



HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

Student Health CONNECTION

A resource for school staff and teachers



Stuck in the 90's

The last time Ontario had a new sex education curriculum was in 1998—making it the oldest one in Canada.

Here's a short list of things we didn't have in 1998: We didn't have YouTube, or even the first iPod, much less Facebook and Twitter. Sending someone a text that said, "Hi" involved tapping the number 4 at least 5 times, unless of course you were lucky enough to have the predictive functions of T9. USB flash drives didn't exist. Never mind the fact that Snapchat and other social media wasn't around.

Teaching is intended to provide students with the skills to make informed decisions about their lives. Just as we cannot teach how to use a computer with the manual of an old typewriter, we cannot expect students to learn important information about their sexuality from a document that is stuck in the 90's.

The Changes:

The new curriculum presents a shift from a content-based focus which concentrates on the "what" of a specific topic. It instead focuses on building the skills of students to make healthy choices, or the "how".

Include Parents

Parents and guardians are a primary and important source of sexual health education for young people. They lay the foundation for attitude, moral and value formation.

However, 72% of boys and 66% of girls say they first learn about sex from someone other than their parents. Canadian youth have stated that friends, siblings, and media sources are the most common sources of sexual health information. Survey results consistently show that Canadian parents and students want schools to provide Sexual Health Education. Schools can be a primary vehicle for ensuring that young people have access to consistent, accurate and up to date sexual health education as one component of a comprehensive sexuality education program.

Parents are asked to reinforce what is learned at school. This will help students become more comfortable with what they have learned.

Preparing Yourself to Teach Sexual Health Education

Your Values

Reflecting on your own values and beliefs about sexual health education before addressing students is an important part of teaching any sensitive issue. Sexual Health Education must address and acknowledge the diverse needs of all students. It is important for teachers to provide education that is culturally appropriate and reflects different social situations. Talking about facts rather than values is an effective way to reduce apprehension about certain topics.

When examining your own values, it is important to avoid making the following assumptions:

- All students come from traditional nuclear families
- All students are heterosexual
- All students are (or are not) sexually involved
- All students' sexual involvement is consensual
- All students who are sexually active are having intercourse
- All students have the same knowledge base
- All students have the same cultural and religious beliefs

Increasing Your Comfort Level

Prepare Yourself for Teaching Sexuality

Preparing yourself for teaching sexual health involves becoming knowledgeable in the topic. The following website offer factual information about sexual health: www.sexualityandyou.ca

Be in the know

Research shows that teaching about sexual health and development does not increase sexual behaviour, and can actually prevent risky sexual activity. Teaching Health and Physical Education provides unique opportunities and challenges. As an example, a teacher may be the only caring adult a student has to look up to. Keep the lines of communication open with students.

Teachers can use a variety of strategies including instructional assessment and evaluation. This allows students to develop critical thinking skills.

Teachers should maintain the lines of communication with parents. This may be done through course outlines, newsletters, and website postings.

Learning Styles

Effective instruction is the key to student success.

Researching effective learning strategies or effective learning practices are a good start to student success.

Students learn at different rates, come from different backgrounds, and with different needs. Understanding this aids in teaching sensitive topics in the classroom.

Ask students where they are getting information from.

Students get their information from various sources, some reputable, some not so reputable. It is advised that students get the right information, especially when it comes to their health. Teaching this curriculum allows educators to give their students the correct information. This curriculum also provides information that allows the students to be safe (ie: sexting, safer sex).

Prepare Your Class

Setting Ground Rules

Sexual Health Education happens most effectively in a classroom where there is a mutual feeling of trust, safety and comfort. Having ground rules in place can be a very successful way to facilitate a positive classroom atmosphere. Groups feel more ownership if they are able to participate in creating the ground rules. Allow students to offer suggestions of items that should be included (e.g. being respectful to others, not talking over each other, being open-minded, the ability to pass, using correct terms etc.). Feel free to suggest items that they miss.

Effective ground rules are:

- Appropriate for the age and developmental stage of your students.
- Agreed upon by everyone.
- Well explained so that students are very clear about the expectations.
- Posted clearly in your classroom.
- Referred to at the beginning and throughout the sexual health unit.

Responding to Questions

One of the most challenging parts of teaching human sexuality can be responding effectively to questions from students. The following tips will help make answering those tough questions a bit easier:

- ✓ prepare yourself for teaching human sexuality
- ✓ follow some general tips on answering questions
- ✓ understand the type of question being asked

General Tips for Answering Questions

1. Reinforce the ground rules.

2. Validate students' concerns about asking questions.

Give affirmation to the student who asked the question. Phrases might include:

"Thanks for asking..."

"That's a good question. Tell me more about what you'd like to know."

You can also normalize the question by stating something like:

"Many students probably wonder about this..."

Consider every question to be a valid question and don't assume you know what's being asked. Ask clarifying questions if required.

3. Answer every question as best you can.

Assess whether the question is related to information, feelings, values, or a combination:

- Answer the factual information part

of the question first. Consider the following:

- o Curriculum relevance
- o Content and knowledge background of students
- o Age appropriateness
- o The most simple and straightforward way to answer the question
- Address feelings that may arise from a question.
 - "I'm a bit uncomfortable with this"*
 - "We all are embarrassed sometimes, but it is important to discuss..."*
- Identify the value component of the question and if necessary refer students to family or clergy for help with decision making.
 - "This question relates to personal decisions and may vary from individual to individual; so I can't give you a definite answer. It's best for you to get all the information and discuss this with your _____."*

Understand the types of questions being asked

Student questions about sexuality can usually be grouped into four broad overlapping categories:

- Requests for information
- "Am I normal?" questions
- Permission Seeking questions
- Shock questions

Requests for Information

If you know the answer, provide information within curriculum guidelines. Be honest about your information or your lack of information. All teachers may have difficulty with a question. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know – I'll have to check." Ensure that you follow through. If you say you'll get information or a booklet, do it.

"Am I Normal?" Questions

These questions generally focus on adolescent concerns about their bodies and the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing.

- Validate their concern and provide information about what they can expect to happen during the adolescent years.
- Refer them to parents, clergy, family physician, nurse, community resources, school resource teacher or counsellor for further discussion, if appropriate.

Permission Seeking Questions

These questions come in two common forms, both seeking permission to participate in a particular behaviour:

1. "Is it normal to ...?"
 2. "Did you... when you were growing up?"
- Avoid the use of the word "normal" when answering questions. Normal for some might not be normal for others. For instance, think of the vast differences in morals and values. Present the facts. This could include what is known medically, any legal issues, risks and consequences.
 - Always give positive reinforcement that seeking information and discussing issues is an important way for teens to learn about making healthy decisions.
 - Establish ground rules related to discussion of personal behaviour, such as: "We won't be discussing personal behaviour during class." If you get a

question about personal behaviour, remind students of this ground rule.

- Refer students to parents and clergy for further discussion of moral/religious questions.

Shock Questions

- These questions may be raised due to embarrassment about the topic, an underlying concern, or simply to divert attention from the topic.
- Assume positive intent – seemingly "silly" questions are a means by which more sophisticated questions can be formulated.
- Remind students of the ground rules related to appropriate questions for classroom discussion. It might be a good idea to set ground rules about using correct terms to avoid inappropriate language.
- Reword the vocabulary or slang to diffuse the question. For example, a

question such as, "Should your balls hurt for days after being hit?" could be addressed by saying, "First, the correct term for balls is testicles. Testicles are very sensitive, and do hurt when hit. Pain which lasts for more than a day is cause for concern. If your testicles are sore for more than a day, you should see your doctor to rule out any problems."

- Try to address the underlying concern or use a segment of the question for discussion. "It sounds like you are asking a question about respect in a relationship."
- If you are uncomfortable with the question, defer it until you have time to think about how to address or reword it.

We're speaking a different language. Help!

The language of children and teens are changing constantly. The use of technology has created a new vocabulary and an excess of acronyms to go along with it. It can be hard to keep up.

If students are using a term that you are not familiar with, you can ask clarifying questions to understand. Sometimes they may be using this language because they are unsure of the correct term.

A useful resource to navigate your way through the teenage language is www.urbandictionary.com. This is **NOT** a regulated website and may contain inappropriate content; however, youth update the definitions themselves making the content both adaptable and reflective of the teenage lifestyle.

Becoming comfortable with and teaching this new curriculum will take time. Resources are available to help. OPHEA is currently working on putting resources together for teachers. Your local Public Health Unit is also available to help. The best thing to remember is that you are not in this alone!

For further information please contact your Public Health Nurse assigned to your school.

Resources:

<http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/newsmaker-of-the-day-ontarios-new-sex-ed-curriculum/>

The Ontario Curriculum: Health and Physical Education 2015

www.sexualityandu.ca





Your School Health Team

Public Health Nurse	Health Promoter	School
Ruth Ann Shoemaker	Josh Daley	Delhi District Secondary School Holy Trinity Catholic School Simcoe Composite School Waterford District Secondary School
Terri Hartwick	Josh Daley	Cayuga Secondary School Dunnville Secondary School Hagersville Secondary School McKinnon Park Secondary School
Agnes Zabinska	Josh Daley	Valley Heights Secondary

Community Sexual Health Services are available in various locations throughout Haldimand and Norfolk counties including Caledonia, Dunnville, Langton and Simcoe.

We provide:

- Birth control counselling and low cost birth control
- Pregnancy testing and referral
- Emergency contraceptive pills (Plan B)
- Sexually Transmitted Infection
- (STI)/HIV testing
- Cervical screening
- Sexuality/sexual orientation information
- Needle Syringe Program

Appointments preferred.

Contact 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623 Ext. 3225 or 905-318-5367 Ext. 3346 to book an appointment



HealthUnit
Haldimand-Norfolk
www.hnhu.org • info@hnhu.org

Simcoe:
P.O. Box 247,
12 Gilbertson Dr.,
Simcoe, ON N3Y 4L1
519-426-6170 or 905.318.6623

Caledonia:
282 Argyle St. S1,
Caledonia, ON N3W 1K7
905.318.5367

