

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Comprehensive Sexual Education for Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults

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"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . ." – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue: Sexuality is an important part of normal human development. Comprehensive sexual education programs that are easily accessible and available to all young people are imperative. As defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), comprehensive sexual education programs are those that (1) utilize evidence-based, medically accurate curriculum that can be adapted for youth with disabilities; (2) employ developmentally appropriate information, learning strategies, teaching methods, and materials; and (3) provide basic functional knowledge around six key topics: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. Such programs not only result in fewer adverse physical health outcomes like STIs or unplanned pregnancies, but they also improve social-emotional health by decreasing bullying related to sexual identification; increasing awareness of gender norms, sexual abuse, and abuse prevention; promoting responsible sexual relationships and practices; raising awareness of links between substance use and high-risk sexual behavior; and reducing dating and intimate partner violence. Populations that experience oppression, such as young people who identify as LGBTQ+ or adolescents with developmental disabilities, are especially susceptible – LGBTQ+ youth report higher rates of suicide and suicidal ideation where suicidal ideation is frequently associated with bullying, while adolescents with disabilities are more likely to be victims of sexual violence. Efforts to reduce victimization of youth through sexual education curricula are limited by regional disparities, inequitable access to sexual education, and a lack of sexual education requirements in special education curricula.

It is the position of APA that:

- 1. Children, adolescents, and young adults should have access to comprehensive sexual education regardless of disability status and/or presence of psychiatric illness, intellectual disability, or autism spectrum disorder.**
- 2. Schools are ideally situated for instruction on comprehensive sexual education, and parents and caregivers are vital in ensuring access to this education, both at school and at home.**
- 3. Sexual education should promote health and safety and should be trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive, and inclusive of non-dominant sexual and gender perspectives.**

Authors: Justine Larson, Anish R. Dube, Kathleen Koth, Elizabeth McGuire, Consuelo Cagande, Catherine Martin, Karen Pierce, and Natalia Ramos

Collaborators: Council on Children, Adolescents, and Their Families; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.