



## Just Say KNOW

Amy Johnson  
Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice

A concerted effort is underway to dismantle public school programs for youth that discuss everything from menstruation to reproduction to identifying as gay, queer, trans, or nonbinary.

In 2023, over [100 regressive bills were introduced across 31 states](#), striving to move education away from [National Sex Ed Standards](#) and leaving young people not only vulnerable to a lack of information, but actively providing them misinformation. In addition, these bills serve to further stigmatize and isolate LGBTQ+ youth, as well as creating unsafe educational settings for many young people.

Under the guise of protecting children, many of these efforts are misleading. For instance, the [Kids Online Safety Act](#), which purports to increase online safety for young people, would actually result in censorship of sexual and reproductive health content, particularly in pockets of the country where sexuality education is being most restricted in public schools.

In addition, [book bans and censorship of instructional materials were enacted in 11 states](#) in 2023. These bills not only ban books from libraries—some also require parental notification or consent before youth can access certain books. On the surface, this may seem reasonable, but imagine a young person looking for a book to help understand what they are feeling and needing parental permission from openly anti-LGBTQ+ parents before accessing anything. Or imagine any young person not being able to find any books with characters that look, sound, and have experiences similar to them.

The results of these bills are an increase in shame and stigma about normal bodily functions like menstruation,

about sexual thoughts and behaviors, and about identities and orientations other than straight and cisgender. And we know shame and stigma can be fatal.

According to [Trevor Project](#), nearly half of LGBTQ+ youth have seriously considered suicide within the past year. Youth of color who identify as LGBTQ+ have a higher rate of suicide than their white peers. Yet, LGBTQ+ youth who have a high level of social support from their families, their schools, and their communities [have a much lower rate of attempting suicide](#).

The United Church of Christ has a long history of offering sexuality education based on the values of self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, and justice & inclusivity through its [Our Whole Lives](#) (OWL) ministry. In partnership with the [Unitarian Universalist Association](#), the UCC produces materials and provides [access to training](#) for local congregations and community groups interested in providing comprehensive, inclusive, age-appropriate sexuality education in their settings.

Our Whole Lives upholds that accurate and age-appropriate information about bodies and sexuality is helpful, not harmful, and that youth deserve to have questions answered by trained and trustworthy adults in their faith communities.

Our God-given bodies, knit together in our birthers' wombs, deserve care and attention. Whether you offer Our Whole Lives or not, stay informed. Check out these resources from the [Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States](#). Be aware of what your state and local school boards are voting into law and policy. As we like to say in OWL, just say KNOW.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

The Rev. Amy Johnson is the Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice for the United Church of Christ.

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