



CHOOSING A SEXUALITY EDUCATION CURRICULUM

In the midst of the controversy that surrounds sexuality education in many communities, it is understandable that adults have questions or doubts about the best curriculum for a school-based program. Parents, teachers, and school board members who are not familiar with all the available resources may find it difficult to make informed decisions.

Although a national task force has developed guidelines for comprehensive sexuality education (National Guidelines Task Force, *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, rev. 1996, SIECUS, New York), no one curriculum is used nationally. Included in this information kit is a listing of curricula and related resources recommended by Planned Parenthood for review. Ultimately the choice of a specific curriculum will depend on the requirements of local school policy, state law, and the views of members of designated curriculum committees. As part of the discussion about the kind of program you want to implement, it is important to identify which students you want to educate (all students in a school system? only certain grades?) and what you hope the outcome of the education will be. Before making a choice and investing resources in a particular curriculum, we suggest that you carefully consider the following criteria.

Are the goals and objectives of the curriculum clear? Are they realistic?

So much attention may be focused on choosing a curriculum that is acceptable to different groups, that the impact on students gets lost. Are the goals and objectives stated in measurable terms, and are the content and methods specifically outlined to ensure the desired outcome? Is the goal to control a student's sexual behavior or to promote sexual health?

Does the curriculum contain medically accurate, balanced, and unbiased information?

Has the content been updated to reflect recent findings from clinical research and other studies? Is it free from titillating or provocative descriptions? Are the references cited in the text reputable and current?

Is the curriculum comprehensive?

Is the curriculum designed for kindergarten through grade 12? Does it cover biological, psychological, social, and ethical aspects of sexuality? Does it cover topics in sufficient depth and detail to meet the stated objectives? Does it include the "tough" topics — masturbation, contraception, abortion, and homosexuality?

Does the curriculum meaningfully involve parents and other family members?

Does the curriculum promote family communication and learning about sexuality? Does it help family members recognize that different families may have different values, and that individuals within families may have different values?

What will it cost to implement the curriculum?

Consider the cost of the curriculum, teacher's guides, parent information, student workbooks, and related videos, etc. Will there be a need to replace materials with every class that takes the course (e.g., student workbooks)? How much training will be required for teachers, and what will it cost?

Is the curriculum easy to use?

Do the teacher and student workbooks correspond? Are the lessons laid out logically with an outline? Are they easy to read and to follow? Are materials easy to reproduce (photocopy)? Is the information for parents easy to read and not overwhelming?

Does the curriculum include lessons that help students to develop and practice effective communication skills?





Are there exercises that provide opportunities to role play including dealing with peer pressure to engage in risky behavior, making positive, healthy decisions, asserting individual choice about one's behavior, building healthy relationships?

Does the curriculum support responsible behavior?

Does it aim to reduce misinformation, help young people delay premature sexual intercourse, support safer sex, prevent drug abuse, and develop an understanding of, and respect for, differences? Will the curriculum help students understand their obligations and responsibilities to self and others?

Does the curriculum present clear messages about attitudes and values?

Will the curriculum enable students to question, explore, and assess their values, attitudes, and feelings about sexuality? Will it support the development of students' self-esteem?

Is the curriculum balanced?

Does it present more than one interpretation of situations and issues, especially controversial ones? Does it clearly distinguish between a position, an opinion, and a fact? Does it validate the family and cultural values of the students — recognizing their diversity?

Is the curriculum inclusive and respectful of diversity?

Does the curriculum reflect the demographics (racial/ethnic groups, sexual orientation and lifestyle, family structure) and changing conditions of communities in the United States? Does the curriculum acknowledge the broad range of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviors that exist in our pluralistic society, or does it insist on a singular approach or philosophy? Does it integrate, rather than separate in special sections, information about people who are disabled or gay/lesbian/bisexual/ transgender?

Is the curriculum appropriate to the developmental stage and learning needs of students?

Does it approach learning about sexuality as a developmental process that occurs at every age and stage in life? Does it help students acquire knowledge, explore their attitudes and feelings, and examine their behavior? Does it enable students to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills? Will students be able to identify their options and the consequences of their choices? Is it sensitive to those students who have experienced sex through exploitive relationships, such as incest and rape?

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