

# Sexuality Education

## “More than the Facts of Life”

*A Family Life Victoria Program*

### **What is Sexuality Education?**

Sexuality education is a life-long process that begins at birth. It includes a variety of learning experiences that affect the way we think, feel and act in relation to our sexual well-being and identity. Young people learn about sexuality all the time.

Today we tend to talk about sexuality education as distinct from sex education. Many people will remember occasional, clumsy discussions about sex, where the emphasis was more on reproductive information than interpersonal and emotional issues like intimacy, attraction, sensuality or gender.

In Victoria, the health component of the Personal Development Framework states that “Sexuality is an integral part of our selfhood” and so involves more “than being anatomical and genetically female or male.”

### **What Do Young People Need To Know?**

We sometimes refer to sexuality education as telling the children the facts of life. But talking to young people about sexuality is not just a matter of providing simple information about reproduction, menstruation, diseases and sexual behaviour. Young people need clear factual information about these issues. Sexuality education could also include:

- Positive messages about themselves and their bodies
- An appreciation of family values about sexual matters
- Practise at making decisions, solving problems and communicating confidently
- Understanding and managing feelings
- Reassurance about their own safety and welfare
- Thinking about friendships and responsibilities
- Consideration of tolerance and prejudice
- An atmosphere of openness, honesty and trust

### **What are the Benefits of Sexuality Education?**

Sexuality education can provide consistent and accurate, age-appropriate information about sexual matters. Sexuality education provides a context in which young people are able to discuss other aspects of sexual relationships including; informed and responsible decision-making, respect, choice and commitment.



Sexuality education complements the values and attitudes held by the family. Sexuality education encourages broader and more open communication between parents and their children. Early sexuality education helps counteract some of the negative messages portrayed in the media.

Sexuality education helps empower young people with skills and information that can help protect them from abuse. Sexuality education in the school setting helps children cope with sexual innuendo and bullying.

Systematic sexuality education allows for the development of content that reflects the specific needs of a group. Sexuality education provides an opportunity to counteract myths and misinformation young people may have about sexual issues.

### **Whose Responsibility Is Sexuality Education?**

Parents and other carers are and always will be the first and primary sexuality educators of their children. The school and other community groups have an important, complimentary role in the education of young people.

Many parents feel uncomfortable and unable to talk to their children about sexuality. Some may feel unsure about their knowledge base and others may feel inhibited by embarrassment or fear.

### **Why Have a School Program?**

In today's society it is often difficult for young people to obtain accurate, age-appropriate information about sexuality. Children are continuously trying to make sense of what they see and hear around them.

A person's sexual learning begins before they are old enough to be aware of it and is most strongly influenced by the values and attitudes learned in the family.

From an early age they are absorbing images and ideas about sex, whether they are spoken about or not. The earlier young people are able to talk about the good side of sex - which it is a loving, exciting and natural part of adult life the more normal will be the attitudes they develop.

A Family Life Victoria program treats sexuality as more than reproduction. It is about the way we behave as males and females. It is about lifestyle and culture; relationships emotions and values.

### **School Programs**

Primary School programs are conducted for primary aged students during school hours. These programs have been developed as 3 core modules and up to eight elective modules. They have been designed to help schools implement particular

aspects of the health curriculum including reproduction, pregnancy and birth and the physical, social and emotional changes at puberty.

Family Life programs offer students an opportunity to gain accurate, age-appropriate information about puberty and reproduction. The content of the sessions is age-specific and interactive, using a variety of audio-visual materials, discussion and games.

The approach used is sensitive, positive, tolerant and fun and offers scope for children to ask questions openly so that any myths can be dispelled. The program respects and supports the role of family in sexuality education and promotes their involvement through the use of homework sheets.

