

## Strategies for answering RSE questions

When answering questions from children and young people keep your answers:

Brief

Factual

Positive

### Have a framework

Having a framework for answering questions can help to distance oneself from the content of the question as it offers another step before launching into an answer. This framework involves categorising questions into 'types' to help you understand how to answer them.

### Types of Questions – and how to respond

- Information questions
  - Give factual information.
- “Am I normal” questions
  - Respond with factual information while reassuring and fostering self-esteem.
- Permission seeking questions
  - Give information and validate a diversity of experiences.
- Values based questions
  - Respond in an informational manner while acknowledging and validating a variety of values.
- Questions requesting personal information
  - Acknowledge the underlying concern and give information if appropriate, but don't answer personal questions which are inappropriate. If a working agreement is in place, refer to the privacy guideline.

## Examples questions how to answer them

When you as an educator get asked a question, give yourself a moment to reflect on what type of question it is. This will help you know how to answer it. You can give a simple answer or elaborate upon it with more information. The depth of elaboration will depend on the young person's age and stage of development. For example, the answer you give a student who is experiencing puberty and asking about physical changes (in which case the changes are likely healthy), would differ from the answer you give a student in their late teens, in which case you might advise they check with a doctor about physical changes.

**Q 1.** "How does a baby get out?" – Information seeking question

To answer: give factual information

**A 1.** "A baby is born via vaginal or abdominal birth. A baby grows the uterus, when it is time to come out the baby either travels through the vagina, (a special passage that leads from the uterus to outside of the body between the legs) or is removed by a doctor."

**Q 2.** "Is it ok to masturbate every day?" - Permission seeking question

To answer: give information and validate their experience

**A 2.** "Masturbating everyday can be healthy and safe (as in you can't get pregnant or get an STI) as long as it's not compulsive. By that we mean that as long as needing to masturbate isn't interfering with other things in your life, like spending time with friends or getting exercise. It's something that you do in private. Some people masturbate everyday, some once a month, and some people not at all, everybody's different."

**Note:** Masturbating regularly to porn can be unhealthy. Masturbating regularly to images can change the things people find arousing because it wires the stimulus/images and pleasure together in the brain. Young people's brains are particularly susceptible to this as they are 'under construction' until their early 20's. As free mainstream porn often has themes of sexual violence, when young people consume this type of porn regularly it can negatively impact their health and relationships. Refer to the Growing up in Australia Annual Statistical Report 2018, chapter 5.5 for the correlation between porn usage in teenagers and perpetrating unwanted sexual behaviour.

**Q 3.** "How old were you when you first had sex?" - Personal question

To answer: refer to rules about privacy and respect, give information if relevant

**A 3.** "Since that's a personal question, I'm not going to answer it. Remember our working agreement about not asking personal questions and respecting people's privacy. But when it comes to deciding to have sex what is important is that both people are comfortable and consenting. The legal age of consent is 16, meaning that for all people to legally be consenting to sexual activity they need to be 16 or over."

**NOTE:** Someone asking "how old were you when you first had sex" could be seeking advice on when/what age it might be appropriate for them to engage in sexual activity, be open to potential motivation for the question even if your first thought is that they are being disruptive.

While the legal age of consent is important information, we know that young people under the age of 16 are engaging in sexual activity.

**Q 4.** “Is abortion ok?” - Value based question

To answer: give information and acknowledge a range of values and attitudes

**A 4.** “Some people believe that it is the woman’s right to choose. Others believe that it depends on the circumstances. And some think it is never ok. In QLD people under the age of 18 are legally allowed to have a termination (with or without parental consent)” - QLD Health.

**Q 5.** “One of my balls is bigger than the other is this ok?” - Am I normal question

To answer: reassure and give information

**A 5.** Yes, one testicle often hangs lower than the other for comfort, but everybody’s body is unique and healthy bodies look all different ways”.

**Note:** this answer is aimed at someone during puberty, if it were an older student asking you might direct them to see a doctor as people in their late teens can get testicular cancer.

**Q 6.** “What’s an orgasm?” - Information seeking question

To answer: give information

**A 6.** Orgasms are good/pleasurable feelings in the genital area. Everybody can experience an orgasm regardless of gender.

## Other considerations when answering questions

Clarify the question – Before you answer it might be worth clarifying what the child or young person is asking.

Use a question box – At the end of a lesson distribute identical pieces of paper to every student, allow them to write a question, regardless of if the paper is written on or not every student then distributes the paper in a box at the end of the lesson. The educator then takes the questions away, reads them and addresses them the next week.

Model technical language – Use anatomical language, in the one question above the student has asked about ‘ball’ size, when the educator has answered they have used anatomically correct language and changed balls to testicle.

No such thing as a silly question – Reassure children and young people that there are no silly questions as this may be their only opportunity to ask such questions.

It’s ok not to know the answer – If you don’t know the answer it’s ok to say so, to offer to find out and get back to a young person or redirect them to an appropriate place where they could have their question answered.

Use protective interrupting – if a young person starts to ask a question of an overly personal nature interrupt them to protect them from disclosing personal information.

Reinforce that everybody is different – when talking about bodies or answering questions reinforce that everybody’s bodies are different.