ACTIVATE

A partnership between
Child Trends & Chapin Hall

A Practical Tool for Building Data Collection and Data Use Capacity in Youth-Supporting Organizations

Module 2: Choosing Which Sexual and Reproductive Health Questions to Ask



Module 2: Choosing Which Sexual and Reproductive Health Questions to Ask

Once youth-supporting organizations know why they are collecting data on sexual and reproductive health, their next step is to decide which questions they will ask. Sexual and reproductive health encompasses a wide range of topics, including receipt of sex education or sexual health services, sexual activity, condom and contraceptive use, sexual and reproductive health knowledge, sexual and reproductive health care access, and sexual and intimate partner violence.

Youth-supporting organizations do not need to collect data on every topic; rather, they should ask questions that will provide them with the data they need to support the young people they serve. Additionally, organizations should ask clear, age- and developmentally appropriate questions that youth will feel comfortable answering. It is also important to give young people the option to skip any questions they do not wish to answer.

Whenever possible, youth-supporting organizations should select questions that have already been developed and tested (or *validated*) with youth to ensure that they are clear, concise, and produce accurate responses. Another benefit of choosing validated questions is that they may allow youth-supporting organizations to compare the data they collect to data collected as part of studies involving similar populations.

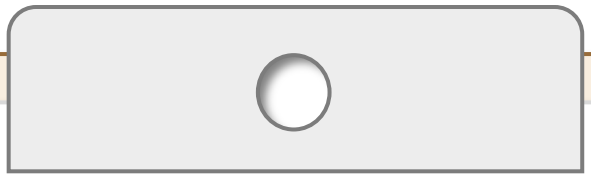
Building Foundational Knowledge

The following concepts are used in this section and may be helpful to understand. These are terms commonly used in research and evaluation.

- **Measure:** A question, item, or tool used to gather information about the quantity or characteristics of what is being studied.[1]
- **Validated:** A measure or tool that has been tested and shown to accurately assess what it was intended to measure.[2]
- **Youth-centered:** An approach that prioritizes the active participation, perspectives, needs, and strengths of youth.[3,4,5]
- **Response burden:** The amount of time, effort, or stress experiences when completing a questionnaire or participating in a study.[6]

The figure below includes a curated list of questions related to the sexual and reproductive health topics that were featured in Activate's sexual and reproductive health data summaries for youth experiencing homelessness, youth experiencing the child welfare system, youth experiencing the justice system, and youth disconnected from school and work.

Figure 2.1. Sexual and Reproductive Health-Related Questions[7-11]



Sex Education[7]

Which, if any, of these topics have you ever talked with a parent or guardian about?

- ❑ How to say no to sex
- ❑ Methods of birth control
- ❑ Where to get birth control
- ❑ Sexually transmitted diseases
- ❑ How to prevent HIV/AIDS
- ❑ How to use a condom
- ❑ Waiting until marriage to have sex
- ❑ None of the above

Have you ever had any formal instruction at school, church, a community center, or some other place about [INSERT ANY OF THE ABOVE TOPICS]?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Receipt of Sexual Health Services[8]

In the past year, have you received family planning counseling or services?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Where did you receive family planning counseling or services? (Check all that apply)

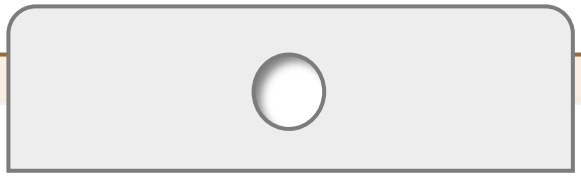
- ❑ Private doctor's office
- ❑ Community health clinic
- ❑ School
- ❑ Hospital
- ❑ Some other place

Sexual Activity[9]

Have you ever had sexual intercourse?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Figure 2.1. Sexual and Reproductive Health-Related Questions (cont.)



Sexual Activity (cont.)[9]

During the past 3 months, with how many people did you have sexual intercourse?

- ❑ I have never had sexual intercourse
- ❑ I have had sexual intercourse, but not during the past 3 months
- ❑ 1 person
- ❑ 2 people
- ❑ 3 people
- ❑ 4 people
- ❑ 5 people
- ❑ 6 or more people

Did you drink alcohol or use drugs before you had sexual intercourse the **last time**?

- ❑ I have never had sexual intercourse
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Condom and Contraception Use[9]

The **last time** you had sexual intercourse, did you or your partner use a condom?

- ❑ I have never had sexual intercourse
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

The **last time** you had sexual intercourse with an opposite-sex partner, what one method did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy?

- ❑ I have never had sexual intercourse with an opposite-sex partner
- ❑ No method was used to prevent pregnancy
- ❑ Birth control pills (Do not count emergency contraception such as Plan B or the "morning after" pill.)
- ❑ Condoms
- ❑ An IUD (such as Mirena or ParaGard) or implant (such as Implanon or Nexplanon)
- ❑ A shot (such as Depo-Provera), patch (such as Ortho Evra), or birth control ring (such as NuvaRing)
- ❑ Withdrawal or some other method
- ❑ Not sure

Figure 2.1. Sexual and Reproductive Health-Related Questions (cont.)

Sexual and Reproductive Health Care Access[9]

Have you ever been tested for HIV? (Do **not** count tests done if you donated blood.)

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ Not sure

During the past 12 months, have you ever been tested for a sexually transmitted infection (STI), such as chlamydia or gonorrhea?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ Not sure

Sexual & Intimate Partner Violence[9]

During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with force you to do sexual things that you did not want to do? Count such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.

- ❑ I did not date or go out with anyone during the past 12 months
- ❑ 0 times
- ❑ 1 time
- ❑ 2 or 3 times
- ❑ 4 or 5 times
- ❑ 6 or more times

During the past 12 months, how many times did someone you were dating or going out with physically hurt you on purpose? Count such things as being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon.

- ❑ I did not date or go out with anyone during the past 12 months
- ❑ 0 times
- ❑ 1 time
- ❑ 2 or 3 times
- ❑ 4 or 5 times
- ❑ 6 or more times

Pregnancy (Open-ended numeric responses) [10, 11]

[IF FEMALE] How many times have you been pregnant in your life? _____

[IF MALE] To the best of your knowledge, how many times have you made someone pregnant? _____

The questions in Figure 2.1 come from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS),[12] the National Survey of Family Growth,[13] and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health).[14] Table 2.1 provides information about these and other national datasets. Although all four datasets summarized in Table 2.1 include questions about sexual and reproductive health, each has its own focus.

Table 2.1. National Datasets that Include Sexual and Reproductive Health-Related Items

National Datasets	Focus Areas
National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)	Adolescent and adult health, including relationships, sexual behavior, health outcomes, and social and environmental contexts
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997	Transitions from adolescence to adulthood, including education, employment, fertility, family formation, and sexual behaviors
National Survey of Family Growth	Family life, marriage, fertility, contraception use, and sexual health across adolescents and adults
Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)[15]	Health behaviors among high school–aged youth, including sexual and reproductive health, HIV/STI prevention, and related risk and protective factors

Module Takeaways

- Youth-supporting organizations should draw on existing survey instruments for widely used questions about sexual and reproductive health.
- Youth-supporting organizations should be thoughtful about the questions they ask young people and should avoid asking questions that are not relevant to their data collection goals.

Reflection Questions

- Which sexual and reproductive health topics are most relevant to your organization's goals?
- What data does your organization need to improve service delivery or support decision making?
- How might young people experience or interpret the questions your organization chooses, and are those questions appropriate given the setting and the relationships staff have with young people?

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many contributors to this resource. Experts who informed the resource include Dr. Barbara Ball, The University of Texas at Austin, Karen Angelici, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Maia Pruim. Thank you also to the several youth-supporting professionals and young people who contributed but are not named here.

We also thank other Activate project team members who assisted in the development of this resource, including Mindy Scott, principal investigator, Amy Dworsky, co-principal investigator, and April Wilson, project director. We are grateful for the contributions of Child Trends staff who contributed to this resource, including Kristen Harper, Alana Ward, Matthew Rivas-Koehl, Olga Morales, Catherine Nichols, Brent Franklin, and Stephen Russ.

Suggested citation: Griffin, A.M., Beckwith, S., & Guerra, G. (2026). *A practical tool for building data collection and data use capacity in youth-supporting organizations.* Child Trends.

About the Authors

Amanda M. Griffin, PhD, is a researcher at Chapin Hall.

Sam Beckwith, PhD, is a research scientist at Child Trends.

Gabriella Guerra, BA, is a senior research analyst at Child Trends.

This project is supported by the Office of Population Affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $4,384,000 with 100 percent funded by OPA/OASH/HHS. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, OPA/OASH/HHS or the U.S. government. For more information, please visit https://opa.hhs.gov.

References

[1] NYU Langone Health Clinical and Translational Science Institute. (2025, December 9). *Validated survey measures: Best practice brief*. https://ctsi.med.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Validated-Survey-Measures-BPB-FINAL-12.9.25.pdf

[2] NYU Langone Health Clinical and Translational Science Institute. (2025, December 9). *Validated survey measures: Best practice brief*. https://ctsi.med.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Validated-Survey-Measures-BPB-FINAL-12.9.25.pdf

[3] Checkoway, B., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2003). Youth participation in community evaluation research. *American Journal of Evaluation, 24*, 21–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821400302400103

[4] Cook, A., Hunt, R., Silcox, J., Canas, E., & MacDougall, A. G. (2025). Defining youth-centred practice in mental health care. *BMC Psychiatry*, *25*, 578. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-025-06864-7

[5] Lantos, H., Allen, T., Abdi, F. M., Franco, F., Moore, K. A., Snell, J., ... & Miller, J. (2022). *Integrating positive youth development and racial equity, inclusion, and belonging approaches across the child welfare and justice systems.* Child Trends.

[6] Aiyegbusi, O. L., Roydhouse, J., Rivera, S. C., Kamudoni, P., Schache, P., Wilson, R., ... & Calvert, M. (2022). Key considerations to reduce or address respondent burden in patient-reported outcome (PRO) data collection. *Nature Communications*, *13*(1), 6026. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-33826-4

[7] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *2022–2023 National Survey of Family Growth: Female questionnaire*. National Center for Health Statistics. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nsfg/crqs/2022-2023-NSFG-CRQ-FemaleQuestionnaire.pdf

[8] Harris, K. M., Halpern, C. T., Whitsel, E., Hussey, J., Tabor, J., Entzel, P., & Udry, J. R. (1998). *The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health): Wave I in-home questionnaire codebook*. Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://adatawinter.site.wesleyan.edu/files/2017/08/AddHealth-Wave_1_Questionnaire-and-Codebook.pdf

[9] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). *2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey: National high school questionnaire.* National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/media/pdf/2025/2025-YRBS-national-HS-questionnaire508.pdf

[10] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG): 2022–2023 Female Survey in CAPI Reference Questionnaire (CRQ) Format.* National Center for Health Statistics. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nsfg/crqs/2022-2023-NSFG-CRQ-FemaleQuestionnaire.pdf

[11] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG): 2022–2023 Male Survey in CAPI Reference Questionnaire (CRQ) Format.* National Center for Health Statistics. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nsfg/crqs/2022-2023-NSFG-CRQ-MaleQuestionnaire.pdf

[12] Brener, N.D., Mpofu, J.J., Krause, K.H., et al. (2024) *Overview and methods for the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System — United States, 2023*. MMWR Suppl 2024;73(Suppl-4):1–12. http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7304a1

[13] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (n.d.). *National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG).* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/index.htm

[14] National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. (n.d.). *Add Health: The national longitudinal study of adolescent to adult health.* University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://addhealth.cpc.unc.edu/

[15] Brener, N.D., Mpofu, J.J., Krause, K.H., et al. (2024) *Overview and methods for the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System — United States, 2023*. MMWR Suppl 2024;73(Suppl-4):1–12. http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7304a1

[16] Human Research Protection Program, University of Michigan. (n.d.). *Informed Consent Guidelines & Templates.* University of Michigan. https://hrpp.umich.edu/irb-health-sciences-and-behavioral-sciences-hsbs/informed-consent-guidelines-templates/

[17] Andrews, K., Parekh, J., & Peckoo, S. (2019). *How to embed a racial and ethnic equity perspective in research: Practical guidance for the research process*. Child Trends. https://ncwwi-dms.org/index.php/resourcemenu/resource-library/inclusivity-racial-equity/advancing-racial-equity/1418-how-to-embed-a-racial-and-ethnic-equity-perspective-in-research-practical-guidance-for-the-research-process

[18] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2022). *Sharing survey results with stakeholders (Tip sheet).* https://web.archive.org/web/20250829214404/https://teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/SRAETTA-2022-TipSheet-Sharing-Survey-Results-508.pdf