



Sexuality and LGBTQ+ Topics in Schools: The Role of Parents

Few educational questions produce as much anxiety or disagreement as teaching children about sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Some parents fear that schools may introduce complicated ideas too early or present disputed beliefs as settled fact. Others worry that silence leaves children vulnerable to misinformation, abuse, bullying, and unhealthy choices.

A responsible discussion must avoid two misleading extremes: that every authority endorses one detailed curriculum, or that no professional agreement exists at all.

Where a broad professional consensus exists

Major public-health and educational organizations generally agree that children should receive education about their bodies, personal safety, relationships, puberty, and sexual health. They recommend that such instruction be:

- Appropriate to the child's age and developmental maturity
- Medically and scientifically accurate
- Introduced gradually rather than all at once
- Taught by properly trained educators
- Respectful of students and families
- Connected to consent, safety, responsibility, and healthy relationships
- Developed transparently with parental and community involvement

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) describes quality sexual-health education as medically accurate and developmentally appropriate. It also specifically recommends engaging parents, caregivers, families, and community partners.

Similarly, the [World Health Organization](#) and UNESCO support an incremental approach. At younger ages, this can mean learning the correct names for body parts, recognizing inappropriate touching, understanding personal boundaries, respecting different families, and identifying trusted adults. It does not mean giving young children the same instruction intended for adolescents.

Authorities also generally agree that avoiding the subject entirely does not prevent children from encountering it. Children receive messages about sex, relationships, and gender from friends, entertainment, advertising, social media, and online pornography. Good education can provide context, correct misinformation, and help children recognize coercion or abuse.

Evidence reviewed by international health authorities indicates that well-designed sexuality education does not cause young people to become sexually active earlier. It can improve knowledge, encourage safer decisions, and, in some settings, delay sexual activity.

LGBTQ+ and transgender topics

Professional educational and health organizations increasingly recommend that curricula acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people and families exist and that schools protect students from bullying or exclusion. The CDC's guidance for effective health curricula calls for materials that include people of different backgrounds and sexual orientations. The [National PTA](#) likewise supports curricula that represent LGBTQ+ people as part of the larger community.

There is an important distinction, however, between acknowledging people and prescribing beliefs.

A lesson stating that some children live with two mothers or two fathers is not necessarily a lesson about sexual behavior. A rule against harassing a transgender student is not the same as requiring every student to accept a particular philosophical theory of sex and gender. Schools should be able to insist upon civility without demanding uniformity of conscience.

The preferred contemporary term is generally “transgender,” rather than “transsexual.” The latter term is still used by some individuals but often refers more narrowly to people who have medically altered—or wish to alter—their sexual characteristics.

Where consensus ends

There is no complete professional, political, religious, or legal consensus concerning:

- The precise age at which particular subjects should be introduced
- How sexual orientation and gender identity should be defined

- Whether gender identity should be discussed independently of biological sex
- How much curriculum time these subjects should receive
- Whether parents should receive advance notice or exercise opt-in or opt-out rights
- How schools should respond when a child's statements at school conflict with the family's beliefs
- Whether teachers should present certain claims as scientific facts, social interpretations, or contested ideas

International organizations frequently use a human-rights and gender-equality framework that some families fully support and others do not. Scientific and medical information can be separated from moral conclusions only to a point; instruction about sexuality inevitably touches values such as commitment, restraint, autonomy, family, religion, and responsibility.

Therefore, claims that “all experts agree” on every feature of LGBTQ+ or gender-identity instruction are inaccurate. There is broad agreement about safety, factual accuracy, human dignity, and protection from bullying. There is considerably less agreement about terminology, moral framing, parental authority, and the treatment of disputed propositions about sex and gender.

The essential role of parents

Parents should not be treated as passive recipients of decisions made by schools. They are their children's first and most enduring educators, especially on questions involving morality, relationships, identity, and family life.

Constructive parental involvement should include:

- 1 **Reviewing the curriculum.** Parents should ask for lesson outlines, instructional materials, recommended reading, videos, assignments, and the qualifications of instructors.
- 2 **Looking beyond alarming labels.** A program called “comprehensive sexuality education” may contain sensible health and safety instruction, while an innocently titled lesson may contain material a parent considers inappropriate. The actual content matters more than the label.
- 3 **Discussing the material at home.** Parents should explain their family's convictions while also teaching children to treat classmates respectfully. A child can understand, “Our family believes this,” without being taught to ridicule people who believe or live differently.
- 4 **Inviting questions without punishment or shame.** Children who fear a parent's reaction may seek answers from less reliable sources. Calm conversation protects parental influence.

- 5 **Considering maturity, not merely age.** Children develop at different rates. Parents know their child's experiences, emotional readiness, medical needs, and vulnerabilities better than a standardized curriculum can.
- 6 **Using opt-out rights thoughtfully.** Withdrawal may be appropriate when material is explicit, developmentally unsuitable, one-sided, or contrary to deeply held religious convictions. However, opting out should be accompanied by suitable instruction at home. Silence is not an adequate substitute for education.
- 7 **Participating before conflicts arise.** Parents can serve on curriculum committees, attend school-board meetings, communicate with teachers, and advocate for advance notice and accessible materials.

In the United States, parental rights vary by state and school district. Federal law provides certain rights concerning inspection of instructional materials and sensitive surveys, but it does not create a universal right to reject every classroom lesson. The Department of Education's [Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment guidance](#) explains the federal protections that do apply.

In 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in [Mahmoud v. Taylor](#) strengthened the claims of parents seeking religious accommodation from certain LGBTQ+-inclusive elementary-school instruction. The decision does not automatically invalidate inclusive curricula or establish an unlimited national opt-out right, but schools and parents should understand its implications alongside applicable state law.

A reasonable educational standard

A sound policy should neither exclude parents nor erase students whose families or identities differ from the majority. It should provide:

- Advance disclosure of sensitive instructional content
- Meaningful opportunities for parental review and comment
- Clearly defined, developmentally appropriate learning objectives
- Accurate distinctions among biological, medical, psychological, and social claims
- Respect for religious and nonreligious viewpoints
- Protection against bullying and humiliation
- Reasonable accommodations where legally required
- Alternative instruction when students are excused
- No pressure on children to disclose private feelings, experiences, or identities publicly

The goal of education should not be to recruit children into an identity, encourage premature sexual behavior, or dictate a family's moral theology. Nor should it be to pretend that sexuality, LGBTQ+ people, or transgender people do not exist.

The better goal is to give children truthful, age-appropriate knowledge; help them protect themselves and respect others; and preserve the central role of parents in interpreting difficult questions through the values of their families.

Schools possess educational expertise. Parents possess intimate knowledge of their children and primary responsibility for their upbringing. Responsible sexuality education requires both.