

## More than babies and bodies, young people want 21<sup>st</sup> Century sex education.

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, has today released **Sex Education in South Australia** – a report on the relevance of sex education currently being delivered to children and young people across the State.

The report examines whether the relationships and sexual health education currently being delivered to students in SA schools is fit for purpose from the viewpoint of young people themselves.

The Commissioner received more than 1200 responses from young people aged 12 to 22 years, to a survey asking about the quality, appropriateness, accessibility, and timeliness of their relationships and sex education. The report examines the extent to which young people believe the context, content, and experience of sex education, empowers them to make informed decisions to be safe from harm and ensure their sexual and physical boundaries are communicated and respected.

It is clear from their responses that South Australian young people want much more than puberty, anatomy, and how to prevent pregnancy and disease, taught in their sex education classes. They're seeking content that is more comprehensive and responsive to the current realities, pressures, and complexities of their lives.

This includes practical guidance in understanding what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like, how to respond to peer abuse and exploitation, and how to safely navigate their relationships and sexual interactions, knowing who and where they can turn to if things go wrong.

Young people feel they don't have a good enough understanding of the social and practical aspects of consent. Nor do they know how to navigate the reality of image-based abuse, including unwanted exposure to pornography and the damaging use of sexting that can sometimes occur amongst their peers. They want a better understanding of the interplay between sexual safety and the use of drugs and alcohol too.

**Quotes attributable to Commissioner Helen Connolly:**

With the virtual tsunami of commentary around sexual assault and rape allegations that have continued to fill our airwaves since the start of this year, it is well and truly time for politicians and educational leaders and decision makers to engage in a contemporary, mature, and pragmatic conversation about what children and young people need to be taught about relationships and sexual health. The evidence shows an approach which focuses on gender, power, and rights, is much more likely to achieve positive health outcomes, both in terms of knowledge and in the attitudes and behaviours that follow. This holistic approach, which integrates issues of gender diversity and gender equity alongside sexual health, safety and wellbeing, means viewing relationships and sexual health education as a fundamental right; embedding it in education to bring it in line with international best practice, and delivering it via engaging content ideally co-created with students themselves.

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