Sexuality Matters

Advocating for Your Sexuality

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe how to find a sexual healthcare provider that fits your needs;
- Identify where to find safer sex supplies, contraception, and STI testing;
- Evaluate sources of health information to determine if they are accurate and reliable;
- Identify ways to get involved in changing policy; and,
- List ways to be a sexuality resource to other people.

What does advocating for your sexuality involve?

It’s when you are able to articulate your sexual health needs, as well as your beliefs and boundaries. It’s the ability to locate and identify reliable and accurate sources of information, to be a critical consumer of media, to make your voice heard regarding policy, and to be a resource for other people in your life. This lesson will give you some tips on how to do these things.

How do you advocate for your sexuality?

Video Transcript

Luis: I kind of enjoy advocating for my own sexuality. I feel that it's kind of a personal responsibility, but then again, also a personal choice I make.
Jess: I feel like I advocate for my sexuality by not being shy about it.
Devyn: I am very active on campus. I do a lot of public speaking, especially on trans issues. Which I want to be very clear that being trans is not a sexuality, it's a gender identity.
Maddy: I am a sexual assault advocate, so my biggest issue or thing that I want to see change in society are things like rape culture and issues of consent.
Chris P: I think that the best way that I advocate for sexuality is just being open about sharing my own experiences, and sharing kind of the reasons for why I do the things that I do.
Jess: I think that a lot of it is just like normalizing the word, sexuality, and that it's okay to be at a restaurant or dinner table saying that word or having that conversation. Because that first step is going to make people more comfortable with it.
Devyn: One big way that I advocate for my sexuality is just always talking about it and always being open and always being able to say that, "I'm trans. I'm queer. I'm gender queer. I'm polyamorous."
Advocate for Your Sexuality Video Transcript Cont’d…
Janelle: I advocate for my sexuality through two main ways. I think I advocate by being really positive about sex and my body, and what me and my body like, and what me and my body don’t like. And I think through that I’m able to get to the second part of how I advocate for my sexuality, and that is being a role model.

One way that you can advocate for your sexuality is by making sure you’ve taken care of your sexual health needs.

The first thing you can do is to locate a healthcare provider if you’re thinking about becoming sexually active or already are.

Where can you find a provider? You could see your regular family practice physician for these needs if you’re comfortable. Your student health service is also one place to go if you’d like to stay on campus. County departments of public health generally offer some sexual health services. Another option is to figure out if there are sexual health clinics near by. Planned Parenthood® has locations all over the country, but there are also other independent clinics to choose from. Ask your friends or campus peer health educators for word-of-mouth recommendations. They can speak from first-hand experience or let you know where other people have gone before.

Call around or check websites to see what services each clinic offers. The more comprehensive clinics will provide a physical that includes the standard blood pressure reading, heart rate, height and weight measurements, along with cancer screenings that affect the reproductive organs such as breast, testicular, and cervical cancer. They will also prescribe contraception, counsel on and refer for all pregnancy options, and provide STI testing, treatment, and vaccines. These clinics may also provide additional services like community health education. If you have questions about confidentiality, insurance, or eligibility for services on a sliding fee scale, it’s best to call the clinic and talk to someone.

Community Resources:
Boynton Health Service (612) 625-3222
Family Tree Clinic: (651) 645-0478
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Resources

To get a start on finding providers who offer sexual health services, visit the Office of Population Affairs website.

To find providers who offer STI testing, visit the CDC’s National HIV and STD Testing website.

When you make an appointment, ask how you should be prepared before you come in.

Are there certain protocols to follow, like no sexual activity for a certain number of days or not menstruating at the time of the appointment? What pieces of your health information do they need to know about? It may have to do with family history or something individual like the date of a person’s last period. Write down any health questions you want to ask during your appointment and bring the list with you so that you don’t forget to ask while you’re there.

View a first appointment with a new provider as a test drive. Pay attention to the way they talk to you, their tone of voice, and the questions they ask. Do they respect your personal decisions and privacy? Providers should let you know about ways to protect yourself or reduce your risk if you indicate that you’re engaging in behaviors that are deemed risky for STIs or pregnancy. They should also be professional and respectful in their language. If you feel like the provider is stepping outside of their professional role and judging you, that’s not cool. Speak up if you feel comfortable using the communication strategies you’ve learned. Most clinics have a comment box or provide phone numbers of customer service or administrators so that you can voice your experience.

Being knowledgeable about screening or contraception recommendations can help if you ever get in a situation where your provider is going against current protocols.

For example, some providers still make patients get a yearly pap test before they will give them a prescription for contraception, which may be based on outdated information on how often pap tests need to be performed. Another
example is providers who refuse to prescribe an IUD because the patient is not married or hasn’t had children. If you already know these guidelines, you’ll be prepared to speak up. If the provider still disagrees with you, consider asking to see another provider in the clinic or going somewhere else. Keep in mind that the providers at sexual health clinics may be more up-to-date on recommendations than a general family practitioner.

Finally, if you think your provider is not inclusive to your health needs, we encourage you to find a provider who is. This can be especially applicable if you’re someone who identifies as LGBTQ or as a survivor of sexual assault. Certain clinics specialize in working with these populations. You can ask local community organizations that are associated with these populations if they have any referrals. The goal is to find someone that you’re comfortable talking with openly and honestly. It’s in your best interest to be upfront with your provider about any concerns you have. Being honest about your behaviors and partners will help them tailor the visit to your particular situation.

**Community Resource:**
MN Family Planning and STI Hotline

**Resource**
Scarleteen
Bedsider

**Educator Perspective: How to find the right sexual health provider**

**Video Transcript**
Tatum Bishop: A lot of times, people are afraid to ask questions ‘cause they’re afraid to bring something up to a doctor or a healthcare provider. But starting off with those right away and just asking them from the get-go can be really helpful to see how a doctor might respond and then, you’d be able to know like if they didn’t even know these kinds of things that I’m really curious about, maybe this isn’t the place for me. And you know, not being afraid to speak if something’s uncomfortable, if something doesn’t feel right to you, you know, don’t be afraid to speak up because the doctor or the healthcare provider really wants you to be comfortable. Their ultimate goal is to keep you healthy. And so, if they’re doing something that makes you uncomfortable, a lot of times, they will want to kind of alter what they’re doing. So, you are the only one who knows what you need. And that you really have the control when you’re in any healthcare provider’s room. You’re in control, and...
The Right Sexual Health Clinic Video Transcript Cont’d…
Tatum Bishop: … you should be in control. And really, I would say, if you feel like a person isn’t treating you with respect, that that would kind of be key. So, if you ask a question and it’s either not answered or maybe, it’s you know, passed by or answered in a way that you feel isn’t being respectful to the question, that would be something that might be a queue for someone. Maybe this isn’t the right place for them. Call them, you know, and ask, and see how they treat you on the phone. If you don’t feel like you’re being treated respectful on the phone, then you might not be treated with respect when you get there either. So, feeling it out that way. And I also think that like friends and people that you trust in your life can be really good resources as well. ‘Cause remember that you’re not the only one that needs to go to doctors. Everyone does. So, asking people around you that you trust kind of their opinion on this stuff can be really helpful too. I think that that word of mouth piece can be really, really important, as far as like how a person really does get treated. Because even sometimes, places that might say that they’re like LGBT friendly, that might just be something that they put on a brochure, and it might not be a lived experience that people have when they actually go there.

Where do you find safer sex supplies, like condoms, dams, gloves, and lube?
Sexual health clinics are a trustworthy place to find free or low cost supplies. As an added bonus, there is usually someone there who can give you some recommendations on your different options, which can be more beneficial than just reading the package. Drug stores, grocery stores, and other big box general merchandise stores generally have a section devoted to safer sex. Each store will have a different selection, and it may be more difficult to find the variety you want at these stores. These stores may not carry dams or internal condoms, or lack products made out of different materials. Also, keep in mind that some stores keep safer sex supplies locked up behind the counter, so you may need to ask an employee for assistance. Progressive sex toy stores are another spot to pick up supplies. Lastly, the Internet can provide practically every choice that’s out there. Just be careful to make sure that you’re purchasing from a reputable and secure website.

Community Resources
Free safer sex supplies at the U of MN – SHADE Health Advocates
Educator Perspective: What is healthy sexuality?

Video Transcript

Tatum Bishop: So, I think that really the best tool and the best skill is communication, honestly. Sometimes I’ll get the question of, “What’s the best advice for good sex?” and it’s communication. It really comes down to that because everyone is so unique. Everyone’s body is so individual that unless you talk to a person that you are with or like, talk to yourself even, thinking about what you want, there is no way to know. So, the communication is the key. When a person feels comfortable with the whole idea that they are a sexual person, I think that’s what’s healthy. I think that it is not necessarily the way that we think of health in other ways, as far as the absence of infection or something like that. I think it really has a lot more to do with a person’s attitude and the way a person feels that their body deserves to be treated because what studies show that when a person respects their sexuality and respects their body, that’s when it is less likely that people have infections. Because they are more likely to take care of themselves and use protection and get tested and things like that. So, I think that that attitude is definitely the key to healthy sexuality. The skill of being able to ask questions when you don’t know is really important. I think that feeling empowered to say, “No,” when you don’t want to do something, and say, “Yes,” when you do want to do something. I think that having, just being able to talk about this stuff. So, not only asking questions, but also just having open conversations with partners about, with what might be interesting or about what you definitely don’t want to do. Having those conversations, I think, is the best tool that a person can have or can use in order to have healthy sexual experiences. The more we talk about this stuff, the easier it is to talk about and the more comfortable people get with the idea of talking about condoms and using condoms and that kind of stuff.

The next way you can advocate for your sexuality is by taking care of yourself and your well-being.

We’re talking about the eight dimensions of wellness. Your sexuality is affected by all of these dimensions in someway; it does not stand by itself. Are you getting your needs met in these other areas? Are you eating healthy, getting enough sleep, and exercising? Are you spending time with your family and friends? Are you intellectually stimulated by what you read, by going to cultural events or museums or by absorbing the world around you? How do you view spirituality? What is your outlook on life and how do you feel about yourself? Are you personally fulfilled by the work that you do? Does your financial health affect your plans? Finally, are you satisfied with where you live and the opportunities it
offers? Like sexuality, each of the dimensions is tied to the others. Finding balance amongst these areas will help you be in a place where you enjoy and understand your sexuality.

How does being imbalanced affect your sexuality?

Video Transcript

Chris P: I think when my life balance is not altogether, I think one of the first things to go is sex and sexuality.  
Danica: Staying well is really like key to just kind of being the person you envision being like. With your sexuality and just with your overall being.  
Luis: If I'm, you know, having a hard time at school, and sexuality would kind of be left to the side until I can fix what's wrong.  
Laura: It's usually due to me focusing too much time on work or homework. And pretty much, my sexuality just goes down the drain. It's not taken care of in any way.  
Chris P: Often times, I just, you know, I don't have time. I don't have the energy to have sex, things like that.  
Devyn: I usually am not as sexual at those times in my life. If I'm like really stressed out or if it's a really busy point in my school life. And sex is usually less fulfilling then because while I'm having sex, I'm worrying about a plethora of other things that really aren't relevant while I'm in bed.  
Andrew: You're not concerned with like pleasing your partner. You're not concerned with your partner's feelings about it. You're just kind of—you're trying to get your own life back together.  
Chris P: We still might not have the energy to have sex, but just being more intimate, you know, being naked together, cuddling, and just fooling around, things like that, like has been something that helped bring us back together at times when our stress and life imbalance has pulled us apart.  
Laura: I definitely have to catch myself and focus on relationships, myself, and stop worrying so much about work.

Finding reliable sources of health information is a crucial component of advocating for your sexuality.

For a variety of reasons, sex is one of those topics that people flock to the Internet to seek out information. Making a decision based on what you find online can have a big impact on your life, especially if that information is wrong. How do you know if a site provides accurate and reliable sexuality information? Here are some questions you can ask yourself while evaluating a website.
Who is the provider of the website? Is it a government agency, non-profit, school, or commercial entity? A primary, secondary, or tertiary source?

Looking at the domain name is one clue to help identify the provider.
- .org = non-profit organization
- .edu = US educational institution
- .info = commercial
- .tv = television
- .gov = US government
- .mil = US military
- .biz = business
- .museum = museums
- .com = commercial site
- .net = network resources
- .name = personal site

You’ll also want to consider what are their mission and goals? Do they provide contact information? Do they list website authors or staff? How is the website funded?

Do they have advertisements, and if so, are they easily identifiable? Are there any conflicts of interest between the page authors and the content of the website? For example, is a website that recommends a brand name medication funded by the drug company that sells it?

How would you rate the quality of the website? From where does the information on the website originate? Are sources clearly labeled? How is the information selected? Do qualified experts review the information? Is the material current and do they provide a date of last update? Are there any unbelievable or emotional claims? Are there any spelling errors or obviously incorrect data?

How is your privacy protected? Are you asked to submit personal information? If so, do they tell you how it will be used? Are you okay with their stipulations for use?

**What if you answered all of these questions and you’re still on the fence?**
If you find a particular piece of information you want to verify, try to find that data in two other reliable sources; be sure you ask these same questions about the additional sources. If you find the data is consistent in multiple reliable sources, you have a good idea that it is valid.
If you’re trying to figure out if a clinic, erotic store, or other organization is legitimate, unbiased, accurate, and reliable, you should visit their website and evaluate them based on the previous questions.

Be sure to take note of the various books, websites, and organizations listed as resources throughout the lessons, as they have already been evaluated by the course creators.

**Community Resource**

**MN Family Planning and STI Hotline**

**Resource**

For a sexual health glossary, visit the Planned Parenthood website

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**What do you wish you would have known before coming to college?**

**Video Transcript**

Abby: I wish that I had known earlier that I could think about what I was looking for in a partner, like really sitting down and thinking, “What do I want in a partner?” I just think I have done a lot of haphazard dating, which is fine, sometimes. But now I wish I’d have been a little more thoughtful about who I dated, and I think that would have impacted how meaningful the relationship was. Like how much I learned about myself through those relationships and the quality of sex in those relationships.

Andrew: Sex is not the end-all deal to relationships in college.

Ashlee: You can actually date people in college, and you don’t have to go to a different party every weekend and hook-up with somebody, like that’s not expected of you.

Ashlee: Like, there definitely are people that do that; you’ll have friends that do that, and that’s fine, but you don’t have to feel that pressure that you need to be that person, too.

Luis: I feel like in high school there’s this really big stigma that, you know, everyone’s starting to have sex. And I thought, “Oh, in college, I was going to be one of the few virgins on college,” but actually in reality, I feel that people who are virgins are the majority.

Andrew: A lot of sex can be fun, but it can also be detrimental.

Luis: At the end of the day, sometimes it really is kind of something that just happens recreationally. You learn that it feels good, and sometimes, you just have sex to have sex. Although, it’s probably a lot more meaningful when there is kind of that relationship and some sort of energy or synergy that goes along with it.
What do you wish you would have known before coming to college?

Video Transcript Cont’d…

Robin: Most people are really good about if you ask a question, they’re really good about answering it, whereas if you just make assumptions and make statements that are not well-informed, then that’s when you start offending people or hurting people’s feelings. The more you know, the more you don’t know. So, the more I found out about it, the more I realized there’s a lot I don’t know.

K-anna: In college, a lot more people accept you for who you are. Especially when a lot of cultures are coming together and a lot of different people are coming together that they have to, you know, learn to accept everybody that way.

Another part of being a savvy advocate is being media literate.

Be a critical consumer of what you see on TV, movies, pornography, books, magazines, and websites. For example, advertisements are notorious for being filled with gender bias and using sex to sell their products. You can use many of the same questions that you use to assess the reliability of health resources to what you see in the media.

- Who is the intended audience?
- What message is this trying to communicate? Is it in line with reality?
- Who is funding this?
- Do the funders have a bias?

How can you make a difference on a higher level?

Advocating for policy change is one way to do that.

There are opportunities to voice your opinion on the local school board, city, county, state, and federal government levels. It could even be an organizational policy at a workplace or community organization. Issues related to the ability to access affordable health care, sexuality education, and equal treatment of all people are common examples of policies.

How do you get involved?
It could be simple like signing an online pledge or sending an email to your representative. Or you could get even more involved and meet with your representative. There are opportunities to volunteer for organizations that support those issues to help get policy passed. You could help with petitions, education, or protesting. Start by researching groups that defend your topic of choice and see if they have an advocacy division. And of course, you can let your thoughts be known by visiting the ballot box. Elections just don’t happen every four years. Keep up with the political scene to know what is on the ballot and when. Being a responsible citizen means being informed on the issues and the candidates. Whatever the matter, there are ways to make sure that your voice is heard!

**Resources**
- Learn more about sexuality policies in your state
- Learn how to make a difference

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**What is healthy sexuality?**

**Video Transcripts**

Robin: I would describe somebody who has healthy sexuality as somebody who is confident in their own body.

K-anna: You’re confident in what you’re doing, and you’re not ashamed of what you’re doing.

Devyn: Honestly, look at themselves and think about what turns them on and what do they like in bed and is also able to ask for those things.

Nolan: Being comfortable with yourself, being comfortable with your relationships.

Abby: Being respectful of yourself and of the person that you are being sexual with. Being respectful of them and having open communication.

Heather: You’re doing things without pressure from your partner or anyone else. It is something that you want to do. You’re doing something for yourself.
Describe Healthy Sexuality Video Transcripts Cont'd...
Laura: They are okay with being with themselves, and they are able to maintain the balance between personal, romantic relationships, friendships, family, work, homework. They can maintain that balance.
Heather: Considering the medical health side of it as well, as the emotional health side. Do you feel safe? Do you feel happy? Is this fun? Like, you shouldn't be doing these things if it's not enjoyable to you.
Jess: Being healthy about all of this kind of lies in wanting to be informed and wanting to understand yourself as an individual and taking the time to reflect on your experiences and your decisions. And to be intentional about all of that, and then to go into relationships or conversations or situations and not be afraid to bring all of that knowledge with you.
Danica: Being empathetic is the way to really understand the people around you, and that goes for sexuality and really anything when you meet somebody. You really just have to kind of understand them. And people who can exemplify that are the best. You know, they're the people that you really want to hang around with, that are confident and make you feel better about your sexuality too.

Finally, you can be an advocate for other people.
Being a resource to friends, peers, family, school, cultural groups, and the community benefits society. You can be an advocate in a number of ways.

First, you can be an educator. If you hear misinformation or myths, speak up and correct them. This could be in a one-on-one conversation with someone, on social media, or it may be while you're out and about and overhear a discussion. Of course, be polite about it and if applicable, let the other parties know how you got the information.

Another way you can be an educator is through a more formal process. If you find the topics in this course fascinating and want to teach the good word of sexuality, there are options for you. On a campus level many schools have peer health educators who speak with students on an individual and group level. Check with your student health center, student activities office, or a related
academic department to inquire about these positions. Sexual health clinics rely on volunteers to help with education both in-house and in the community. Both of these roles can offer the possibility of future opportunities if you find that you really enjoy the work.

**Community Resources**

- SHADE Peer Educators
- Aurora Center Volunteers

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**Tatum Bishop: Community Outreach Educator**

**Video Transcripts**

Tatum Bishop: My name is Tatum Bishop, and I'm the Community Outreach Educator for Family Tree Clinic. And my role is to represent the clinic out in the community. I do sexual health education all way from 4th grade on up to adults, and that includes any topic ranging from anatomy, reproduction, pregnancy, pregnancy prevention, sexually transmitted infections, healthy relationships, anything in that realm is stuff that I can go and talk about. Usually, as a kind of guest speaker to different classrooms and other community organizations and groups.

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Second, you can step up! If you see a situation that does not sit right with you, take action. Bystander intervention can take place in a variety of scenarios. Maybe your friend is being pressured to get sexual with their partner when they’re not ready. Or it could be overhearing your classmates slut shaming a fellow student. It could even involve a situation where a photo of a person’s genitals is being circulated around your residence hall. Whatever it is, if it triggers a nagging feeling that what is happening is wrong or potentially dangerous, step up using the tools we’ve provided you.

Finally, you can be a role model. You have more power than you may realize. People in your life notice your actions and what you say. By being true to yourself and advocating for your sexuality, you’re actually making a difference in the lives of other people. Your behaviors or conversations can change the way someone thinks or acts, even if it’s in the smallest way. Remember that you’re powerful in more ways than you think.

**Community Resource**

- STEP UP Program at U of MN
## What is your advice for fellow students?

### Video Transcript

**Robin:** Be open. Be willing to learn.

**Nolan:** Definitely keep an open mind. College is just a different world.

**Devyn:** Be open to exploring yourself and your sexuality. Don't be afraid to try new things. Even if you’ve been told that they aren’t good or they are bad. Everybody’s sexuality is different, and everybody likes different things in bed.

**Andrew:** Be open to different people’s ideas about sex.

**K-anna:** Be comfortable with who you are. Be confident in who you are.

**Nolan:** Don't fall victim to what people expect of you.

**Danica:** It is really okay to be whoever you want to be sexually and with your sexuality. And not only that, but you can have friends who are completely different than you are.

**Dan:** Get to know yourself before you start to get to know others in that way.

**Chris P:** Let your brain and your heart do the deciding, and not your penis or your vagina.

**Laura:** Just be comfortable being by yourself and with yourself before you start trying to add someone to your life.

**Dan:** Know about your own boundaries and about what consent actually means.

**Andrew:** Be open in terms of talking to your partner about consent, about what they want, about boundaries.

**Chris H:** There is a lot of pressure in college to have sex, and you shouldn’t have to feel pressured to have sex.

**Abby:** Personally, I think exploring your sexuality is really important, which is why I think masturbation and sex toys are a great way to do that.

**Luis:** Take this time to find yourself and be you. It's okay to experiment, it's okay to try new things.

**Aoife:** Definitely look for the resources that are available because there are a lot.

**Robin:** And trying to not place the stigmas and not place the stereotypes of your past on your present or on your future.

**Jess:** I encourage people to be human in the conversations they have about sex. I think that will change the world actually, or how we think about sex at least.
Information in these course lessons is provided for educational purposes. It is not meant to and cannot substitute for advice or care provided by an in-person medical professional. The information contained herein is not meant to be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease, or for prescribing any medication. You should always consult your own healthcare provider if you have a health problem or medical condition.

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