

The Sex Ed We All Deserved

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It is the responsibility of educators to craft a sex-ed curriculum that is relevant and applicable to students' lives.

In a [clip from the Laugh Factory Hollywood's Instagram page](#), comedian Alex Kumin reveals that "the only thing [she] remembers from sex ed is that [her] reproductive system looks like the logo for the Texas Longhorns." Before telling this joke, Kumin asked the audience if they had sex ed growing up, and while many responded *yes*, when asked if they remember anything from the experience, the audience collectively responded *no*.

While the Texas Longhorns logo does resemble a female's reproductive system, is that relevant information to the lives of young adults considering sex and relationships? No. Young adults need sex education they can carry with them. [They are at the highest risk of sexual violence](#), according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), and [1 in 3 young people will be in an abusive or unhealthy relationship](#) according to the organization DoSomething.

In the same way that it is the responsibility of policymakers to ensure that teens receive comprehensive sex and relationship education, it is the responsibility of educators to craft

a curriculum that is relevant and applicable to students' lives—or, if they can't, to hire someone who can.

According to the [2014 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's School Health Profiles](#), fewer than half of high schools and only a fifth of middle schools cover all of the topics recommended by the CDC as essential components of sex ed. This is why I admire [California's new sex and gender education curriculum](#), which supplies students with the sex education we all deserved but didn't receive. The California Healthy Youth Act promotes sex education that's inclusive of all gender identities and sexualities and provides students with trained educators.

While I first laughed when Kumin's skit appeared on my Instagram feed, as someone who has experienced sex education as both the student and the facilitator, I questioned what I remember from the two experiences.

As a sophomore in high school, I remember participating in an activity that used Skittles to simulate the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Each Skittle represented an infection or a contraceptive. I remember my classmates snickering as they discovered their infections, and the disappointment of some after discovering that abstinence protected them from these infections. The activity might have introduced us to STIs, but more importantly, it failed to teach us that STIs are spread through blood, vaginal fluid, and semen, and failed to amplify that condoms are key to protection from STIs.

As a junior in high school, I enrolled in a sexuality practitioner training course. My first semester consisted of training from Planned Parenthood professionals who arrived at each class with a carefully prepared lesson plan. Rather than fooling around with Skittles, I learned that the copper IUD works well as emergency contraception, that latex condoms and oil-based lubes don't mix, and that dental dams *exist*. I spent my second semester leading classes, using lesson plans crafted according to the needs of the students.

This is the environment that all students deserve from sex education. Students will learn and retain information in the right environment with the right facilitators and the right curriculum. But schools fail to create environments where all students feel safe to learn about sex and relationships, or simply fail to teach them anything worthwhile.

A [global study performed by the British Medical Journal](#) (BMJ) revealed what young adults think about their school's sex and relationship education. Participants described their experience with sex ed as out-of-touch, negative, and exclusionary. The study's authors urge that schools try a different approach: classes taught by experts who maintain boundaries with students, recognize the complexity of the situation and the range of student experiences and identities, and teach accordingly.

California's new sex ed curriculum clearly reflects the recommendations of BMJ's study. Yet the curriculum has received backlash from outraged parents because it incorporates concepts like foreplay, masturbation, and oral and anal sex. California parent [John Andrews](#) says "if [he] were to show that material to a child, [he] would be brought up on charges."

While we must be thoughtful about what is being taught, we must not shy away from certain topics due to discomfort. It is important to consider what age is appropriate to learn about the different contraception methods, or learn how to put a condom on a penis.

But children will discover masturbation, orgasms, and other sexual concepts outside of the classroom either way, and without the guidance and candor of expert educators, they may risk their safety in the process.

In my fifth grade health class, we constructed diagrams of reproductive systems with cotton balls as ovaries and straws as fallopian tubes. We watched videos of animals giving birth. I would have preferred learning about masturbation to watching a dolphin bear its offspring. This would have saved my classmates and me from the unsafe and at times unsanitary exploration of our own bodies and each other's.

As we continue to fight for comprehensive sex and relationship education for people like Kumin, and for all young adults and children, we must remember to teach these classes with care. We must focus on the safety and well-being of the students and provide them with the information they need. We must be proactive and create spaces where students can engage comfortably, because we recognize that a firm understanding of sexuality, gender, and relationship health will translate to safer workspaces and universities, and ultimately to a society of healthy individuals who contribute in positive ways.

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Image Source: [Pixabay](#)

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