



ETR Virtual Vitality

Adapting Sexual Health

Education for a Virtual Environment



Virtual learning can be effective for sexual health programs!¹ Teaching sexual health education virtually, through live and/or self-paced delivery, provides an opportunity to reach students wherever they are located, get creative with new teaching strategies, and build meaningful connections.

Some teaching strategies translate easily to an online format and some activities need to be altered to better address program objectives. This tip sheet for educators provides useful engagement strategies and tools designed to facilitate the learning process across all stages, from developing to delivering lesson plans for a virtual environment.

General Tips

+ Reflect on the purpose of each activity and adapt as needed. Be creative and realize you may not be able to replicate the in-person activities exactly. Ask yourself:

- What is the focus/goal/objective of this activity?
- What knowledge, skill or attitude does this activity address?
- What is the best way to achieve the objectives in a virtual space? This may be different than in-person delivery AND that is okay if the format promotes the desired learning!

+ Assess and respond to your students' needs.

- Prior to implementing virtually, elicit input from students on what might make virtual learning engaging. Create a quick survey to see what concerns or suggestions they have. Include their recommendations and adjustments, as possible.
- Be sure to have a way for students to contact you privately, if needed. Additionally, consider setting up an anonymous space for sensitive questions using online tools accessible to you.
- Connect with parents/guardians, if possible, to establish expectations and supports for student engagement (e.g., quiet space, appropriate technology, dedicated time, etc.).
- Have a plan in place for sharing and providing community referrals, particularly for students experiencing issues such as food insecurity, stress and trauma.
- Follow through on promises to students, whether for information or resources. Be sure to find out the best way to stay in touch with students (e.g., text, email, phone, discussion boards, etc.).

+ Create a set of visually engaging slides that lead you through the lessons.

- You might include curriculum poster content on slides, or other meaningful graphics. Refrain from including too much text. Text should be limited to highlight key messages, activity instructions, skill steps, or other core content.

Live Delivery Tips

Content is delivered in real time with students via a learning platform.

+ Set the Stage

- Utilize group agreements, mood check-ins, and mindfulness moments to unify students and build a safe space. Group agreements can be shared in chat or through a shared online document (e.g., Google Doc). Important group agreements to add when engaging virtually include: close out other applications, engage in discussion by text and/or voice, only use phone for instructional activities, etc.

+ Keep it Flowing

- Draw on a student leader to act as chat moderator or to offer basic tech support. This will help you manage the slides, the chat, speaking, and video.
- Check the chats! This is often the space where a lot of engagement happens – between you and your students, as well as among your students.
- Utilize an engagement strategy (brainstorm, poll, icons, pair share, etc.) every 3 to 5 minutes to support students to stay present and focused.

+ Find Connection

- Utilize a webcam to build a sense of connection. When using a webcam, look directly into the camera to create eye contact with your students. If you have a small group, encourage students to turn on their cameras; this can help you read non-verbal cues to determine when a student is confused or inattentive. Depending on the learning platform you use, using webcams with large groups may be too distracting. Keep in mind that some students may feel uncomfortable being seen on camera, particularly in their home space – respect that boundary and do not force them to be on camera.
- Encourage students to engage, while allowing space for students to pass. Some students will not feel comfortable discussing sexual health content in their home-space. This means allowing engagement to take different forms—including chats, polls, posting on discussion boards, and homework responses. If you notice a lack of engagement from a student, consider reaching out individually to see how you might support them.
- Allow for response time.
 - Embrace silence. This is a time for students to think.
 - Give plenty of time for students to ponder and type their responses.

Self-Paced Tips

Content, activities, videos and homework is provided for students to complete at their own pace within a designated time period.

+ Set the Stage

- Set clear expectations and deadlines. When allowing students to engage through self-paced delivery, it's important for students to understand what is expected of them.
- Give precise instructions for completing activities.

+ Keep it Flowing

- Check in with students during designated check-point times you've shared in advance of the program.
- Make yourself available to students for questions or concerns that may arise. This might mean designating "office hours" when you will be available to answer questions and talk by phone or text. Remember to set clear boundaries related to your workday and accessibility (i.e., "I am available to talk/text any time between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.>").
- Know where to seek technical support on your learning platform should students need assistance with technical issues that you cannot resolve.

+ Find Connection

- Maintain a discussion board for students to continue to stay connected to one another. You may pose discussion questions there and ask students to enter a response by a deadline. While fostering student connection and conversation is important, give students the option to respond to prompts privately.
- Consider creating/posting recorded videos of yourself delivering content. If you choose to record videos, look directly into the camera to establish eye contact with your students. You may consider asking students to record and submit videos of themselves completing activities such as role-plays. Keep in mind that some students may feel uncomfortable being seen on camera, particularly in their home space – respect that boundary and have an alternate way to complete the activity. Note: Be sure to adhere to your school/agency privacy policy around student use of video/audio.
- Help students feel "seen and heard." Self-paced online learning may be new for some students and can feel isolating; asking for additional support can be hard. Schedule time to check in with each student individually once a month. This one-on-one phone, video call, or text exchange could be about class content or not – it's time and space for you and your student to stay connected.



We hope these tips are helpful! Let us know if you have questions

ETR will be continuing the Virtual Vitality series to provide support for best practices in designing and delivering virtual learning processes. In addition, we are offering consultation services to assist constituents in learning best practices for virtual design, delivery and follow-up.

If you have questions, suggestions, or just want us to have your contact information for future tips and resources on virtual learning, you can contact Debra Christopher at D4L@etr.org and share your request, your name, and your contact information. We look forward to connecting with you.

References

1. Widman, L., Nesi, J., Kamke, K., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Stewart, J. L. (2018). Technology-Based Interventions to Reduce Sexually Transmitted Infections and Unintended Pregnancy Among Youth. *The Journal of Adolescent Health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 62(6), 651–660. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.02.007>