

FACTS/VALUES CONTINUUM

FACT: A provable, accurate statement based on scientific, medical, legal, sociological or psychological research or the opinion of “most” experts in a field. Hypotheses and theories can count if they are identified as such.

Example: *A person can get an STD even if they use a condom.*

INSTITUTIONAL VALUE: A value that is agreed upon and often represented in the policies of your school or organization.

Example: *All students have a right to learn in a safe and inclusive environment.*

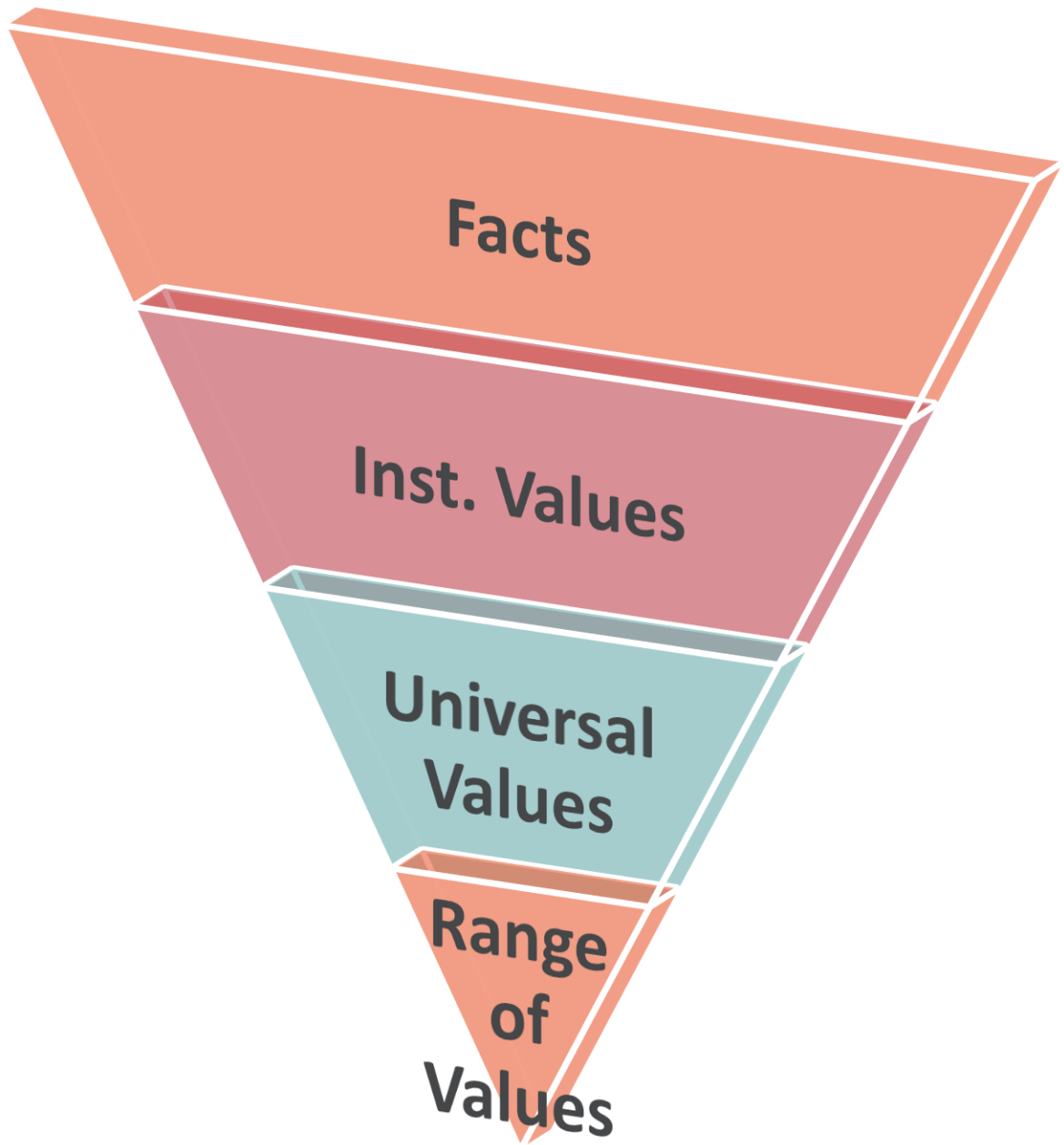
UNIVERSAL VALUE: A value that is agreed to by the consensus of people in this society.

Example: *It is wrong for an adult to sexually abuse or rape a young child.*

VALUE: A belief or opinion about the morals or ethics of an issue—about right and wrong, good and bad or the relative importance or what one should or shouldn't do.

Example: *Masturbation is a sin.*

Most sexuality education programs are based on a number of values about sexuality, young people and the role of families. While these values reflect those of many communities across the country, they are not universal. Parents, educators and community members may wish to review these values to be sure that their sex education program is consistent with their community's beliefs, culture and social norms.



GUIDELINES FOR SELF-DISCLOSURE

We disclose information about ourselves every day, often without thinking about it. When it comes to answering questions about sexuality — especially when working with young people — there is more of a slippery slope to consider.

Some professionals believe that disclosing personal information will help them build a sense of trust with young people, yet others make strong connections with teens without doing so or by maintaining clear boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate topics.

Every professional must decide for themselves whether to — and how much to — disclose personal information. All professionals should consider the following issues when making these important decisions:

When you MAY choose to disclose:

- Only with an established individual or group with lots of trust
- Only when it enhances learning and the example makes a good point

When NOT to disclose:

- For ego-enhancement, to get a laugh or to make others like you
- When it is about your personal sex life
- When what you share is something you would not want others to share about themselves
- When it could jeopardize the future education or safety of group members

Keep in mind that once a piece of information has been disclosed ...

- You can't take it back.
- You have no control over what the person/people hearing it will do with the information. Young people in particular are at a developmental stage in which they may use personal information inappropriately.
- It often carries more weight than general information. There is an inherent power imbalance in a professional-student relationship. Therefore, if a young person asks you what type of condoms or other birth control you use and you share that information, that young person may value that information over making their own decision. Your perspective may carry more weight for them just because they know and trust you.

Remember: what is right for you is not necessarily right for your students or anyone else.



RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

It is important to acknowledge ALL questions that students ask. This model can help facilitate answering questions. If a question is inappropriate or you do not know the answer, do not be afraid to admit that.

Affirm

Affirm the learner for asking the question.

Identify

Identify the type/components of the question. This is usually a silent process.

Informational/Clarification “Am I Normal?” Shock Permission Seeking Value

Fact

Answer the factual part(s) of the question.

Beliefs

Explore the range of beliefs.

Refrain

Refrain from stating your own beliefs.

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

Our Usual Worries:

Questions posed in a sexuality education session can be difficult for the facilitator for a variety of reasons:

- You may not know the answer, and worry about giving out misinformation or omitting essential information;
- You may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with slang terminology used by the learner;
- You may be uncomfortable with the content of the question (e.g., related to certain sexual behaviors);
- The question may be of interest to one learner but developmentally inappropriate for the rest of the group;
- The question may be intended for "shock" value, rather than being a sincere inquiry; • The questioner may be seeking personal information about you and your experiences or values.

The Stop, Drop, & Roll strategy for responding

- **Stop** talking and think about the question you've been asked
- **Drop** your opinions and personal judgments, values, etc.
- **Roll** the question into a discussion topic for the group
 - “That’s a great question, I’d like to hear what you think...”
 - “Has anyone else been thinking about this and, if so, what are your thoughts?”

Navigating Values-Based Questions

When addressing a value-based question, it’s important that students understand that a range of beliefs are held about that topic. One way to do this is to use the “SOY” Method:

- “Some people believe...”
- “Other people believe...”
- “I can’t say what is right for You.”

Other Helpful Tips:

When dealing with a question that is difficult for you, no matter what the reason, here are some helpful strategies and guidelines to follow:

- 1) **Be aware of your body language and tone of voice** and what they communicate to the learners about discomfort or disapproval you may be feeling; try to use the same straightforward approach you would use for less difficult questions.
- 2) **Respond to or acknowledge ALL questions**; don't avoid or ignore the question or the asker. (Avoiding a question can diminish further communication with that learner; if not sincere, your avoidance may encourage renewed attempts to shock or upset you.)
- 3) **Affirm the asker and legitimize the question**, as appropriate: Say "I'm glad you asked that" or "Many people ask this question" or "This is an important question." Do not laugh at or dismiss any question; what may seem funny or inconsequential to you may be very serious to the questioner. A negative response (such as, "you are too young to be asking this") can shut down communication and learning.
- 4) **If the question includes slang, paraphrase the question**, changing slang to appropriate terminology; if you don't understand the slang, ask for clarification of the question. If the question was posed anonymously, ask the class "Do you think this question means . . .?" If you decide that it could mean more than one thing, address all the possibilities.
- 5) **If you don't know the answer, admit it**. Offer to obtain further information on the topic, or (even better) suggest that someone else in the class seek the answer as a project, if appropriate. This approach acknowledges that you do not have all the answers and are not the only available resource for learners. It also encourages independent research.
- 6) **Ask for questions in writing**. The "anonymous question" strategy accomplishes two things simultaneously: 1) it is less intimidating for learners than asking questions out loud and 2) it will allow you time to reflect on difficult questions before answering. A time-honored strategy is to pass the challenging questions to the bottom of the stack until you decide how to address them.
- 7) **For developmentally inappropriate questions, give a brief, general answer** that is appropriate for all the learners and offer to respond in more depth with the questioner after class.
- 8) **Practice answering questions that make you feel uncomfortable** in front of a mirror or a supportive friend. Also, learn more about the topics about which you feel uncomfortable; as your knowledge and skills increase, so will your comfort level.