

Ten things parents need to know about the new sex ed

BY IMFC STAFF



In 2010, Ontario unveiled a new sex ed curriculum for children in grades one through eight.

When parents saw what was in it, there was such an uproar that the government immediately withdrew it.

They said they'd re-examine it, and they promised to consult with parents. But it's not clear they did. And now it's back.

From the technical names of genitalia at age six to gender identity at age eight, to anal and oral sex at age twelve, to a "personal plan" for sex at age thirteen – many parents say it's too much, too soon.

So what do parents need to know about the new sex ed?

1. It infringes on parental rights.

Parents are their child's primary educators. They have a right to the "moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."¹ Sex ed is not like math or science. It teaches values. Those values are for parents to decide.

2. It burdens kids with adult decisions.

The new curriculum teaches the importance of consent. It doesn't mention that the legal age of consent in Canada is sixteen.

The message to kids is that it's up to them to decide when they're ready to have sex. One teacher prompt tells kids that "making a personal plan" can guide them.²

Unfortunately, children are not equipped to make adult decisions. Modern neuroscience tells us that even the teenage brain is not fully developed in the area that evaluates risk.³

What kids need to hear is that they are not ready, and that they won't be ready until they are adults.

3. It's not age appropriate.

The new sex ed is not age appropriate because there is no such thing as age appropriate for every child. Parents know that their children – even siblings within the same family – mature at different rates. Information that's fine for one child might be upsetting to another.

The American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry advises that, "Parents should respond to the needs and curiosity level of their individual child, offering no more or less information than their child is asking for and is able to understand."⁴

Kim John Payne, author of *Simplicity Parenting*, talks about the burden of too much knowledge. He explains that it can upset a child's development to give them more information than they're ready to handle.⁵

4. It doesn't prioritize health.

The curriculum is clear that smoking and drugs are unhealthy and risky and kids should avoid them, but the approach to sex is different.

The health risks are minimized. Kids are not told what the real health consequences of sexual activity can be. For example, they are not told that depression and suicide attempts triple in teens who are sexually active.⁶ Or that there's a significant risk of contracting Herpes even when using a condom.⁷ Or that different types of sexual contact have different levels of risk.⁸

When it comes to teaching health, the new sex ed gets an F.

5. It's not very effective.

Parents are told it's urgent that we update the curriculum now.

But the reality is that school-based sex ed curriculums are a weak tool.

According to a major 2007 analysis, sex ed programs were most often shown to have no significant impact on sexual behaviours.⁹

In fact – when New Brunswick introduced their new curriculum, the teen pregnancy rate jumped almost 40%.¹⁰

Clearly, knowing more about sex doesn't necessarily translate into safer sex behaviour. Especially not for teens.

6. It downplays the importance of parents.

Teens rate their own parents as the biggest influence over their sexual decision-making.¹¹

And they're right. Studies show that parental monitoring and good relationships reduce sexual risk taking among teens.¹² They wait longer, and are less likely to get pregnant.

The curriculum starts off by acknowledging the important role of parents, but the actual classroom instruction downplays it.

It tells nine year olds that students should consult with “a trusted peer or adult” when they feel stressed, but why not direct children to their parents?¹³

7. It doesn't warn about online porn.

We are told that the new sex ed is needed to counter what kids are exposed to on the internet. By age 18, 90% of boys and 60% of girls are exposed to Internet pornography.¹⁴

But the new sex ed doesn't mention that there are very real dangers to watching porn. It can be addictive,¹⁵ it hijacks the reward pathways in the brain,¹⁶ and it can lead to intimacy disorders.¹⁷

In fact, the new sex ed doesn't mention porn at all.

8. It doesn't mention love or marriage.

The vast majority of teens say that they'd like to be married one day.¹⁸

These kids might want to hear about a 2009 study from the Journal of Marriage and Family. It found that teens who have more sexual relationships are less likely to end up happily married.¹⁹

Unfortunately, the new sex ed has no time for love or marriage.

9. It teaches gender identity

The concept of gender identity is first introduced in Grade 3, to eight year old children.²⁰

It's later explained that “Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense or feeling of being male or female, which may or may not be the same as the person's biological sex.”²¹

Many parents believe this is confusing, especially for children so young.

10. Opting out will be difficult.

The Education Act allows parents to request to take their kids out of class,²² but several boards have announced that they won't let students skip certain parts of the curriculum.²³

In fact, one Hamilton parent has taken his school board to court. He's simply asking for advance notice and the right to opt out his kids.²⁴

Three years later, he still has no court date.

Quebec recently decided that parents are not allowed to opt out their kids from sex ed for *any* reason.²⁵

So what can concerned parents do?

First of all, parents should know their rights. Parents have the right to educate their children according to their own values.

Develop a good relationship with your child's teacher, so they'll be receptive to hearing if you have concerns. Insist they let you know ahead of time when sensitive issues will be discussed.

Be proactive in addressing healthy sexuality with your kids. Create a home atmosphere where it's safe to ask questions.

And tell your kids that you want to hear about what was said in class. This will provide an opportunity to discuss if they've heard something they weren't ready for, or if the lesson seems to contradict the values you teach your child at home.



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Endnotes

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