

Sexplain teachable moments worksheet task: “Communication about sex helps to build confidence and trust”. Discuss.

Essay below by Vicky Mitchell, Year 13 student.

Throughout the Sex Education episode, we are presented with two storylines centred around communicating about sex. The Sexplain definition of sex is anything that makes you feel horny. Ola and Ms. Sands both struggle to explain what they like during sex, while their partners both struggle to understand what they should do in order to please their partner. This is where communication is vital.

There are a few questions that should be asked before, during and after the sexual activity. Here are some examples: if they have been tested for STIs; what protection to use; what turns each other on as well as the turn offs; the relationship status which they are in and the intentions with each other (is it serious or casual?). This can create an environment that makes you feel confident and one where all intentions are made clear. Consent should not be considered a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, rather think of it as threaded through all these questions. In doing so you will hopefully make the sexual activity a more pleasurable experience for you and your partner. These questions don't have to be asked all in one go, you can bring them up in conversations in person or over message, there is no perfect format for them to be asked. Ola/ Otis and Ms. Sands/ Mr. Hendricks both originally fail to communicate in this way, which leads to an overall state of awkwardness and lack of confidence when it comes to them getting intimate.

This awkwardness could be avoided if they changed their perspective on sex. Communicating about sex may appear daunting at first which is highlighted in Ola's character; she feels anxious at the prospect of telling Otis what she gets sexual pleasure from. This is because she fears it will ‘freak him out’ or ‘hurt his feelings’. Although Otis may be disheartened at first, he ultimately wants to please Ola. It appears Otis takes on a problematic perception of sex originally, viewing it as a skill to master rather than something that requires working together and ‘tuning into [Ola's] orange’. These views are reflected in the TED Talk by Al Vernacchio, where he discusses the metaphors used for sex. The metaphor that is widely used in the US is baseball which presents sex as a competition, sexist, hetero-sexist and a game (along with many other problematic connotations). For an alternative metaphor, Al Vernacchio suggests pizza as a better one because sex requires asking questions and choosing your preferences. Conversely, the baseball one presents only one way for sex to ‘work’. Therefore, talking about sex can be difficult for some people as there is a pressure to be ‘good’ at it and some may find it an embarrassing topic, but to be ‘good’ you need to communicate with each other. It is important to view sex like you're ordering a pizza, rather than playing a game. The more you communicate the easier it will get.

Communicating about sex builds confidence and trust as it creates a suitable environment for it to take place. During the scene when Ola and Otis are hooking up, Ola is not enjoying herself. Even though Otis asks if she's enjoying it and if it's ok, Ola pretends that it is all going well. This is where a conversation before it took place would have been important as they could both communicate about what they enjoy. The episode ends with Ola suggesting Otis watches her do it to herself, which is promising as it's them interacting with one another about sex and in doing so Otis will feel more confident when he comes to doing it. Likewise with Ms. Sands and Mr. Hendrick, when Ms. Sands explains to him what she likes, it makes them feel much more confident and trusting in one another. Hence, letting each other know what you enjoy makes for a more pleasurable experience all round.

The conclusion of the episode is to ask each other questions about sex and don't be afraid to do so. This is because it can build trust between the partners and can avoid any uncomfortable situations. The communication needs to be throughout sex and this way your partner can get a clearer picture of what you like which will develop their confidence, and the confidence you have in them.

Dr Tanya Horeck, Anglia Ruskin University feedback on student essay: "Communication about sex helps to build confidence and trust":

This essay provides a wonderful discussion of the importance of communication during sex. It demonstrates an excellent understanding of the Ola and Ms Sands' storylines, and clearly delineates their struggles to explain to their sexual partners the kind of sex they like.

I love how the essay begins with the Sexplain definition of sex – as 'anything that makes you feel horny'. It then provides an engaging and well-informed discussion of consent and communication. Drawing from the TED Talk by Al Vernacchio, the essay demonstrates the problematic use of the baseball metaphor for sex and makes a convincing case for why the pizza metaphor, with its emphasis on preferences, is a much better alternative.

Finally, the essay concludes with a concise summing up of just how important it is to keep communicating throughout sex: 'this way your partner can get a clearer picture of what you like, which will develop their confidence, and the confidence you have in them.'

This is a smart, insightful and well-written essay. Great work! Thank you so much for sharing it with me.