

An Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and Resources Toolkit



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Introduction

Purpose of the Toolkit

This toolkit is a resource and guide for school health educators, school counselors, school nurses, and school social workers in Lowell, MA. The toolkit includes information on comprehensive sex education (CSE), adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, creating safe spaces, confidential care, local and state resources. The activities in the toolkit provide suggestions, reflections, and practice questions for school personnel. Current research shows that access to CSE and SRH services and resources result in better health outcomes for adolescents. School personnel can play an essential role in guiding students to make informed and thoughtful decisions, reducing risk-taking behaviors, and improving student health by providing CSE, sharing information and promoting access to available services and resources.

Reproductive Justice Framework

Implementation of this toolkit strongly aligns with the ideals of the Reproductive Justice framework. It is meant to empower school personnel to advocate for education and SRH services to better support youth in healthy decision making. Visit [Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice](#) and [SisterSong](#) to learn more about the Reproductive Justice Framework.

State Sex Education Guidelines

The state of Massachusetts does not mandate schools to provide comprehensive sexual reproductive education to students. School districts decide what type and quality of sex education they provide to students. If sex education is offered, schools are not required to include education on sexual orientation or gender identity and consent. In addition, caregivers and guardians have the option to opt-out their child from receiving sex education. The state suggests schools to utilize the [MA Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework](#) published in 1999. Efforts by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are being made to update the Health Curriculum Framework to ensure gender-inclusivity and trauma-informed practice. *As of September 19, 2023 the new [MA Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#) was approved.*

Healthy Youth Act

In Massachusetts, the Healthy Youth Act (HYA) seeks to ensure comprehensive sex education in MA public schools consisting of a curriculum that is research-based, medically accurate, age appropriate, LGBTQ+ inclusive, and culturally competent. Visit [Massachusetts State Profile](#) and [The Healthy Youth Act](#) to learn more about the Healthy Youth Act.

State Law about Children's Health Care

In Massachusetts, a minor can consent to reproductive and family planning care and treatment without parental consent, therefore middle school is a critical moment for students to receive age-appropriate and evidence-based SRH education and learn about services and resources in their communities.

Why Adolescent Sexual Health Matters?

Current research demonstrates that access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education and services plays an important role in reducing teen birth rates, incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Adolescent pregnancy can lead to negative maternal and child outcomes including higher risk of mortality and morbidity, prematurity and low birth weights, and low socioeconomic status^{1,2,3}. Students that experience pregnancy are less likely to complete school and pursue higher education.

Adolescents face many challenges when seeking sexual health services. Adolescents report a lack of awareness of available services and youth-friendly services. Often, adolescents feel that they do not have a trusted adult to discuss sexual health topics. Some adolescents are hesitant to seek health services because they worry about privacy and confidentiality^{4,5}. Access to CSE and adolescent SRH services and resources can help students make informed and thoughtful decisions, reduce risk-taking behaviors and overall, improve health outcomes.



¹ Egan et al. (2020). Engaging expectant and parenting adolescents: Lessons from the Massachusetts pregnant and parenting teen initiative. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 24(2), 191-199.

² Medline Plus. (2018). *Teenage pregnancy*.

³ Leung et al. (2020). What will it take? Using an implementation research framework to identify facilitators and barriers in implementing a school-based referral system for sexual health services. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20(1), 1-12.

⁴ Brittain et al. (2020). The teen access and quality initiative: Improving adolescent reproductive health best practice in publicly funded health centers. *Journal of Community Health*, 45(3), 615-625.

⁵ Decker et al. (2021). Bridging the gap between sexual health education and clinical services: Adolescent perspectives and recommendations. *Journal of School Health*, 91(11), 928-935.

Comprehensive Sex Education

Curriculums

A comprehensive curriculum is evidence-based, medically accurate, and developmentally appropriate. CSE provides information on human development, relationships, communication skills, sexual behaviors and health, and society. The CSE curriculum commonly utilized in Lowell, MA is *Making Proud Choices*. Make sure to check your school requirements and recommended curriculum. Talk to your students, parents, and other school personnel about potential community needs. Additional curriculums can be found on the *Resources* page.

Lowell Youth Development

The city of Lowell has made efforts to improve youth health by implementing and maintaining youth programs. The following are some examples and brief descriptions of these youth programs.

Teen BLOCK

Lowell Community Health Center has a free after-school youth program that supports the healthy development of young people. The Teen BLOCK program includes:

- Teen Talk: teens discuss common issues and participate in group activities.
- Youth Reaching Out (YRO): teens can engage and service their community. The focus is violence prevention.
- Healthy Teens, Healthy Relationships: Making Proud Choices is an evidence-based curriculum which provides sexual health education. Teen BLOCK not only provides sexual health education to their program teens, but they collaborate with Lowell Public Schools to deliver in-classroom education.
- Valuing Our Insights for Civic Engagement (VOICES): teens can explore their personal experiences and develop leadership skills.

Girls Inc. of Greater Lowell

Girls Inc. supports the development of girls in the community. This program aims to “Inspire all girls to be strong, smart, and bold through a safe and nurturing environment, teaching independence and personal responsibility needed for success.”

- Girls Inc. in Lowell offers after school and school vacations, summer enrichment programs, and outreach.
- Teen BLOCK provides age-appropriate sexual health education for youth at Girls Inc.

Health Services

Sexual and reproductive health services and resources that are youth-friendly, free of cost, and ensure confidentiality have shown to be successful in improving adolescent sexual health. School-based health centers (SBHCs) have improved access to SRH education, services, and resources, ultimately reducing teen birth rates and incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)^{6,7}. According to MA law, minors can access reproductive and family planning care, however not all pediatricians and primary care providers are equipped to protect confidentiality. The city of Lowell has implemented two SBHCs and a free youth clinic. Health services at these programs are gender-inclusive, culturally competent, and trauma-informed.

School Based Health Centers

The Lowell High and Stoklosa Middle School Health Centers are located within the schools to provide easy and accessible health services to students. The health centers are staffed with a Nurse Practitioner, Behavioral Health Provider, Medical Assistant, and other supporting health staff. The SBHCs are open during school hours, and closed during vacation, holidays, and non-school days.

Services provided:

- Physical exams
- Management of chronic medical conditions
- Sick visits
- Health screenings
- Immunizations
- Mental health counseling
- Nutrition counseling

SBHC at Lowell High School:

- Confidential health care
- Sexual health education
- STI testing and treatment
- Pregnancy tests
- Distribution of condoms
- Access to birth control: oral contraceptives, Depo Provera, and birth control vaginal ring
- Emergency contraceptive
- Invasive contraceptives such as IUD and birth control implant are not provided
- For abortion services, a student is referred to the LCHC, then providers refer outside of LCHC.
- Prevention education
- Referrals to other services

SBHC at Stoklosa Middle School:

- Confidential health care
- Sexual health education
- Referrals to LCH

⁶ Leung et al. (2020). What will it take? Using an implementation research framework to identify facilitators and barriers in implementing a school-based referral system for sexual health services. BMC Health Services Research, 20(1), 1-12.

⁷ Lowell Community Health Center. <https://www.lchealth.org/health-wellness/medical-services/school-based-health-centers/>

Clinics

Teen Clinic

The OB/Family Planning at Lowell Community Health Center (LCHC) offers a FREE confidential teen clinic (ages 13-26) on Tuesdays from 3-5 pm. All services are confidential and do NOT require parent consent. Teens do NOT have to be a registered patient at LCHC to receive care.

Sexual health services provided by the teen clinic are:

- Sexual and reproductive health education and information
- Birth control, condoms
- STI testing and treatment
- Pregnancy test
- Emergency contraception

The Center for Hope and Healing, Inc.

The Center for Hope and Healing offers free and confidential counseling, medical and legal advocacy, support groups to survivors of sexual violence. In addition, prevention, and education related to sexual health and sexual violence.

How can I help students access health services?

Use this list to learn how you can help students access the health services they need!

- **Take steps** to be a trusted adult
- **Know** who the go-to people in your school that can help students identify and access needed services
- **Learn** what your state allows and prohibits when it comes to referring students to sexual health services
- **Encourage** students to talk to their parents, caregivers, or other trusted adults
- **Develop** or know resources where students can access confidential health services in the community (suicide prevention, substance use, sexual health services, STD testing and treatment)
- **Promote** or encourage the promotion of youth-friendly health services (posters, presentations, social media) and places student will notice (bathroom stalls, highly visible areas) ⁸

Answer this question to evaluate your ability to help a student access health services.

A student asks you where they can get a pregnancy test. What are your next steps?

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Creating a Safe Space

To encourage adolescents to ask questions and seek health services, creating a safe space to learn and discuss sexual health topics is essential. An environment that is non-judgmental, respectful, and honest, can help adolescents feel more comfortable when asking questions or approaching a trusted adult.

For additional resources about safe and supportive schools, visit the [Safe & Supportive Schools](#) page on the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.

Use this checklist and think of an example of how you practice and promote a safe space.

Safe Space Checklist and Reflection

☐ Inclusivity

☐ Culturally competency

☐ Trauma-informed information and care

Think about ways that you could improve!

LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

Include a range of identities and orientations or exclude gendered language all together. Try using “*partner*” instead of gendered words like “boyfriend” or “girlfriend.” Consider how “safer sex” might mean something different to people who have same or different sex partners. Make sure your discussions of health relationships include consideration for a range of partnerships. This allows for everyone to feel equally represented!

Use the [LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools: A Self-Assessment Tool](#) to assess your LGBTQ inclusivity. For more LGBTQ+ resources visit [Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students](#).

Using a Trauma-Informed Approach

[Adverse childhood experience \(ACEs\)](#) significantly impacts the health of youth. Being trauma-informed means acknowledging and understanding the role of trauma in a person’s life. A trauma-informed care approach identifies how trauma can have a direct impact on access to health services. Using a trauma-informed approach is particularly important in Lowell because it is home to many foreign-born immigrant and refugee families. This population is at increased risk for health and health care disparities. Using a trauma-informed approach in school and health care settings can promote safety, a shared understanding among staff, access to health services and community collaboration. Establishing safety, trustworthiness, transparency, support, collaboration, and empowerment can help cultivate resilience among youth. Visit the [Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center](#) to learn more about integrating a trauma-informed approach.

Use the [Greater Lowell Trauma Resource Directory](#) to find trauma resources.

Learn more about the [6 Guiding Principles](#) to a trauma-informed approach.

Tips for Setting Group Rights

The purpose of setting group rights/rules/agreements is to create a safe space for students to discuss sexual health. This gives you an opportunity to establish a safe learning space from the beginning. You can always refer back to these rights if necessary.

Have you established group rights/rules/agreements?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Suggestions on how to establish group rights:

- Start with a list of what you consider the essentials
- Work with students to create a set of rights
- Make sure the group rules are visible to everyone
- Considering using visuals to present agreements

Take a moment to create a list of 5 rights. Make sure to share these rights with students to create a safer space in your classroom or office!

For example, you have the right...

- To be embarrassed
- To be uncomfortable
- To ask any questions

You have the right to....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



Try using an Anonymous Question Box! This can help facilitate comfort and allows students to avoid asking uncomfortable questions aloud.

Answering Student Questions

Sometimes answering student questions can be challenging. This section provides school personnel with tips on how to answer student questions as suggested by the *Answering Student Questions* workshop by Planned Parenthood.



Helpful Tips to Answering Student Questions:

While answering student questions, it is important to use gender neutral language (they, people, person, human), avoiding using the term “you,” and do not make assumptions.

Categorizing Student Questions

Categorizing questions might be helpful in answering questions. What type of question is the student asking?

Planned Parenthood has established categories for student questions, as follows⁹:

- *Information-seeking*: These are very straightforward questions that have specific, factual answers
- *Am- I- Normal*: These questions are often about something a person worries about and needs reassurance about. While there may be a factual response, the person needed to know that wanting to know the answer is normal
- *Permission-Seeking/Advice*: These questions are about something that a student is trying to make a decision about and needs permission to make a decision. They really want to know the steps to figuring out the answer for themselves.
- *Personal Beliefs or Experience Situations*: These questions are again a test of how much you are willing to share about yourself. Most of the time, sharing personal information is not appropriate, but generally explaining that your experiences happened at a time very different from today, and therefore are not relevant to them, is a safe way to avoid answering those questions.
- *Shock Questions*: This is a check of your sense of humor, your ability to think on your feet and your ability to not get flustered or upset by a question. Sometimes it is best to ignore the question, but other times, it helps to give a serious answer.

⁹ Planned Parenthood. (2019). *Professional training workshops for educators & other professionals*.

Practice categorizing questions

Category	Information-seeking	Am I normal?	Permission-seeking/advice	Personal beliefs	Shock value
What is the correct age to have sex?					
What does oral sex mean?					
How old were you when you had sex for the first time?					
What is the average size of a penis?					
My girlfriend smells like dead stinky fish, what should I do?					
Can you get an STI from a toilet seat?					
Do you think abortion is wrong?					

Three -Step Method

Planned Parenthood uses a three-step method to answering student questions

Validate	Facts	Teachable Message
Young people want reassurance that they are “normal.”	Here you are answering the actual question and providing information that is evidence-based and using proper language	What message can students take away? Not every question has an opportunity for a teachable message

Example: What if I have already had sex and now, I don’t want to?

Validate → “Thank you for asking that question, a lot of people have asked this before.”

Facts → “Abstinence is voluntarily choosing not to engage in sexual behavior that could result in pregnancy or STD. Abstinence or delay sexual behavior is not a one-time choice, if someone decides they do not want to do it again that is their choice.”

Teachable Moment → “People may have different ideas about what abstinence means, it is important that partners communicate with one another about values and beliefs to eliminate confusion.”

Facilitation Skills Check List

What are some facilitation skills you already practice? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Listen
- ☐ Keep focused and on track
- ☐ Create a safe space and respectful environment
- ☐ Ask open-ended questions
- ☐ Clarify and repeat statements
- ☐ Patience
- ☐ Honesty
- ☐ Maintain eye-contact
- ☐ Utilize humor
- ☐ Utilize silence
- ☐ Aware of your language
- ☐ Know your role

Minors' Access to Confidential Care

Adolescents are often hesitant to seek health services because they worry about their privacy and confidentiality. In Massachusetts, under the state law, minors can consent to their own medical treatment. It is important to note that there are some exceptions and circumstances in which age restrictions apply.

- In MA, under the state law, minors can consent to their own medical treatment.
- A child 12 or older may consent to substance use treatment
- Youths 16 or older may request admittance to a mental health facility.
- Children may consent to their own treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.
- In MA, anyone age 16 or older can get an abortion without parental approval. Under the age of 16 needs parental or judicial approval.
- A minor may consent to family planning services¹⁰.

How can I be a trusted adult?

- Use a nonjudgement tone of voice
- Ask open-ended questions
- Practice active and reflective listening
- Give affirmation, do not deny, criticize, or shame
- Keep conversations focused on the student
- Provide facts and information, avoid opinions
- Discuss confidentiality¹¹

However, there are situations in which confidentiality is not possible, and mandated reporting is warranted.

- Suspected abuse including sexual abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking
- A person expresses wanting to physical harm themselves or others

What should you do next? Immediately check what your school policy is with mandated reporting.

For more information, refer to the [Massachusetts Guide on the disclosure of confidential information: Health care information](#).

Find out more information about [Mandated Reporting](#).

¹⁰ Commonwealth of Massachusetts. *110 CMR 11.00: Medical authorizations*.
<https://www.mass.gov/regulations/110-CMR-1100-medical-authorizations>

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Resources

Health Services

Program / Resource	Website	Hours	Address / Phone Number
Teen BLOCK	https://www.lchealth.org/health-wellness/healthy-community/teen-block-youth-programs/	Monday through Friday during after school hours	Address: 161 Jackson Street, 2 nd floor Lowell, MA 01852 Phone: 978-322-8949
Girls Inc. of Greater Lowell	https://girlsinclowell.org/	Monday through Friday 2pm- 6pm	Address: 220 Worthen St. Lowell, MA 01852 Phone: 978-458-6529
Teen Clinic	https://www.lchealth.org/health-wellness/medical-services/ob-family-planning/	Tuesdays from 3pm -5 pm.	Address: 161 Jackson Street, 2 nd floor Lowell, MA 01852 Phone: (978) 937-9700
School Based Health Center at Lowell High School	https://www.lchealth.org/health-wellness/medical-services/school-based-health-centers/	Open during school hours, closed during vacation, holidays, and non-school days.	Address: 50 Father Morissette Boulevard, Basement Room 22 Lowell, MA 01852 Phone: (978) 458-6642
School Based Health Center at Stoklosa Middle School	https://www.lchealth.org/health-wellness/medical-services/school-based-health-centers/	Open during school hours, and closed during vacation, holidays, and non-school days.	Address: 560 Broadway St. Lowell, MA 01854 Phone: (978) 970-3346
The Center for Hope and Healing, Inc.	https://chhinc.org/ https://chhinc.org/get-help/prevention-education/youth/	Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm 24-hour hotline: (800) 542- 5212	Address: 15 Hurd St, Lowell, MA 01852 Phone: (978) 452-7721 Hotline: (800) 542- 5212 Chat: https://chhinc.org/chat-with-us/
Planned Parenthood of Massachusetts Health Centers	https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/online-health-center/our-health-centers	Hours vary on location, please see website for more information	Multiple locations including Boston, Worcester, Marlborough, Springfield Telehealth Appointments are available!

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education

Curriculum	Description	Website
Massachusetts Comprehensive Curriculum Framework	MA Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework published in 1999. Efforts by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are being made to update the Health Curriculum Framework to ensure gender-inclusivity and trauma-informed practice. As of September 19, 2023, the new Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework was approved.	https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/health/1999/1099.pdf https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-healeys-new-comprehensive-health-and-physical-education-framework-receives-unanimous-approval
Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)	The Personal Responsibility Education program aims to increase reproductive health outcomes and life opportunities for youth through sexual health and adulthood preparation education. Youth in both DPH funded community-based programs and DESE funded school districts receive high quality, age-appropriate, and medically accurate comprehensive sexuality education.	https://www.mass.gov/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep
ETR	ETR offers resources and youth curricula that is evidence-based.	https://www.etr.org/store/curricula/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw27mhBhC9ARIsAIFsETF2krP9UzUhyJYaLR1lIQaboClkaQjJ4qg5Wm0-uWaagiAwg55XTeAaAvyHEALw_wcB
Get Real	A comprehensive sexual health curriculum	https://www.getrealeducation.org/ https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education#Youth
Making Proud Choices	A comprehensive sexual health curriculum. This curriculum is used by Teen BLOCK in Lowell.	https://www.lchealth.org/health-wellness/medical-services/ob-family-planning/ https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/mpc-teen-pregnancy-prevention-program.pdf https://www.etr.org/ebi/programs/making-proud-choices/

Professional Development

Training Opportunities	Description	Website
Planned Parenthood	Professional trainings for teachers, nurses, social workers, and other professionals who work with youth. In person and virtual options available.	https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education/professionals
Planned Parenthood	Education that provides parents with skills, information, and resources on sexual health education. Offered in Spanish, as well.	https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education/parents https://cdn.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/cd/e3/cde39a0f-0bbb-4d30-a6e1-613d3bf8d020/27_lets-talk-tv-parents-checklist_d12.pdf

Additional Resources

Resource Name	Description	Website
Commonwealth of Massachusetts - Office of Sexual Health and Youth Development	Sexual reproductive health program recommended health education materials	https://www.mass.gov/service-details/sexual-and-reproductive-health-program-srhp-recommended-health-education-materials
Adolescent Sexuality Education Program	2018 Massachusetts adolescent sexuality education program which funding 20 high-risk need communities across the state to provide youth with evidence-based sexual health curricula, youth development and leadership.	https://www.mass.gov/doc/adolescent-sexuality-education-ase-program/download
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US	The Massachusetts State Profile summarizes laws and regulations related to sexual reproductive health in the state. Information on other states is available.	https://siecus.org/state_profile/massachusetts-state-profile-23/

Healthy Youth Act	The Healthy Youth Act would ensure comprehensive curricula are taught in public schools that choose to offer sex education, helping young people learn the benefits of delaying sex, as well as how to prevent STIs and pregnancy when they become sexually active.	Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US. (2021). Massachusetts state profile. https://siecus.org/state_profile/massachusetts-state-profile/ https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-advocacy-fund-massachusetts-inc/issues/healthy-youth-act
2022 Greater Lowell Community Health Needs Assessment	This document is community health needs assessment conducted in Greater Lowell communities. One of the health priority areas included <i>Reproductive, Sexual & Pregnancy Health</i>	https://www.lowellgeneral.org/files/lghPublication/documentFile/2022-greater-lowell-community-health-needs-assessment-v6a.pdf

Practice Question Answers

Category	Information-seeking	Am I normal?	Permission-seeking/advice	Personal beliefs	Shock value
What is the correct age to have sex?			✓		
What does oral sex mean?	✓				
How old were you when you had sex for the first time?				✓	
What is the average size of a penis?		✓			
My girlfriend smells like dead stinky fish, what should I do?					✓
Can you get an STI from a toilet seat?	✓				
Do you think abortion is wrong?				✓	

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