



Guidance document for schools on working with parents, carers and families about sexuality and sexual health education

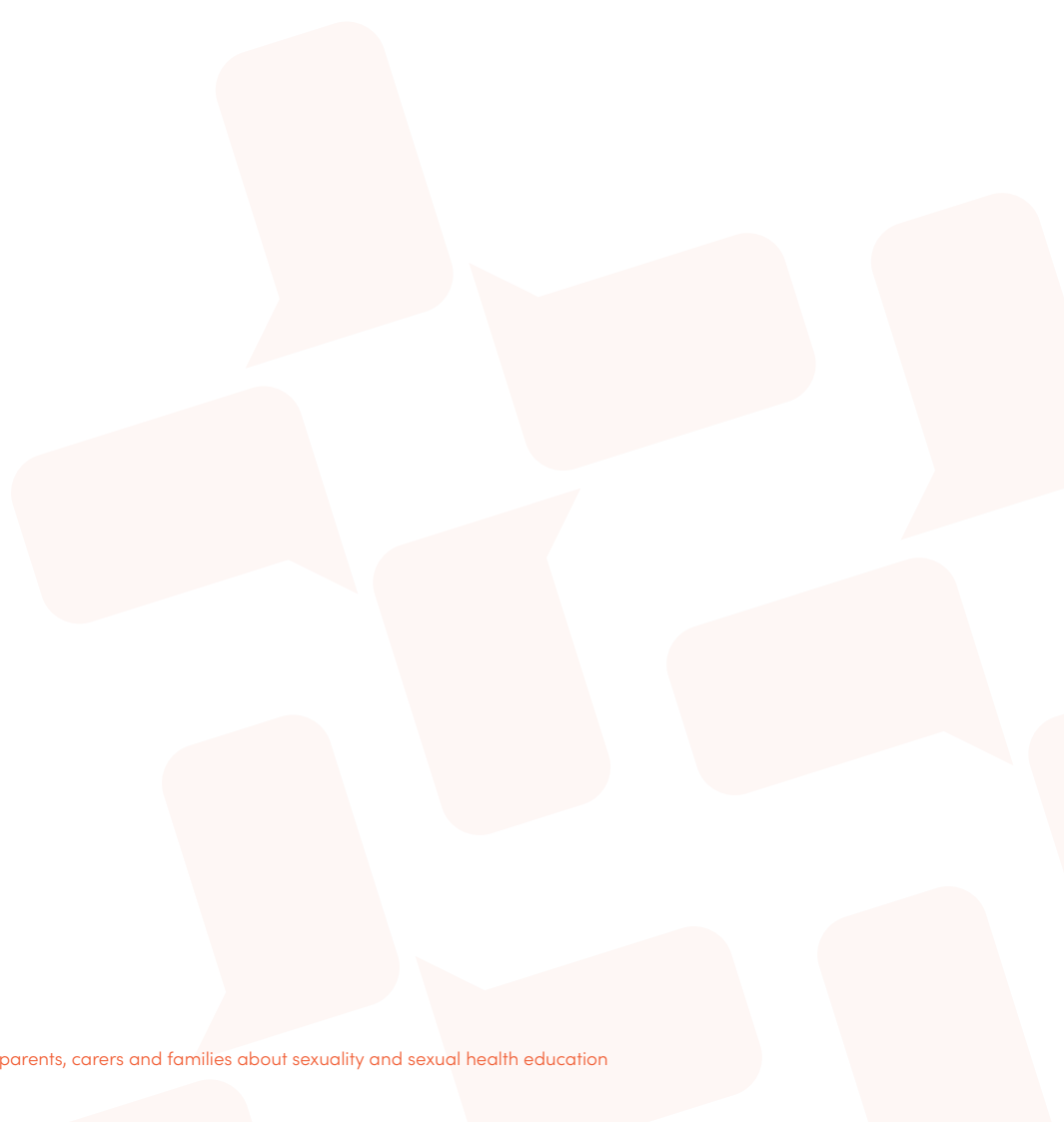


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Principles of sexuality and sexual health education (SSHE)

- 1 Human rights
- 2 Accessible to all young people and inclusive of identities and experiences of all young people
- 3 Appropriate to the age and level of development of learners
- 4 Holistic and broadly-based in scope and depth
- 5 Scientifically accurate
- 6 Incorporates emerging issues related to sexual health and wellbeing
- 7 Supports development of health literacy
- 8 Uses a learner-centred approach
- 9 Emphasises a deep understanding of consent and respectful relationships
- 10 Promotes gender equality and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence
- 11 Culturally relevant
- 12 Nurtures positive values and attitudes towards sexuality and sexual health
- 13 Supported by a whole-of-school, or health-promoting school, approach
- 14 Provided by educators who have the knowledge, skills, confidence and commitment to deliver comprehensive sexuality and sexual health education
- 15 Uses engaging, evidence-based teaching methods
- 16 Trauma-informed



Guidance document for schools on working with parents, carers and families about sexuality and sexual health education

Purpose

The aim of this document is to support secondary schools in NSW in their communication with parents, carers and families about sexuality and sexual health education (**SSHE**) in school. These materials are for use by any school staff who are working with parents, carers and families. Evidence-based sexuality and sexual health education is intrinsically linked with respectful relationships and consent.

This document supports a whole-of-school approach, which recognises that **SSHE** messages are more effective when they are well-planned and consistent across schools and the community.

Documents in this series:

- Sexuality and sexual health education best practice statement (Family Planning Australia, 2023)
- Guidance document for school leaders on sexuality and sexual health education (Family Planning Australia, 2023)
- Guidance document for school wellbeing staff on sexuality and sexual health education (Family Planning Australia, 2023)
- Guidance document for schools on working with parents, carers and families about sexuality and sexual health education (Family Planning Australia, 2023)

Introduction

Parents and carers are the first and continuing educators of their young people. They have a shared responsibility to determine what is considered appropriate, which includes sharing information as well as sharing personal and cultural values with their young people.

Schools also have a vital role to play in supporting the **SSHE** of young people. Schools working in partnership with families and the community is referred to as the whole-of-community approach. The whole-of-community approach is more likely to lead to **SSHE** programs which are relevant, culturally appropriate, engaging and more effective.

Families also benefit from a partnership approach to **SSHE** with schools. Schools can share important information with families to support them in talking to their young people.

This document includes an outline for a school information session for parents and carers, and a list of community organisations and resources for parents and carers to support the sexual health and wellbeing of their young people.

Receiving effective sexuality and sexual health education is a human right (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2008). **SSHE** programs support better health outcomes across an individual's entire lifespan. These programs also enable young people to develop health literacy and skills to provide agency over their own bodies. Crucially, **SSHE** programs support health literacy and sexual consent across the lifespan of individuals.

Comprehensive **SSHE** is the gold standard for students' development of autonomy and agency in their sexual and reproductive health (UNESCO, 2016). Taught appropriately, **SSHE** is a life skill that is part of each stage of education. Contrary to popular belief, comprehensive sexuality and sexual health education does not increase sexual behaviour amongst young people, nor cause them to engage in

sexual behaviours earlier. However, when people do begin to engage in intimate or sexual behaviours, having received this education makes it more likely that it is safely and respectfully.

The principles in practice for working with parents and carers

To read the full version of the Principles of **SSHE** refer to the *Sexuality and sexual health education best practice statement* (Family Planning Australia, 2023).

In order to foster an effective whole-of-school approach, schools have an essential role in promoting **SSHE** in their interactions with parents and carers. Here are some tips on how schools can promote and nurture **SSHE** programs with the parents and carers in their school community.

1. Promotes human rights

- Promote to parents and carers that **SSHE** is a human right which is important for the lifelong health and safety of all young people.

2. Accessible to all young people and inclusive of identities and experiences of all young people

- Be inclusive of diverse communities in terms of culture, language, literacy and physical accessibility. Allow for different perspectives and attitudes within the context of Australian law and cultural values.
- Always assume that there are LGBTQ students and families in a school who may not publicly identify themselves and provide information to include them. Use language that acknowledges diverse families such as parents and carers rather than a mother and a father.

3. Appropriate to the age and level of development of learners

- Communicate to parents and carers that **SSHE** content begins in the early years of schooling, and that this is essential in helping to maintain a young person's safety, and in building the concepts that will be expanded upon in later years.

4. Holistic and broadly-based in scope and depth

- Communicate to parents and carers that **SSHE** covers not just physical health but also the social, emotional and cultural aspects of sexuality. This includes the positive aspects of sexuality such as intimacy, pleasure and sensuality. Encourage parents and carers to discuss positive relationships at home.

5. Scientifically accurate

- Communicate to parents and carers that resources and information provided to students will be current, scientifically accurate, evidence based and aligned to the curriculum.

6. Incorporates emerging issues related to sexual health and wellbeing

- Talk with parents and carers around emerging issues that are impacting on young people's safety and wellbeing such as body image, pornography and consent.
- Have school procedures in place to support student wellbeing in terms of emerging issues such as those above.

7. Supports development of health literacy

- Encourage parents and carers to empower young people to access health services in ways appropriate to their age and development.
- Share health and community information with young people, parents and carers.
- Discuss young people's rights such confidentiality, privacy and access to sexual health information.

8. Uses a learner-centred approach

- Starting in the early years, ask students what they want to learn and what is important to them in their education in general, and specifically about topics including bodies, puberty, relationships and sex in age-appropriate ways. Let parents and carers know the school does this.

9. Emphasises a deep understanding of consent and respectful relationships

- Talk about consent and healthy friendships beginning in the early years in ways that are not specifically about sexuality. Include information on personal safety.
- As students grow older, school lessons move on to talking about healthy relationships and consent in sexual situations, which parents and carers may also wish to discuss at home.

10. Promotes gender equality and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence

- Explain that school programs discuss gender equality, consent and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in information provided to parents and carers.
- Encourage a safe school environment where students can challenge pervasive gender norms within society. Encourage individual rights regardless of gender.

11. Culturally relevant

- Select resources to reflect culturally diverse communities and languages. Share the multilingual versions of the *Talk soon. Talk often – Tip sheet* (Multicultural Health Communication Service) as appropriate.
- Share links with students and families to translated or accessible resources on relevant health topics such as from Family Planning Australia, Health Translations, International Student Health Hub, Multicultural Health Communication Services and NSW Refugee Health Service.
- Be culturally respectful in your communication with parents and carers. Emphasise strengths and values held by families and cultural groups in the school community. Talk about ways in which cultural norms can affect people's choices and relationships.

12. Nurtures positive values and attitudes towards sexuality and sexual health

- Share with parents and carers a balanced approach to sexuality and sexual health education which includes the positive aspects of sexuality and relationships as well as the prevention of outcomes that can have a negative impact.

13. Supported by a whole-of-school, or health promoting school, approach

- Share the accompanying list called **Resources to share with parents, carers and young people**.
- Treat parents and carers as partners in the provision of **SSHE**. Emphasise how **SSHE** contributes to the shared goals of good health, safety and wellbeing for all students.
- Hold an information session for parents and carers about how they can reinforce key messages and positive behaviours in the home and which resources are available.
- If possible, follow up with families who don't want their children to participate in **SSHE** about reasons for their decision and if further information is needed, or if students can participate in some topics.

Short list of resources:

- BodyTalk (Family Planning Australia)
- eSafety Commissioner (Australian Government)
- Know Your Health (Family Planning Australia)
- Planet Puberty (Family Planning Australia)
- Play Safe (NSW Government) designed for age 16+
- raisingchildren.net.au (The Australian Parenting Website: Raising Children Network)
- Talk soon. Talk often (Walsh, 2015)
- Talk soon. Talk often - Tip sheet (Multicultural Health Communication Service, 2017).

14. Provided by educators who have the knowledge, skills, confidence and commitment to deliver comprehensive sexuality and sexual health education

- Ensure staff have up-to-date knowledge about **SSHE**.
- Communicate to parents and carers the ongoing training that staff undertake in **SSHE**.

15. Uses engaging, evidence-based teaching methods

- Model positive communication styles when communicating with parents and carers.
- Be approachable, invite and answer questions.

16. Trauma-informed practice

- Inform parents and carers about the topics that will be covered with students. Keep in mind that parents and carers are also entitled to a trauma-informed approach.
- Use appropriate ways of working with parents and carers, consider physical and emotional safety such as confidentiality, group agreements, clear and timely communication and respectful, calm discussions. Develop plans to deal with disclosures.
- Empower parents and carers: take a strengths-based approach and provide resources to support positive discussions.
- Refer students, parents, carers and families to appropriate support services if required. Examples are headspace, BeyondBlue, Transcultural Mental Health Centre and Kids Helpline.

Outline for information session, tips and talking points for families

Sample outline for a parent and carer session at school

- Ice-breaker, group agreement, purpose of session
- Topics may include:
 - What is sexual health?
 - Changes during puberty
 - Expectations and developing independence of children during adolescence
 - Healthy friendships and relationships, consent
 - The role of parents/carers in their family's sexual health
 - Tips for good communication
 - Safer sex/contraception and STIs
 - Content of education to be provided by school
 - Sharing resources and services

Tips for families to build ongoing connections with their school

- Respond positively and supportively to learning opportunities at school
- Discuss topics covered at school at home too
- Attend a school's parent/carers information meeting
- Provide the family perspective
- Be aware of your child's level of comfort in discussing sexuality-related issues

Talking points for families at home

- Start early and talk often
- Use teachable moments, such as when things come up in conversation or the media
- Be guided by your child's questions and reactions. Ask them to clarify if needed
- Be honest about your personal views but be willing to listen

You're not the only one who is nervous!

* Part of this information is taken from Victoria Department of Education (2023).

Alignment

This resource aligns with:

- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2022) [Health and physical education: Support resource – focus areas](#)
- Department of Education (2022) [Australian student wellbeing framework](#)
- The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACPHER). (2021). [National principles of health education](#)
- NSW Department of Education. (2018). [Life ready years 11 and/or 12](#)
- NSW Department of Education. (2008). [Quality teaching framework](#)
- NSW Department of Education. (2023). [Sexuality and sexual health education](#)
- NSW Department of Education. (2021). [Statement of intent: Our shared commitment](#)
- NSW Department of Education. (2020). [Trauma-informed practice in schools: An explainer](#)
- NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). (2018). [Personal development, health and physical education \(PDHPE\) K-10 syllabus](#)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2018). [International technical guidance on sexuality education](#)

**Availability of these resources may depend on access provided by each organisation and may change without notice*

References

- Centre for Reproductive Rights. (2008). *An international human right: Sexuality education for adolescents in schools*.
- Australian Government. *eSafety Commissioner*.
- Family Planning Australia. *BodyTalk*.
- Family Planning Australia. *Know Your Health*.
- Family Planning Australia. *Planet Puberty*.
- Family Planning Australia. (2023a). *Sexuality and sexual health education best practice statement*.
- Family Planning Australia. (2023b). *Guidance document for school leaders on sexuality and sexual health education*.
- Family Planning Australia. (2023c). *Guidance document for school wellbeing staff on sexuality and sexual health education*.
- Multicultural Health Communication Service. (2017). *Talk soon. Talk often. – Tip Sheet*. Originally published by WA Health, now translated for the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District(LHD) and Family Planning NSW by the Translation Service, Western Sydney LHD.
- NSW Government. *Play Safe*.
- The Raising Children Network. *The Australian Parenting Website*.
- Victoria Department of Education. (2023, April 18). *Sexuality education for parents*.
- Walsh, J. (2015). *Talk soon, talk often: A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex*. Originally published by Western Australian Department of Health, now adapted for use in NSW by Nepean Blue Mountains, Western Sydney and Hunter New England Local Health Districts.

**Availability of these resources may depend on access provided by each organisation and may change without notice*

Resources to share with parents, carers and young people

We invite schools to share the following compilation with parents, carers and young people. These resources and community organisations provide information and support on sexuality and sexual health. Resources are accessible via a web search using the name of the organisation and/or resource.

Preference has been given to Australian resources, which make up the majority of those listed here.

Index of topics

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
2. Body image and body diversity
3. Consent
4. Contraception
5. Cultural and linguistic diversity; multicultural health
6. Domestic and family violence; sexual assault
7. Health literacy
8. Intellectual disability and autism
9. Legal information
10. LGBTIQ+
11. Mental health
12. Online safety, technology and sexuality
13. Pregnancy, pregnancy choices and abortion
14. Puberty
15. Sex and sexuality
16. Sex education resources for parents and carers
17. Sexual health and sexually transmissible infections (STIs)

Topic	Organisation or resource	Content
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Ask for Health	Website developed by Youth Action containing a range of health literacy topics including information on Aboriginal health support
	Family Planning Australia	'Yarning about' A series providing information on sexual and reproductive health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
	Take Blaktion	Culturally appropriate sexual health messaging to engage Aboriginal young people using comedy
Body image and body diversity	Butterfly Foundation	Support with eating disorders and body image issues
Consent	Amaze	Videos for young people on consent and other relationship and sexual health topics
	Family Planning Australia	BodyTalk website provides information and resources for young people and teachers
	Youth Law Australia	Website providing free, confidential legal information and help for young people under 25
Contraception	Family Planning Australia	BodyTalk website provides information and resources for young people and teachers on contraception and other areas of sexual health Family Planning Australia website contains information on contraception including <i>What suits me? Contraception options for girls and guys</i> Know Your Health website provides information in Easy Read and community languages about contraception and sexual health
	Freedom Condom	Project providing free condoms and health information at Family Planning Australia clinics and youth services across NSW

Topic	Organisation or resource	Content
Cultural and linguistic diversity; multicultural health	Family Planning Australia	Know Your Health website provides videos and factsheets on sexual and reproductive health in community languages
	Health Translations	Free online library of high-quality translated information about Australian health and wellbeing
	Multicultural Health Communication Service	Health service coordinates the provision of multilingual health information
	NSW Refugee Health Service	Provides a range of clinical services and medical assessments for recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers
	Transcultural Mental Health Centre	Service which supports positive mental health for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
Domestic and family violence, sexual assault	1800 RESPECT	Information, resources and online counselling for domestic violence
	Child Protection Helpline	24/7 telephone service for information and assessment of child protection concerns
	Full Stop Australia	Counselling, training and advocacy for people impacted by sexual and family violence
	NSW Domestic Violence Line	24/7 telephone service which provides crisis counselling, advocacy, and assists with referrals
	NSW Health Sexual Assault Services	Contact list for NSW Health Sexual Assault Services
	NSW Rape Crisis Centre	24/7 telephone and online crisis counselling service for anyone in Australia who has experienced or is at risk of sexual assault and family or domestic violence
	QLife	Telephone and webchat peer support and referral service for LGBTIQ+ people and their loved ones
	Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline	24-hour national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line which includes support for the LGBTIQ+ community
	SAMSN	Organisation for male survivors of child sexual assault which includes sections for supporters and service providers

Topic	Organisation or resource	Content
Health literacy	Ask for Health	Website developed by Youth Action containing a range of health literacy topics including sexual health
	Health Direct	Government-funded service providing information online and over the phone
Intellectual disability and autism	Family Planning Australia	<p><i>Disability Resource Collection</i> contains resources for people with intellectual disability and their support people.</p> <p>Planet Puberty is a digital resource suite helping parents and carers of kids with intellectual disability and autism navigate puberty.</p> <p>The Family Planning Australia website contains numerous booklets about intellectual disability including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Relationship goals: Planning for success with friendship and dating</i> • <i>Your child's growing sexuality: A guide for parents and carers of children with intellectual disability</i>
	NSW Council for intellectual Disability	Provides representation and information for people with intellectual disability, including Easy Read information about sexuality
Legal information	Youth Law Australia	Legal information for young people, including information on sex and consent
LGBTIQ+	ACON	Leading health promotion organisation in NSW specialising in HIV and LGBTIQ+ health
	Intersex Human Rights Australia	National body that focuses on human rights, health and bodily autonomy for people with intersex variations
	Intersex Peer Support Australia	Intersex peer support, information and advocacy group for people with intersex variations and their families
	Gender Centre	Service and activities for transgender, gender diverse and gender questioning people
	Minus18	Empowerment, inclusion and mental health support for LGBTIQ+ young people
	Pivot Point: Alcohol and Other Drugs Online Resource	Information and support for sexuality and gender diverse people with alcohol and other drug use
	TransHub	Information and resources for transgender people, allies and health providers
	Twenty10	Provides specialised services for LGBTIQ+ people

Topic	Organisation or resource	Content
Mental health	Beyond Blue	Mental health organisation with information and support for young people
	eHeadspace	Free online and telephone mental health support for young people and their families
	Kids Helpline	24/7 telephone counselling service and online support and information for young people
	Reach Out	Free, confidential peer support and information on mental health and wellbeing for young people, schools, parents and carers
Online safety, technology and sexuality	eSafety Commissioner	Agency providing information, resources and training about staying safe online for children, parents and professionals
	Family Planning Australia	BodyTalk – Website for young people including information on online safety, pornography and other areas of sexuality
	ReachOut	Information and support including online safety
	Safe on Social	Training and education to teachers, students, parents and carers on online safety and online bullying including free parent downloads
	ThinkUKnow	Education program led by the Australian Federal Police which includes information for parents, carers, educators and young people
	Youth Law Australia	Legal information for young people, including on sex and consent
Pregnancy, pregnancy choices and abortion	Children By Choice	All-options information for people experiencing unplanned pregnancy (Queensland based)
	Family Planning Australia	A range of booklets and factsheets including <i>Pregnant? Working through your options</i> Health provider of sexual health services Know your health – Information and factsheets on pregnancy options in community languages and Easy Read Talkline – Free, confidential unbiased support and advice telephone line
	Marie Stopes Australia	Health provider of sexual health services

Topic	Organisation or resource	Content
Puberty	Family Planning Australia	BodyTalk website provides information and resources on puberty Family Planning Australia website contains resources on puberty including <i>Me Myself and I: Puberty information for everybody</i> Planet Puberty is a digital resource suite helping parents and carers of kids with intellectual disability and autism navigate puberty.
	7th National survey of secondary students and sexual health	Report on the sexual health and wellbeing of young people in Australia
	Family Planning Australia	Talking Frank is a podcast discussing Australia's sex life
Sex and sexuality	Scarleteen	US-based sex and sexuality education and information in e-zine format
	Amaze	Videos designed for children and young people on relationships, sexuality and sexual health
	Australian Parenting Website	Information for parents and carers, including strategies for talking to children and teen about sexuality and sexual health
	Talk Soon Talk Often	Parents' and carers' guide to talking sexuality with kids (NSW version of booklet)
Sex education resources for parents and carers	Talk Soon Talk Often – Tip Sheet	One page tip sheet for parents and carers on talking sexuality with kids
	Family Planning Australia	<i>Your best defence: Keeping an eye on STIs</i> – Booklet on sexually transmissible infections for young people Factsheets on website Talkline – Free, confidential unbiased support and advice telephone line
	PlaySafe	STIs, testing and treatment information for young people
	Sexual Health Infolink	Access to evidence-based information and telephone support on all aspects of HIV, STIs and sexual health

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