

Sex ed requires a modern shift

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Students calling for focus on relationships

EXCLUSIVE
REBECCA DIGIROLAMO

SEX education is too focused on babies and body image and not enough on safe, modern sexual relationships, South Australian school students say.

South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, said since she took on the role four years ago sexual consent and its absence in formal education had been raised by young people as a serious issue of concern.

"Sexual consent is one of the most important issues to them, as is the lack of education around it, or that is too little, too late or out of touch with modern times," she said.

"Young people have told me that there is too much of a focus on bodies and babies and not enough on the practical aspects of keeping sex safe and knowing what a healthy relationship looks like."

Calls for earlier school-based sex education, particularly focusing on consent, have been echoed nationwide after a recent petition circulated by former Sydney schoolgirl Chanel Contos.

SA educators are responding. The state's leading boys' and girls' colleges are due to meet for discussion within weeks, and the State Government is awaiting the Federal Government's review of the

WHAT'S TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS

PUBLIC

From age three to Year 12, age-appropriate sex education – which includes safe and respectful relationships – is part of the curriculum. Consent is taught to small children through relationships and their body and concepts such as privacy, rights and saying no. A more specific focus on informed sexual consent occurs more formally in years 9 and 10.

CATHOLIC

Respectful relationships is covered in each year level of the curriculum, alongside identity, human development,

reproduction and reproductive health. In years 9-12, understanding rights and responsibilities in relationships, including the law, sexting, consent, are covered.

INDEPENDENT

Sex education is taught through the Australian curriculum and in varying forms through pastoral care and other programs. Association of Independent Schools of SA chief executive Carolyn Grantskalns said some schools had reviewed their sex education curriculum to increase the focus on consent and respectful relationships.

“*Sexual consent is one of the most important issues to them*”

HELEN CONNOLLY

Australian curriculum, including sex education.

Prince Alfred College headmaster Bradley Fenner said the all-boys' R-12 college would join representatives of several leading single-sex schools, led by St Peters Girls,

to share education programs and ideas.

Mr Fenner said PAC had initiated a working party of key pastoral staff and engaged advocate and expert for healthy and consenting relationships Dr Tessa Opie to

review the school's current pastoral program, which encompassed sex education.

Education Minister John Gardner said sex education was an important part of learning, and the government wanted to make sure the curriculum was right and schools had the necessary supports to create a culture of respect and safety.

The State Government is also updating and expanding its 2019 cross-sector guidelines on recognising and responding to sexual behaviour incidents to include prevention of concerning and harmful sexual behaviours.

SHINE SA, which runs relationship and sexual health programs in schools, said it was important for consent to be understood as a fundamental concept beyond being just tied to touch or sexual activity.

"Consent can be, and is, taught from a very early age regarding sharing or interaction with others, including the notion that consent can be withdrawn at any time, like saying, 'I agreed to sharing my chips with you. But, when you started taking more than I thought you would, I stopped sharing,'" SHINE SA chief executive Natasha Miliotis said.

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