



**FORWARD  
TOGETHER**



**TRANSFORMING API COMMUNITIES:  
TOOLS FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

## WELCOME

While California is a model state in terms of laws supporting comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), we still have a long way to go to ensure that state policy is implemented at the local level. Access to CSE is important to all students as one key way for them to have the resources and information they need to be active participants in their health and well-being. Because of the dismal state of access to health care in low-income and marginalized communities, CSE may be the only way that low-income students, students of color, and immigrant students gain access to information about their bodies, gender, and sexuality. Forward Together, formerly Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, developed *Transforming API Communities: Tools for Sexuality Education* to continue to engage communities that have traditionally been left out of the dialogue and organizing efforts around CSE.

While numerous toolkits provide the nuts and bolts of developing and implementing local CSE campaigns, they require that parents and caregivers already be educated, galvanized, and ready to take action. What's lacking are resources aimed at getting parents and caregivers in Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities to a place where they feel prepared to engage in campaigns. In other words, what's lacking are tools to transform individuals' beliefs about the benefits of CSE into action for concrete change. We believe *Transforming API Communities* is a critical first step in creating lasting and sustainable support for comprehensive sexuality education and will establish a strong foundation for many other reproductive justice issues facing our communities.



**Why focus on Asian Pacific Islander parents and caregivers?**

Recent polls show that API parents, like most California parents regardless of religion, race, or education level, overwhelmingly support CSE. However, little to no outreach is done to API parents and caregivers to activate their power. This toolkit is designed to help you organize and mobilize API parents and caregivers to support implementation of CSE in their local communities and schools.

Most parents are committed to improving their children's education—including sexuality education—but don't know what kind of sex education their children are being taught or what needs to change. Many API parents have never talked to their children about sex and, though they would like to, feel uncomfortable doing so and have no idea how to begin the conversation. Some parents—because of language and cultural barriers—don't feel connected to their children's schools or know how to approach teachers and administrators about subjects such as sexuality education. What most parents are looking for is basic information and resources on sexuality education, tools on how to talk to their children about sex, and encouragement in feeling empowered to be advocates for their children in their schools and communities.

**Who should use this toolkit?**

This toolkit is for anyone interested in engaging Asian Pacific Islander parents and caregivers, especially immigrant parents and caregivers; anyone interested in engaging populations that have been left out of the traditional dialogue on comprehensive sexuality education; anyone interested in ensuring that sexuality education includes a broad framework promoting positive sexuality and lifelong learning; anyone interested in ensuring an equitable focus on the well-being of girls and women; and anyone who wants to help create a world where all people have the power and resources to make healthy decisions about our gender, bodies and sexuality for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Organizers, service providers, doctors, nurses, teachers, advocates, and parent activists alike, if you are committed to creating lasting and sustainable change, this toolkit is for you!



## **PART 1**

# **HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT**

*Transforming API Communities* is designed to prepare you to engage API parents in conversations about sex and sexuality education. Your reasons for wanting to have these conversations may range anywhere from simply wanting to provide accurate information to organizing a campaign to change what's being taught in your local schools. Whatever your reason, we believe that since many API parents have never discussed these issues with other parents and members of their community, your engagement will provide unique and important opportunities for them to be informed about and involved in their children's development.

### **What's in this toolkit?**

This toolkit is divided into two sections.

**Part 1** includes information for you to educate yourself about sexuality education. Included are:

- *Guiding Principles for Transformative Engagement*  
Tips for creating lasting and sustainable change in your community.
- *Learnings about Our Communities: A Summary of Our Research*  
Background information on API parents and caregivers. This section includes a summary of our conversations with API parents and caregivers, talking points, a case study, as well as a list of potential strategic partners to consider when implementing your engagement and organizing efforts.
- *Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Tool for Increasing the Health and Well-Being of Our Communities*  
Policy background on CSE in California and a Frequently Asked Questions guide.
- *Getting to the Next Step: Resources for CSE campaigns*  
Resources that provide the nuts and bolts of creating and implementing a CSE campaign.

Before engaging with parents, we encourage you to read through this section to ensure that you have the necessary tools and resources to facilitate the most productive discussions possible. Note that the final piece of this section, “*Getting to the Next Step: Resources for CSE Campaigns*” will be most useful after you have had in-depth discussions with parents and caregivers in your community and when they have demonstrated interest, capacity, and commitment to working on a campaign.

*Part 2* offers tools for you to engage parents who want to know more about sexuality education. We know that getting parents to talk about sex and sexuality education is difficult, and the tools in this section are designed to spark conversation and discussion. There are a total of seven tools; each can stand alone, but together they are designed to bring a person from a point of faint interest to a point of being an agent for change. Each tool includes a list of questions and suggested activities to spark and guide discussions. *Part 2* includes:

- *Instructions for Using Parent Engagement Tools*  
Recommendations on how to use the tools effectively, including tips for trainers and organizers facilitating conversations with parents and caregivers.
- *Tool #1—How Early is Too Early to Talk to Your Children about Sex?*  
A pictorial depicting API parents struggling to answer questions about when to talk with children.
- *Tool #2—It’s Hard to Talk to Your Children About Sex*  
A pictorial depicting the challenges and solutions for talking to children about sex and sexuality.
- *Tool #3—The School as a Partner*  
A pictorial depicting the school—teachers and curriculum—as a complementary partner in sexuality education.
- *Tool #4—What Do API Teens Want Their Parents to Know?*  
A list of quotes straight from the mouths of API teens. This piece intends to bridge the silence between parents and teens.
- *Tool #5—It’s Different Here in America*  
A pictorial depicting API parents grappling with fear, hope, and action.
- *Tool #6—Dear Ivy*  
An advice column featuring real life sex educator Ivy Chen.
- *Tool #7—Resource List for Parents*  
List of websites for parents who want more information on comprehensive sexuality education at home and in school.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the process of researching and drafting this toolkit, we were careful to create a resource that provides a holistic view of sexuality education, addresses root causes of reproductive oppression, and draws upon social justice values to ensure inclusiveness of our allies across communities, issue areas, and social justice movements. After numerous conversations to refine our goals and purpose, we decided that the following guiding principles best reflect Forward Together's reproductive justice vision. We think these principles can guide your work in transforming your community too!

1. Recognize the different systems of oppression that are connected to how people experience sexuality (e.g. poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia).
  - Sexuality education must address the needs and realities of all people and be based on lived experiences of diverse groups of people.
  - It must be relevant to communities beyond people of color & immigrants, including people who are LGBTQ, disabled, elderly, men & boys, indigenous people, and people of faith.
2. See immigrant parents as leaders, bridge builders, innovators, and agents of change who want to promote the well-being of their families and communities.
  - They have always carved out new paths for themselves and their families and are not just "people stuck in their old ways."
  - Their children are not the only bridge builders—this type of thinking can disempower parents.
  - Their leadership development is a core strategy for change.
3. Aim to transform communities.
  - Real change relies on the efforts of the entire community including parents, organizers, advocates, service providers, and teachers.
  - Political education is a critical component of advancing sexuality education.
4. Go beyond a deficit-based, disease, and pregnancy prevention framework.
  - Celebrate sexuality as a natural part of human development.
  - Contextualize sexuality in our whole lives—who we are at home, at school, and in our communities.
  - A holistic view of sexuality and sexual health includes positive body image, self-esteem, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, communication, and decision-making in relationships.
  - Sexuality is not something "dangerous" to avoid but something that helps people and communities thrive.

- Social, cultural, and economic support is required for pregnant and parenting youth; stigma and demonization of young parents of color must be addressed directly.
  - Provide young women with options and tools rather than limits based on gender roles.
5. Debunk cultural and societal myths, stereotypes and barriers to appreciate how sex and sexuality is part of the reality of our families and communities. Expand the definition of “family” to include:
    - Chosen and created families;
    - Cross-generational parenting;
    - Multi-family households; and
    - Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parenting.
    - Also consider the role of fathers, men, and boys.
  6. Break the silence around sex and sexuality.
    - Family communication is a critical part of sexuality education – starting early and lasting throughout life.
    - School-parent partnership can support young people’s sexuality both at home and school.
    - Move away from the stigma of sexuality as being shameful, bad, and taboo to something natural and healthy that is part of each of us.
  7. Address the gap between the educational system and immigrant parents.
    - Information and resources for English language learning parents.
    - Engage parents in improving sexuality education curricula in schools and school districts.

## LEARNINGS ABOUT OUR COMMUNITIES: A SUMMARY OF OUR RESEARCH

Asian Pacific Islanders (API) remain one of the fastest growing communities in the United States. APIs are extremely diverse and represent 49 different ethnic groups and over 100 languages. APIs include Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Hawaiian, and others, and they represent similarly diverse cultures and immigration experiences.

It's a common perception that API parents are unwilling to talk about sex and sexuality. The assumption that the topic is taboo or culturally unacceptable has led to the conclusion that API parents are not ready for comprehensive sexuality education and may contribute to the scarcity of information about API parent attitudes on this subject. This conclusion has profound effects on outreach and organizing strategies and whether API parents are invited to the table to discuss sexuality education. Our conversations with API parents and caregivers show that not only are they eager to talk about it, but are ready to learn effective ways to communicate with their children about the topic and learn more.

### What We Did

With the assistance of Real Reason and translators from various community organizations such as Lotus Bloom and Asian Community Mental Health Services, we designed a set of questions for use in three focus groups conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles.

Our research was by no means exhaustive, but rather a launching point for more conversation and study. The findings outlined below are themes that emerged from our conversations with Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino parents and caregivers, the majority of whom were immigrants. The conversations were conducted in Chinese, English and Vietnamese at community centers in the participants' communities.

Think of the following themes as guides rather than prescription. The diversity within the API community necessitates creativity and openness in our approach. You may find another theme that belongs on this list—let us know!

### What We Found

#### *Talking to Children About Sex as an Entry Point to Conversation about Comprehensive Sexuality Education*

Bringing up topics about sexual behaviors, sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, etc. might quiet some parents and kill the conversation before it starts, but we found that parents



were eager to learn how to discuss the topic with their children as a parenting tool. Most parents and caregivers had questions about when is the appropriate time to talk to their children about sex and sexuality. Several shared anecdotes of being stumped by questions coming from their children at a very young age. *How early should we begin? What do we say? Will discussing the topic give them a green light to experiment?* These were just some of the questions that came up during the conversations.

“You know kids are curious—she/he wants to know why her/his body looks different from her brothers or sister’s body. ‘Why does she have those growing and I don’t?’”

Parents and caregivers acknowledge that curiosity about sex starts early. Their interest in when and how to talk to children about sex offers us an opportunity to engage and introduce them to other reproductive justice and social justice issues.

The photographic novellas in this toolkit address the concerns that parents and caregivers expressed about when and how to broach the subject with their children. Along the way we introduce ideas such as broadening the definition of sexuality, family, gender roles; parent, community, and political participation; and the school as a partner in assisting parents in educating their children about sexuality.

### ***Parents Feel Torn Between Two Worlds***

We’re familiar with children of immigrants expressing the sentiment that they feel torn between the world of their parents and the world of their peers. Similarly, parents expressed a tension between the world they grew up in and the world in which they’re raising their children.

“Here it’s different... I’m more conservative with my youngest because the way she’s brought up here is different. [Her] brother and sister are very conservative about this [sex], but [she’s] very curious, wants to know everything...”

This toolkit attempts to encourage a positive role for parents and caregivers as bridge-builders between two cultures, without dismissing parents’ and caregivers’ fears, hesitation, or values as old-fashioned, outdated, and irrelevant. We believe these parents’ and caregivers’ views—formulated in their native countries and shaped by the forces of immigration and migration—are relevant and critical to activating civic participation and overall community engagement.

### ***Sexuality as Something to Avoid and Sexuality Education as Protection From It***

Our conversations revealed eagerness and willingness among parents and caregivers to actively support efforts to ensure that youth in their communities were receiving sexuality education and that they themselves had accurate, age-appropriate information for their children. Yet,

this support may stem from a negative perception of sex and sexuality as something to avoid in general as a result of both cultural and societal pressures.

If we were to think only of short-term goals, then the framing of sex education as protection from sex and sexuality would surely be an effective strategy to promote comprehensive sexuality education. However, if our long-term goal is to create a world where all people have the power to make their own decisions about their gender, bodies and sexuality, then promoting sexuality as a natural, positive aspect of life and human development is a critical, albeit arduous, first step. This toolkit attempts to shift negativity about sexuality and counter existing stereotypes associated with sexually active teens, same-sex parents, etc.

### *Propriety*

The notion of “proper” vs. “improper” behaviors came up in our conversations with parents. Given the limited scope of our research, we were not able to delve further into this topic, but we sense that parents are concerned about their children deviating from a “proper” path or spectrum of behavior. How this plays out in parents’ perception of sexuality and sexuality education is unclear. For example, what is in the realm of “proper” and “improper,”? Is the behavior being judged or the person? Is the line between “proper” and “improper” fluid—is a person considered “proper” in some areas but “improper” in others? Parents talked about this topic using words and phrases like “proper,” “appropriate,” and “bad-influence.”

Some parents expressed a desire for their children to be “proper” and a concern about them “turning bad.” There may be an assumption that teenagers who have sex are bad, and certain parents felt relief that their kids “knew how to exclude themselves [from those] who are sexually active.” While we hope these feelings seem to arise from a place of wanting to protect their children from harm, we want to be careful about the possibility that these are thoughts that judge or stigmatize people who behave in particular ways. To explore this further, it is critical to support conversations that examine gender roles and the ways in which young women are held to different standards than young men.

### *Medical Professionals are Trusted Sources*

Parents and caregivers most frequently identified doctors and nurses as go-to sources to discuss questions and concerns about sex and sexuality. This suggests that medical professionals should not be overlooked in any CSE effort or campaign to engage API parents.

Parents also cited friends who already have children and older parents as trusted sources. Teachers were rarely cited by parents as the most appropriate source for sexuality information. Promoting CSE in schools requires building teacher credibility in the eyes of parents. To do this, we suggest emphasizing shared characteristics between teachers and those identified as trusted sources. Shared characteristics include: caring for children, knowing children well, knowing correct and accurate information, and receiving training to teach sexuality education.

### *The Role of Religion*

Like the issue of propriety, the scope of our research did not allow us to examine deeply the role of religion in API parents' attitudes toward sexuality education. While religion came up only among the Filipino parents, we suspect that it influences parent attitudes more broadly and profoundly than our conversations revealed and encourages further research on this topic.

### **Talking Points—Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

As with any other audience, messages to API parents and caregivers must take into account their deeply held values. Conversations must tap into their values and be bolstered by facts. The following talking points may resonate with API parents because it links CSE with positive development.

- Comprehensive sexuality education incorporates an age-appropriate structure. CSE addresses parents' concerns about when and how to talk to children about sex and sexuality.
- Comprehensive sexuality education builds self-esteem among youth.
- Comprehensive sexuality education classes teach the information youth need to make responsible decisions and to become responsible people.
- Comprehensive sexuality education offers an opportunity for parents to build a trusting relationship with their children, one where children feel comfortable going to their parents with questions and concerns about sex.
- Youth are bombarded with messages about sex and sexuality by the media and peers. Without comprehensive sexuality education, youth will not have a reliable source of information.

### **Potential strategic partners**

Given the diversity of API communities, the varying political climate of different school districts across the state, and that traditional approaches have not always worked with our communities, we need to be both creative and inclusive in engaging stakeholders and allies in our CSE efforts. The following is a list of partners to consider—some are obvious, but others are less so. Our research demonstrated the importance of going beyond traditional allies to garner broader support for CSE. This list is also based on what parents, advocates, organizers, and others have identified as trusted sources and a possible first point of contact for API parents and caregivers for sexuality education.

- Parent groups—Are there any informal or formal parent groups that might be interested in building the leadership of API parents while making sure the local school or school district provides CSE to students? Even if these groups typically do not focus on specific issues or campaigns, they are probably interested in protecting the long-term health and well-being of their children.

- Teacher or instructor groups, including local teacher’s unions—Are there local groups or networks of teachers or instructors you can outreach to? They have a vested interest in making sure students receive high quality education and may be open to helping to build and further your campaign.
- Advocacy organizations—Are there organizations that work to protect people’s freedoms and rights in your region? Such groups can provide additional campaign support around policy and legal issues.
- Direct service organizations—Are there organizations that work with API young people, families, or parents and caregivers through legal, housing, youth, or other services that may want to learn more about your campaign? If so, this is a good opportunity to connect with their constituents and staff.
- Immigrant rights groups—Are there organizations or networks working to advance dignity and justice for immigrant communities? Based on shared vision and values, they might be good candidates as supporters and allies in your campaign to mobilize and empower immigrant API parents.
- LGBTQ groups—Are there groups or networks that work to protect the rights and promote the equality of queer and trans youth and families? They may be interested in joining efforts to ensure CSE as a vehicle to develop a positive sense of self and safe school environments for all students.
- Educational justice groups—Are there groups working to demand equal access to education for communities of color, low-income communities, and immigrant communities? By linking CSE with educational justice, we can strengthen our campaigns, build our collective base, and advance our movements together.
- Health clinics or teen clinics—Are there clinics that provide services to the API community and/or API teenagers, either in the community or within schools? As trusted sources of information about health and sexuality for parents and caregivers, medical professionals can be helpful in building the credibility and visibility of your campaign.
- Health and sexuality educators—Are there groups of health and sexuality educators that promote wellness and positive decision making for young people and families? These educators can help to frame sexuality as a critical component of natural human development.
- Reproductive health, rights, and justice groups—Are there groups that work on reproductive and sexual health, rights, and justice in your area? If so, they are likely to be interested in your campaign.
- Faith-based institutions and leaders—Are there religious or spirituality-based groups or leaders that are supportive of a more holistic and positive view of sex and sexuality? They can open many new doors in terms of the reach, scope, and buy-in for your campaign.
- Research and evaluation groups—Are there groups or organizations that conduct research and/or evaluation for the “common good?” If so, they may be helpful in helping to develop, conduct, and analyze research and assessment for your campaign.

## **CASE STUDY:**

### **THE STRUGGLE TO MAKE SEXUALITY EDUCATION COMPREHENSIVE IN FREMONT, CALIFORNIA**

Just before the Fremont School Board was scheduled to vote on a new sexuality education curriculum for the district's middle schools, several school board members indicated that they were considering sidestepping the controversy by canceling sexuality education in junior high schools altogether, threatening to scuttle a year's worth of organizing and advocacy by Fremont parents and community members.

The controversy over sexuality education erupted in 2008 when parents notified the Fremont Unified School District (FUSD) board that the 7<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum was not in compliance with the law because it provided inaccurate and insufficient information about condoms and contraception. After parents and community members launched an effort to remove the curriculum, which included repeated meetings with school district officials and testimony at school board meetings, the board agreed to look into and select a new "comprehensive" curriculum that would be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and include information about both abstinence and prophylactic methods for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Board members set January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009 as the date for officially bringing the city's junior high sex education into alignment with California law at the time, California's Comprehensive Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Act. However, given the indications that some members of the school board might move to cancel sex ed, supporters of comprehensive sexuality education feared that their dream of an accessible and comprehensive curriculum would be dashed.

California's Comprehensive Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Act mandated that sexuality education in schools must be age-appropriate, factual, medically accurate, objective, and cover all contraception and STD-prevention methods approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. It had to contain information about both abstinence and condoms/contraception. But, although schools had to provide more limited HIV/AIDS prevention education, they could choose not to offer sexuality education at all, thereby eliminating youth's access in school to information and resources they need to be active participants in their health and well-being.

About 30 miles outside of San Francisco, Fremont is a racially and ethnically diverse city with no group claiming majority, and becoming more diverse each year. Supporters and organizers knew that sustainable support for CSE must reflect the city's diversity. API communities represented 37.4% of Fremont according to the 2000 Census, and the American Community Survey estimated that the communities reached 47.2% by 2007. API support therefore was important for this win and any future struggles that could arise regarding sexuality education. Parent groups worked hard to mobilize API parents to speak at school board meetings and attend



demonstrations and kept them abreast of the school board's every step. One API parent activist recalled, "The promotion [of CSE] is not broad enough [in our communities]. API parents don't think it happens to Asian kids. I think what can be helpful is giving them local information and statistics to show what's really happening in their communities." Another parent activist pointed to the cultural and generational differences, "It's hard for Asian communities...it's hard for immigrant parents—who probably didn't receive sex education themselves—to see that we're not asking the schools to teach their children to have sex, we're arming kids with information so they can be knowledgeable, safe and confident."

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, API parents and supporters along with other parents, teachers, students, teen parents, recent graduates, and health professionals crowded the room where school board members met. They stayed until the early morning hours to have their voices heard and to urge the board to follow through with its commitment to adopt a comprehensive curriculum at this meeting.

Their tenacity triumphed. After much debate, the board voted 5–0 in favor of adopting a new, legally compliant curriculum. Effective immediately, Fremont Unified School District middle school students would receive a curriculum that was science-based, free of bias, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and that taught them that sex and sexuality is a natural part of being human.

This case study illustrates the importance of advocacy by parents, teachers, students, and other community members. It also illustrates the direct impact that they can make on policy-making. After years of advocacy by community members and advocate groups, California passed the California Healthy Youth Act (Education Code 51930–51939) in 2015. This new law requires that schools teach students integrated, medically accurate, age-appropriate, inclusive comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education, at least once in middle school and once in high school.

## COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR INCREASING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF OUR COMMUNITIES

There is no one magic wand that will address all of the needs of our communities for accessible, accurate, and culturally-resonant information and services around healthy sexuality. To meet our needs, we need to strengthen our schools, build family and intergenerational communication, increase access to a broad range of health care services, and shift media representations of sexuality and gender in our communities. Whew, it's a lot to think about!

To get started, California state policy provides an important tool that we can use to ensure students are receiving medically accurate, age-appropriate information. In short, California passed a state law in 2015, the California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA), Education Code 51930–51939, that requires that schools provide students integrated, medically accurate, age-appropriate, inclusive comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education, at least once in middle school and once in high school.

Access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and HIV prevention is important for all students as one key way for them to have the resources and information that they need to be active participants in their health and well-being. Accessing accurate information about sexual health and sexuality is difficult for all young people, but it is especially difficult for low-income students, students of color and immigrant students. For these young people, CSE may be the only place where they have access to information about their bodies, gender, and sexuality.

California law provides many opportunities for parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders to get active.

1. If schools are not teaching sexuality education, communities can organize to ensure that they do.
2. If schools are teaching sexuality education but it is not comprehensive, as described by state law, then communities can organize to hold schools accountable.
3. If community-based organizations are teaching sexuality education with public funds, then communities can organize to hold them accountable.

The reality is that even though the California Healthy Youth Act took effect in January 2016, too many young people might not be getting the benefits of this law. The implementation and monitoring of the law in local school districts is poor. This means that many schools are teaching sexuality education that fails to provide students the information they need and that does not comply with the law. Some schools are still teaching abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum. The abstinence-only approach is based on political ideology, not grounded in public health science, which shows that comprehensive sexuality education is what helps young

people make healthy decisions. Abstinence-only instruction is damaging to our communities for many reasons, some of which include:

- Medically inaccurate information that undermines the ability of youth to make choices about their health and well-being, such as stating that condoms are ineffective;
- Gender stereotyping, which limits the life choices for youth; and
- Enforcement of values and morality from only one perspective.

Even schools that do want to provide CSE as required by law experience significant challenges because the state does not provide schools with much support for teaching this subject. Schools in low-income communities that are already stretched thin are therefore forced to deal with a lot of competing needs and may need extra community support to ensure that sexuality education is considered a priority. However, In spite of these barriers, many communities have gotten active and used the law to ensure that their young people are receiving CSE.

But before any action is taken, it is critical to understand the law so that it can be used effectively as a tool to support our communities.

### **California's fundamental principles for state-funded sexuality education and HIV/AIDS prevention**

California has two laws relating to sexual health education. The California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA) mandates comprehensive sexual health education and HIV prevention education in the state's public schools. A second, complementary law, the California Sexual Health Accountability Act, relates to state funding for community-based sexuality education programs. The two laws vary to some degree in their specifics, but together they establish a fundamental baseline for publicly funded sexuality education in California.

### **School-based programs**

Passed in 2015, the California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA)[1] expanded on and clarified previous law. It mandates that schools provide integrated, medically accurate, age-appropriate, inclusive sexual health and HIV prevention education to students at least once in middle school and once in high school. Instruction must also be appropriate for and equally available to English language learners and students with physical and developmental disabilities. The law ensures students are provided with the high quality sexual health education they need to become healthier and more successful adults.[2]

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1 t Cal Educ. Code. §§ 51930–51939

2 ACLU of California, Comprehensive Sexual Health Education & the California Healthy Youth Act: Parent Fact Sheet, available at [www.aclunc.org/sex\\_ed](http://www.aclunc.org/sex_ed).

Sexuality education instruction must:

- Promote healthy relationships and encourage students to communicate with their parents or caregivers about human sexuality
- Teach all FDA (Federal Drug Administration) approved forms of contraception and STI prevention in grades 7-12
- Teach that abstinence is the only method that is 100% effective in preventing STIs and unintended pregnancy in grades 7-12
- Provide information about pregnancy, including the importance of pre-natal care and all pregnancy outcomes in grades 7-12
- Teach respect for committed relationships such as marriage

### **Community-based programs**

Passed in 2007, the Sexual Health Accountability Act<sup>[3]</sup> established similar baseline standards for state-funded community-based sexual health education as for school-based education. The Sexual Accountability Act has information about both abstinence and methods for preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections for youth aged 12 and over.

### **Are you ready to know more about sexuality education in schools?**

Here are some frequently asked questions and answers about the California Healthy Youth Act developed by the ACLU of California [www.aclunc.org/sex\\_ed](http://www.aclunc.org/sex_ed).

#### ***Does the law allow abstinence-only education?***

No. “Abstinence only” sex education, which offers abstinence as the only option for preventing STIs and unintended pregnancy is not permitted in California public schools.

Comprehensive sexual health education in grades 7-12 must include medically accurate up-to-date information about the effectiveness and safety of all federal FDA approved methods for preventing HIV and other STIs and pregnancy. (EC § 51934(a)(9).)

In addition, abstinence may not be discussed in isolation from other methods of preventing HIV, other STIs, and pregnancy. The Education Code requires that instruction and materials include information that abstinence is the only certain way to prevent HIV, other STIs, and unintended pregnancy. However, it also states: “Instruction shall provide information about the value of delaying sexual activity while also providing medically accurate information on

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3 Cal. Health & Safety Code § 151000-151003

other methods of preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.” (EC § 51934(a)(3).)

*Why is there a requirement for integrated instruction, and what does it mean?*

In order to ensure that students receive instruction that best supports their need for accurate, comprehensive information, the requirement for integrated instruction means that there must be internal consistency within sexual health education and HIV prevention instruction and materials. All instruction and materials must support and align with the purposes of the California Healthy Youth Act and with each other; they may not be in conflict with or undermine each other or any of the purposes of the law. For example, schools may not use materials that, in promoting abstinence, focus exclusively on the failure rates or perceived disadvantages of condoms or contraception, even if schools attempt to balance these materials with other, objective information. (EC §§ 51930(b)(4), 51933(c).)

*How does the law promote healthy relationships for youth?*

The California Healthy Youth Act has a strong emphasis on healthy relationships, in both the purposes and the required content. Students must be taught knowledge and skills related to recognizing, building, and maintaining healthy relationships that are based on mutual affection and are free from violence, coercion and intimidation. This includes teaching decision-making and communication skills and helping students to understand the value of and prepare for committed relationships, such as marriage. It also includes information about unhealthy behaviors and risks to their health, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and sex trafficking. (EC §§ 51930(b); 51933(f), (g), (h); 51934(a)(10), (11).)

*What determines whether the facts taught are medically accurate?*

As defined by the law, instruction is medically accurate if it is verified by proper scientific research and recognized as accurate and objective by agencies with expertise in the field, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Public Health Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (EC § 51931(f).)

*What does the law say about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students, sexual*



### *orientation, gender, and gender identity?*

All instruction and materials in grades K-12 must be inclusive of LGBTQ students. Instruction shall affirmatively recognize that people have different sexual orientations and, when discussing or providing examples of relationships and couples, must be inclusive of same-sex relationships. (EC § 51933(d)(5).) It must also teach students about gender, gender expression, gender identity, and explore the harm of negative gender stereotypes. (EC § 51933(d)(6).) This means that schools must teach about sexual orientation and transgender, cisgender, and nonbinary gender identities. The California Healthy Youth Act requires that sexual health education be appropriate for use with students of all genders and sexual orientations and clearly states that part of the intent of the law is “to encourage a pupil to develop healthy attitudes concerning adolescent growth and development, body image, gender, sexual orientation, relationships, marriage, and family.” (EC § 51930.) The California Healthy Youth Act also prohibits sexual health education classes from promoting bias against anyone on the basis of any category protected by Education Code § 220, which includes actual or perceived gender and sexual orientation.

### *What does the law say about students with disabilities?*

Instruction and materials must be appropriate for students with physical, developmental, or intellectual disabilities. This includes but is not limited to providing a modified curriculum, materials and instruction in alternative formats, and auxiliary aids. (EC § 51933(d)(3).)

### *What does the law say about students who are English language learners?*

The California Healthy Youth Act requires that instruction be made available on an equal basis to pupils who are English learners, whether they are placed in English immersion classes or alternative bilingual education classes, and must be consistent with the existing sex education curriculum. (EC § 51933(d)(2).) In addition, the law requires that instruction be appropriate for use with students of all races and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. (EC § 51933(d)(1).)

### *Does the law affect parent/guardian notification and consent policies for instruction?*

Yes. The law recognizes that while parents and guardians overwhelmingly support the teaching of medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education in schools, they have the ultimate responsibility for imparting values regarding human sexuality to their children and, consequently, may choose to withdraw their children from this instruction.

Parents or guardians must be notified by the school at the beginning of the school year about planned sexuality education and HIV/AIDS prevention education, be given an opportunity to review materials, and be given the opportunity to request in writing that their child not participate in the instruction.

### *Does the law require teachers to be trained?*

Comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education must be taught by instructors trained in the appropriate courses (EC §§ 51934(a), (b).) This means that instructors must have knowledge of the most recent medically accurate research on human sexuality, healthy relationships, pregnancy, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (EC § 51931(e).)

In addition, school districts must provide periodic training to all district personnel who provide HIV prevention education to enable them to learn new developments in the scientific understanding of HIV. Teachers with a demonstrated expertise in the field or who have received training from the California Department of Education, their affiliates or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention need not be additionally trained by the district. School districts may expand the training to include the topic of comprehensive sexual health education.

*For more information on laws about sexuality education in California, contact the ACLU of California, [www.aclunc.org/sex\\_ed](http://www.aclunc.org/sex_ed).*

## GETTING TO THE NEXT STEP:

## A COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION CAMPAIGN RESOURCE LIST

*Transforming API Communities* is the only tool that provides political education and transformation of API parents and caregivers around CSE. It's a critical first step to building lasting and sustainable support for CSE. Once parents and caregivers in your community have demonstrated readiness – interest, capacity, and commitment to work on a campaign – the following resources will support the development and implementation of a campaign to bring CSE to your schools.

### ■ **Latina/o Sexuality Education Action Kit**

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice

<http://californialatinas.org/resources/sex-ed-action-kit/>

This bilingual/bicultural (English/Spanish) kit contains a range of model educational, advocacy and organizing materials developed to promote CSE in local communities. Through this Action Kit, CLRJ provides community-based organizers, advocates, *promotoras*, and health educators who work with Latina/o parents and youth information about their right to CSE in California public schools; it is combined with tools to support the development of grassroots advocacy and organizing campaigns.

### ■ **Resources for Parents and Community Members about Sex Education in California**

ACLU of Northern California

[www.aclunc.org/sex\\_ed](http://www.aclunc.org/sex_ed)

The ACLU, a sponsor of California's sex education law, provides a variety of resources to help parents and community members understand the law and take action to improve sex education in their schools. Among the various resources are a mini-toolkit with step-by-step guidance for advocating with school districts, a checklist to evaluate curricula for legal compliance, a list of questions for parents to ask schools about sex education instruction, and a list of curricula that are in compliance with California law.

## **PART 2**

# **INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING PARENT AND CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT TOOLS**

This section of the toolkit is for you to engage parents and caregivers in discussion about sex and sexuality education. There are a total of seven tools in this section. Each is designed to either stand-alone or work in tandem with the other pieces. Read through all the tools to determine which will be most appropriate for the community with whom you're working. This selection process requires you to know your audience—what do they now think about comprehensive sexuality education, how involved are they with their children's education, how active are they in their communities, etc. If you're new to the community, ask your colleagues and/or talk to some community members beforehand to get a sense of these issues. To further assist your selection, we've outlined key themes and take-aways from each tool.

*Key themes and take-aways from each tool:*

### Tool 1—How Early is Too Early to Talk to Your Children about Sex?

- Addresses parents' and caregivers' concerns about age-appropriateness, a concern raised by every focus group we facilitated.
- Models parents and caregivers dialogue about tough questions posed by their young children.
- Acknowledges and normalizes what API parents and caregivers already suspect and know: children have questions about sex starting at very early ages.

### Tool 2—It's Hard to Talk to Your Children about Sex

- Acknowledges that Asian Pacific Islander (API) parents and caregivers want to broach the subject with their children but don't know how.
- Acknowledges that most API parents and caregivers admit to not wanting their children to learn about sex in the ways they learned.
- Models parents and caregivers initiating conversations and establishing trust with children.

### Tool 3—The School as a Partner

- Emphasizes the potential role of schools as co-educators with parents and caregivers about sexuality.
- Models parent/caregiver and school engagement. Shows parents and caregivers can be empowered to impact their children's education.
- Illustrates how comprehensive sexuality education can teach both children and parents/caregivers.

#### Tool 4—What Do API Teens Want Their Parents to Know?

- Offers parents and caregivers a glimpse of key concerns teens have about approaching their parents.
- Normalizes teens' curiosity about sex and sexuality and shifts parents' and caregivers' association of sexual curiosity with impropriety.
- Allows parents and caregivers to plan their responses to teen sexual curiosity.

#### Tool #5—It's Different Here in America

- Acknowledges parents' and caregivers' anxiety and concerns about raising children in America.
- Emphasizes parents' and caregivers' immigration and cultural experiences as an asset (versus old-fashioned, out-of-touch, and irrelevant).
- Encourages parent/caregiver leadership and participation.

#### Tool #6—Dear Ivy

- Highlights frequently asked questions and common scenarios.
- Normalizes the questions and scenarios.
- Models effective ways of addressing the concerns illustrated by each question.

#### Tool #7—Resource List for Parents

- Provides information for where to turn if and when parents have more questions.  
*Note:* All the websites are in English.

As you can see, each tool covers a distinct topic but all serve to increase parents' and caregivers' understanding about the benefits of sexuality education and the roles they can play in ensuring that their children have access to a curriculum that helps build a positive sense of self and prepares them to make decisions about their bodies, sex, and sexuality. The guiding questions that appear at the end of many of the tools will help you spark dialogue, but you might come up with your own questions that better resonate with your community.

#### *Suggestions for using the tools*

Once you've identified the tools you want to use, decide where and how you want to use them. The tools are designed to fit into your trainings and meetings in a variety of ways, so use your training and facilitation expertise to determine the best way to incorporate these tools. Here are a few suggestions:

#### Where

- Use one tool at a time. We anticipate that each can spark long, involved conversations because the work of transforming and shifting attitudes takes time!
- Distribute a tool at a standing parent meeting—i.e., an already established monthly parent gathering.



- Conduct a workshop on how and when to talk to your children about sex. Almost all the parents and caregivers we talked to gravitated to this topic, and we suspect it is a good way to get them in the door! Schedule follow-up workshops using the other tools to continue and deepen the conversation.

### How

- Have parents act out the photographic novels, then use the guiding questions to spark discussion. Bring up the themes above. Keep in mind your goal for the conversation and direct the group there.
- Distribute the tool, ask parents to read on their own, then discuss their reaction either in small groups or as one group. Use the guiding questions to direct conversation. Keep in mind your goal for the conversation and direct the group there.
- After reading the tool out loud or silently, ask two parents to role-play it in front of the entire group. How would these parents respond to the situation described in the photographic novels or other tools? Ask for input from the other parents in the room.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to keep the tool and share it with their friends and families. In subsequent meetings, ask how they've used the tool on their own or with friends and family.

## **Before you get started—General tips**

### *Be a trusted source*

The tools are designed not only to help build trust between parents, and children, and schools but they are also to establish trust between parents, you, and your organization.

At the onset, we encourage you to share with parents why you as an organizer, service provider, or advocate are interested in engaging in these conversations with them and why you think it's important for these conversations to happen. As a trusted source and a member of the community, your honesty and openness about the importance for parents to understand sexuality education will create a safe and comfortable space, particularly for parents who may feel discomfort, disinterest, or ambivalence in having these conversations. In addition to using these tools as conversation starters, you can also use them as materials simply to pass out to parents to look through on their own time. Either way, by introducing these topics to parents you are taking the first step in supporting something we already know: that API parents are leaders, bridge builders, and agents of change in our communities.

### *You don't have to be the expert*

Just like some of the parents you work with, you might not have a lot of experience talking to other adults about sex and sexuality education. You might find yourself in a position where someone asks you a question that you cannot answer, or you feel discomfort about some of the topics that come up in discussion. When this happens, remember that it's best to be honest.

You don't have to be the expert, and you can let folks know this and guide them toward the Resource List for Parents at the end of the toolkit (Tool 7) where they can find more information. An even better option might be to look through those materials together! You can use these situations as an opportunity to have a dialogue about your own fears, lack of knowledge, or discomfort in talking about sex. It's a helpful way to keep the conversation going.

One common pitfall that happens when we're in these challenging situations is that we naturally fall back on some of the most familiar messages. In the case of sexuality education, we might gravitate toward focusing narrowly on pregnancy and disease prevention. We encourage you to keep in mind the Guiding Principles for Transformative Engagement (laid out in Part I) that embody a reproductive justice framework and social justice approach that speaks specifically to API parents with a holistic view of sexuality and youth development.

### *Understand the connection between sexuality and other social justice issues*

You might have started this process thinking that sex education—like most things related to sex—is a wedge issue that divides our communities and that it's a separate and isolated issue that has nothing to do with any of our other struggles. By now, we hope you see how issues of sexuality in immigrant API communities and other communities of color are connected to economic inequity, institutional racism, and youth development. By using our Principles for Transformative Engagement, which reflect our reproductive justice vision, we have had great success in talking about issues of sexuality in immigrant API communities and other communities of color, making connections to issues that concern our communities, and building bridges with other social justice sectors. These conversations have empowered our communities and strengthened our organizational alliances, and we hope that you will join us in realizing the many benefits of organizing around sexuality education using a reproductive justice framework.

### *My community is ready for a campaign!*

We hope that by educating parents and raising their consciousness about the importance of comprehensive sexuality education in their children's schools they will be galvanized to take action. If you feel that your community is prepared to create change in your local schools and school districts, then congratulations! You have successfully laid a strong foundation for a campaign to create positive change that will support the health and development of youth in your community. Check out the "Resource List for Organizers" in Part 1 for a list of easy-to-use guides that can help you develop and implement a successful campaign for comprehensive sexuality education.

### *Still Have Questions?*

If you have read through all of the resources in this toolkit and would like further support before engaging parents, please contact Forward Together at 510.663.8300 or email [info@forwardtogether.org](mailto:info@forwardtogether.org). For more information on comprehensive sexuality education in general, contact the ACLU of California at [www.aclunc.org/sex\\_ed](http://www.aclunc.org/sex_ed).

**TOOL 1**

# HOW EARLY IS TOO EARLY TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX?

## SCENARIO 1



*Girl:* Dad, why does my chest hurt when I play ball? It didn't do that before.



## SCENARIO #2



*Girl:* Mommy, where is your pee-pee?



## SCENARIO 3



**Girl:** Grandma, why does Tommy have two mothers and no daddy?



*We have all gotten these questions from our children.* Children's curiosity about sex and their bodies start at an early age. Most parents don't know how to respond and push the questions away by saying, "You're too young to know such things," or not respond at all.

Talk to your children about sexuality in early childhood when the questions come. And if you haven't already, it's never too late to start! Don't be afraid to initiate.

Giving our children information that is appropriate for their age gives them the facts and tools they need for decision making now and in the future. Talking to your

children early and continuing those conversations as they grow also means developing relationships with your children so that they feel comfortable approaching you with questions about sex.

### **What Do Children Need to Know by Age 5?**

- That love should make people feel good, safe, and wanted.
- That people's bodies are different sizes, shapes, and colors.
- That people have different sexes, genders, and body parts.
- That people's bodies belong to themselves.
- The correct names for all body parts, including sex and reproductive organs.
- How to talk about their sexual parts without feeling naughty.
- That it's normal to touch one's sex organs for pleasure.
- How a baby "gets in" and "gets out" of a woman's body.
- That no one has to have a baby unless they want to.
- How to talk with trusted adults about sexual issues, questions and concerns.
- How to say "NO" to unwanted touch.

### **What Do Children Need to Know by Ages 5-7?**

- That all living things reproduce.
- How plants and animals grow and reproduce, what they need, and how we care for them.
- That all people, including our parents and grandparents, are sexual.
- That we all live through a life cycle that has a beginning and an end and includes sexuality at all ages.
- That people experience sexual pleasure in a number of different ways.
- That everyone has sexual thoughts and fantasies and that having them is normal.
- That families are structured in different ways.
- The roles and responsibilities of different members of their families.
- How to identify gender stereotypes and that gender stereotypes limit everyone's ability to be themselves.
- That people's gender identity is determined by how they feel, not how they look or what body parts they have.
- That people may have sex with, fall in love with, and start families with people of any gender.
- That we must all take an active role in protecting our health.
- That health care providers support our health and well being.
- The basic facts about HIV/AIDS.
- That a friend is someone we enjoy being with, someone who shares, listens, encourages, and helps us think through our problems.
- How to develop, maintain, and end friendships.
- How to recognize and protect themselves from potential sexual abuse and its dangers. For example, sexual predators may seem kind, giving and loving; they may be friends or family members.
- How to identify trusted adults who can provide support and guidance around growth, development, and relationships.



## **What Do Preteens Need to Know by Ages 8-12?**

### **About Adolescent Development**

- How our bodies grow and differ depending on our body parts.
- That puberty starts at different times for different individuals.
- How to be comfortable with their changing bodies, especially in relationship to other children their age.
- What menstruation and wet dreams are.
- How to take care of their personal hygiene during menstruation.
- That emotional changes are common during this time.

### **About Human Reproduction, Birth Control and Sexually Transmitted Infections**

- The biology of the fertility cycle, how pregnancy happens, and the basics about how pregnancy develops.
- That no one has to become a parent.
- That birth control methods—including emergency contraception—can prevent pregnancy.
- That 85 out of 100 people who have vaginal intercourse will become pregnant within a year if they do not use birth control.
- How to talk about birth control and what some of the methods are.
- How to get birth control.
- All legally available pregnancy outcomes, including parenting, adoption, and abortion.
- That people can get pregnant without having sex by using alternative insemination or other fertility treatments.
- That people can get sexually transmitted infections (STIs) from having sex, but that there are ways to prevent them, including by the HPV vaccine and by using condoms.
- That it is important for sexually active people to get tested for sexually transmitted infections and to get treatment if they have an STI.
- How to identify and communicate with trusted local resources, including health providers and trusted adults, who can provide support and guidance around reproductive health and healthy relationships.

### **About Relationships**

- How their communities, families, and peers feel about dating.
- That families are structured in many different ways, how the relationships in families differ, and how families fit into their societies.
- How to end relationships without anger.
- How to describe the characteristics of a healthy relationship.
- How to recognize and protect themselves from abusive relationships.

## **What Do Teenagers Need to Know by Ages 13-18?**

### **About Sexuality and Gender Identity**

- That sexuality is a positive aspect of one's personality.
- How to take ownership over and responsibility for sexual choices and behavior.
- That sexual orientation is a part of sexual identity.
- That there are a lot of different and normal ways to have sex.
- That people may form healthy sexual relationships with people of any gender.

### **About Personal Values and Social Pressures**

- How to balance independence with responsibility.
- How to adapt to emotional changes and social needs.
- How to recognize how sexuality and gender roles are portrayed in the media – and how to control how much the media shapes what they think and how they feel about gender and sexuality.
- That everyone has the right not to have sex.
- That unintended pregnancy brings many challenges.
- How to talk about their own experiences, attitudes, and feelings about relationships and sex.
- How to make healthy decisions and solve problems.
- How to build self-esteem.

### **About Sexual Health**

- The details about how to prevent and treat HIV and other STIs.
- The details about birth control methods and how to tell myth from fact.
- What their rights are for accessing health care.
- How to identify trusted health care providers, and how to ask about and get sexual health care and be comfortable while doing it.

### **About Healthy Relationships**

- That relationships, including those within our families, often change over time.
- How to avoid unwanted or inappropriate sexual experiences.
- How to be assertive when refusing sex or insisting on using birth control and having safe sex.
- How to communicate clearly with a partner or potential partner, including about topics like sex.
- How to have realistic expectations about healthy relationships at different stages.
- How to identify and address instances of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence.
- How to identify and address instances of human trafficking.

### **About Parenthood**

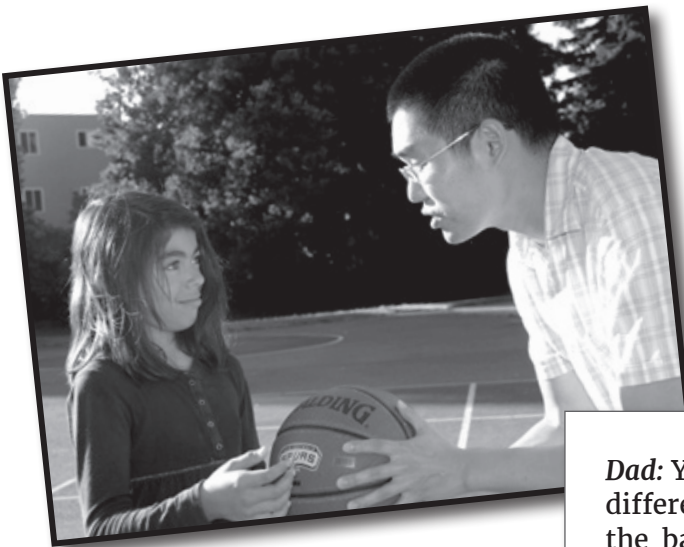
- That it is possible to plan parenthood.
- That having a child is a long-term responsibility and that every child deserves mature, responsible, loving parents.
- What a parent's responsibilities are.
- The stages of pregnancy and child development.
- The basics of what a parent needs to do to meet a child's needs.
- The basics about how to take care of an infant.

### What About Kids with Disabilities?

People often ignore or deny the sexuality of kids with intellectual, developmental, or physical disabilities. The fact is that all people are sexual beings, including people with disabilities. And, like all other kids, those with disabilities need to learn about the different aspects of sexuality listed above even if it means presenting this information in a different way in order to make it accessible and effective.

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## SCENARIO 1: RESOLUTION



*Dad:* You are growing and girls' and boys' bodies grow differently. It is normal that your chest is sensitive to the ball because your breasts are developing. This is natural, and all girls go through it. There will soon be other changes too, and we will continue to talk about them as you grow.

## SCENARIO 2: RESOLUTION



*Mom:* Mommy doesn't have a pee-pee, Mommy has a vagina. You have a vagina too. People have different types of private parts. When babies are born they come out through the vagina.

## SCENARIO 3: RESOLUTION

*Grandma:* There are many different kinds of families. There are families with one parent, two parents, two fathers, two mothers, families where aunties and uncles are not related by blood but we call them family anyway. There are families where grandparents raise the children. There are foster parents and adopted children. The most important thing about family is that there is love, care, and support among the people.



## GUIDING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the benefits of talking to your child about sex and sexuality?
- What questions have your children asked you regarding sex, sexuality, and their bodies? How would you respond to those questions now?
- What are some questions you do not know how to answer? How would other parents in the group answer those questions?
- How have the parents in the scenarios kept the door open for future conversations? How would you leave the door open for your child?

## TOOL 2

# IT'S HARD TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX



*Thy:* Anh-Hoa has been watching a lot of TV lately. You know, those shows with the young girls constantly talking about their boyfriends. Then, the other night I overheard her talking on the phone with one of her friends about so and so and her boyfriend, and I said, “Ly, get off the phone! You are only 12-years-old and have no business talking about those things.” She obeyed and hung up, but I know it was still on her mind. Now when she talks on the phone, she talks in a soft voice so I can’t hear.

*Maria:* Mine would have rolled her eyes!

*Thy:* Your daughter is good. She would listen.

*Maria:* Yes, she listens, but at their age they are bound to think about boys, relationships, probably sex too. It’s everywhere they look—TV, radio, movies, music.

*Thy:* Remember when we were young? Not a peep about anything like this. Not from our parents, our teachers, even our friends—nobody!

*Maria:* Yes, but it’s different here in America. Whether we want to or not, our children are bombarded with messages about sex all the time. So, I think we have to talk to them first before someone else does.



*Thy:* I’m afraid talking about it will make her think it’s okay to do it.

*Maria:* I had the same fear, but knowing that they’re getting messages all the time I feel I must insert my voice in my children’s lives. It’s a way for us to let our children know about our values. We as parents have to make sure they get the right information so they make the right responsible decisions. We can’t watch over them all the time. Talking to them is preparing them for life.





*Thy:* Okay, but what do we talk about? I don't even think I know the answers to her questions. How do we talk about it? How do we bring it up?

*Maria:* First thing, you don't have to know everything in order to talk to your daughter! The point is to create an open channel of communication—let her know that you're there for her if she needs to talk—so she knows to turn to you and trust you. You'd be surprised at how many ways you can bring up the topic. The other night, I brought it up with my daughter after observing her watch a music video on TV. I said, "What do you think that video says about women's bodies?" And that started a conversation. Another time, after watching a make-up ad on TV, I asked, "Are girls in your school wearing make-up?" and "Why do you think girls wear make-up?" That got us talking about whether girls wear make-up to feel better about themselves or to attract boys.



*Thy:* Weren't you embarrassed to talk about this stuff?



*Maria:* Yes, at first. But then I think about how little my parents taught me. My mother was embarrassed when I mentioned that I started my period. She blushed and said that I can't play with boys and can't let them touch me below the waist. That was so scary to me because I played tag with boys everyday and sometimes they tagged me below the waist. My mother didn't say much more, other than to teach me how to use pads. There was no mention of puberty and sexuality at all. I just felt cursed to be born a woman.

*Thy:* My mother was the same. She wouldn't look at me when I told her about my period!

*Maria:* I don't want my daughter to be as confused as I was.

*Thy:* You're right. And what about her father? He might not like the idea of me talking to our daughter.

*Maria:* My husband agrees with the conversations I'm having. I think fathers should be part of the conversation too, regardless of whether you have sons or daughters. Maybe that is not always possible, but I think it's a good idea!



## CONVERSATION STARTERS

Sometimes asking your child a question is a great way to open up a conversation. Here are a few questions you might ask:

### Young Children

- Do you know the names of all your body parts?
- Do you notice any differences between different peoples' bodies?

### Preteens

- People change a lot during puberty. What have you heard about the changes of puberty? How do you feel about going through puberty?
- At what age do you think a person should start dating? Have any of your friends started dating?
- Do you think boys and girls are treated differently? If so, how?

### Teens

- How have you changed in the last two years? What do you like and what do you not like about the changes?
- At what age do you think a person is ready to have sex? How should a person decide?
- At what age do you think a person is ready to be a parent?

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©2009 PPFA. All rights reserved. [www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/how-talk-your-child-about-sex-4422.htm](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/how-talk-your-child-about-sex-4422.htm).



*Thy:* Anh-Hoa, were you just on the phone?

*Anh-Hoa:* Yes, mother. But I didn't do anything wrong. We were just talking!

*Thy:* I know, I know. I'm not going to accuse you of doing something wrong. I know you're growing up and things are changing.

*Anh-Hoa:* What do you mean?

*Thy:* Your body is changing on the inside and outside. Do you feel some changes?

*Anh-Hoa:* I guess so. Yes.

*Thy:* Yeah? What do you notice is happening?

*Anh-Hoa:* Well, you know, my period. And my breasts...



*Thy:* All girls go through these changes. Your friends talking about boys—that's part of the change too. What I'm saying is that the curiosity you and your girlfriends are having is a normal part of growing up. I just want you to know that if you have any questions about the changes in your body, or feelings you have for someone, you can talk to me about it.

*Anh-Hoa:* But aren't you just going to tell me not to have those feelings?

*Thy:* I can't control your feelings, but I want to help you make good decisions about your life. This can be a very confusing time in your life and you're going to get a lot of messages about sex and your body. There are many changes in your body and you will in many ways be seeing the world in a new way. I have my opinions for sure, and I know the world I grew up in is different than yours, but as an older woman who was once your age, I have wisdom I can share.



## GUIDING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How was the conversation between Thy and her daughter at the end different from their first conversation?
- Maria shares her story of confusion and fear because her mother did not talk to her at all about sex and growing up. Do you have similar stories? How would you teach your child differently or similarly to the way you were taught?
- How would you initiate a conversation with your child about sex and sexuality?
- Would your conversation with your son be different from a conversation with your daughter? How? Why?
- If the room is filled predominantly with mothers and grandmothers: What role does your husband play in educating your children about sex and sexuality? What role would you like him to play?

### TOOL 3

## THE SCHOOL AS PARTNER



*Father:* Anh-Hoa brought this home today. It's a permission slip to take a sex education class. I don't know if I want our daughter in those classes.

*Thy:* I was talking to other parents about it and some of them said if she doesn't learn it from school, where would she learn the information? From TV? Magazines? Her friends?

*Father:* I don't know. What if she learns bad habits through the class and gets the wrong ideas in her head. If she has any questions about her body shouldn't she ask us, or ask the doctor at the clinic?

*Father:* Dr. Kim suggests we talk to the teacher. She said teachers are well-trained to talk to children about this stuff and that schools are usually good resources for both children and their families.

*Father, Thy:* Hi, Ms Yee.

*Ms. Yee:* Hi, Mrs. and Mr. Ngyuen. It's great to meet you.

*Father:* We have some questions about the sex education class.

*Ms. Yee:* I am glad you asked. First of all, I am happy that you contacted me. I know it's difficult to take time off from your busy schedule. Therefore, I know that this issue must be very important to you.

*Thy:* Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. We want our daughter to be a good student and responsible person, but we are concerned that teaching her about sex will only put ideas in her head and send her down the wrong path.

*Ms. Yee:* I hear your concern. Let me give you more information about what the course actually covers. I think that will help. The curriculum we use is called "Comprehensive Sexuality







Education.” The main thing it teaches is how to be responsible and respectful of yourself and others. It is designed to give students the facts they need to make smart decisions for themselves about their bodies and relationships. It teaches them to be confident. In this grade, we review reproductive anatomy, talk about what a healthy romantic relationship looks like, talk about sexual decision making such as why people do and don’t decide to get physically involved, sexually-transmitted infections, and birth control.

Does this information help you feel more comfortable about the class?



*Thy:* Yes, but how do we make sure that our daughter doesn’t date until we believe she is ready and doesn’t have sex or anything like that until later in her life?

*Ms. Yee:* Every family must decide for itself the values they want to impart to their children. Look at it this way, your child learns facts and develops the skills to think about those facts at school. I also emphasize respect for themselves and others. You, the parents, teach them what to make of their school experience at home.

*Ms. Yee:* The best we can do for our children is to give them the information they need.

*Father:* Yes, that sounds appropriate.

*Thy:* So, it’s up to us parents to complement the teachings at the school.

*Ms. Yee:* I hope this conversation helps your decision on whether to allow your daughter to take the class.

*Thy:* It has been very useful. We know other parents have similar questions, so we will let them know! Thank you.







### TWO WEEKS LATER...

*Anh Hoa:* Mom, my teacher said to study this at home so I can memorize the names of body parts for the test. See, it shows where the woman's eggs come from and where the baby gets big in her body.

*Thy:* It's important to know what your body is capable of doing at this age, and that capability comes with a lot of responsibility.



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are your hopes and fears about sexuality education at your child's school?
- What are the downsides of not providing this information at schools?
- What would you ask your child's school and teacher about sexuality education? What do you want to know about sexuality education in your child's school?
- Where do you believe your child gets information about sex and sexuality?
- How has Thy and her husband's view on sexuality education changed?

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

This discussion offers opportunity for the organizer to explain the benefits of Comprehensive Sexuality Education and California codes and laws pertaining to sexuality education in public schools. It also offers an opportunity for the organizer to talk about the current state of CSE in the school district(s) where he or she is organizing.

## TOOL 4

# WHAT DO API TEENS WANT THEIR PARENTS TO KNOW? (OR WHAT THEY WISH THEY COULD TELL THEIR PARENTS)

I might not be having sex now, but when I do start having sex I know there's protection out there. I want to learn how to use it now so I can be prepared for the future.

I know you're just trying to protect me, but don't you also want me to learn how to protect myself?

Having sex doesn't mean you're bad.

I know you want me to be safe and healthy and have a good life. To do that, I need enough information to make responsible decisions about my body.

I wish I could ask you questions about sex, but I feel like if I do I'll bring shame on to the family because you'll think I'm a bad kid.

When I hear you tell me, "Don't get pregnant" all the time, I feel like you don't trust me to make smart decisions about my life.



I always hear you say, "Don't have sex," but you never want to talk about it. I wish you would tell me why you feel that way, and ask me what I think. If you listen, I'll listen too.

Just because I want to learn about sex doesn't mean I'm having it. And just because you talk to me about sex doesn't mean I think you're telling me it's okay to have it.

Sometimes I feel like you don't want to know what's going on with me if you think I'm being bad. But there's no one else I can talk to that I trust as much as you.

There's so much about sex that I don't know because I'm not learning enough at school. And if I don't learn it from you, the only places I can go are to TV, the internet, and my friends.

Mom, I wish you would talk to me about how to be a woman because it seems like Asian women are only supposed to be either nerdy and unattractive, or super sexy all the time. I feel so confused!



Dad, I wish you would tell me what to expect as I become a man. A lot of guys at school brag about all the girls they've been with like it's a competition, and I sometimes feel like there's something wrong with me because I'm different.

I think I like both girls and boys. I want you to know, but I'm afraid you'll disown me and kick me out of the house if you found out I am gay.



You had to have sex to have me, right? Isn't it natural?

It's really hard to look different than some of the other teenage guys—I don't have chest hair, facial hair, or big muscles. I wish I knew it was okay to look the way I do and that it doesn't mean I'm not man enough, strong enough, or attractive enough.



You might think I'm just a kid and I don't know anything, but I know that I can make good decisions if I have the right information and support from adults that I trust, especially you.

I wish I could ask you questions about sex, but I don't even know how to say those things in our language, and I don't think you'd understand what I'm talking about anyway.



It's not fair that you treat me differently than my brother just because I'm a girl. He gets to stay out late, you trust him more than me, and you never tell him to be careful not to get girls pregnant!

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Which thought bubble surprised you? Why?
- Which thought bubble struck you the most? Why?
- Having read this, what questions do you think your teen has for you?
- How will you communicate with your teen differently about the subject of sex and sexuality?
- How do you think Maria or Thy from the photographic novellas would respond to these comments from teens?
- What kinds of information or education do you need to address your teen's concerns and questions?
- Who can you work with to adequately address your teen's concerns?

## TOOL 5

# IT'S DIFFERENT HERE IN AMERICA



*Parent 1:* Did you hear that Mr. Hu's granddaughter is seen hanging around boys all the time lately?

*Parent 2:* That girl is playing with fire. Always wearing the red lipstick and eye make-up. Her life is going to be ruined!

*Parent 1:* Unfortunately, this seems to be a common story here in America. Children adopt bad behaviors and disobey their parents. Back home when we were young, this didn't happen.

*Parent 2:* It is different here. There are drugs, violence, and children having sex early. Sometimes the only way I think I can protect my children is to lock them up at home and only let them out for school.

*Parent 1:* Even that would be no use. Half that stuff happens in schools too!



*Parent 1:* There are Thy and Maria.

*Thy and Maria:* Hi! How are you? What are you gossiping about today?

*Parent 1:* We're fine. Thanks. We were just talking about Mr. Hu's promiscuous granddaughter.

*Parent 2:* And how there seems to be no hope for raising children properly in this country. It's so different here in America.

*Maria:* It is different, but there is hope too. By the way, Mr. Hu's granddaughter is a straight A student who just got accepted to UC Berkeley! To me, it's not about whether she talks to boys but whether she knows how to handle herself.

*Parent 2:* Maria, you are always the optimistic one, the Americanized one, the one who gets involved, goes to meetings, speaks your mind. To you there's always hope!







*Maria:* How can you talk of no hope! You, who left your homeland and traveled thousands of miles across the ocean to give your children a better life here. And you, you wanted this life so badly that you hid for days with no food waiting for an American ship to show up. You both had hope when you were so close to death—are you going to let a little backtalk and rebellion from your children stop you?

*Parent 1:* But they're getting messages everywhere else. They're not listening to us. I try to talk to my son, tell him if he's going to talk to girls he better understand what the consequences can be, and he says, "you're so old-fashioned, mom."



*Parent 2:* Now the school says they want us to go to a meeting and talk to the teacher about sex education, but I don't know what good that will do.

*Maria:* Thy and I are going. Why don't you come with us and see what it's about. It doesn't hurt to stop by.

*Parent 1:* I can't go with you even if I want to. I work most evenings.

*Parent 2:* Don't worry, we'll tell you all about it!







*Parent 2:* That meeting was more informative than I expected. Who knew that teachers are required to get training in order to teach children about sex?

*Parent 1:* So you were glad you attended the meeting?

*Parent 2:* Yes, I feel more informed.

*Thy:* I trust that teacher. My husband and I talked to that teacher the other day. She is very good with the students and understands where parents are coming from.

*Maria:* We can't control everything that happens with our children, but we can make sure they have the skills and information to make the right decisions.

*Parent 1:* I am glad you filled me in, and I agree with what you're saying, but I still have doubts. What if my son has questions I can't answer? What do I do?

*Thy:* Maybe we should teach ourselves too. None of us had "sex education" when we were going to school.

*Parent 1:* I can't even imagine my old teacher saying the word "sex"!

*Parent 2:* Maybe we should have a "sex education" class just for parents! And we'll make sure that parents with different work schedules can attend.

*Thy:* Maybe we can borrow the curriculum from the school, or maybe our doctors have information we can use.

*Maria:* Now that sounds like a great idea!



## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What differences do you see between the community where you grew up and the community where you're raising your children?
- In what ways has your personal history helped you overcome the challenges you face in raising children here in America?
- What transformation occurred for the parents in the story?
- How much did their transformation have to do with them talking and working together?
- What do you think is the power of working together with other parents? Where can you see that happening in your life?



## TOOL 6

### DEAR IVY

*Ivy Chen is a sexuality health educator who has worked with Bay Area communities for 13 years. She teaches students ranging in age from 4<sup>th</sup> grade through college as well as parent groups, community based organizations, teachers, and other health professionals. Ivy received her BA and MPH from UC Berkeley.*

**Q:** I caught my 5-year-old child touching his genitals while sitting in the living room watching TV. I don't want to ignore what I saw and sweep the topic under the rug, but what should I do?

**A:** It is quite normal and common for kids to masturbate, to be curious about their private parts, and to do something that feels good to them. Rather than overreact or shame him, give him some clear directions such as "that is something you do in private, like in your own room."



**Q:** My 7-year-old asked me, "What is sex?" I was dumbfounded and realized I did not know how to respond. What do you suggest?

**A:** I would tell your 7-year-old that sex is when two adults put their private parts together when they are in a very close relationship. If a man and a woman have sex, they can make a baby. You can also include your values in the discussion, such as your feelings about the role of love and commitment in a sexual relationship.



**Q:** My daughter is an early developer compared to her classmates. I've noticed that she tries to hunch over to hide her chest and slouches to appear shorter than she is now that she's taller than all of her friends. I know she is going through an awkward stage, but what can I do to help her feel more comfortable about herself?

**A:** Reassure your daughter that she is normal, even though she is going through puberty earlier than her friends. Everyone will grow and change at his/her own rate, which is programmed by our genes. Get her a puberty book that can help her understand her changes. Share stories about when you went through puberty and your feelings then about those changes. Also, encourage your daughter to play sports where the focus is more about her strength and physical skills rather than focused on what her body looks like.

**Q:** The other day my 10-year-old asked, “Why are some people gay?” I rambled on and on in the attempt to provide a comprehensive answer and realized at the end that I could not come up with a succinct and digestible answer for a 10-year-old. What would you say?

**A:** It is normal for 10-year-olds to be curious about attraction and relationships. You can explain that being gay is when someone is attracted to and falls in love with someone of the same sex. Many people believe that gay people are born that way and often realize that they are gay from a young age. It is just one of many ways that people are unique.



**Q:** My 14-year-old daughter told me she is in love. I am thrilled that she came to me, so I don’t want to dismiss her feelings as mere “puppy love”—I remember the intensity of those feelings when I was her age—but how do I have a conversation with her about this?

**A:** Ask your teen to tell you about this person that she has these feelings for. Validate the powerful emotions that she feels. Share your values about dating, love, and relationships. You can even share your past experiences and memories of your first love.



**Q:** While doing laundry the other day, I discovered condoms in my daughter’s jean jacket. My immediate reaction was panic. I thought, “Oh my goodness she is having sex already,” and “she doesn’t know what she’s getting herself into.” Luckily, I stopped myself from charging into her room and demanding an explanation right then and there because I know that would end any further communication between us. What’s your advice on how I should talk to her?

**A:** Do not immediately assume that your teen is having sex. Clarify your values about sex and relationships with your teen in a calm manner. Talk about the decision making process and about the possible risks. Ultimately, your goal is for her to have healthy, safe, positive sexual involvement only when she is ready physically and emotionally. For her to feel totally ready, the best choice for her may be to wait.



**Q:** Should curfews for my teenage son and daughter be different? Girls face harsh criticism from other parents and children, and I fear that she would be considered promiscuous.

**A:** To be fair, parents should raise their sons and daughters with the same rules. For their own safety and respect for the family, all teens should be home by a reasonable time. If a teen is responsible and trustworthy, he or she can earn more freedom.

**Q:** Should boys and girls be taught the same things about sex and sexuality?

**A:** Yes. Both boys and girls should be taught about how the bodies of both sexes develop, how to care for and respect their own bodies, and how to have healthy romantic relationships when they are older. Boys and girls should learn about sexuality from caring adults of both sexes as well. Parents should start communicating with all their children at a young age so that these conversations feel as normal and natural as possible.



## TOOL 7

# RESOURCE LIST FOR PARENTS

There are so many things that parents want and need to know about sexuality education and how to talk to their children about sex; sometimes it's overwhelming! But don't worry, there are plenty of great resources out there for parents. Here are some of our favorites. We acknowledge that there aren't a lot of materials in Asian languages.

### ■ Talk Early, Talk Often

*Michigan State Parent Resources*

<http://www.parentactionforhealthykids.org/workshops/>

This website is part of a grassroots effort to give parents of middle school students the tools they need to talk to their children about the important issue of sexuality. It includes a "Tips for Parents" page that has a few practical, research-based tips for parents. Many of these tips will seem familiar because they're based on what parents already know from experience – like the importance of maintaining strong, close relationships with their children, setting clear expectations for them, and talking with them about important matters.

### ■ Advocates for Youth

**Parents Sex Ed Center**

[www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=206](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=206)

This section of Advocates for Youth's website contains all of the information and resources you need to begin talking with your children about sex. It includes ten different articles on the importance of parents as sex educators, as well as information on topics like Growth and Development, Getting Started: Helping Parents and Children Talk, Other Important Topics in Sex Education, and Advice from Parenting Experts.

### ■ Planned Parenthood Federation of America

**Human Sexuality—What Children Need to Know and When**

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/parents/resources-parents>

This website outlines what children need to know about sexuality at what age—from infancy through adolescence. This guide can help parents, caregivers, and educators decide when a discussion of a certain subject is age-appropriate. They include information and concepts about sexuality and reproduction that children need to learn at different ages.

- **Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)**

- For Parents**

- [www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=632&nodeID=1](http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=632&nodeID=1)

- This section of the SIECUS website contains resources to support parents and caregivers in talking to their children about sexuality in an open and positive way. It includes Frequently Asked Questions; a 12-issue newsletter called Families are Talking that's designed to give parents and caregivers encouragement and support in talking with their children about sexuality; Ten Tips for Talking to with Kids About Sex; and a booklet called Talk About Sex that helps teenagers communicate more openly and effectively about issues related to sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

- **Real Life Real Talk**

- [www.realliferealtalk.org](http://www.realliferealtalk.org)

- Real Life Real Talk is a nationwide social change effort to shift the social climate in communities by creating more open, honest, and balanced talk about sex and health. The website offers sex education for parents by providing resources such as videos, tools for talking about sex and sexuality, Ask the Experts Q&A, and links to relevant research.

## ABOUT US

Forward Together unites communities to win rights, recognition and resources for all families. Formerly known as Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, we've been transforming culture and policy since 1989.

Forward Together has been working on comprehensive sexuality education since 2001, when we partnered with the ACLU of California to help pass the California Comprehensive Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Act (SB 71). In 2015, we again partnered with the ACLU of California and others to sponsor the California Health Youth Act, Education Code 51930-51939, requiring all public schools to provide integrated, medically accurate, age-appropriate, inclusive comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education to middle school and high school students. We have worked to train and support communities of color across the state to hold their schools and school districts accountable to the California Education Code.

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