



BEYOND BANANAS:

A GUIDE TO IDENTIFY
GOOD PLEASURE FOCUSED
IMAGERY



INTRODUCTION

Images are an important part of sexuality education and any form of educational materials about sex and sexuality. It allows learners to see and identify with realistic images of bodies and sexualities. Education and information about sex and sexuality, both offline and online, can provide a safe space for learning and are often one of the main place(s) that have the potential to expose young people to real and diverse images about sexuality, free from stigma and judgement.

Images are powerful in building inclusive and diverse views, but also have the power to reinforce stigmas in society. Often we don't miss what we don't see but images do impact the way we inform and experience ourselves and our sexual self. At the same time, if you are a person who is not represented in many of the images you see, then the images lack validity and can lead to feeling ostracised. The work we do is never unbiased and without intention, we can give (subliminal) prejudiced messages, especially through deciding what we show and do not show in images we use around sexuality education.

In recent years, the use of inclusive and pleasure-positive language has gained more attention in sexuality education and there are many guides available to make sexuality education truly inclusive and comprehensive. Now it's time to do the same for the images we use in our education materials!

Sexuality educators may not have the time, energy and budget to find or develop comprehensive and pleasure-positive images for their work. This is why we have started evaluating and collecting sources and images that inspire and tell an inclusive, nuanced and pleasure-focused story. This library aims to inspire you and provide you with an accessible and easy-to-use platform through which to find quality sources. The library is open-access and ever-evolving. We invite you to evaluate the resources and add your sources to the library as well!

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is for anyone working in sexuality education and information, online and offline and who wants to use images that support the content of your education and information. It will help to improve your understanding of the breadth of imagery available for use and thus education and will contribute to a better understanding of sex and sexuality education. This guide will help you to identify and use sex-positive images of good quality in your sexuality education using 4 simple criteria, that the images are; realistic, sex-positive, inclusive, and evidence-based. We will explain the importance of these four criteria, how to look out for them and share go's and no go's. Additionally, you can learn all about how to use images designed by others by correctly quoting and crediting the artists.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS GUIDE?

You can use this guide in different ways. The best way is to follow the step by step approach when you are planning to develop images for your sexuality education or information. You can also use this guide to assess whether images you have developed can be changed or improved.

Of course, we are all working in different contexts. We understand that what is acceptable in one context, cannot be used in other contexts. You are the best person to decide what is suitable for your particular context and the focus of the discussion. But... let's try to be brave and push for progression! It is crucial not to give mis-information through your images, for example by leaving things out, e.g the clitoris or the labia. If you cannot use the real thing and you, for example, still want to use fruit to show genitals, you need to explain in words what the picture is missing.

We hope you enjoy reading this guide and that it provides useful guidance to supporting you in developing and sharing more comprehensive and pleasure-positive education and knowledge!



DEFINITIONS

SEXUALITY

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproductions. Sexuality is experienced in thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices and relationships. While sexuality can include all these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced and expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, social economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factor" (WHO, 2006)

SEXUAL PLEASURE

Sexual pleasure is the physical and/or psychological satisfaction and enjoyment derived from solitary or shared erotic experiences, including thoughts, dreams and autoeroticism.

Self-determination, consent, safety, privacy, confidence and the ability to communicate and negotiate sexual relations are key enabling factors for pleasure to contribute to sexual health and wellbeing. Sexual pleasure should be exercised within the context of sexual rights, particularly the rights to equality and non-discrimination, autonomy and bodily integrity, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and freedom of expression.

The experiences of human sexual pleasure are diverse and sexual rights ensure that pleasure is a positive experience for all concerned and not obtained by violating other people's human rights and wellbeing." (GAB, 2016/ WAS 2017)

PLEASURE FOCUSED

This means that pleasure is seen as the core of our sexual drive by focusing on pleasure you support enhancing knowledge how to cultivate pleasure, how to give and receive pleasure, how to give ourselves pleasure.

SEX POSITIVE

Being sex positive is an attitude that celebrates sexuality as an enhancing part of life that should bring happiness, energy and celebration. It strives to support to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences. At the same time, acknowledges and tackles the various risks associated with sexuality without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo of their clients' sexuality

STEP 1. IDENTIFY WHICH IMAGES WILL SUPPORT YOUR MESSAGE

“A picture is worth a thousand words” – adapted from a quote by Henrik Ibsen

Images can make or break your content. It is therefore important to choose images for your content on sexuality that fits your message! Many people are visually oriented and will understand better what you are explaining if your message is accompanied by pictures. That's why you need to choose the best image that will complement your content.

Unfortunately, we still see vague or misleading imagery that many education materials on sexuality include bananas and flowers. This of course has nothing to do with real sexuality or sexual behaviours. Critically think to yourself: what exact topic am I talking about? What image could support this topic? When you have this clear for yourself, you can use the checklist in step 2 to find the best image for your content.

Your image should also match the tone of your message. Are you trying to make your audience confident about their own bodies? Are you informing them about their right to choose for themselves when, how and whom to have sex with or to choose their own contraceptive method?

Often, traditionally used images are used that convey laughter or scare the audience about sexual behaviours while we should be empowering young people and providing them a safe space to explore their own thoughts and feelings. A common example is the fear images convey when we talk about STIs or unintended pregnancies (see picture on the right). If you want to keep your messaging sex-positive, you could also decide to show what an STI test actually looks like and that sex is as pleasurable when using a condom.

STEP 2. CHECK IF YOUR IMAGE FITS THE 4 FOLLOWING CRITERIA

The Sexual Pleasure Community of Practice of Share-Net Netherlands has developed four criteria to identify whether images about sexuality and sexual behaviours are of good quality. The criteria that will help you to check whether the images represent real and diverse situations.

Most images used in sexuality education or healthcare settings do not address all four criteria. We recognise that images are used in context and that they need to fit your personal goal and style as a facilitator and be right for your audience.

CRITERION A. IMAGES SHOULD BE REALISTIC

With this criterion, you check whether the images of bodies and sexual activities are realistic representations. Realistic images should not only focus on sexual activities involving intercourse, but should be a variety of sexual practices. Similarly, realistic images do justice to the variety of bodies and genitals that are all very different and unique: having spots, wrinkles, different sizes and shapes.

Using illustrations can also be a very good way to depict realistic sexual activity and they can often give more clarity. Drawings and illustrations are also often seen as less confronting and do not get the label of being 'pornographic'. Showing different drawing styles on the same topic can help with diversity as a topic can approach it from multiple perspectives.

CHECKLIST

- Does this source reflect authentic sexual practices?
- Does this source reflect realistic bodies?
- Does this image foster a healthy body image?
- Can the audience identify with this image?

NO GO'S

- ✗ Sexual activities and bodies that are portrayed as degrading or an unrealistic performance
- ✗ Images that are too simplistic, concealed, or almost childlike and 'sweet'
- ✗ Images that include smilies or are trying to be 'funny'
- ✗ Not being age appropriate

GO'S

- ✓ Images portraying sexual activities as a way to explore sex: fun but messy
- ✓ Images that portray all kinds of sexual activities, including masturbation, outercourse (manual and oral sex), anal sex, and sex toys
- ✓ Images that include realistic sceneries of sexual activities, including for example the depiction of lubricants, condoms, a towel, or a toilet roll

GOOD EXAMPLES OF IMAGES BEING REALISTIC



Image on the left depicts oral sex and was illustrated by Afroditi Papadopoulou for Share-Net Netherlands



Image on the left depicts post-sex cuddling and was illustrated by Alexandra Maignan for Share-Net Netherlands

CRITERION B. IMAGES SHOULD BE SEX-POSITIVE

With this criterion, you can check whether the imagery is sex-positive. This means that it shows sexuality as a positive part of our lives. Pictures that are used to induce fear or are only focusing on the risks of sexual activities don't meet this parameter. Although teaching about safe sex and reproduction is important, images should include pleasure and connection as well. Research has shown us that addressing sexual pleasure in a realistic way has a positive impact on sexual health, safer sex and general health outcomes¹. Interestingly, many images portraying sex, don't often portray people's heads as if sex only takes place between genitals. This objectifies genitals and sex. Therefore it is important to use images which display full bodies and showcase context and connection. This criteria is a good opportunity to check whether your sexuality education is destigmatizing and empowering people.

CHECKLIST

- Is this source pleasure focused?
- Does this image portray sexuality in a positive way?
- Do these images contain people (with heads and faces) connecting?
- Do these images not induce fear about sex?

NO GO'S

- Images that induce fear of having sexual activities: these can be recognised by angry or afraid faces, or an accusing finger
- Images that only focus on risks and risky behaviours
- Images that exclude people's heads

GO'S

- Images that focus on the connection between partners
- Images that show genuine enjoyment
- Images that spark curiosity and excitement about what sex can be like

GOOD EXAMPLES OF IMAGES SHOWING PARTNERED SEX



Illustrated by Lucy Macaroni for COSMOPOLITAN

CRITERION C. IMAGES SHOULD BE INCLUSIVE

This criterion does not only look at images individually, but also the full set of images used. Diversity and inclusiveness in images are important for the audience to identify and recognise themselves, and create a broader understanding of what sexuality and relationships can entail. Diversity is a broad term, and images should be diverse in bodies, people, sexual preferences, and sexual activities shown. Diversity includes gender, ability, sexuality, ethnicity and many more forms of diversity. It also refers to sex positions and how (and how many) people involved are portrayed, for example, who is portrayed as active and passive.

CHECKLIST

- Can the audience identify with these images?
- Does this source portray inclusive bodies, genitals, sexual preference, and practices

NO GO'S

- Only use images of sexual activity between cisgender and heterosexual couples
- Give the false impression that all penises and vaginas look the same (ie. that they are airbrushed to make them look more beautiful or perfect.
- Show penetrative intercourse as the "normal" form of sex

GO'S

- Show genital diversity: pubic hair, length, shape, colour, and size of labia and penises – including circumcision
- Normalise the use of condoms and other barriers methods
- Portraying all sex and gender expressions, including intersex and transgender individuals
- Show natural sexual circumstances, such as sexual activity during pregnancy, menstruation, at older age, with a disability etc.
- Diversity in setting, context and level of kinkiness

GOOD EXAMPLE SHOWING DIVERSE GENITALS



Image on the left: "Penis Gallery" - Illustration by Hilde Atalanta published in Het Parool (August 17th, 2017)



Images on the left: Vulva portraits from the Vulva Gallery - illustrated by Hilde Atalanta

CRITERION D. IMAGES SHOULD BE EVIDENCE-BASED

In this criterion, we evaluate whether or not the image provides or supports evidence-based information. Evidence-based information is in particular important for anatomical diagrams. This is especially important in regards to the anatomy of genitalia, including the clitoral complex.

It is essential that images are specific and do not hide any aspect of genitals or sexual behaviours, but help to get a good understanding of the body. Flowers or bananas instead of genitals could give the impression that sex is something to be hidden or ashamed of. When explaining anatomy, do not only focus on the reproductive importance but also the science behind lubrication and orgasms.

This parameter also tests whether or not your imagery is appropriate for the level of understanding of your audience, as some diagrams are very complex and create confusion rather than understanding.

CHECKLIST

- Do these sources provide evidence-based information?
- Do these images unnecessarily conceal information?
- Are these images too complex/too simple for my audience?

NO GO'S

- Using blurry or poor quality pictures
- Using images that are not relatable or contextualised to your audience (eg. showing only cisgender and heterosexual bodies and activities to LGBTI+ youth)
- Using pictures that portray the clitoris as only a small gland, rather than a complex network of erectile tissue and nerves, with parts located inside and outside your body.

GO'S

- Images that show the full genital organs and acknowledging if something is unknown yet
- Adapted images for your audience (see step 5. Evaluate)
- Try to avoid the use of flowers or bananas instead of genitals
- Using both circumcised and uncircumcised penises

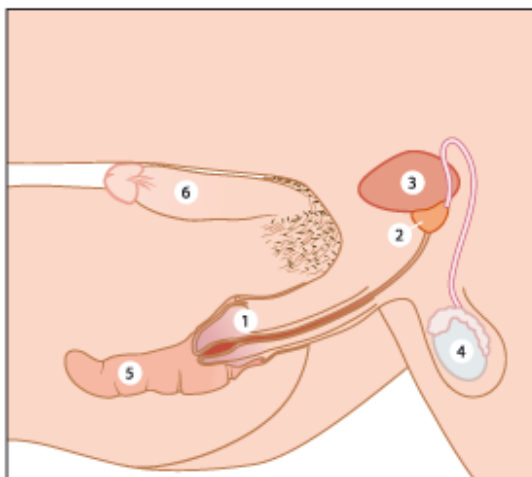
GOOD EXAMPLE SHOWING THE ANATOMY OF THE CLITORIS



Image: "The clitoris: the whole iceberg" from Anatomy of Pleasure



Image: this image shows the anatomy of anal sex between two people with penises from Pharos



STEP 3. HOW TO FIND AND CORRECTLY CITE SOURCES AND REPORT CONTENT

This step is directly linked with the criteria in step 2. If you are using content that you did not create yourself, it is very important to credit and cite the creator correctly. This does not only give credit to the original artist or author but also makes you look more credible. Artists and illustrators focusing on SRHR deserve to be recognised and promoted for their work. Good visual content is an important part of SRHR (online) activism and something that is worth paying for.

There are different sources of images: royalty free, public domain, and creative commons. Royalty free images are images that you buy a license for once and can then use according to the rules of the license. Public domain images can be freely used and creative commons provides restrictions of use that you have to adhere to. Whichever form of image you use, make sure to read the fine print carefully, link or tag the original author and when in doubt, contact the author

ADDITIONAL POINTS OF ATTENTION:

- Include a hyperlink or social media handle of the original artist or author and include the #repost
- To give full credit and only if applicable, explain in what context their images were created (for example, was the image taken or created for a special occasion, as part of a competition, or a social media campaign)
- If you take the picture from a social media page that is not public, you have to ask permission from the owner to use it.
- In case of photos: you need to have permission of the people in the photo to be sure you can use it. Often people only gave permission to have their picture used for one specific occasion. Stock images showing people can be used freely.

STEP 4. TEST, EVALUATE AND ADAPT

Whatever your goal or whoever your target audience is, make sure to test your materials with them. Testing your materials will help you to improve them and make them more accessible and appropriate to your target group.

Testing, evaluating and adapting should happen regularly and at different moments in your process. Before you use the materials for the first time, it is advised to test the materials with your target audience and ask for feedback.

TESTING AND ADAPTING²

Participants: 5+ people who are representing your target audience but are diverse in other personal characteristics. For example, your target audience might be in-school adolescents. In that case, make sure where possible that they are diverse in gender, sexual orientation, education level, socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, etc.

Materials: Make sure your materials are near finished, so you are testing an almost finalised version. The sexuality education materials should be in the formats in which you are planning to use them.

Testing: Although we are testing the images, it is important to look at their relation to the materials as a whole. You can use the following questions for your participants when testing the images and content:

- What do you see in this image? Can you explain what you recognize in this picture?
- How do you think the image and text link together?
- What do you think of the format of the picture. Would you prefer a photo or painted image?
- Do you have tips how we can make the image and text more fitting to each other?
- (Testing if the goal of the material was reached) Did the image, in combination to the text, make clear to you that... ?
- What are your recommendations to make the material better?

Adapting: Integrate the feedback from your test into the materials before finalising and publishing the images. You can ask the participants to review it again, if you think that is needed.

EVALUATING AND ADAPTING

Next to the testing, it is useful to regularly evaluate whether the materials are understandable, applicable and appropriate. For this, you can simply ask your target audience what they thought of the images used and how the images made them feel.

The understanding aspect looks at whether the content and images are understandable for people from different backgrounds and different education levels. The application aspect looks at whether people are able to make informed decisions after having used your materials. Evaluating these two aspects will help you to keep improving the contents and make them useful for your target audience.

Thirdly, it is important to regularly assess whether the images are (still) appropriate to your target audience. Changes in the social or cultural context might make images more or less acceptable to your target audience. By evaluating this regularly, you will make sure your materials will reach their goal without creating opposition.



CONCLUSION

We hope this guide has been helpful in supporting you to develop and share more comprehensive and pleasure-positive education and knowledge! The key takeaway message from this guide is that a picture really does say a thousand words, so be mindful of the kind of pictures you are using in your work. We understand that it may not be possible for you to show all the images that you would like and according to the criteria above, but we encourage educators to be bold in the imagery they use in their work. Together, we can work towards normalising realistic, inclusive and clear sex education imagery that showcases pleasure.

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