregnancy.”
- Millennial Woman, US

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- Millennial Woman, US

“I was so terrified to get a girl pregnant. It took me a while after high school and even college to know that it’s only possible during certain times.”
- Millennial Man, US

Pregnancy

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- Millennial Woman, US

“I was so terrified to get a girl pregnant. It took me a while after high school and even college to know that it’s only possible during certain times.”
- Millennial Man, US
Shame took precedence over power

Q: What information has not proven useful, or even been wrong?

5% felt “EMPOWERED” after sex ed

11% CA
4% US
3% UK

### Number of Partners

“The whole women and chewing gum analogy (no one wants someone that’s “used” / not a virgin) is so wrong and damaging!”
- Millennial Woman, US

“Implying you’re "tainted" if you have sex with lots of people.”
- Gen Z Non-binary, US

“The idea that people who have sex with a number of people are inherently engaging in "risky" behavior and will be less capable of forming emotional connections with future partners.”
- Millennial Woman, US

### Sex til Marriage

“The trope that one should only have sex after marriage/with someone they want to spend their life with. That notion has created a taboo around the subject in my experience, limited my understanding, and created a guilt tied to my sexual experiences.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“Abstinence only. I went to Catholic school and, surprise, it doesn’t work.”
- Millennial Man, US

“Everything was whack. It made me not have sex until my mid 20’s. I thought I would burn in hell if I touched myself. I didn’t know half the things I was feeling. I now struggle with my sexual expression, giving and receiving sexual attention.”
- Millennial Woman, US

### Virginity

“Lots of stuff around virginity has been wrong and unhelpful (e.g. you can’t wear tampons because they will ruin your virginity; virginity is something that can be "taken"; losing your virginity can damage your and your family’s reputation). I didn’t believe this stuff then and still had sex as a teen, but I could feel the shame/disappointment around it anyway.”
- Millennial Woman, US

 “[The most misleading thing I learned was] that love was mandatory to enjoy sex & that virginity was special.”
- Millennial Woman, US

“We were taught if you have anal you’re still a virgin??”
- Gen Z Non-binary, US
Sex-ed left them feeling uneasy vs. in control

How did you feel immediately after sex ed?

#1 NERVOUS
#2 EMBARRASSED
#3 SILLY
#4 CONFUSED
#5 TIMID
THE INTERNET: UPSIDES & DOWNSIDES
Google has become their best friend for questions & curiosities

Of young people have sought out sex ed information out of curiosity.

- 86% Gen Z
- 79% UK; 76% US; 56% CA

Q: Where do you turn when you have questions about sex/sexual health?

#1 Google (60%) ▶ 70% Gen Z

2. Articles/videos from trusted sources (48%)
3. Friends (38%)
4. Medical professionals (38%) ▶ 43% Millennial
5. Social media (9%)
One of the most common reasons they seek information is to check if something they experience is “okay” or “normal”.

67% seek sex ed to check if something they experienced was okay/normal
- 85% Gen Z
- 79% UK; 68% US; 37% CA

75% have questioned whether something that happened during sex was okay/normal
- 82% Gen Z
- 87% Non-binary*

*Based on low sample size (<75); use directionally
They’ve also learned about sex from porn

1 IN 2 young people say:
“Porn shaped my idea of what sex looked like before I had sexual encounters.”

- 63% Men; 42% Women

- Feel that porn can be entertaining and enjoyable.
  - 91% Men; 84% Women

- Have tried to replicate something they saw in porn.
  - 79% Men; 65% Women

- Believe porn can be educational.
  - 55% Men; 46% Women
But without proper perspective, porn can create misleading ideas around sex.

84% do not believe the way pleasure is depicted in porn is accurate.

82% do not believe porn does a good job of addressing consent.

79% of young people say: “Porn can have a negative impact on real-life sex.”

75% Men; 84% Women
CONSENT:
IN CONCEPT VS. PRACTICE
Vocalizing boundaries and desires is a powerful tool

67% of young people say they often/always feel comfortable communicating to their partner about their pleasure

70% US; 62% CA; 60% UK

Q: What has been the most valuable thing you’ve learned about sex/sexual health?

“Learning how to set boundaries with sex and telling people no or that you’re uncomfortable or that they need to use a condom was very valuable.”
- Gen Z Woman, UK

“Everybody is different and likes different things. Communicate well with whoever you’re having sex with. Figure out what they like and communicate what you like.”
- Millennial Man, US

61% of young people are often/always vocal about what they want and don’t want

65% US; 54% CA; 51% UK
64% Millennial; 54% Gen Z
But consent by definition and consent by practice have different understandings

82% say they feel fully informed on what consent is
85% US; 81% UK; 65% CA

69% feel only somewhat or not at all informed on how to manage non-consensual sexual encounters

65% feel only somewhat or not at all informed on what is consensual around sexting

42% feel only somewhat or not at all informed on how to understand consent signals
52% CA; 41% US; 41% UK
For more information, please reach out to:

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