

Sexuality education in primary schools

INFORMATION FOR WHĀNAU

Sexuality education is important

This brochure tells you what sexuality education should look like in your child's school, and how the school should consult with you about it.

Sexuality education is a key learning area in *The New Zealand Curriculum*. It focuses on the wellbeing of students and other people and of society. Sexuality education starts off simple for young children, but it is important to get a good foundation for more complex learning later on.

Your child's school is required to make sure all students get high quality sexuality education that:

- » promotes students' overall wellbeing
- » increases students' ability to make good decisions about their health
- » helps students think critically and act fairly towards others
- » helps students thrive and become confident and actively involved life-long learners.

What has ERO been doing?

ERO has recently completed an evaluation of sexuality education in New Zealand schools. Some schools were doing a good job of teaching sexuality education, but many schools could be doing better.

Society is changing, so schools need to change too, to help young people face new challenges.

These include things like social media use and the growing understanding of different gender identities and sexual orientations.

What is sexuality education?

Sexuality education includes learning about biology but also friendships, relationships and social issues.

Sexuality education contributes to the overall health, wellbeing and resilience of young people.

Sexuality education helps everyone develop the skills, attitudes and understanding necessary to share a positive environment at school that is welcoming for everybody.

Sexuality education in Years 1 to 3

In Years 1 to 3, your child's sexuality education should cover:

- » growth and development of the human body
- » identifying body parts
- » friendship skills
- » supporting others' wellbeing
- » family relationships
- » gender stereotypes
- » basic human rights.

Sexuality education in Years 4 to 6

In Years 4 to 6, your child's sexuality education should cover:

- » pubertal change and supporting self and others during change
- » positive body image

- » human reproduction
- » social messages about relationships, gender and sexuality
- » access to health care
- » identifying risks and issues in online and social media environments.

Sexuality education in Years 7 and 8

In years 7 to 8, your child's sexuality education programme should cover:

- » conception and childbirth
- » identifying health care resources in the community
- » intimate relationships and sexual attraction
- » respect and communication skills
- » strategies to support inclusion
- » critiquing dominant media messages about sexuality
- » developing assertiveness skills
- » recognising and working against bullying and discrimination.

Consultation with the board of trustees

The board of trustees at your child's school **must** consult with the community **at least every two years about the health education curriculum**, which includes sexuality education. This is an opportunity for you to discuss your expectations for your child's sexuality education.

Each school's consultation process will work differently.

What does good consultation look like?

Features of a good consultation process include:

- » consultation on the proposed health education curriculum taking place at least every two years and preferably every year
- » opportunities for formal and informal discussions
- » providing translators or people to liaise where needed

- » clear explanations of what will be covered in class
- » opportunities for questions, suggestions and feedback.

When schools are consulting well, they gather perspectives from parents/whānau and students and consider them when developing their sexuality education programme. When that happens programmes are more likely to reflect the needs and values of the community.

If you feel your school's board hasn't been consulting with the community effectively or every two years, you can talk to the principal or directly to the board about your concerns.



The most important thing is to hear from parents and the students to make sure the school is meeting their needs.

board chair

What children want from sexuality education

New Zealand research suggests students do not think the sexuality education they receive in school is comprehensive enough. Teachers and parents might feel that enough is being covered, but it is important to respect and acknowledge the changing needs of children. For example, in primary schools topics covered should include online safety because children will already be engaging with online content.

Students ERO talked to mentioned the value of learning things before they needed to know about them. This preparation made the changes occurring for them seem less scary and this promoted positive body image and understanding.

These and similar comments highlight the need for schools to find out how well their sexuality education programme is meeting the needs of their students.

Culture, religious beliefs and values are respected in sexuality education and any discomfort or reservations you have can be discussed.

If you still wish to withdraw your child after you have talked about it, you can do so by writing to the school principal.

Find out more

Education Review Office

ERO has completed an evaluation of sexuality education in New Zealand schools and published several documents relating to it (aside from this one):

- » Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education
- » Sexuality education in secondary schools – Information for senior students
- » Sexuality education in secondary schools – Information for whānau
- » Sexuality education in secondary schools – Information for boards of trustees
- » Sexuality education in primary schools – Information for boards of trustees

These documents are available on the ERO website.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry has the following resources available:

-  [The New Zealand Curriculum](#)

-  [Sexuality education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees and teachers](#)

-  [Sexuality education: Practical information about education for parents and carers](#)

-  [Supporting LGBTIQ+ students](#)

These documents are available on the Ministry of Education website.