

Background Material

SEX?
**A Healthy
Sexuality
Resource**



Background Material

SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource

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Background Material

SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource

The information contained in this book is up-to-date as of the date of printing. This book is not a substitute for the advice of a health professional. Always consult a health professional for information on personal health matters.

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ISBN: 0-88871-852-7

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Introduction

This booklet is intended to serve as a quick reference for public health nurses and others who may be called on to answer questions about, or related to, **SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource**. It contains background information on the resource, answers to frequently asked questions, Health/Personal Development and Relationships curriculum outcomes, and information on how to talk to your kids about sexuality.

All of the material in this reference may be copied and circulated as needed to respond to inquiries from parents, teachers, and others.



INFORMATION about

SEX?—A Healthy
Sexuality Resource



.....

INFORMATION about SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource

Children and youth hear messages about sex from many sources — movies, TV, music videos, the internet. In 2002, a survey in Nova Scotia found that many young people were engaging in sexual intercourse at a very young age and many were at risk both for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) — such as, chlamydia, herpes, and gonorrhoea — and for unintended pregnancy.¹

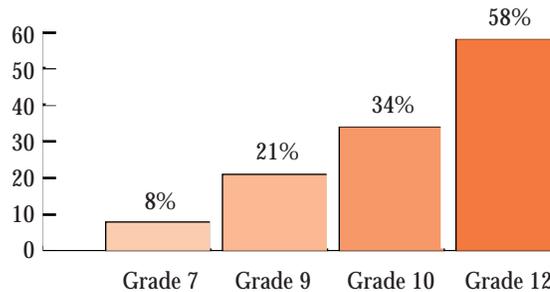
“The health and safety of our youth is our number one priority. It’s crucial that we provide youth with credible information to help them to make safe, healthy choices about their sexual health.”

Dr. Jeff Scott
Chief Medical Officer of Health, Nova Scotia

Unfortunately, a 2002 survey of Canadian youth showed that these young people knew less about sexual health than those surveyed 13 years earlier.²

Health and education professionals in Nova Scotia believe that the following statistics confirm that youth need information about healthy sexual choices.

- **8% of grade 7 students in Nova Scotia have already engaged in sexual intercourse.** This increases to 21% in grade 9; 34% in grade 10; and 58% in grade 12.¹



Of the students who have had sexual intercourse

- 37% had more than one sexual partner in the previous year
- 36% had **not** used a condom
- 66% had unplanned sexual intercourse
- 35% were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they had intercourse

- **Youth between the ages of 15 and 24 have the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).** The rate of STIs is also increasing faster in this age group than in any other.³

- **A 2002 Canadian survey of youth sexual behaviour also shows youth making unsafe sexual choices.**² This study found that:
 - 30-52% of youth had engaged in oral sex
 - Only 1-3% of those who had intercourse had ever had an STI test
- **The same study showed that 44-66% of youth didn't know that HIV/AIDS can not be cured.**
- **At least one in nine Canadian high school students has already been involved in an abusive relationship.**⁴

SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource offers youth accurate, up-to-date, practical information to help them make better decisions about their sexual health.

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HOW WAS THE RESOURCE DEVELOPED?

Nova Scotia's new sexual health resource, **SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** is the product of a three-year-long development process, undertaken jointly by the Office of Health Promotion, Public Health Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and our community partners.

Over 500 youth were involved in developing this resource. We started by asking young people what they or their friends “wanted to know, needed to know or wish they had been told” to help them to make healthy sexual decisions. Based on this information, we researched and produced a draft of a healthy sexuality book. We then tested this draft with youth throughout the province to ensure that they understood and could read the information. Seventy three percent (73%) of youth told us that this book would help them to make better decisions in the area of sexual health.

We also received positive responses, helpful advice and good ideas from eight parent/teacher focus groups throughout the province as well as from national and provincial experts in the field of sexual health and sex education.

SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource is a non-judgmental presentation of facts. It includes information about:

- Sex, Relationships, and Decisions
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Sexual Assault
- Preventing Pregnancy

Our youth have told that they want to make good decisions about their sexual health and they asked us to give them the information they need. We have listened to them and done our best to develop a resource that meets their need for accurate, up-to-date, practical, and readable information.

Sources:

1. **Nova Scotia Student Drug Use 2002 Survey**, Technical Report. Nova Scotia Department of Health, Addiction Services and Dalhousie University, November 2002.
2. **Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study**, Factors influencing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Health Canada, Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2003.
3. **Condoms, Sexually transmitted infections, Safer Sex and You** STD Epi Update, May 2002, Health Canada
4. **Healthy Relationships Violence Prevention Curriculum**, Men for Change, Halifax, NS, 1994.



2.

QUESTIONS
AND ANSWERS
RELATED TO

SEX? — A HEALTHY
SEXUALITY RESOURCE

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A LIST OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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1.

Question: Why is this book necessary?

Answer:

- Youth have asked for factual, easy-to-understand information to help them make safe, healthy choices before they become sexually active.
- Students and parents in focus groups across Nova Scotia have said that they want and need the information.
- Nova Scotia youth are engaging in sexual activity at a young age, and many are not protecting themselves from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy.
- A 2002 Nova Scotia Study (2002 Student Drug Use survey) shows that: **8% of grade 7 students had already engaged in sexual intercourse.** This increased to 21% in grade 9; 34% in grade 10; and 58% in grade 12.
- Of the students who had had sexual intercourse:
 - 37% had more than one sexual partner in the previous year
 - 36% had **not** used a condom
 - 66% had unplanned sexual intercourse
 - 35% were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they had intercourse
- A national study released in September 2003 (Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study: www.cmec.ca/publications/aids/) shows youth making unsafe sexual choices. This study found that:
 - 30-52% of youth had engaged in oral sex
 - 44-66% didn't know that HIV/AIDS was incurable
 - 6-8% of girls had been pregnant
 - Only 1-3% of those who had intercourse had had an STI test
 - One-third of grade 9 students and more than half of grade 11 students said that they had had oral sex at least once
- This resource is an efficient way to maintain accurate, up-to-date information for youth across the province. It will help to standardize the basic information given to youth and their parents. **SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** replaces and consolidates the more than 30 pamphlets, loose pages, and other assorted printed resources that are currently used. These are easily lost or overlooked, quickly become out-dated, and many were not really suitable for youth
- This resource will give young people a source of reliable information that they can keep and refer to.

2. *Question: Why did you call the book SEX?.....*

Answer:

- So it would appeal to our audience — youth. In our focus testing, young people said that if the resource looked boring, they wouldn't bother reading it.
- "SEX?" was one of the titles focus tested, so we knew teens would like it.
- We also tested more descriptive titles — like "Healthy Sexual Choices" — but youth rejected them.

3. *Question: Can I get a copy of the SEX? book?.....*

Answer:

- During the 2004-2005 school year, copies are available, free, for all Nova Scotian youth age 12-17, through public health offices or through schools in areas where the School Board has approved distribution. After this initial year, the resource will be available free to grade 7 students in participating schools and to out-of-school youth through public health offices.
- After August 2004, the entire resource can be viewed on-line or downloaded as a pdf file from the Office of Health Promotion website: www.gov.ns.ca/ohp
- After August 2004, copies of the book can be purchased from Nova Scotia Government Publications.
 - Address:* P.O. Box 637, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2T3
 - Hours of Operation:* Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 4:30
 - Phone:* 902-424-7580 and, toll free within Nova Scotia: 1-800-526-6575
 - Fax:* 902-424-7161
 - E-Mail:* publications@gov.ns.ca
- You can also see a copy in your local public library or at the local public health office.
- Check with your local school to see if a copy is available there for parents to view.

4. *Question: Has the Department of Education approved this resource?.....*

Answer:

- **SEX — A HEALTHY SEXUALITY RESOURCE** is NOT a school textbook. It is a personal health resource developed for youth age 12 and older that is being distributed through participating schools. It supports many of the topics currently being addressed in the grades 7, 8, and 9 Health/Personal Development and Relationships curriculum — for example, risk taking, assault and abuse, HIV/AIDS, sexual orientation, dating and relationships, pregnancy, and methods of contraception.
- **SEX?** has been listed in the Department of Education’s *Authorized Learning Resources* as a teacher resource. This means that the resource will be available to teachers to assist them in planning instruction to address curriculum outcomes related to sexuality education.

5. *Question: Why give this out at school?.....*

Answer:

- Youth in focus groups told us that school is by far the best place for getting this information to them, and it’s the most effective and efficient way to reach nearly all youth.
- A national study (Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study, released in September 2003 by Health Canada and the AIDS Commission) shows that youth say school is the number one place where young people get their information about sexual health.
- Also, the information complements (but is not part of) the Sexuality Education component of the Health/Personal Development and Relationships curriculum in schools.

6. *Question: Why are grade 7 students receiving the same information as grade 12 students?*

Answer:

- Grade 7 is the primary audience for this resource. It has been developed to address their needs and written at a grade 6 reading level.
- Students in grades 8-12 will be receiving the resource only during the first year of distribution. This is because it wasn't available to them in grade 7.
- **SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** supports many of the topics currently being addressed in grades 7, 8, and 9 Health, Personal Development and Relationships curriculum at your child's school— for example, risk taking, assault and abuse, HIV/AIDS, sexual orientation, dating and relationships, pregnancy, and methods of contraception.
- Students in elementary school have already been receiving sexuality education that gives them a basic understanding of the topic. This resource builds on that information.
- The youth in our focus groups –71% – said they thought the resource should be given to those in grade 6 or 7. This was consistently reinforced parents and teachers in our focus groups.
- Statistics and other evidence tell us that students at this level are already involved in risky situations. For example, in 2002, a survey in Nova Scotia found that many young people were engaging in sexual intercourse at a very young age and many were at risk of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This study found that 8% of grade 7 students had already engaged in sexual intercourse. By Grade 9 that jumps to 21%. This statistic refers only to sexual intercourse and does not include other activities like oral sex.
- Important decision-making happens during the junior high years. Parents, youth, and health professionals in the focus groups testing this resource stated that young people should have this information before they become sexually active so they can make safe, healthy decisions.

7. *Question: Isn't it the parents' job to talk to their children about sex?*

Answer:

- Yes, absolutely. Parents are their children's first and best teacher and their most important sexual health educators. You have the opportunity to ensure that your children know about sexual health and healthy sexual choices and are their best source of information, guidance, and support.
- This resource provides non-judgmental information on healthy sexuality, but family discussions and conversations provide young people with the values that will guide their choices.
- **SEX? — A HEALTHY SEXUALITY RESOURCE** provides accurate, up-to-date information and encourages youth to talk to parents, guardians and other responsible sources.
- Parents have told us that they don't feel they have up-to-date information on sexual health issues and that this book will help them bring up these topics with their children.

8. *Question: How can I talk about this topic with my kids?*

Answer:

- We have an information sheet for parents called "How to Talk to Your Kids about Sexuality and Healthy Sexual Choices."
- We hope the book will offer parents a way to discuss these topics with their children.

9 *Question: I'm not comfortable talking about sex with my children. What do I do if they ask questions about this book?.....*

Answer:

- You are not alone. Many parents are uncomfortable talking about sexuality and sexual issues with their children.
- Questions and curiosity about sex and sexuality are a normal part of growth and development.
- You could start by asking them what they think about the resource. Let them know that it contains information that is new to you. Ask them questions like:
 - Do you think this book will help other kids?
 - What do you think about the section on decision-making?
 - What did you think about the information in the sexual assault section?
- If you don't feel comfortable talking about sex and sexuality with your children, help them find other adults or professionals they CAN talk to.
- Let your children know it's okay with you if they ask for information from other accurate, reliable sources, like doctors, public health nurses, and teen health clinics.

10 *Question: My child finds this whole topic unsettling. S/he was upset when reading the book.....*

Answer:

- Children and youth mature at different rates and your child may just not be ready for this information. That's fine. Children and youth can refer to the book when they're ready. Let them know that its okay if they don't want to read it.
- If you are concerned about your child's reaction, consider suggesting that it might be helpful for him/her to talk to someone else about the issue — for example, a public health nurse.

11. *Question: Where can I get more information about sexual health issues?.....*

Answer:

- There are hundreds of websites where you can get information about sexuality, relationships, birth control, and STIs. Here are few good places to start.
 - Office of Health Promotion: www.gov.ns.ca/ohp
 - Nova Scotia Department of Health: www.gov.ns.ca/health/publichealth
 - Sex Information and Education Council of Canada: www.sieccan.org
 - Canadian Health Network SRH Centre:
www.canadian-health-network.ca/1sexuality_reproductive_health.html
 - Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada Youth Site:
www.sexualityandu.ca

- For additional background information on the topics related to sexuality, sexuality education, and related issues we recommend:
 - **What You Need to Know about STI: Sexually Transmitted Infections**
This can be downloaded in pdf format from Health Canada at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/std-mts/index.html
 - **Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education**
This can be downloaded in pdf format or ordered from Health Canada at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/cgshe-ldnemss/index.html
 - **Sex Sense**
The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
A comprehensive look at sexuality and contraception
Can be ordered toll free at: 1-877-519-7999 or online at:
www.sogc.org/sexsense/index.htm
 - **Common questions about sexual health education**, SIECCAN Newsletter, Vol.35, No. 1 — Summer 2000. The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada:
www.sieccan.org

12. *Question: Does this resource address the morals and values involved in sexual choices?*

Answer:

- No. This resource provides facts. Parents and others give children the values they will use to interpret and act on the information. This book can help parents discuss the topic of sexual health with their child.
- Morals and values play a very important role in sexuality. Morals and values are shaped by many influences — most importantly parents and family. They are also shaped by peer groups, religion and faith, personal experiences, books, media, and more.
- This resource presents the facts in a non-judgmental manner. Its goal is to give youth the information they need so they can make safe and healthy decisions about their sexual health.

13. *Question: Won't giving youth information about sex make them more likely to have sex?*

Answer:

- No. Research has shown that teaching children and youth about sex will help them to make healthy sexual choices. Young people who do not have information are more likely to take dangerous risks.
- The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS reported in October 1997 that evidence indicated that sex education for children and young people promotes safer sexual practices and does NOT increase sexual activity.
- 17 different studies of HIV and sex education programs show that sex education had a positive impact — most started sexual activity at a later age, had fewer sex partners, and/or had reduced rates of unplanned pregnancy and STIs.

14. *Question: Shouldn't we just teach them about abstinence?
Just tell them not to do it!*

Answer:

- Abstinence is clearly defined and promoted throughout the resource.
- Research has shown that an “abstinence only” approach to sex education does NOT result in youth waiting until they’re older before having sexual intercourse for the first time.
- Many youth are already sexually active, and we have a responsibility to provide them with the information they need to protect themselves.
- Responsible sex education programs must meet the needs of all the youth who participate, including those who have chosen, or will choose, to become sexually active.
- Abstinence-only programs do not allow youth to learn skills they need to reduce the risks of sexual activity when they become sexually active in the future.

15. Question: How accurate is the information in this book?

Answer:

- The information in this resource has been researched and checked for accuracy. The text has been reviewed by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada, (SIECCAN) as well as by medical experts in Nova Scotia.
- Depending on which sources are used, there will always be variation in the details. For example, in contraceptive effectiveness rates, we use both the rates for “perfect use” (how well a method works when you follow the directions exactly and use it every time you have sex) and “typical use” (how effective the method is likely to be if you don’t follow the directions exactly and don’t use it every time). Others may choose to use just one of these rates. Neither of these is wrong. They are just different perspectives.
- The Working Group that produced *SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource* chose the information used in the resource based on the advice of content experts. It is as accurate as we can make it as of the date of publication.
- The information will be reviewed and updated as new research is done so that future editions will remain accurate and up-to-date.

16. Question: Does this resource promote homosexuality?

Answer:

- No. This resource contains basic information on many topics related to sexual health. Homosexuality is one of them.
- The book introduces the topic but makes no value judgments, except to say that it is okay to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, but wrong to treat people badly because of their sexual orientation.

17. *Question: Why did you have to talk about things like oral sex and anal sex in this resource?.....*

Answer:

- Youth have asked us for this information. Many have engaged in these practices or know someone who has. A 2003 study found that 30 to 52 % of youth had engaged in oral sex.
- We have an ethical responsibility not to withhold information that relates to youth health and safety, and to let them know that these activities have risks.
- Youth have the right and the responsibility to make decisions about their sexual values, ethics and behaviour. They need both accurate information on which to base these decisions and their family's values to help guide them.

18. *Question: Is this a Planned Parenthood resource?*

Answer:

- No. This resource was produced by the Healthy Sexuality Working Group, which is made up of representatives of the Office of Health Promotion, Public Health Services, the Department of Health, and the Department of Education.
- **SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** was developed in consultation with parents, teachers, schools, health and sexuality experts, and hundreds of youth from across the province.
- Planned Parenthood was a contributing member of the Healthy Sexuality Working Group and just one of the many community partners consulted in the development of this resource. Planned Parenthood is an organization recognized for its expertise in issues related to contraception, and its medical staff was valuable in contributing this expertise to the resource.
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada, the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada, and others also contributed their expertise by reviewing the text for accuracy.

19. *Question: Will teaching them about birth control and condoms just encourage them to have sex and make it MORE likely that someone will get pregnant?*

Answer:

- No. Research shows that giving teens information about using contraceptives and condoms does NOT lead to earlier sexual activity or to more sexual activity.
- Research also shows that programs that teach about contraceptives and condom use DO increase the use of contraceptives among teens who are sexually active. This would make unplanned pregnancy less likely.
- You'll find more information on the website of SIECCAN — The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada: www.seiccan.org

20 **Question: Contraceptives don't work anyway, so why bother teaching about them?**

Answer:

- When used consistently and correctly, contraceptives are very effective.
- When no contraception is used, 85% of sexually active women will get pregnant within a year.

21 **Question: Why does the resource talk about condoms so much?.....**

Answer:

- Other than total sexual abstinence, only condoms offer significant protection against HIV/AIDS and other STIs.
- However, to be effective, condoms be used correctly and consistently. That's why it's important for teens to learn why they should use them and how to use them correctly.

22 **Question: Don't condoms have a high failure rate?**

Answer:

- No. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) confirms that condoms offer very effective protection against both HIV and unplanned pregnancy.
- The NIH also reports that condoms offer protection against other STIs, such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and trichomoniasis.

23. *Question: I've heard that condoms don't protect against HPV (Human Papilloma Virus). Is that true?*

Answer:

- Condoms do not provide 100% protection against all STIs. Condoms cannot protect against viral infections — like HPV and herpes — on the parts of the body that they DON'T cover.
- However, there is clear evidence that using condoms consistently dramatically reduces the risk of STI infection, particularly HIV/AIDS.
- Using condoms consistently and correctly can also reduce the risk of diseases associated with HPV, for example cervical cancer.

24. *Question: Is the morning after pill really an abortion pill?*

Answer:

- No. Here's the technical explanation:
Medical science considers that a pregnancy has begun once implantation of a fertilized egg in the lining of a woman's uterus is complete. The process of implantation begins about five days after fertilization and is completed about one week later, around the time of the expected menses. Emergency contraceptives are ineffective once implantation has begun; they cannot cause an abortion if the woman is already pregnant.
- In plain language:
 - “The morning after pill” or ECP (Emergency Contraceptive Pills) prevent pregnancy.
They do not interfere with a pregnancy or cause abortions or miscarriages.
 - They work by either preventing or delaying ovulation, or by preventing a fertilized egg from attaching to the wall of the uterus. Scientifically, a pregnancy starts when the fertilized egg attaches to the wall of the uterus.
 - Taking ECP will not hurt a pregnancy that has already started or cause a miscarriage.



3.

Health/Personal
Development and
Relationships
Outcomes Related
to Healthy
Sexuality—
Grades 7, 8, and 9

HEALTH, PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS OUTCOMES FOR SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Grade 7 Outcomes: *Students will be expected to...* _____

- **Risk-taking behaviours**
 - identify positive and negative reasons for taking risks (B3.1)
 - explain the relationship between risk-taking and self-image (B3.2)
 - assess their own risk-taking in a variety of contexts (B3.3)
- **Decision making**
 - identify and practise strategies for making decisions in situations that involve risk (B3.4)
- **Peer relationships**
 - identify and practise strategies for dealing with change in peer relationships (D3.4)
 - identify and practise ways of supporting healthy self-concept and decision making among peers (D1)
 - identify the roles, rights, and responsibilities involved in various relationships (D3.2)
 - demonstrate respect for the feelings and beliefs of others (D3.1)
- **Assault and abuse**
 - identify types of abuse and demonstrate knowledge of laws related to assault and abuse (B4.4)
- **Expressing emotions**
 - identify and practise healthy ways of expressing emotions (B6.1)
- **Managing stress and solving problems**
 - identify and practise strategies for managing stress and solving problems associated with the changes and challenges of adolescence (D1.1)
- **Consumer awareness**
 - demonstrate an awareness of adolescents as a target population for consumer marketing (C3.2)

Grade 8 Outcomes: *Students will be expected to...* _____

- **Risks of being sexually active**
 - identify risks and related precautions of being sexually active (B3.1)
- **Decision making**
 - demonstrate self-knowledge, self-respect, and assertiveness in sexual decision making (B4.3)
- **Teen pregnancy**
 - evaluate options and consequences related to teen pregnancy (B3.2)
- **Avoiding dangerous situations**
 - Identify and practise strategies for avoiding potentially dangerous situations (B4.2)

- **HIV/AIDS and STIs**
 - Identify and practise strategies for preventing sexually transmitted diseases (B5.1)
 - Identify and practise strategies for preventing HIV/AIDS (B5.2)
 - Demonstrate empathy toward people living with HIV/AIDS (C5.2)
- **Media and lifestyle choices**
 - Evaluate the impact of media on self-image and lifestyle choices (C3.1)
- **Sexual orientation**
 - Identify personal, social, and cultural influences related to sexual identity and decision making (B3.3)
 - Demonstrate acceptance of, and appreciation for, their own and others sexual orientation (C5.1)
- **Dating and relationships**
 - Identify traits of healthy relationships
 - Identify and practise strategies for communication personal needs in relationships
- **Personal values and peer acceptance**
 - Identify and practise strategies for balancing personal values and needs with the need for peer acceptance (D3.5)
- **Health and Illness**
 - Demonstrate a knowledge of symptoms, risk factors, and management strategies for various types of cancer (B5.3)

Grade 9 Outcomes: *Students will be expected to...* _____

- **Pregnancy**
 - Demonstrate an understanding of the stages of pregnancy and prenatal development (A1.2)
 - Identify the risks of smoking, drinking, and other drug use during pregnancy (B3.3)
- **Methods of contraception**
 - Evaluate the safety and effectiveness of various methods of conception (B3.2)
- **Sexual harrassment/date rape**
 - Identify and practise strategies for preventing sexual harrassment and date rape in dating relationships (B4.3)
- **Expressing strong feelings**
 - Expressing strong feelings such as anger, fear, and rejection in healthy ways (B6.1)
- **Maintaining health**
 - Evaluate the trustworthiness of alternative products and therapies used for the prevention and treatment of disease (B5.3)
 - Define and practise strategies for maintaining a general sense of health and well-being (D1.1)
- **Dealing with problems**
 - Demonstrate attitudes and strategies needed to face and deal with problems (D1.4)
- **Peer Relationships**
 - Identify and practise strategies for dealing with the challenges of peer relationships (D3.2)



4.

HOW TO TALK
TO YOUR KIDS
ABOUT SEXUALITY
AND HEALTHY
SEXUAL CHOICES

.....

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEXUALITY AND HEALTHY SEXUAL CHOICES

Youth need to hear about sexual health issues in different ways — by talking with parents and other trusted adults, through books, and in class discussions. Books and resources like **SEX?—A HEALTHY SEXUALITY RESOURCE** can provide information, but family discussion provides young people with the values that will guide their choices.

As a parent, you are your children’s first and best teacher. You have the opportunity to ensure that your children know about sexual health and healthy sexual choices. Young people have told us that they want to make the right choices and that they need information that will allow them to do so. You are their best source of information, guidance and support. We hope this information will give you some ideas for talking with your children about sexual health.

Be available and easy to talk to.

Start conversations about sexual issues. Ask what your children are learning in health class, what they hear from their friends, what they see and hear in the media — movies, TV, videos, magazines, etc. Your children will be more willing to come to you for information if they know you’re willing to give it.

Let them know you’re willing to talk about difficult issues. You may feel uncomfortable discussing topics like abuse, assault, dating violence, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual orientation, but it’s likely that your children or someone close to them will face one of these issues at some point.

Listen to your children without judging them.

Accept that your teens may see things differently. Share your own opinions, values, and views in a non-threatening way. You can disagree without condemning or belittling your child. Your children won’t open up to you if they’re afraid of being put down.

Look for accurate, up-to-date information to share with your children.

The more you know, the more you will be able to help your children and the more comfortable you’ll be with the whole topic of sexuality.

There are many up-to-date resources that are accurate and respect young people’s intelligence and ability to make decisions. These include books, videos, magazine articles, television, and the internet. And don’t overlook local professionals like public health nurses, your family doctor, or community agencies.

Leave resources and reading material where your children can find them when they need information. Keep in mind that before your children come to you with a question, they’ve probably already looked for information about it. Do your best to be sure that what you tell them is honest and straightforward and that the resources you give them are accurate, respectful, and up-to-date.

Help your children learn to make decisions and accept responsibility.

Children who have experience in making decisions and accepting responsibility for the results of their choices will be better prepared to make responsible sexual choices.

Don’t forget about boys.

Often sexual health information focuses on young women. This can give young men the message that they don’t need information and don’t have to accept responsibility for their actions. Young men need to hear about male sexuality and sexual responsibility too.

It’s never too late.

Talking about sexuality and sexual issues with your teenagers will seem more natural and comfortable if you’ve been answering their questions since they were small. But it’s never too late to share your values, beliefs, and experiences with your children. It’s never too late to let them know you care about them and the choices they make. Fathers and adult males offer important perspectives and can contribute a great deal to these discussions.

If you don’t feel comfortable talking about sex and sexuality with your children, help them find other adults or professionals they CAN talk to. Questions and curiosity are a normal part of growth and development. If you’re uncomfortable with the topic, let your children know it’s okay with you if they ask for information from other accurate, reliable sources.

For more information, check the Office of Health Promotion website: www.gov.ns.ca/ohp

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Adapted from:

Just Loosen Up and Start Talking. Planned Parenthood Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Department of Health, 1996, revised 2002.

Just Loosen Up and Keep Talking. Nova Scotia Round Table on Youth Sexual Health, 2nd Edition, March 1999.

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END!

Background Material

SEX?—A Healthy
Sexuality Resource


NOVA SCOTIA

Health Promotion
Health
Education

Public Health Services

www.gov.ns.ca/ohp

