

Myths remain about sex ed in our schools

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Family Planning reaches milestone, but ...

TWENTY-one years have passed since **sexuality education** was introduced in Queensland schools, and the myths about what it constitutes keep circulating.

Jo Stewart, of Family Planning Queensland, said the most common questions parents put to educators pertained to whether fruit was used to display contraceptives and whether explicit videos were shown to children.

The first rumour was believed to relate to a past display device, which resembled a piece of fruit, while the second suggestion would be illegal, Ms Stewart said.

The truth is that **sexuality education**, or sex **education**, as most lay people know it, constitutes a lot more than sex. And while Queensland premier Mike Ahern ruffled feathers in 1987 when he set up a review that led to guidelines for human relationships **education** in schools, Ms Stewart says surveys show 82% of parents support **sexuality education** in school.

Sexuality education can range from teaching children the correct names for body parts to discussion of protective behaviour, puberty, reproductive systems, and safe sex, depending upon the age of the children involved.

Sexuality education is taught in about 40 schools on the Sunshine Coast, with the decision on whether to participate left to each school community.

“Most of our work is in primary schools, and we do some in some high schools as well,” Ms Stewart said.

Family Planning Queensland educators visited schools sometimes to run classes, but in other cases, **sexuality education** was delivered in a more subtle way by teachers, who combined it seamlessly with subjects such as science and social science, Ms Stewart said.

“If we are getting in there, it’s classes that we’re doing, but we’re really encouraging schools to pick it up. Some staff are doing it across the curriculum in different areas,” she said.

The information that was delivered to children was age-appropriate, Ms Stewart said.

Children in younger grades might discuss the differences between public and private touching, while older students might discuss safe and unsafe sexual practices.

“A lot of our programs are based on what the kids are asking,” she said.

It was not unusual for children to seek answers at school, because they had been told they were too young to know or that they should not talk about “dirty” things, Ms Stewart said.

•Family Planning Queensland will celebrate the 21st anniversary of **sexuality education** in schools at a **conference** in **Brisbane** on Thursday, and with an invitation-only afternoon tea at Cotton Tree on October 21.

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