

# SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

## POLICY

### BACKGROUND

In Victoria, it is compulsory for government schools to teach the Victorian Curriculum. Catholic schools and many independent schools also teach the Victorian Curriculum. The Health and Physical Education area of the curriculum includes relationships and sexuality as a focus area. Sexuality education is also included in the Personal and Social Capability.

The Department provides the *Catching On* sexuality education teaching and learning materials which are evidence-based resources founded on recent research on sexuality education and child sexual development. The *Catching On* resources support every compulsory year-level with comprehensive sexuality education resources. Use of the resource is not compulsory.

### Rationale

Sexual Health education is an integral part of health education. In providing a comprehensive sexual health education curriculum consideration will be given to the age appropriateness of material and will be provided in consultation with parents and school council.

- Sexuality education forms part of the Health and Physical Education and Personal and Social Capability domains of the Victorian Curriculum in both primary and secondary school
- The goal of sexuality education in Victorian schools is to enable young people to make responsible and safe choices
- Schools are able to select the resources they use to teach the curriculum and are encouraged to engage the school community on its implementation
- The Department provides the evidence-based, age-appropriate, optional teaching and learning resources, *Catching on Early* and *Catching On Later*, to help schools teach the sexuality education components of the curriculum.
- Schools allocate funding from their SRP towards delivering the sexuality

education curriculum, as they do for all areas of the curriculum. The amount of funding allocated is at school discretion.

### Aim

To provide age appropriate information regarding all areas of sexual health, ensuring students are provided with accurate information regarding sexual health issues. Students will be equipped with the necessary skills to increase their ability to make positive choices.

### Implementation

- Age-appropriate sexuality education is an important component of the Health and Physical Education curriculum taught across government, Catholic and many independent schools
- School-based sexuality education is one of the core learning and teaching responsibilities a school undertakes to equip its students for a healthy and fulfilling adult life
- The goal of sexuality education in Victorian schools is to enable young people to make responsible and safe choices
- Sexuality education focuses on respect for others and oneself, personal rights and responsibilities, relationships and friendships, effective communication, diversity, decision-making and safe behaviours
- Schools are able to select the resources they use to teach the curriculum
- Sex education can be delivered by school teachers, or school teachers supported by expert presenters.
- Evidence-based age-appropriate optional teaching and learning resources such as *Catching on Early* and *Catching On Later* are available to help schools teach the sexuality education components of the curriculum.
- Related teaching and learning materials have been available to Victorian schools since 2004 and were developed in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services.
- The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted *Catching On* as an example of a broad sexuality education program across all primary year levels. It acknowledges the program's resources have been

designed to build knowledge, skills and behaviour to enable students to make responsible and safe choices.<sup>1</sup>

- An appropriate sexual health curriculum will be provided to Grade 6 students only
- Students will be provided with a sexual health curriculum relevant to developing puberty
- The school will seek digital parental consent before commencing a sexual health unit
- Students who do not participate in the sexual health program will be provided with worthwhile alternative activities
- The sexual health curriculum will be delivered as a core component of the health curriculum and will be age appropriate
- The school will invite others with expertise in this area to participate in lessons eg. local general practitioners or the school nurse.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

If asked: At what age do schools start teaching sexuality education?

- Sexuality education forms part of the Health and Physical Education and Personal and Social Capability domains of the Victorian Curriculum in both primary and secondary school
- Sexuality education is delivered in an age-appropriate manner in line with students' ages, abilities, physical, social and emotional development, taking into consideration the needs and context of the school community
- In the primary years, Foundation to Level 2 in the Victorian Curriculum focuses on relationships and body understanding
- From Levels 3-4, the Victorian Curriculum focuses on helping students to understand their bodies, how they grow and change, including providing preparation for the changes associated with puberty, and age appropriate information on how babies are conceived and pregnancy

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<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Vol 6: Making institutions child safe, Page 77

- The Victorian Curriculum in primary schools also helps students to learn the anatomically correct vocabulary, which assists them to frame questions about their bodies and express themselves. This is an important protective factor for the prevention of sexual abuse. Students learn about personal safety and identify teachers, parents and/or carers who they can ask for help
- In the secondary years, sexuality education has a focus on developmental changes and transitions, healthy and respectful relationships, safe practices and help seeking
- From Levels 7-8, the Victorian Curriculum focuses on supporting students to manage the physical, social and emotional changes that occur as they grow older, the benefits and impacts of relationships, developing skills to evaluate health information and to express health concerns, as well as examining the barriers to help-seeking
- From Levels 9-10, the Victorian Curriculum focuses on managing situations that impact on safety, health and wellbeing, evaluating factors that influence the way young people think about their bodies and sexual health, and critiquing the effectiveness of different health and wellbeing supports.

If asked: How are parents engaged with sexuality education in schools?

- Parents and carers play an important role in the delivery of effective school-based sexuality education
- Schools are encouraged to maintain open dialogue with the school community about sexuality education and to hold information sessions for parents prior to delivery
- Parents can contact their child's school at any time to find out details of its sexuality education program.

If asked: Can parents withdraw their child from sexuality education?

- Yes. As outlined in the School Policy and Advisory Guide, parents may decide not to allow their child to participate in the sexual health component of the school's health education
- The Department encourages all parents to enable their child to benefit from accurate, evidenced based and age appropriate sexuality education.

If asked: How does sexuality education link with the curriculum?

- Sexuality education sits within the Health and Physical Education and Personal and Social Capability areas of the Victorian Curriculum
- The Health and Physical Education area of the Victorian Curriculum is based on the Australian Curriculum with minor changes to incorporate respectful relationships and the Personal and Social Capability
- The Health and Physical Education curriculum contains twelve focus areas. The focus areas provide the context through which the Content Descriptors and Achievement Standards are taught and assessed
- Sexuality education links with the Relationships and sexuality education and Safety focus areas
- The Relationships and sexuality focus area addresses physical, social and emotional changes that occur over time and the significant role relationships and sexuality play in these changes. The curriculum supports students to develop knowledge, understanding and skills to support them to establish and manage respectful relationships. It also supports them to develop positive practices in relation to their reproductive and sexual health and the development of their identities. In doing so, students will gain an understanding of the factors that influence gender and sexual identities
- The Safety focus area addresses safety issues that students may encounter in their daily lives, including those in the home. Students develop knowledge, understanding and skills to make safe decisions and behave in ways that protect their own safety and that of others, including strategies for dealing with unsafe or uncomfortable situations, managing personal safety and safety in relationships and dating
- The Personal and Social Capability contains content relating to building positive relationships including recognising the impact of personal boundaries, intimacy, distribution of power and cultural and social norms in the ways relationships are expressed.

If asked: Does the Government support teaching pleasure as part of sexuality education?

- The goal of sexuality education in Victorian schools is to enable young people to make responsible and safe choices
- Sexuality education should be delivered in a non-judgmental manner and should not increase stigma, shame or embarrassment related to sexual activity. Rather, sexuality education is one of the many important responsibilities a school undertakes to equip its students for a healthy and fulfilling adult life

- Teachers use their professional judgment to deliver sexuality education in a manner that is appropriate to the ages, physical, social and emotional development, diversity and abilities of the students in the classroom
- Evidence shows that rather than encouraging experimentation or increasing sexual activity, comprehensive sexuality education programs in schools are more likely to delay sexual activity in young people.<sup>2</sup>

If asked: What is the Government's response to the 'Sex Ed Sit Out day' that was promoted on Facebook for 23 April 2018 and encouraged parents to keep their kids home from school as a protest against comprehensive sex education, Safe Schools and Respectful Relationships?

- Sexuality education is delivered in an age-appropriate manner in line with students' ages, abilities and emotional development, taking into consideration the needs and context of the school community
- Parents and carers play an important role in the delivery of effective school-based sexuality education
- Schools are encouraged to maintain open dialogue with the school community about sexuality education and to hold information sessions for parents prior to delivery
- Parents can contact their child's school at any time to find out details of its sexuality education program
- Attending school every day is crucial to children's academic, social and emotional development
- The Safe Schools program is not part of the Victorian Curriculum, nor is it a sexuality education program
- *[For more information, refer to PAEC briefs: Safe Schools Program and Anti-Bullying & Respectful Relationships for children and youth].*

### **Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed, with parent and community input, as part of the school's three-year review cycle.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Catching On-line: Questions and Answers on Sexuality Education, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/social/physed/sexeduqanda.pdf> (Accessed on 23 January 2017)

This policy was last ratified by School Council in....

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