

Position Statement

School-based Relationships and Sexuality Education

SHQ believes that comprehensive sexuality education should be made available to all young people from an early age.

Comprehensive school-based relationships and sexuality education programs are those which build a foundation of knowledge and skills related to human development, respectful relationships, respect for diversity, gender roles and expectations, communication skills, decision-making, help seeking, abstinence, safer sex, contraception and disease prevention.¹

Sexuality education needs to be made available to young people before they start sexual activity. Comprehensive, developmentally appropriate school-based relationships and sexuality education begins in kindergarten and is sequential and ongoing. The provision of effective relationships and sexuality education contributes to a young person's positive social and emotional health, and helps to reduce risk-taking behaviour, STIs and unintended pregnancies.¹

Research indicates that effective relationships and sexuality education can help young people delay the onset of sexual activity, reduce the frequency of sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners, and increase condom and contraceptive use.^{1,2} Easily understandable, relevant and accurate information, along with a broader understanding of sexuality in terms of a young person's life choices, are key components of effective relationships and sexuality education.

Parents and carers are the primary providers of relationships and sexuality education and need increased support and information to accurately discuss safer sex practices with young people from an early age. Comprehensive, school-based relationships and sexuality education delivered by well trained and supported educators is an important setting for educating young people about relationships and sexual and reproductive health.³

Peer influence plays a key role in the success of relationships and sexuality education. SHQ recognises that young people are highly influenced by their friends and social networks and identifies that peer education is a successful model in influencing young people's sexual behaviours.⁴

Relationships and sexuality education offered in schools around Australia differs between states and territories and is not compulsory. In WA, individual schools and teachers make decisions about what is taught. SHQ acknowledges the role of the WA Department of Education in providing curriculum and policy in schools regarding relationships and sexuality education, and supports the use of the Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships developed by the WA Departments of Health and Education, and supported by the Association of Independent Schools WA.⁵

SHQ will seek to work with the WA Department of Education, schools, other services and health providers to enhance the sexual health information and delivery of services available to young people.

SHQ believes that relationships and sexuality education and promotion within schools should be well resourced, evidence based, evaluated and accompanied by training for educators. Issues affecting same-sex attracted youth must be included in effective relationships and sexuality education.

SHQ will take every opportunity to advocate for effective and inclusive school-based relationships and sexuality education.

References

1. Future of Sex Education Initiative, 'National Sexuality Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12, <http://www.futureofsexeducation.org/documents/josh-fose-standards-web.pdf>, 2012, (accessed 22 October 2012)
2. A. Mitchell and M. Schlichthorst, 'How close is Australia to best practice sexuality education?', <http://www.minnisjournals.com.au/educationtoday/article/How-close-is-Australia-to-best-practice-sexuality-education-417>, 2010, (accessed 22 October 2012)
3. A. Smith, M. Schlichthorst, A. Mitchell, J. Walsh, A. Lyons, P. Blackman and M. Pitts, Sexuality education in Australian secondary schools 2010, Melbourne, La Trobe, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, 2011.
4. A. Sorenson and G. Brown, Sexual health education and young people in WA: a youth consultation, Perth, Health Department of Western Australia, 2007.

Information current as of October 2012

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