

Sexuality and Relationship Education Guide

Quotations:



This activity was used in the 2015 *Strengthening Sexuality Education Workshops*.

Facilitator guidance:

These will be cut up, with one quotation being given to each participant for a pair/small group discussion.

Possible prompts:

- ✓ How does this resonate with your (or your school's) practice and why is it important to you?
- ✓ How does this challenge your (or your school's) practice and why is this the case?

Sexuality education in New Zealand takes a positive view of sexual development as a natural part of growing up. It encompasses learning about physical development, including sexual and reproductive knowledge, gender identity, relationships, friendships, whānau and social issues.

One-off events such as expos and presentations that focus on delivering information are not effective. They don't take account of an individual student's learning needs, or particular school contexts.

Strong collaborative partnerships with parents, caregivers, family, whānau, iwi, and the wider community are central to learning. They are considered to be particularly beneficial to Māori and Pasifika students.

A school should provide a supportive context both within the HPE-explicit classroom, the whole school environment and the wider community where pro-social behaviours like fostering positive relationships are modelled. These contexts are important in shaping the values, attitudes and behaviours of students that contribute to their wellbeing.

Relationship education needs to take place in an effective, positive classroom environment where social interactions promote respect, concern for others, and shared responsibility for learning is the norm.

Cooperative interactive approaches to learning are essential in relationship education. Teachers should work collaboratively with their students to identify important learning for them so that lessons are relevant and meaningful in addressing their needs.

All young people need access to information and opportunities to think about, question, and discuss issues related to relationships, gender, sexual identities, sexual orientation, sexual behaviour, sexual and reproductive health, and societal messages. Sexuality education provides a framework in which this can happen.

Holistic, well-planned sexuality education programmes, taught by informed and up-to-date teachers make a significant difference to the learning and overall sexual health of young people.

Current issues that require attention in sexuality education programmes for adolescents include consent and coercion; the sexualisation of young people, particularly girls; the effects of pornography on young people's understanding of sexuality and relationships; and examining the bias that opposite sex relationships are normal (heteronormativity).

Programmes should engage, empower, and inform young people rather than focus on risk.

Students prefer programmes that connect with their lives, are relevant, interactive, and student-centred. Students should be involved in setting content and in contributing to pedagogical decisions.

The Education Review Office identified that schools with effective programmes spent between 12-15 hours per year on sexuality education (ERO, 2007b), with significantly more time allocated in senior secondary programmes.

Programmes in sexuality education need to be informed by holistic notions of health and be positive and supportive. Research shows that when sexuality programmes are linked with health services and access to resources, outcomes are likely to be better.

Sexuality education in New Zealand schools supports and acknowledges diversity among students. Schools should work to question gender stereotypes, and assumptions about sexuality.

In upholding the values of The New Zealand Curriculum, schools will also reflect the values and goals of the local communities that they serve. Approaches to sexuality education may differ according to school character, community, and location.

Sexuality education is enhanced when supportive school policies and practices are developed, links with relevant community agencies are made, and students are helped to identify and access support.

International research suggests that physical education classes are often not inclusive of diverse students and can reinforce rather than question gender and sexuality stereotypes. Physical education classes, however, present opportunities for exploring and challenging gender stereotypes, and work towards inclusion.

Programmes that include a strong focus on values, critical thinking, power sharing, and student voice can enable learning about gender and sexuality issues and be empowering for all students.

Sexuality education should not, however, be framed by notions of risk and safety (this can lead to programmes that are driven by fear and blame). Teachers may consider separating lessons that focus on sexual violence, safety, and abuse and addressing these issues in lessons on mental health, keeping safe, or during alcohol and other drugs education units.

Culturally relevant, whānau-focused, and evidence-based sexuality education can be an effective strategy for supporting Māori students to achieve overall success.

Using Pacific language terms in sexuality lessons is important. For example, Fa'afafi ne (Samoan), Fakaleiti (Tongan), Akava'ine (Cook Islands) are all terms used to describe unique and traditional gender identities for males who identify themselves as having the spirit of a women, or as behaving in the fashion of a female. It is important to recognise that these groups are unique to the Pacific and do not fit neatly into western categories of male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transsexual (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2013).

Research and evaluation shows that effective and successful sexuality education occurs when enough time is dedicated to programmes and teachers are confident and knowledgeable enough to deliver programmes that are meaningful, student-centred, and up-to-date.

School uniforms can reinforce gender norms, so schools may consider offering gender-neutral clothing choices when uniforms come up for review. Schools may also consider reviewing options around toilet facilities to ensure students have choices of safe spaces.

Toilets can be unsafe environments for students who do not conform to gender norms.

Events to which partners are invited, like school balls, can be an opportunity to strengthen the wider school's contribution to valuing diversity if same-sex as well as other-sex partners can attend. Additionally, schools may wish to adopt a harm-minimisation approach prior to such events by providing students with information about how they can keep themselves safe before, during, and after the event.

On-site services reduce issues of access and embarrassment for students and allow them to seek immediate support and advice in a safe and supportive environment. Where access to on-site services is not possible, students should be supported to access professionals outside the school. Health professionals can also be consulted about programmes and are a useful resource for teachers, both in planning programmes and as guest presenters alongside the class teacher.

Where outside providers are engaged, services should be incorporated within existing programmes and linked with achievement objectives from the health and physical education learning area of The New Zealand Curriculum (2007).

Health education is the only part of the school's curriculum for which the law specifically requires the board of trustees to consult with the school's community.

Teachers are legally entitled to respond to any questions that students ask in formal sexuality education programmes or at any other time. Some questions may be difficult to answer and teachers may wish to delay their answers and seek advice and support from other health education teachers (or via professional development contacts).

Consultation involves listening to others, considering their responses and then deciding what should be done. Within any community there is likely to be a diversity of responses. Some initial reactions to sexuality education are based on anxiety about possible content (and developmental appropriateness) and misinformation about what is taught. Open and honest conversations between community members and schools will ensure that misunderstandings are addressed and do not inform decisions.

It is recommended that all students engage in sexuality education in years 11-13. This should not be limited to students completing courses and standards in health education under the NCEA.