

# Position Statement

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## Values and sexuality education – An inclusive approach

Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) advocates for the rights of all children and young people to high quality sexuality education.

Sexuality education involves developing knowledge and understanding about sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image and gender roles. Sexuality education supports people to develop the skills to communicate effectively and make responsible decisions.

The National Guidelines Taskforce (2004) state that values inherent in high quality sexuality education programs include:

- Sexuality is a natural and healthy part of living
- Sexuality includes physical, ethical, social, spiritual, psychological and emotional dimensions
- Sexual relationships should be reciprocal, based on respect, and should never be coercive or exploitative
- All persons have the right and obligation to make responsible sexual choices
- Families should provide children's first education about sexuality
- Young people explore their sexuality as a natural process in achieving sexual maturity
- Individuals, families, and society benefit when children are able to discuss sexuality with their parents and/or trusted adults

(National Guidelines Taskforce, 2004:20)

Sexuality education supports and provides children and young people with the opportunity to explore:

- *Attitudes, values and insights:* by providing opportunities to question, explore, and assess sexual attitudes.
- *Relationships and interpersonal skills:* by supporting the development of interpersonal skills.
- *Responsibility:* by assisting young people to exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships.
- *Information:* by providing accurate information about human sexuality.

(National Guidelines Task Force, 2004:19)

School-based sexuality education programs enhance the sexuality education that children and young people receive from their parents and carers, extended families, religious, cultural and community groups (National Guidelines Taskforce,

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2004; Sex Education Forum, 2002). FPQ affirms and supports parents, carers and teachers in their roles as the primary and day-to-day sexuality educators of children and young people.

FPQ acknowledges that a wide range of family, cultural, religious beliefs and values exist in the community, which influence individual and collective perspectives on human sexuality. It is a parent's/carer's right and responsibility to share their beliefs and values with their children. Inclusive sexuality education helps young people appreciate the diversity of values, attitudes and beliefs in a pluralistic society (Sex Education Forum, 2004). The role of the teacher is to provide opportunities for students to examine the *range* of values relating to sexuality issues and to encourage them to discuss these issues at home. It is essential that teachers avoid imposing their own personal values on students either implicitly or explicitly during sexuality education programs.

A review of international research to identify components of effective sexuality education programs, which demonstrate effectiveness in changing sexual risk behaviours (Senderowitz & Kirby, 2006), noted the importance of values in sexual and reproductive health education – that for young people to make good decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, they need *“good information, values and attitudes consistent with health goals, skills to behave consistently with their knowledge and values, and access to quality health services”* (Senderowitz & Kirby, 2006:7) in conjunction with the presentation of information that is scientifically and medically accurate.

Schools are places where both students and school staff come together everyday in social and educational engagement with one another, and through their interactions with one another are promoting, facilitating and transmitting values to students everyday (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). *The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005) states that effective values education is an explicit goal of schooling, which values the diversity that exists in Australian schools. Effective values education occurs in a safe and supportive learning environment through which students are encouraged to explore their own values, their school's values and their communities' values (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). The agreement at a national level of nine common, core values of Australian society for promotion in schools, including respect, freedom, tolerance and inclusion, can be considered to underpin democratic society and uphold human rights. In turn,

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this can be considered to promote acknowledgment and understanding of the range of values and beliefs in our society.

Particular groups or individuals in the community may have specific beliefs about some topics that are taught during school sexuality education programs. Sexuality education programs can play an important role to promote tolerance by acknowledging the range of values that exist in the community (Sex Education Forum, 2004) and supporting students to develop their own beliefs and values.

FPQ advocates for all children and young people to experience sexuality education which is based on current research and evidence about sexual health and sexuality education, effective teaching and learning practices, and reflects contemporary issues for children and young people. All children and young people have the right to access information and services which meet their sexual and reproductive health needs, and which support them to reflect on and develop their own values and beliefs. This will support them to develop the knowledge and skills to care for their health and wellbeing, make decisions that are congruent with their personal values and beliefs, and promote their sexual health throughout life.

## References

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