

Position Statement

Comprehensive relationships and sexuality education in schools

Definition

Comprehensive relationships and sexuality education (CRSE) has been defined as “a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values. It encompasses sexual development, sexual and reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image, and gender roles” ⁽¹⁾.

CRSE is different from traditional sex education, which is often perceived as having a limited focus on the biology of the reproductive system and contraception, and also concentrating on the negative outcomes of sexual behaviour ⁽²⁾. In contrast, CRSE focuses on empowering young people with age appropriate information on respectful relationships, attitudes and values, as well as focusing on education about the reproductive system, healthy sexual behaviours, and preventing unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) ⁽³⁾.

SH&FPA recommends

- That the key role of teachers in delivering CRSE should be clearly articulated by all Australian educational authorities and acknowledged as an education and health promotion initiative.
- That government fund comprehensive age-appropriate sexuality and relationships education programs for all schools, as well as community programs for out-of-school young Australians.
- Support for a whole school approach that integrates action across three key domains.
 - (i) Teaching and learning: what is taught and how it is taught.
 - (ii) School environment and ethos: policies and physical and social environments that contribute to the “feel” of a school.
 - (iii) School-community partnerships: partnerships that encourage family involvement and recognise their role and influence, and relevant agencies and community resources.
- That the whole-school approach model includes input from local health community service providers, as required, to supplement (not replace) the role of teachers in delivering the program.

- Schools and their education programs should be respectful of diversity and have material inclusive and representative of different cultures, religions, sexual orientation, gender identity and family values. Not only should relationships and sexual health programs be inclusive and relevant for same sex and/ or opposite sex attracted students, but the diversity of sexual attraction and gender identity needs to be visible and valued within learning programs and school commu
- Relationships and sexual health education should empower all students to make informed, safe and healthy decisions.
- Adequate and regular professional development opportunities should be made available to combat a lack of confidence of teachers to deliver sexuality education. This should include the compulsory inclusion of adequate sexuality and relationships education training at the tertiary level for all pre-service teachers across Australia.
- Ensuring sufficient detail be provided within curriculum documents so that teachers know what topics they need to address, and adequate teaching time being allocated to teach these topics effectively.
- Support for parent and carer programs to develop their capacity to support the development of personal safety skills in all children and young people.

Statement of intent

SH&FPA will:

- Advocate for the maintenance and expansion of funding to enable quality school-based CRSE programs to be delivered in Australia;
- Engage in debates about sexuality and relationships education and provide research-based information to decision and policy makers;
- Promote best practice approaches in the delivery of comprehensive sexuality and relationships education programs;
- Continue to support the evaluation of comprehensive sexuality and relationships education programs to ensure continuous improvement and effectiveness; and
- Collaborate with other groups and networks in order to fulfill these objectives.

References

ⁱ Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 'SIECUS - Sexuality Education Q & A', 2012, <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=521&grandparentID=477&parentID=514>.

ⁱⁱ A. Smith et al., 'Sexuality Education in Australian Secondary Schools 2010', *Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, La Trobe University* (2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ IPPF, *From Evidence to Action: Advocating for Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2009), <http://www.gfmer.ch/SRH-Course-2010/adolescent-sexual-reproductive-health/pdf/IPPF-SexEdAdvocacy-2009.pdf>.

