

TEACHING HUMAN SEXUALITY TO STUDENTS WITH DIFFERING ABILITIES

GRADE
DIFFERING
ABILITIES



INTRODUCTION:

Students with physical and developmental disabilities experience the physical, social and emotional changes associated with developing into a healthy teen. However, many students miss out on sexuality education and have gaps in knowledge and understanding about how to cope with puberty changes and develop healthy relationships.

Some students with differing abilities may experience challenges in their social and emotional development in comparison to typically developing students; their social opportunities may be limited to a few social settings meaning their peer groups are small and comprised of students with similar challenges. “Life learning” may be limited due to their disability (e.g., a child with hearing impairment may not catch conversations). They may also be given a hard time over social mistakes – they may feel that they are living under a microscope (in comparison to a typically developing youth who makes a social mistake and can usually laugh off the situation).

Every student has individual needs, strengths and challenges. Working with family and other professionals involved with the student will help to meet their individual needs. If a student has an issue at school related to sexuality e.g., difficulty with physical boundaries, engaging his or her family and any professionals involved will help to resolve the issue. Many issues need lots of time, practice and reinforcement to resolve so making sure that every adult involved with the student’s care is included is important.



USING THE DIFFERING ABILITIES LESSON PLANS

All of the lesson plans available for teachers to use in this section can be adapted to the needs of individual students and groups. The lesson plans often give options e.g., activities for students who may need more support versus activities where

students can work more independently in small groups, so mix and match to produce a lesson that fits.

The following is a guide to the information students require as they develop into healthy teens:

- Practical knowledge including what parts of the body are private; an understanding that [our bodies are private](#)
- [Puberty changes](#) and how to cope with them especially [menstruation](#) and hygiene
- [Personal boundaries](#) including public and private behaviours;
- [Personal safety](#) – what to do to maintain personal boundaries
- Safe [friendships](#) and dating relationships
- For students who are able to understand all of the above there may be the need to teach about dating [relationships](#) and safety in intimate relationships including [STIs](#), [birth control](#), safer sex and access to health care services

Here are some tips and strategies for teaching human sexuality to your students with differing abilities:

- Ensure that [ground rules](#) are established before starting your lessons. Sexual health education occurs most effectively in a classroom where there is a mutual feeling of trust, safety and comfort.
- Whenever possible be as hands on as possible using everyday objects and examples e.g., use hygiene tools when talking about puberty and practice hygiene routines at school.
- To help students develop skills use role play, experiential opportunities and problem solving scenarios. For example, students learning about private and public space can tour the school to identify which areas are private and public and the types of behaviours and activities that are appropriate in these spaces.
- Where possible include the students' family and carers by letting them know what topics you are covering in school and suggesting activities to do at home that reinforce the teaching points from class e.g., students could identify private and public spaces at home.

- Sexuality is just one part of overall health and well-being and can easily be linked to other health topics. For example, when discussing puberty changes include discussions and activities for healthy eating and active living as both contribute to students' development.
- The question box is a tool that can be used to encourage students to ask questions privately. It can be adapted for students who do not read or write by setting up a time when students can have a scribe available to them, either the teacher or an assistant.
- Some of the lessons discuss social media use and the need for rules and boundaries to stay safe. Take time to remind students of the rules about online safety especially online gaming, social networking sites and texting. Link this back to the privacy activities – remind students that nothing is truly private in the online world.