

SEX EDUCATION IS LIFE EDUCATION

I have heard people argue that sex education is not necessary in schools; I have heard people argue that sex education is not necessary until an older age; I have also heard people argue that sex education is not necessary at all. I often find people making these arguments have misinformation about what is being taught and at what age, within the school system.

Sex education is more than sex; sex education teaches about relationships, respect, consent, communication, decision making, self-esteem, self-confidence, gender, sexual orientation, human anatomy and physiology, puberty, pregnancy, pregnancy options, birth control, sexually transmitted infections and safer sex. It teaches life skills that children and teens will use every day for the rest of their lives. Sexual health and sexual well-being are an important part of our overall health and well-being, people tend to forget this.

Ontario has a revised Health and Physical Education curriculum which includes sexual health education. Sex education is critically important and can prevent much confusion and fear. Every human being is a sexual being; what people learn at a young age about relationships, sexuality and sexual health is information that can be used over the course of a lifetime. As a parent it is critical that you supplement your child's sexual health education at home and create a comfortable and open environment where they can trust you with their questions and concerns. The school curriculum may teach the facts of sexual health, but it is the role of the parents to teach their children the values and beliefs they hold about sexuality and the expectations they have.

Comprehensive sexual health education has the ability to increase your child's overall health and self-esteem; it helps protect children from sexual abuse and sexual assault; prepares them for healthy adult relationships; increases body awareness, and helps them understand the emotions they are feeling as puberty begins. A lack of sexual health information could increase unhealthy or abusive relationships, unplanned pregnancies, contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and feelings of guilt, shame and confusion.

With increased access to the Internet and social media, children and adolescents have unlimited access to information. Unfortunately, the information regarding sex, sexuality and sexual health is often inaccurate, out-of-date and obscenely inappropriate. The media, including videogames, are awash with sex and sexual messages. These messages are often sexist, racist and homophobic and can be confusing, embarrassing and/or frightening for children.

It is impossible to shield children from all the sexual imagery and language in society. If you want your child to grow into a confident and sexually healthy adult, you must be willing to discuss sexuality openly and often, while teaching them how to think critically about what they see and hear.

Tips to help you talk to your children and adolescents about sex:

- 1. Try to have an open and honest communication style.**
- 2. Educate yourself.**
- 3. Accept that it may be awkward and embarrassing.**
- 4. Reflect on your own upbringing and sexual health education.**
- 5. Talk about feelings and emotions, as well as the facts.**
- 6. Stay informed with the music, television and social media your child listens to, watches and uses.**
- 7. Look for everyday opportunities to have a discussion – one discussion is never enough.**
- 8. Start now - it is never too late to start communicating with your child.**
- 9. Use books, read with your children and give them books to read on their own.**
- 10. Ask your child questions to find out what they know – you may be surprised.**
- 11. Normalize sexuality – it should be a healthy part of your life.**
- 12. Have a sense of humour.**