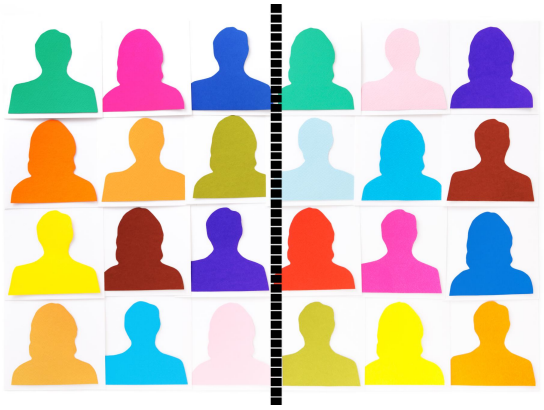
Many teachers wonder if it is best to split their classes by gender for relationships and sexuality lessons. There are pros and cons to be considered for both.



Reasons for co-ed classes

- Separating boys and girls can perpetuate the stigma of the topic.
- Gender-split classes may result in genders receiving inequitable or gender-biased education.
- Students who are gender diverse are better catered for (students who are gender diverse may feel uncomfortable, unsafe or uncatered for in split classes).
- Same-sex attracted young people are better catered for (students who are same-sex attracted may feel uncomfortable, unsafe or uncatered for in split classes).
- Students may act in a more mature manner (in gender-split classes students may feel the need to act in stereotypical gendered roles).
- Opportunities to learn about topics from different perspectives from different genders.
- Opportunities to develop empathy for the changes and challenges experienced by another gender.
- Opportunities to practise communicating with each other about sensitive topics (which is an important skill for developing respectful relationships with other genders - friendships, romantic relationships and intimate relationships).
- Timetabling of gender-split classes can be difficult.

Reasons for splitting classes by gender

- Young people may feel more comfortable asking questions (particularly on topics such as menstruation, erections, wet dreams, female genital modification, sex).
- It may be more culturally appropriate (e.g. In Aboriginal culture there are requirements for delivering 'men's business' and 'women's business'.)
- Lessons may be differentiated more easily to suit the needs and learning styles of all boy or all girl groups.

- Some parents may be more supportive of teaching boys and girls separately.
- Differing maturity levels of boys and girls can be accommodated for.

Teachers and schools are best placed to determine the needs of their students

If you choose to conduct co-ed classes:

- offer opportunities for gender split groups (e.g. a 'girls' chat' or 'boys' chat' at lunch time; or small group work with the school nurse)
- offer instruction taught by both male and female educators to provide positive role models and reduce stigma (if culturally appropriate)
- allow students to ask questions they may not be comfortable asking in front of the class by using a question box.

If you choose to conduct gender-split classes:

- do not just teach the 'girls' topics' to the girls and 'boys' topics' to the boys - both need to know all of the information
- ensure that both groups know that they are both receiving the same information
- offer instruction taught by both male and female educators to provide positive role models and reduce stigma (if culturally appropriate)
- think about ways to cater for gender diverse students (and be aware that gender diverse or intersex students may not be visible to you). It may be appropriate to ask students to choose which group they feel comfortable in, or this may cause more stress and discrimination for the student.
- share questions (and answers) from the question box with both groups so that everyone has the same information. (Collect questions from both groups to answer in the next session to help maintain anonymity and avoid questions being labelled as 'boys' questions' or 'girls' questions'.)

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