



EXPLORING VALUES

Before speaking with young people about sexual health or sexuality, it is important to be familiar with our own beliefs and values.

'As youth workers, we understand that we are people too, with our own histories, beliefs, ideologies and experiences. We understand that these things can impact on our practice. Realising this, youth workers take into account the diversity of values and interests that young people present with. We recognise that our own values may be different to theirs, and we respond to these differences in non-judgemental ways...

Building self-awareness is something we must invest time and energy into. This comes through things like self-examination and critical reflection, regular supervision, and taking part in training and development opportunities that challenge and extend us.' **(Code of Ethics for Youth Workers in WA; 2003)**

There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to values, just differing thoughts and opinions. It is possible for our values to shift and change over time, depending on our life experiences, the people we meet and the things we learn.

It is also important to note that personal values may not align with organisational or professional values – and that's OK. However, in planning sexual health interventions for young people, we need to have considered and reconciled these differing values.

We need to ensure young people:

- Do not feel judged on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity
- Do not feel judged for the sexual behaviours they choose to engage in
- Can safely engage in discussions about their own values related to sex, sexuality and sexual health
- Are not excluded from the conversation because of their sexual experiences and behaviours.

Exploring values exercise

When working one-to-one with young people, take a minute to think about the following value statements and how they might influence conversations with young people on sexual health.

Value statements
Young people should wait until they are in a committed relationship before they have sex
All young people should use condoms – they are so easy and effective!
Teaching sexual health and sexuality is the responsibility of parents and school teachers
Young people who are same-sex attracted or bisexual would probably feel uncomfortable if I tried to discuss sexual health or sexuality with them
It's easy to assume young people are heterosexual until told otherwise
Young women generally want love and commitment, and young men generally just want sex
Sexual health conversations should avoid the slang that young people use to describe their bodies and behaviours