



Introduction to workbooks

FPQ and sexuality education

Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) is a leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services. Since its first clinic session in 1972, FPQ has offered clinical, education, information and training services for metropolitan and regional locations throughout Queensland. FPQ is committed to providing education and information services to all people. This includes people with a disability.

All people are sexual beings throughout their life. Sexuality influences how people understand themselves and how they relate to others. It encompasses the physical, social, emotional and psychological elements of the human make up and includes sexual identity, sexual orientation and sexual behaviour.

Learning about sexuality is a lifelong process, which includes the gathering of information and the formation of attitudes, beliefs and values about identity, relationships and intimacy.

Sexuality education aims to:

- provide a sound foundation for the development of healthy sexual identity
- provide age appropriate information
- provide information in a way that encourages acceptance of self and others
- empower young people to deal with exploitive situations
- encourage young people to choose to be sexually healthy
- enhance relationships

Generally, children who receive comprehensive sexuality education from an early age:

- understand and accept with confidence, physical and emotional changes
- feel positive about their bodies
- appreciate and accept individual differences
- feel good about themselves as males and females
- are capable of communicating about sexual matters,
- understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- are less vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse

Most parents, carers and professionals recognise the importance of children and young people having accurate, age-appropriate sexuality education as they grow. It is important that people with a disability receive positive messages about sexuality. It is also important that parents, carers, schools and support services work together to promote healthy attitudes and to give children, young people and adults encouragement that it is ok to discuss sexuality issues with the parents, carers and professionals in their lives.

Everybody needs to know workbooks

The *Everybody needs to know* workbooks have been developed to assist parents and carers in the important role they have in providing sexuality and self protection education for their children, young people and adults. Parents, carers and professionals are encouraged to openly discuss the content in each of the workbooks as well as respond to questions, interests and curiosity about sexuality education topics. The worksheets contained in the workbooks can provide a focus point for these discussions.

These workbooks allows for flexible delivery of sexuality education. It is recommended that the workbooks be adapted to best suit the learning needs and interests of the individual.

Please note that worksheets may be photocopied.

Points for parents and carers

- You are the primary sexuality educators of your children. They learn their beliefs and values with you.
- Teaching about sexuality is an ongoing responsibility, not just a one-off talk about "the facts". Feelings, values and decision-making skills are vital components.
- Children learn about sexuality every day, not only from you, but also from friends, school, the media and society in general.
- It is never too early, nor too late to start talking about sexuality.
- Use learning moments (eg a pregnant friend, an event on TV, a litter of puppies) to discuss sexuality issues. Don't wait to be asked. Be proactive.
- Remember your non-verbal messages are as important as what you say. Your children are aware of what you do and don't say, your reactions and your behaviour. Make sure your actions are consistent with the values you are trying to impart.
- You don't have to be an expert on the topic of sexuality. Respect for your children and listening attentively and non-judgementally will help you in educating your children about sexuality.
- Use correct terminology for reproductive body parts. Acknowledge that different words are used for these body parts but during these sessions scientific terms will be used. Explain to your children that using correct terminology is empowering them with correct knowledge and allows everyone to communicate clearly.
- Answer questions briefly and factually, at your child's level of understanding. Too much information will not harm them, but they may find it boring.
- Use your sense of humour when talking about sexuality. Most conversations need not be too serious.
- Have a variety of books, pamphlets and other resources available, for both you and your children.
- You are your child's role model. Model respect for feelings and the right of privacy by maintaining confidentiality. Model acceptance and understanding by resisting the temptation to argue, preach or give advice.
- It is good to touch and hug your children and show love, regardless of how old they are.

Points for professionals

- Children, young people and adults with a disability have the right to receive information and support about sexuality, relationships and reproductive health. It is important that people receive positive messages about their sexuality, sexual development and safety.
- Sexuality education should be conducted within and according to organisational policies and values frameworks. The existence of and adherence to sexuality education policies gives facilitators, participants, parents/carers and the community an expected standard and structure for a sexuality education program.
- Seek the support of colleagues when you can, it is important for you to also feel supported.

Answering questions

When answering questions be brief, factual and positive. Also remember tone and body language when answering all questions. Attempt to address all questions, no matter how silly or confronting they may appear. Even questions that may appear silly can mask a serious agenda. It is useful to use a variety of strategies when answering questions.

These approaches may include:

- **Continuum**
 - *"Some people believe . . . , whilst others believe Most people's beliefs fall somewhere in between."* (This could be relevant for an issue such as abortion.)
- **"I don't know."**
 - It is honest and acceptable to admit your lack of knowledge. Always make a plan, including a time frame, to learn the answer and inform the participants. Sometimes you could ask the group or suggest someone does some research into the question. Always check that an accurate answer is given.
- **Personal**
 - *"That is a personal question. Our rules try to remind us not to ask personal questions. I would prefer not to answer it."*
- **Turning the question around**
 - *"That's a good question. What made you think of that?"*
This can help to clarify what the question is really about and what may have motivated the participant to ask. Sometimes questions are asked to test if it is safe to ask all questions or if an honest answer will be given. Young people's questions and curiosity about sexuality are natural and based upon their childhood perceptions, not adult perceptions of sexual activity or sexuality. Establishing what has motivated a question can help to formulate a clear and accurate answer that meets the participants' needs in an age appropriate manner.

Using the workbooks

The following issues should be considered prior to and during the use of the workbooks.

It is important to consider:

- age appropriate communication
- clear and uncluttered information and language
- speed of speech
- allowing time for responses
- voice tone and volume
- checking for understanding of the content

- reinforcing and repeating ideas
- use of clear concrete visuals and resources
- use of signing and symbols

People often benefit from:

- reviews at the beginning, during and after the discussion
- reminders, discussions
- linking key information to the person's everyday life
- concrete reminders of information, for example, worksheet folders, communication books, charts, certificates, photos, posters
- assistance of a support person to review content

Ground rules

If you are going to run a formal session with a participant it is important to set up some ground rules. This creates safety and enables the subject matter to be approached with a set of guidelines.

- **you could ask** the participant **what rules they think are needed**
- **write** or draw the rules onto poster paper and **display**
- it is essential that these rules are kept, discussed and displayed at the beginning of each sexuality education lesson
- as the facilitator it is important to follow and model the ground rules

Rules to include:

Choose pictures from magazines or draw pictures to match the rules if required.

Ask questions

It is important to encourage questions. All questions should be treated with respect and answered positively, briefly and factually.

OK to be embarrassed

Explain that giggling or laughter is often a way of showing you are feeling embarrassed.

"It is ok to feel embarrassed. People often feel embarrassed talking about bodies and relationships. It helps to take a big deep breath if you are feeling embarrassed or nervous. Let's practice taking a deep breath now."

Be private

It is important to remind the participant not to talk to everyone about the content of these lessons. This reinforces rules about private talk. *"Appropriate people to speak with"* is a topic to be addressed in each lesson.

When establishing this ground rule it is essential to tell the participant that if they disclose any kind of physical, emotional or sexual violence you will have to tell someone else. Some things are too important to stay in the room.

"During these lessons we will be talking about private things. It is important to remember there are rules for talking about private things. It is ok to talk to me or another adult that you trust about these lessons but remember it is not ok to talk to everyone."

Be nice to each other

A reminder that while doing these lessons that everyone needs to be respectful of each other's feelings. If in a group, this rule allows the facilitator to interrupt teasing and put downs and draw attention to appropriate behaviour. This rule can also be used to remind participants that it is not ok to ask private questions of the facilitator or other group members.

Sensitivity to the Subject Matter

Sexuality education for people with a disability requires an acknowledgment of the sensitive nature of the content area. Often people with an intellectual disability have had limited education regarding sexuality and may have had negative experiences relating to many of the topic areas. Many people with a disability may have little or no control over their freedom to express themselves sexually. Many people have had decisions made by others for them with regard to their own sexual health.

Self protection theory

It is important to be aware of sexual assault issues and self protection theory before using the workbooks. Talking to people with a disability about their bodies, about being private, recognising feelings and early warning signs, types of touch, communicating with others and a safety network is important from an early age. In a sexuality education program sexual intercourse and sexual relationships should always be discussed within the context of informed consent, pleasure, privacy and choices.

Omitting discussion about sexual activity in a sexuality education program will not prevent sexual exploitation. FPQ supports the fact that comprehensive sexuality education can help participants to understand their right to consensual sexual activity and safety. Children, young people and adults with a disability will be more able to assert themselves and communicate in order to receive support if they know you are comfortable talking with them.

Responding to a disclosure

The parent/carer/facilitator can help participants who disclose sexual abuse/assault behaviour by:

- not panicking or expressing shock or outrage
- ensuring privacy when talking to the participant
- listening
- telling them that they believe them
- saying they are pleased they told them and that it was the right thing to do
- emphasising that whatever has happened was not their fault
- telling them that some people do wrong things
- acknowledging that it is hard to talk about such things
- not giving promises that can't be kept – for example, that you won't tell anyone or that you will stop it happening again
- understanding and adhering to the organisational policy (if applicable) on managing disclosure of sexual abuse

It is not the job of most facilitators to investigate the nature or detail of an allegation, nor the truth of a disclosure. For more information on responding to disclosures please visit www.childsafety.qld.gov.au

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