

## **FAQ on schools sex education programmes**

### **1. Why is Sexuality Education necessary?**

Sexuality education is an important programme in our schools. It aims to help our young understand the physiological, social and emotional changes they experience as they mature, develop healthy relationships with the opposite sex and to teach them how to make responsible choices.

There are a few related challenges that we aim to address through sexuality education. There is the problem of teenage pregnancies and the rising incidence of STIs/HIV among youths, because some youths are sexually active but do not use contraception. Our youths also have greater access to information. Our young have many sources of information online, from popular culture and friends. They are exposed to the social norms of other interest groups, including those with liberal values. Hence, it is important for them to be able to receive objective and reliable information in schools.

### **2. What are the messages taught in MOE's sexuality education programme?**

When sexuality education was started, the key message was abstinence, reflecting the conservative social tone of our Asian society where liberal values on sex are not espoused. But it was clear that abstinence as the only focus was not an effective strategy in reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and STIs. In 2007, messages were added – beyond knowing how to say no, students were also taught the repercussions of unwanted pregnancies and STIs/HIV and how to prevent them.

Content on sensitive topics related to pre-marital sex and homosexuality were made known openly and found to be generally acceptable. Even then, these sensitive topics were not and should not be the main focus of our sexuality education. Homosexuality forms a small proportion of the entire package – less than 3%. On homosexuality, children are taught what it is, and that homosexual acts are illegal. Pre-marital sex is generally covered in secondary schools to teach the consequences of sexual activity and the key learning point is that it is not encouraged, as there are undesirable consequences.

MOE's sexuality education programme respects the primary role of parents and needs to be taught in the context of values which our mainstream society believes in. This means encouraging heterosexual married couples to have healthy relationships and to build stable nuclear and extended families. We do not condone promiscuity, sexual experimentation or promote homosexuality. MOE teaches the values which are held by the majority, whether they are religious or not. This is why we still promote abstinence as the best option for teens.

### **3. What is MOE doing to tighten processes in the engagement of external agencies?**

MOE will continue to work with schools to train a core team of teachers to teach and deliver the sexuality education programme. External agencies can complement the teachers and are useful resource partners, because many have useful areas of expertise which can help to achieve our goals more effectively. Hence, schools should continue to be allowed to engage external personnel and agencies. However, unlike before where schools were provided the autonomy to engage these providers, the vetting process will now be centralised at MOE. The vetting process will be tightened to raise the level of accountability of providers. More stringent checklists will apply. A Committee, headed by Director/Education Programmes will be formed to approve agencies/trainers on the panel. It will institute periodic audits on the fidelity of sexuality education programmes in schools as well as their compliance with guidelines on the engagement of external agencies.

### **4. How can parents obtain more information on sexuality education?**

The Growing Years series has been made available to the public. In addition, we will put more information on our overall sexuality education framework on the MOE website so that as far as possible, parents will know what is being taught in schools and can play their primary role in sexuality education.

Schools will also provide sufficient information to parents on their sexuality education programme. Apart from providing an overview of their programme and topics covered at different age levels, schools should inform parents of any talks or workshops run by external providers and post such information on their websites. Parents are allowed to opt their children out of entire school programme or just for individual topics, talks or workshops.

### **5. Will MOE continue to engage AWARE as an external vendor?**

All external agencies will be subject to the new vetting process but beyond these procedural aspects, is the more important issue of trust. For the programmes to be delivered effectively, parents and MOE must be able to trust that external agencies teach according to the framework and values of MOE's sexuality education. External agencies must subscribe to these values if they choose to participate in sexuality education. If they believe otherwise, or think that MOE's approach on sexuality education is wrong, it is better not to participate in MOE's programmes but instead make their views known to the Steering Committee, who as professionals will decide the merits of their arguments and if the programme needs updating.

This is a better and more transparent approach for external vendors to take. External vendors must recognise that access to students in our schools is a qualified privilege based on trust. This applies to teachers as well. If parents are suspicious and distrustful of providers as having a negative influence on their children, then our programmes will be ineffective. For these reasons stated, we will not be able to use AWARE until they have gained the public's trust for their sexuality programmes.

We must guard against schools and educational institutions becoming arenas for advocacy by either side for issues on religion, race, politics and sensitive areas like sexuality education. If this happens, our students and educational system will end up the losers. We welcome the participation of community groups, VWOs, parents and other agencies to help MOE provide holistic education. But just as teachers must not abuse their privileged access to advocate their own points of view, external partners who are allowed to speak in schools must respect this privilege as well.

*For more information, visit the MOE website at [www.moe.gov.sg](http://www.moe.gov.sg).*