

Introduction

Raise your hand if you've been a victim of little to no sex education?

If your hand isn't raised, you're one of the lucky ones.

Many of us either received very poor sex ed, or no sex ed. It's difficult to find someone whose sex education was adequate, let alone comprehensive and inclusive, and it feels like a common experience to simply shrug our shoulders at how little we know about sex, our bodies, gender, identity, contraception and more. This shouldn't be the norm. We should all have access to sex education that teaches us how our bodies work, how best to keep our bodies healthy and safer, how to navigate sex and relationships and who we can talk or go to when things go in a direction we didn't expect them to go. Good sex education promotes inclusivity and diversity, it covers a variety of topics, it is presented in a way that is accessible for all individuals and is done so in a safe environment where there is no judgement. Though many of us can agree, this simply isn't the state of sex education universally, globally, at this time.

Sex education is a human right that all individuals deserve but, sadly, not all individuals receive or have a way to access it.

Why is inclusivity needed in sex ed?

Every individual, regardless of how they identify, deserves access to comprehensive, inclusive, and basically just good sex ed. As a queer and trans individual whose sex education was the classic ‘condom on banana,’ ‘don’t have sex or you’ll get pregnant’ spiel, I had to teach myself everything I now know about queer sex ed – at the age of 21 when I finally realized I was queer. As a young queer, I got myself into dangerous sexual situations, felt unable to talk to anyone about my experiences, felt confused by my sexual feelings and had to rely on word of mouth, and later Google, porn and social media (which aren’t always the safest of places to get your information from), to supplement my knowledge. I don’t want anyone to feel alone on their sex ed journey, which is why I decided to write a book for all folks, but with an emphasis on LGBTQIA+ individuals because in-class sex ed is still far from the inclusive haven many of us dream for it to be. I’ve tried to include as much as I could, and by the time this book is in your hands, there will be things I wish I could have added or things that have changed or been updated, as well as topics I couldn’t cover in as much depth as I wished I had.

Regardless of how you identify, you will meet many people throughout your life who identify in different ways to you and it’s crucial we know how to navigate those relationships and situations and how best to support other people. Whether it’s a family member, friend, colleague or partner, understanding different people’s experiences only enhances your ability to support them.

Inclusive sex ed prepares us for the world, for life, and makes us better allies. Sex education is lifesaving as it provides us with the tools on how to navigate difficult situations and sexual encounters in a safer way. Not only that but being educated on experiences outside of our own also makes us more comfortable and confident in who we are and the world around us. We learn how to respect and accept all kinds of individuals, from all unique places, and in turn learn how we want to be respected and accepted. Sex education makes us better members of the community and society.

Who am I?

Before we go further, I should introduce myself properly.

I'm Dee; my pronouns are they/them. I'm a nonbinary, transgender, queer, neurodivergent sex educator who has been educating folks on LGBTQIA+ sex education via @s3xtheorywithdee on Instagram and TikTok for several years now. That's a lot of labels to describe myself, but funnily that's not even the half of it! I'm also the founder of the solidarity campaign *Trans Kids Deserve to Grow Up*, which seeks to provide support to our trans youth in schools inside and outside of sex education, a LGBTQIA+ journalist and now, I guess, an author.

Language use

I wanted to dedicate some time to talk about the inclusive language I use throughout this book. Inclusive language is not exclusive, and I wanted to ensure that everybody could access this book and see themselves reflected in the language. I am a big believer in blending gendered language and terms with gender-inclusive

or neutral terms, because some folks do feel a great sense of connection to their gender, and that's great – even I, as a nonbinary person, feel tied to gender in some way. I'd never want to erase someone or their experience from a conversation, which is why I use phrases that combine both gendered and neutral language.

Throughout you will notice I use phrases like 'girls, women and AFAB individuals', 'boys, men and AMAB individuals', 'women and those with a vulva' and 'men and those with a penis', and although that represents most individuals, there is always room for conversation around the use of language. I use the terms AFAB (assigned female at birth) and AMAB (assigned male at birth) when talking about biological sex and assigned sex, but I also appreciate that not every individual will feel comfortable being referred to by these terms. You are completely valid in this feeling. I also use terms such as 'non-men' when discussing topics around sexual abuse or attraction. I use the term 'cisgender' and 'cis' and we will go into depth about why this term is a-ok to use. By the time this book is in your hands, some of these phrases may already be outdated, and that's ok. That's the beauty of language, we create new terms to encompass the complexities of being human every single day. So, if anything does change, I'll be sure to release a follow-up!

Throughout this book, you will see that I write non-binary as 'nonbinary'. This is just how I personally like it phrased. Some folks may prefer to write it with the hyphen, others like me choose not to! Does the hyphen matter? Well, not in this case, but, as we will learn, some terms require a space or a hyphen. What matters is that we listen to individuals and their own lived experiences, using language that they use when referring to them and their identity.

Why ‘Beyond Bananas and Condoms’?

Nearly every individual I have spoken to about the sex ed they received at school (if they did receive any, that is) said they received a lesson on contraception where a condom was placed on a banana. *I can't stand this*. Not only is it such an inaccurate way of showcasing how to use an external condom, shaming those whose penis size is not that of an average banana, but it also removes the importance of seeing sex and anatomy for what it is and using accurate language around these topics. There shouldn't be metaphors in sex ed. Sex education needs to be concise and accurate, open and honest.

As a qualified sex educator, campaigner, journalist and English Grad, language is very important to me. When it comes to sex education, our use of language is crucial, lifesaving in some situations. Language has become even more crucial to navigating various spaces, including sex, since I came out as trans and nonbinary. That is why throughout this book I say things exactly as they are, use terms that are official, whilst also exploring common slang and phrases used by different communities. I use language that represents and reflects all identities when I can. Historically, sex education has left out many individuals, particularly in its use of language – LGBTQIA+ individuals, individuals of colour, individuals from different backgrounds and cultures. In this book, I want to provide information that is accessible to all, and I try to do that through the language I use. I am aware that I am a white individual, from a specific background, someone who has not medically transitioned, so of course I cannot speak for all communities or experiences.

I invite you to giggle at words, feel the blush on your face,

the butterflies in your belly, but also to not avoid saying or using these words. I invite you to adopt the inclusive language I use throughout this book. The more comfortable we are using very specific language, the better protected we are, the more we can speak out when our boundaries are crossed, able to tell doctors exactly what is causing us pain and navigate our feelings about gender and sexuality and support all types of people. Language is powerful. Understanding how we use that language is also just as powerful. Practise in the mirror at home when you're alone. Get comfortable saying terms around the dinner table with your family (I have said vulva at the family dinner more times than I care to count).

This book will not assume what you already know. Anyone, at any stage of their sex education journey, will be able to take something from this book, whether it's affirming some things you are already familiar with and know lots about, or teaching you things that are completely new to you, or showing you a new angle to a topic you think you may know, perhaps through a queer lens you never considered before!

This book will go beyond what you have learnt in the classroom. It will ditch those bananas. We will go beyond the binary view of sex, gender and expression. We will go beyond yes and no within consent, exploring the complexities within Queer consent. We will go beyond heterosexual relationships between two people. We will go beyond nudes and emojis, talking about how to stay safer online, particularly as an LGBTQIA+ individual.

One step beyond!