

Purpose of Document

This document provides helpful information that teachers may refer to when speaking with families around the importance of their children's participation in sexual health education. It is important to communicate sexual health concepts that will be covered over the course of the year with all families early in the school year, so they may ask questions if they have any. When discussing sexual health education with newcomer families, it may help to have an interpreter present, so newcomer families can better understand the information. This is not meant to be a hand-out for families.

Background

Sexual health education is taught in all public schools throughout Nova Scotia. The curriculum taught in Nova Scotia follows national and international guidelines. Beginning in grade primary and extending through grade 9, sexual health education builds knowledge and skills related to human development, healthy and respectful relationships, positive self-image, and self-worth, informed decision-making, media literacy, and the prevention of negative sexual health outcomes.

One of the goals of sexual health education is to teach personal safety skills. When young people are misinformed or do not feel that they can talk with their families, they may turn to unreliable sources for their information such as friends and social media. This can lead them to make unhealthy and unsafe decisions.

Sexual health education is taught throughout the school year and is not a single event or concentrated with a few classes. Sexual health education concepts are connected to other topics in the health education curriculum, like safe and healthy relationships, substance misuse, safe use of technology, and personal safety. At the elementary level, health education concepts can be integrated with other subjects, such as English Language Arts, Social Studies and Visual Arts. In grades 7–9, the Healthy Living is a compulsory course for all students.

What is taught within the Health Education Curriculum?

Grades Primary - 3

The curriculum helps young learners make informed, safe, and healthy decisions. Some of the concepts introduced in these grade levels include mental health literacy, safe and healthy relationships, poison prevention, injury prevention, chronic and communicable disease prevention by learning about safe and healthy behaviours. Empathy, kindness, celebrating diverse families, how to ask for help from safe adults are other important concepts introduced.

Grades 4-6

In these grades, learners investigate concepts that address mental health literacy, safe, healthy, and respectful relationships, health and safety around substances, injury prevention, puberty, the reproduction system, and reproductive health, gender and sexuality, gender equality, and chronic disease prevention and learning about healthy behaviours such as healthy eating, physical activity, sleep, hygiene, safe and healthy use of technology.

Grades 7-9

The curriculum offers all students opportunities to develop life skills by increasing their ability to make safe and informed healthy decisions as they meet the challenges of everyday life. Some of the concepts include mental health, safe and healthy relationships, puberty, pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections (STBBI) prevention, substance misuse prevention, human rights, communicable and chronic disease prevention, injury prevention, how to stay safe in a workplace, and how to access community health resources

Sexual Health Education: Breaking Down the Myths

MYTH: Sexual health education encourages youth to be sexually active.

Research shows that sexual health education programs can help young people delay sexual activity. Sexual health education covers issues like values, culture, human rights, consent, healthy communication, violence and staying safe, healthy friendships and relationships, what changes in students' bodies are normal as they grow, pregnancy prevention, and how to get help. This sets them up for better health and better quality of life for the rest of their lives. It also enhances critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence, leadership skills and how to self-advocate.

MYTH: Sexual health education programs undermine parental/family authority.

Research shows that most families support the delivery of sexual health education in schools. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *“the role of governments through ministries of education, schools and teachers is to support and complement the role of parents by providing a safe and supportive learning environment and the tools and materials to deliver good quality sexuality education.”* Many families feel that sexual health education taught in schools is beneficial and of higher quality than families themselves can offer their children.

Youth also support the provision of school-based sexual health education and want adults and educators who are knowledgeable and comfortable to teach them about health and relationships. Young people tell us they appreciate teachers who are comfortable talking about sexual health education concepts/topics. Families and schools can be partners in that endeavour.

MYTH: Sexual health education is not appropriate for younger children.

Sexual health education does not expose younger children to materials and topics that are beyond their level of comprehension or developmental stage. Teaching young children about sexual health and well-being in age and developmentally appropriate ways – means teaching young children *over years* about things like consent, body safety, and healthy relationships. It teaches them the names of their body parts and how to keep their body safe, how their body works and how to take care of their health. Sexual health education teaches children and youth to make informed choices while respecting their values (including religious, spiritual, and familial values). It also provides them with information about how to communicate effectively and establish boundaries to keep them safe.

MYTH: Sexual health education disregards values and morals.

Sexual health education incorporates values and cultural sensitivity. Quality sexual health education supports a rights-based approach in which values such as respect, acceptance, cultural understanding, equality, empathy, and reciprocity are emphasized.

MYTH: Sexual health education that incorporates the views of people who identify with diverse gender identities, expression, abilities, or sexual orientation is only good for certain kids.

Sexual health education can be relevant for all students and make sure that schools uphold everyone's right to be informed about their bodies and what they need to stay healthy, and not to be discriminated against. Safe and inclusive learning environments for everyone benefit all children.

References

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