

Five important things you should have learned in sex ed—but probably didn't

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If you grew up in the '90s and '00s, you may feel that sex education didn't teach you much of [practical value](#). Most sex education during this time followed a "prevention" approach, focusing on avoiding pregnancy

and STIs, with most information largely targeted at heterosexual people.

While some schools are now making their sex education more ["sex positive" and inclusive](#), that doesn't change the fact that many in their 20s and 30s feel they've missed out on vital education that could have helped them better navigate the complex world of relationships and sexuality as adults.

But it's never too late to learn. Here are five important lessons that sex ed should have taught you.

1. 'Normal' sex drive is a myth

Sex education never taught us that sex drive is highly variable and has [no universal normal](#). While some may want sex several times a week, others may find once a month or less sufficient.

Regardless of how often you want or have sex, more important is understanding [sex drive](#) is [affected by many factors](#), and may change throughout your lifetime. Many factors, such as hormone fluctuations, stress, certain medications (including [antidepressants](#) and [hormonal contraceptives](#)), as well [lifestyle factors](#) (such as smoking, drinking, exercise and diet) can all affect libido.

The most important thing is aspiring to understand your own sexual needs and desires and communicating these to your partner. This is important for [personal well-being and healthy relationships](#).

Sex drive should only be considered problematic if you're unhappy with it. If you're concerned with it in any way, it's worth [checking with your GP](#).

2. Talking about sex is important

Many of us remember how sex ed tended to focus on discussing the harms that can come from sex. As such, some of us may now see the subject as taboo, and may shy away from talking about sex with our partner.

But research shows that [sexual communication](#) is associated with [higher relationship and sexual satisfaction](#). When we openly communicate about sex, we're revealing otherwise private aspects of ourselves (such as our desires or fantasies) to our partner. Doing so may, in turn, boost sexual satisfaction and feelings of intimacy, which may [improve relationship satisfaction](#) overall.

Thankfully, there's ample advice online to help you learn how to [start this conversation](#) and know what sort of [questions to ask your partner](#). Some [relationship psychologists suggest](#) starting these conversations as early as possible in relationships, to clarify needs and help ensure sexual compatibility.

They also suggest you continue sharing [sexual fantasies](#) as trust in the [relationship](#) grows, regularly asking your partner what they enjoy and sharing what you prefer as well.

3. Sexuality can be fluid

Most [sex education](#) in the 90s and 00s was largely skewed towards people who were [heterosexual and cisgendered](#). This left those who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, non-binary or any other sexual or [gender identity](#) with little or no relevant information on how to negotiate sex and relationships.

This also means many people weren't taught that sexuality can be [multifaceted and fluid](#). Your sexuality is influenced by a combination of many biological, psychological and social factors, and may shift throughout your lifetime. So it's perfectly normal for your sexual desire and who you're attracted to change.

Research indicates that sexual fluidity may be [more common](#) among cisgender women and sexual minorities. It's difficult to discern a clear reason for this, but one possibility is that men who identify as heterosexual may be less likely to act on same-sex attractions, perhaps for fear of negative reactions from those in their social circle.

There's also evidence that same-sex attraction and sexual fluidity are influenced, in part, by [genetics](#), showing us just how natural diversity in human sexuality is.

Understanding that sexuality can be fluid may help people to let go of potentially harmful misconceptions about themselves and others, and feel more open to express themselves and explore their sexual identity.

4. Sexually transmitted infections are very common

STIs are common, with one person being diagnosed [every four minutes](#) in the UK.

But most of us remember our sex ed classes focusing on prevention, resulting in [stigmatized perceptions](#) of STIs. This stigma can be harmful, and can impact a person's [mental and physical health](#), as well as their [willingness to disclose](#) their STI status to partners.

This prevention approach also meant we learned very little about how to recognize symptoms and treat STIs and fuelled the rise of myths surrounding STIs.

For example, one myth is that people with [genital herpes](#) can never have sex again without infecting their partner. Not only is this not true but also, as with all STIs, the earlier you're [diagnosed and treated](#), the easier it will be to avoid future complications such as infertility.

5. Navigating pregnancy and your fertility

Planning for pregnancy and parenthood is important for [both women and men](#). But with sex ed's focus so strongly placed on avoiding pregnancy, this means we missed out on important education relating to pregnancy and fertility. This means many women may not be [properly educated](#) about the many bodily changes that occur during pregnancy and afterwards.

Sex ed also failed to teach us that around 10%-15% of all pregnancies [end in miscarriage](#). This can be a [traumatic event](#), even in cases of early [pregnancy](#) loss. But knowing how common it is and having appropriate support could reassure many women that it isn't their fault.

Many of us also won't have learned about other aspects of fertility, such as how [waiting](#) to have children may affect your chances of getting pregnant. Nor will you have been taught about how [lifestyle factors](#) such as weight, diet, and exercise can also affect your chances of becoming pregnant. We also weren't taught about how [common problems](#) with men's fertility are, and how it can also decline with age.

Even if you did miss out on key sex ed in your earlier years, it's never too late to begin exploring what [healthy relationships](#) and sexuality mean to you.

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