

What Sex Ed Did You Get?

A collaborative approach to improving the consistency of school-based sexuality and sexual health education programs in NSW



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Background

Sexuality and sexual health are fundamental to the health and wellbeing of young people and their development. Over 95% of young people report that they believe sexuality and sexual health education is an important part of the school curriculum, however, only 24.8% reported that their most recent relationships and sexuality education class was very or extremely relevant to them.⁽¹⁾

Feedback from teachers indicates there is a great variation in teachers' knowledge about how to teach sexuality education and limited guidance on how to best deliver it.

Many young people also acknowledge school-based sexuality and sexual health education programs as some of the most utilised and trusted sources of sexual and reproductive health information, however, the delivery of sexuality and sexual health education in NSW is often inconsistent.

How do we improve consistency of sexuality and sexual health education in NSW?

Guided by the NSW STI Strategy 2022-2026, the NSW STI Programs Unit formed an Advisory Committee of key agencies including academics, educator sector representatives and non-government organisations.

The NSW Sexual Health in Schools Advisory Committee provides a collaborative working alliance to improve the consistency, transparency and relevance for teaching about sexuality and sexual health education (SSHE) in all NSW schools, across all three education sectors.

References

1. Fisher C, Waling A, Kerr L, Bellamy R, Ezer P, MIKOLAJCZAK M, et al. 6th national survey of Australian secondary students and sexual health 2018. La Trobe; 2019.
2. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UA, United Nations Population Fund U, UN Women, Organization WH. International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach. Switzerland; 2018.

What we did: NSW priorities

The Committee identified a gap in available NSW school-based resources that support consistent and effective practice in the delivery of SSHE programs. To combat inconsistent delivery, a series of documents were developed, and focus tested with NSW teachers, parents, carers, school leaders and wellbeing staff.

1. Sexuality and Sexual Health Education Best Practice Statement

The SSHE Best Practice Statement provides guidance for planning, delivering and evaluating SSHE programs in NSW schools and identifies principles for effectively delivery. The principles are adapted from evidence⁽²⁾ and the National Principles of Health Education.

Examples of NSW's Principles of Best Practice SSHE include:

1. Accessible to all young people and inclusive of identities and experiences of all young people
2. Appropriate to the age and level of development of learners
3. Holistic and broadly-based in scope and depth
4. Scientifically accurate
5. Incorporates emerging issues related to sexual health and wellbeing
6. Supports development of health literacy
7. Uses a learner-centered approach
8. Emphasises a deep understanding of consent and respectful relationships
9. Promotes gender equality and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence
10. Supported by a whole-of-school approach
11. Provided by confident, skilled and committed educators
12. Trauma-informed

2. Guidance Document for School Leaders, School Wellbeing Staff and Working with Parents, Carers and Families on SSHE

To accompany the Best Practice Statement a suite of three guidance documents for specific audiences were developed. The guidance documents aim to provide practical guidance, direction and support to enable school staff to deliver consistent and evidence-based SSHE within the scope of their role.



"It is clear and concise. It is clearly about healthcare rather than 'sex'. It acknowledges the challenges teachers face."



"This addition to the curriculum will protect children and young people from sexual exploitation and abuse. It is long overdue and much needed."



"It provides guidelines for an holistic approach to education about sexuality and gender, sexual safety and emotional wellbeing."

What do we hope to achieve?

With appropriate support and effective communication of resources and evidence-based teaching materials, schools will be better positioned to deliver consistent SSHE to their students.