

WHY YOUR KIDS NEED EXTRACURRICULAR SEX ED

Think of all the ways we as parents try to broaden our kids' horizons:

- We sign them up for sports so they stay healthy with exercise and learn the importance of discipline and teamwork.
- We send them to summer camps to commune with nature instead of screens.
- We insist they take music lessons to help their brains work in creative and mathematical ways.
- We might bring them to church to cultivate a sense of spirituality.
- We enroll them in art or dance or drama classes to spark their imaginations.
- We encourage them to join clubs or student government so they can learn to work within a community to get things done.
- We might even sign them up for tutoring or test prep courses to help them better grasp their schoolwork and master their educational demands.

But there's one key area of our kids' development that we, as parents, consistently ignore: **their sexual education.**

Sex is something that will eventually impact our children's personalities, drive many of their actions, often lead to great joy, and sometimes cause great pain. After all, intimate relationships at any stage of life involve emotional pitfalls and physical risks. Our child may never master an instrument, become a star athlete, or ace the SATs, but they will almost certainly eventually have sex. And probably sooner than we'd expect or prefer.

Yet we as parents rarely give our kids extra tools to help them better navigate this realm. We often just leave it to fate and hope they don't get hurt...or hurt someone else.

Unfortunately, we can't only rely on schools to provide our kids a truly comprehensive sex-and-relationship education – schools often don't have the time, the resources and, in some cases, the full support of the community to address all the complexities of sex – and there are many. The usual suspects include puberty, anatomy, STIs (sexually transmitted infections), reproduction and pregnancy – the subtleties of which may not get addressed in the average school health class. But what about communication, consent vs. coercion, boundary setting, gender stereotypes, gender identity, sexual orientation, personal agency, body image, pleasure, dealing with rejection, pervasive pornography, guilt, slut-shaming, social media, sexting, trust and justice, to name a few?

The #MeToo movement has made it painfully clear that people need help. Adulthood doesn't magically grant a person sexual communication skills and respect for one's self and others overnight. Sexual literacy is not innate; it is taught and learned. And that education has to start early, be age-appropriate, and continue throughout one's life. You don't take one cooking lesson in 7th-grade Home Economics and expect to become the next Julia Child without any further training! How can we expect our kids to be able to confidently say no to sexual peer pressure, to eventually enjoy the pleasures of their bodies safely and without shame, to effectively protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies & STIs, to think critically about porn, and to understand that sex with a partner is not something given or taken but consensually, respectfully enjoyed if we don't give them the education to do so?

There's so much more to decent sex ed than learning that the pituitary gland kickstarts puberty, a sperm fertilizes an egg, and condoms don't offer complete protection against all STIs. We parents need to make quality extracurricular sex and relationship education a priority, to think of it as essential to our kids' emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth just as much as team sports, piano lessons, sleep away camps, church retreats, or SAT prep courses are. The results of such efforts can transform the next generation and generations to come, reducing widespread miscommunication, entrenched prejudices, and casual abuse. This is the antidote to future #MeToo's.

Sex ed classes may be one more thing you have to drive your kids to, but their sexual wellbeing – both physical and emotional – is well worth it.

ABOUT THE BUTTERFLY ACADEMY: The Butterfly Academy is a sex education organization based in the Hudson Valley that's dedicated to empowering kids and their parents around the realities of sexuality with positivity, inclusivity, and age-appropriate honesty. T.B.A. was recently founded by Lo Sharkey, a veteran sex-&-relationship writer and educator who has, over the course of her 22-year career, co-authored 8 books, penned columns for "New York Magazine" and "The Guardian," written features for publications like "Glamour" and "Details," toured the country on behalf of NARAL Pro-Choice America, presented at colleges such as Colgate and Williams, been profiled in "Time Magazine," and appeared on "Oprah" – all as an expert on the topic. Lo graduated cum laude from Colgate University and is currently enrolled in the nationally accredited, graduate-level certification program at The Institute for Sexuality Education. Lo leads all Butterfly Academy workshops as both an educator and a parent. Full website coming soon!

TheButterflyAcademy.com • info@TheButterflyAcademy.com