

Kids want a sex talk

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SEX education should continue through to years 11 and 12 and parents should lose the right to withdraw their children from the vital classes, the Commissioner for Children and Young People says.

The recommendations come after the state's biggest ever survey of young people on the topic found they wanted to learn more about how to have happy relationships.

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Let's REALLY talk about sex: kids' plea

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Survey participants said that was just as important as learning about the biology of sexual intercourse. This was especially so in the final years of school as young people became sexually active and started relationships just as sex education fizzled out.

After the survey of 1225 people aged 12 to 22, Commissioner Helen Connolly has made four recommendations: **SEX** education should continue into years 11 and 12;

PARENT rights to withdraw students should be rescinded; **AN** online information hub should be created; and **SPECIAL** community support should be provided to vulnerable children such as those with disabilities or in the juvenile justice system.

Families were the primary source of information on sex but a serious conversation was needed on the rights of children as well as parents, Ms Connolly said.

"That is what kids said they wanted," she said. "They are not their parents and they don't necessarily share their values. And they have rights to access information."

Several international covenants back the rights of children and there were international precedents.

The UK legislated in 2019 that courses on sex and health were compulsory right

through school, and parents would lose the right to withdraw their child from learning about relationships after the student turned 15.

"School is not just about education, it's about life," Ms Connolly said. "And it's not just a preparation for life, it's about life now. Young people are engaged in relationships now, be they sexual, intimate or platonic. And they're asking for guidance and support."

More girls than boys took part in the survey, but the boys who did posed many important questions. "They're asking what it means to be masculine, how do you ask girls out, how do you set boundaries," she said.

Current sex education was inconsistent and unregulated and not provided at all year levels – with older year levels often only getting an occasional visiting speaker, she said. Her report comes amid growing calls for respect in sexual relationships including a demonstration by Adelaide High students and petitions for students to be taught more

about consent. The survey found students were navigating relationships on and off-line, but there was too much focus on protecting children from predator adults and not enough about having safe interactions with each other.

In particular, LGBTQA+

children felt left out.

Ms Connolly said an online hub should be funded by government but run independently, guided by young people.

Education Department executive director Susan Cameron said sex education was "a pressing issue". "We are actively engaged in modernising sex education to reflect the needs of young people," she said. National and SA-designed curriculums were under review.

"(However) parental choice is enshrined and there are currently no plans to change that approach," she said.

Opposition Education spokesman Blair Boyer hoped the report would push the government to reinstate funding for the Shine sexual health organisation. Catholic Education SA assistant director Monica Conway said schools worked with parents on the program Made In The Image of God: Human Sexuality Curriculum, which extended from reception to year 12.

"The content is taught in age-appropriate ways," she said. Catholic Education SA is developing an online resource.

Association of Independent Schools SA chief executive Carolyn Grantskalns said "parents have a key role too".

The survey was initiated from student discussions in



youth parliament in 2019.

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DAVID PENBERTHY: SCHOOL'S PROBLEM A GLOBAL SCOURGE
LAINIE ANDERSON: HOW CAN WE TELL GIRLS IT WILL BE OK?



WHAT HAPPENS NOW

SA EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Early Years Learning Framework - birth to 5.
Australian Curriculum: Health & Physical

Education - Reception to year 10.

SA's Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum - age 3 to year 12.

Shine SA relationships and sexual health program - additional option for year 5 to year 10.

Guidelines for teachers on responding to problem sexual behaviour.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Made In The Image of God: Human Sexuality Curriculum

Age-appropriate teaching in all year levels from Reception to year 12. Teachers undergo training for the curriculum, including how to meet individual student need.

A recent review made the



curriculum more relevant and contemporary. Curriculum covers respectful relationships, identity, reproduction, reproductive health and human development. In years 9-12, the content includes rights and responsibilities, law, consent and social influences.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Sex education and relationship policies set by individual schools.



Young people are engaged in relationships now, be they sexual, intimate or platonic.

Commissioner for Children Helen Connolly