

## The Virginity Myth in Sex Education

Content warning:

Age suggestion: 16+



Watch **season 1 episode 6** with special attention to Otis and Lily's scenes together. **\*SPOILERS\*** Both characters are concerned about 'losing their virginites' and feel pressure to have sexual intercourse. In the scene where they attempt to have sex, we see that Otis is uncomfortable with the sort of touching that Lily wants to do.

Later, in **season 1 episode 8**, Lily confesses that she is worried about being the 'weird virgin' and thus 'dying alone'.

### Prompt questions:

1. How would you define sex?
2. What would a heteronormative definition of sex be?
3. What do people mean when they say 'she lost her virginity'? Is anything lost in any sexual activity?
4. Why is Lily so intent on having sexual intercourse with a penis?
5. What is vaginismus?

[This](#) 4 minute video may help think about some of these questions.



### Activity 1:

Think about the scenes where Otis and Lily are in Otis' bedroom, getting themselves ready to have penis-in-vagina sex. Rewatching them may help with this activity. The scenes start at **22 minutes** and then again at **28 minutes** into the episode.

The scene has some really **sex-positive and empowering moments** in it, as well as some honest depictions of the **pressures** that come from the idea of 'virginity'. Create a table like the one below and write down what you notice. We've started it off for you:

<b>Sex- positive / empowering</b>
Otis being honest with 'I'm gonna need to take things slow'

<b>Pressure fuelled moments</b>
Pressure to find sexy music to set the mood

## Activity 2:

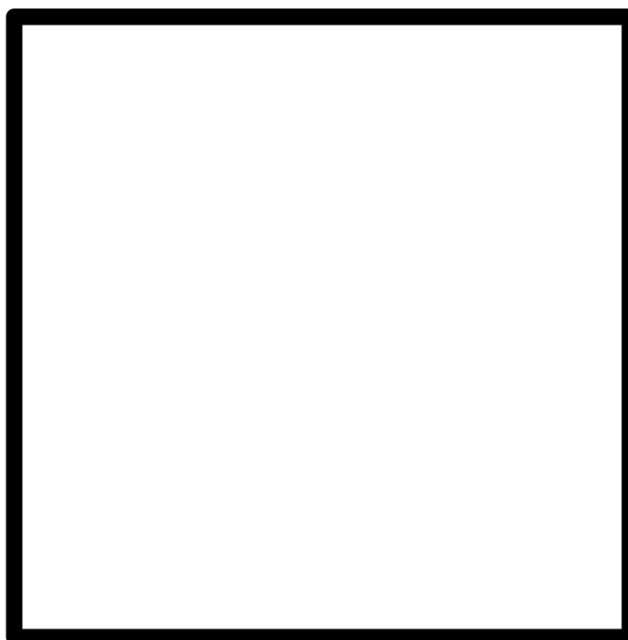
Watch this [Ted Talk](#).

The talk ends with this: 'If you really want to know if a woman is a virgin or not, ask her. But how she answers that question is her choice'. This shows us that the idea of **virginity is made up by society**. It is not fixed in any biological facts. How someone thinks about virginity (if they do at all) is up to them. **They define what is sex for them** and whether using a term like 'virgin' is useful in their lives.

The writer and activist Dr Hanne Blank asserts, '**virginity does not exist**'.

**Jot down some answers to the following questions:**

- Does the idea of virginity mean anything useful to you?
- What type of sexual touching could some people find pleasurable? Doodle your ideas into a poster like this one:





- Is anybody else's sexual experience and activity anybody else's business?
- Does the idea of virginity as we know it assume heteronormativity?
- What language would be more useful for individuals when talking about what sexual activity they have done and would like to do? E.G. 'Do you want to try touching my penis with your mouth?'

### **Activity 3:**

In recent years, thanks to researchers and activists, we as a society have started to correct our damaging views on virginity and sex – but we still have some way to go. Read this blog post for more [info](#).

Using what you have seen, read and thought about so far, think about what you and your communities could do to celebrate sex-positivity and sexual diversity. You could even chat about this with friends over Snapchat/FaceTime to try to make some activist plans for the future!

*E.g. Could you call out friends who make inappropriate remarks or 'jokes' about virginity and different types of sex?*

- What could your friends and family do?
- What could you do as a whole school?
- What could we do on a national level?



## Essay Questions:

How do the writers present Lily's desire to have penetrative sex with a penis throughout season 1?

Sex is not just 'penis in vagina'. Explore the idea that we need to move away from this narrow and exclusive definition in order to empower and safeguard people with regard to their sexuality, gender and touching preferences.

'Virginity is a damaging social construct'. Discuss.

Lily is confident and shame-free when she asks various people throughout season 1 to have sex with her. Explore the idea that society as a whole would be better off if we stopped slut shaming and taught people to assert what they do and do not want.

## Definitions

### Sex:

At Sexplain, we define sex as anything that makes you feel horny or aroused'. It can take place alone, or 'between people with different or the same types of genitalia, even using different body parts. Examples of sexual activities for some people include oral sex, anal sex, kissing, cuddling, massages, masturbation, and hand-play!' writes Katy Elliott for the Sexplain blog.

### Vaginismus:

The NHS defines vaginismus as 'the body's automatic reaction to the fear of some or all types of vaginal penetration. Whenever penetration is attempted, the vaginal muscles tighten up on their own and you have no control over it. Vaginismus does not necessarily affect your ability to get aroused' and enjoy other types of sexual touching. Read more [here](#).

## Support organisations:

- [Women's Aid](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [Switchboard LGBT](#)
- [Mind](#)