

SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

- What every parent should know

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FOREWORD

The whole question of sex education in schools has arisen in recent years and has become a matter of real importance. It is not mandatory on any school but it has become recognised as part of a school curriculum and if it is added to the curriculum of any school then it becomes a compulsory part of that school's education.

This report has emphasised the need for parental agreement to what, in this subject, is to be taught to their children and that such agreement is legally recognised.

It is unlikely that there would be any disagreement about the importance and the necessity of instruction in the basic scientific facts of sexual anatomy and physiology and of reproduction. Sex education has, however, been put forward as an aspect of health education and it would appear that some of the instruction proposed by advocates of more liberal sexual instruction may indeed have an exactly opposite effect to the maintenance of health.

From the health point of view it is obviously a matter of some consequence that there should be greater public knowledge of the incidence and effects of venereal diseases and the greater incidence of cancer of the cervix in young women who have indulged in frequent and promiscuous sexual activities.

The guidelines on the content of sex education which are set out in this publication are vital to the subject and it is to be hoped that the publication will help to create a greater realisation by parents of their responsibility and their officially recognised position in agreeing to what their children are taught in sex education.

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INTRODUCTION

Because of their immaturity and inexperience, young people are particularly susceptible to influence and it is hard for them to identify the nature of the pressures to which they are subjected. Even those boys and girls who are fortunate to enjoy a supportive home background which has given them strong convictions and ideals, may yet find it difficult to reject instruction which implies that it represents some contemporary "norm" of behaviour.

It is of concern to parents individually and to society collectively, that children are increasingly falling victim to the influence of dedicated sex education lobbyists, who promote the idea that if children of any age want to "have sex" of any variety, there can be no objection provided no conception results. The persuasive propaganda of this lobby has been uncritically accepted by many members of the public and by opinion makers.

The declared aim of the front runners of this lobby is to work towards a society in which "archaic sex laws . . . are non-existent" (1) : those laws which help to preserve the family as the basic unit of society and lay the foundation for civilised sexual standards. Sex education has also become the vehicle by which commercial interests seek to "widen the market for contraceptives" (2). Most of the teaching aids currently available for use in the classroom are amoral in approach, some are brutally explicit, and others are frankly subversive. There are times when the material used and the teaching given, particularly by outside lecturers, confuses and distresses normal children.

Because of growing concern by professional people and politicians about the nature and effects of sex education, the law now decrees that parents have a right to know what is to be taught to their children about sexual behaviour. It is important that parents use this right with confidence. They should enquire carefully into courses and the material to be used with their children, even under such apparently innocuous titles as Education in Personal Relationships, Education for Family Life/Parenthood, and Health Education.

Apart from all the physical and emotional health hazards (3), parents should remember that premature sexual experience has a detrimental effect on communication with parent and child, lessening parental influence (4). Children who confide in their parents are substantially less likely to have early sexual intercourse than those who do not confide (5).

In writing thus about the sex education of children in schools it should not be thought that the day-to-day work of teachers is under-valued. Nothing could be further from the truth. The majority of teachers are responsible and dedicated individuals who are greatly encouraged when parents show an active interest in what goes on in the classroom. These teachers are as concerned about maintaining high educational standards as the majority of parents.

This booklet has been written to encourage parents to involve themselves in the sex education of their children. Ideally this is best carried out in the home where sexuality can be taught as an enrichment of the whole personality – mind, emotions and body – in preparation for the future as partners in marriage and parenthood. Those parents who take on this important task will enjoy closer relationships with their children – and the children will be less likely to fall victim to the pressures being brought to bear upon them.

* * *

OFFICIAL POLICY

It is a characteristic of all democratic societies that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (6) and that "The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents" (7). It is parents who are held responsible for their children's general welfare and behaviour. When the State assumes the teaching burden it must respect the right of parents "to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions". (8)

1944 EDUCATION ACT

This Act, one of the pillars of the Welfare State, places on Local Education Authorities the duty of controlling secular instruction (9), giving to children education suited to their age, ability and aptitude (10). It further places on them, as far as their powers extend, the duty to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community. (11) In the exercise and performance of all powers and duties conferred and imposed upon them by the Act, the Minister and Local Education Authorities, shall have regard to the general principle that as far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, *pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents* (12).

If the Minister is satisfied either upon complaint by any person interested or otherwise, that any Local Education Authority, or the Manager or Governors of any County or voluntary school, have failed to discharge any duty imposed upon them for the purpose of this Act, the Minister may make an order declaring the Authority, or the Managers or Governors, to be in default in respect of that duty, and giving such directions for the purpose of enforcing the execution thereof, as appear to the Minister to be expedient (13).

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In 1981 The Department of Education published guidance on the school curriculum. This assumes that sex education will be included in the curriculum of schools and said "sex education is one of the most sensitive parts of broad programmes of health education and the *fullest consultation and co-operation with parents are necessary before it is embarked upon*. In this area, offence can be given if a school is not aware of, and sensitive to, the cultural background of every child. Sex education is not a simple matter and is linked with attitudes and behaviour" (14).

1980 EDUCATION ACT

Regulations made under Section 8 of this Act require Local Education Authorities *to inform parents of the ways and context in which sex education is provided* (15). The regulation was published in 1981 (16) and took effect on 25 May 1981.

LEGAL RIGHT TO WITHDRAW

The 1944 Education Act made religious education the only compulsory subject to be given in schools, and parents were given the legal right to withdraw their children from this subject. However, parents have no legal right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons, an analogous subject. A reason for this is that sex education did not exist at the time of the passing of the Act. Furthermore, it happened because parents are legally obliged to have their children aged 5–16 educated and they have no control over the school curriculum. It follows that if the school introduces sex education, the subject becomes compulsory for every child to receive it.

In short, there is a curious anomaly. Under the terms of the 1980 Education Act, parents now have the legal right to know what is to be taught to their children in sex education classes but no legal right to withdraw their children, however much they may disapprove of the ways and context in which it is to be taught*. In these cases, parents should appeal first to the Head Teacher who is ultimately responsible for what goes on in his school. (See Action for Parents p10)

NO LEGAL OBLIGATION FOR SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE SEX EDUCATION

Although the Department of Education's guidelines *The School Curriculum* suggested that sex education should be introduced in the broad curriculum of schools, it is *not* a mandatory requirement. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that local education authorities are now under pressure to introduce the subject.

*The Inner London Education Authority has issued *Guidelines on Muslim Pupils* (17). This document says in respect of sex education that on request Muslim children "could be withdrawn and given alternative work". Subsequent correspondence reveals that ILEA "is concerned to respect the deeply held beliefs of a religious nature, and in certain circumstances to make special arrangements where those beliefs are incompatible with the school's programme". It is clear from this that ILEA has had to recognise the rights of parents enshrined in the 1944 Education Act to have their children educated in accordance with their wishes, particularly in relation to cultural norms, religious beliefs and moral values.

INSTRUCTION AND EDUCATION

Sex INSTRUCTION concerns the giving of factual details of human intercourse and human reproduction and often includes instruction on the mechanics and use of contraceptives. This may occur in biology classes and as part of various human relationship or parenthood preparation courses. The specific task may be assigned to a particular teacher or to a visiting speaker. The guidelines set out on p.8 are of particular importance.

Parents now have a legal right to prior information that their children are to be given such instruction. It follows that they should also have the opportunity to inspect the books and other visual material to be used and to question the teachers concerned. Head Teachers should provide alternative courses for those children whose parents do not wish them to be given the sex instruction proposed.

Sex EDUCATION is a wider concept. This will often occur incidentally or unexpectedly as human relationships are studied and discussed during the course of History, Geography, Social Studies, Religious Education, Literature (English, Modern Languages or Classics), Civics, Current Affairs and other lessons. In these contexts, in addition to love and marriage, topics such as divorce, abortion, promiscuity, adultery and perhaps even homosexuality may arise. The words 'discuss(ion)' and 'teach(ing)' in the Guidelines cover this broader area and map out the appropriate limits.

Parents are entitled to expect that teachers will all work within the Guidelines on all occasions when such sex education takes place, and will indeed be considerably encouraged where they are assured that schools positively accept this commitment as part of that broader moral education which schools can provide.

PRINCIPLES

What values should be respected before introducing sex education in schools?

Most people would accept the following three principles:

- 1 **The Family** is the fundamental unit of society and should remain the ideal set before the young. The family can be defined as "Those related by blood, marriage or legal adoption" and "the group of people consisting of the parents and their children and those descended from a common ancestor".

The Department of Education has recognised the importance of the family: "The ultimate unity of our society is the family and the interdependence of its members is something that cannot be stressed too highly in education" (18).

- 2 **Ultimate Parental Responsibility** must be accepted and respected by every school in matters of sex education/instruction. "Few will dispute that parents of children of all ages have the chief responsibility, but this does not absolve the schools. This is an area of teaching in which co-operation between parents and schools is not only essential but often highly effective in encouraging mutual understanding and trust". (19)
- 3 **Privacy and Reticence.** "It is vitally important that the privacy and reticence of boys and girls are respected by all teachers, and that teachers should never in any circumstances lift the veil from their own private lives". (20)

If there is agreement on these values, then more specific guidelines for work in the school are desirable. We offer the following set of guidelines:

GUIDELINES ON SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

- 1 Respect for infant life before and after birth should be an ideal set before schoolchildren throughout all sex instruction and education.
- 2 Any instruction given to schoolchildren on the act of sexual intercourse or human reproduction should be given in the context of marriage.
- 3 As advised in the Newsom Report (21) "boys and girls should be offered firm guidance on sexual morality based on chastity before marriage and fidelity within it". Therefore, teaching, discussion or instruction given in schools should not encourage or approve sexual intercourse between persons who are not married to each other.
- 4 Teachers or visiting speakers should not teach, discuss or use printed material which instructs children in unlawful, unnatural, perverse or deviant sexual practices.
- 5 Any act which would constitute an offence against public decency were it to be carried out in public should not be performed, demonstrated or exhibited in pictorial form to or in front of children in schools.
- 6 Coarse, indecent and obscene terminology should be avoided at all times in schools; the language used by all teachers and visiting speakers should be dignified in accordance with the principles and guidelines above.
- 7 Discussion, teaching and/or instruction in the use of contraceptives should be given in the context of marriage and not given to children below the age of consent (16). There should be no implication in such instruction, teaching or discussion that it is anticipated that schoolchildren are likely to be involved in any kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.
- 8 Any kind of pornographic or indecent book or other printed text, cinematograph or television films, slides, video-cassettes, recordings, photographs, pictures or other representations should be excluded from all teaching, discussion or instruction in schools.
9. There should be very careful selection of those people who are designated to instruct schoolchildren in matters of sexual intercourse, human reproduction and personal relationships. "It would seem that people with an urge to teach sex to children should be discouraged" (Dr. D. W. Winnicott, child psychiatrist) (22).
- 10 Where the Department of Education and Science or the Department of Health and Social Security makes a grant to any body in relation to sex instruction/education, that body should agree to abide by the guidelines and principles. The continuance of the grant should be subject to the Departments being satisfied with the result of a continual monitoring of the work of these organisations. Head Teachers and Her Majesty's Inspectors should be encouraged to monitor the work of such bodies in schools.

The principles and guidelines above would therefore preclude:

- a) Those who desire to promote attitudes and activities which do not accord with the principles and guidelines stated above.
- b) Those who act, directly or indirectly, for or on behalf of persons or bodies gaining a financial advantage from the advertisement, sale or distribution of contraceptive materials and/or abortion services.
- c) Those who are members or supporters of, or sympathise with, groups campaigning for the acceptance of paedophilia and/or homosexual practices as natural and normal.
- d) All books which contravene the above guidelines and principles and those who would wish to use them with schoolchildren.

ACTION FOR PARENTS

If the unsatisfactory situation should arise where the instruction to be given is against the parents' deeply held religious or philosophical beliefs, what can be done? Here is the correct procedure.

- 1 Seek an *appointment* with the Head Teacher of your child's school. Take your husband, wife or another parent with you. If you have not been informed or consulted before sex education was embarked upon with your child, ask why not, and quote the Education Acts of 1944 and 1980.
- 2 Ask the *context* in which information on sexual intercourse and childbirth is given. If you have beliefs or cultural norms in such matters as contraception, abortion, nudity, masturbation, marriage and family life, ask what your child is being, or is to be taught on these matters. Listen carefully to the answers and note them in writing. Ask for a written copy of the syllabus.
- 3 Ask to see, and read carefully, all the sex education *material*: books, leaflets, packs and slides which are used in the school. Ask for a list of books on the subject in the school library. If necessary, ask the Head Teacher to arrange a showing of the films for you and your group of parents. Note the titles and publishers of any material about which you are concerned.
- 4 Ask whether any *particular organisations* are involved in sex education in the school. Some organisations are associated with the sale of contraceptives, the provision of abortions and the promotion of homosexual activities. They are not concerned with education in marriage, parenthood and family life. Further enquiry may be necessary into apparently harmless titles.
- 5 Note all the answers courteously. Do not be drawn into heated arguments. If you are dis-satisfied tell the Head Teacher this and why. State clearly *your beliefs and cultural norms* – you do not have to justify them.

Ask what steps will be taken to see that your child is not indoctrinated with any other standards and values.

- 6 On returning home, write an account of what has happened. Send a copy to the Head Teacher asking him or her to confirm your understanding of the *school's policy* and the ways in which your wishes will be met.
- 7 If you are not satisfied with the response of the Head Teacher, ask for an appointment with the *Chairman and Parent Governors of the School*. The names and addresses may be obtained from your local Town Hall or Library. Repeat the same procedure as with the Head Teacher.
- 8 The last word locally on publicly provided education is that of the *Director of Education* for your area. He can be contacted at the local education offices.
- 9 If you do not gain satisfaction from the Director of Education, write to your *Member of Parliament*. Ask that the matter is taken up with the Secretary of State for Education and Science.
- 10 If you still do not receive satisfaction, there is only one thing left to do: bring the matter to the attention of your *local papers, radio and TV*. Public exposure is often the only effective way of seeing that your voice is heard.

Do not be afraid to act decisively as defenders of your child's well-being.

**YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN LEGAL RIGHTS.
WHY NOT USE THEM?**

SOME PROFESSIONAL OPINIONS

The missionary zeal which has accompanied the introduction of sex education in schools should be treated with caution.

In 1970, Dr Rhoda Lorand, psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, wrote the following about types of sex education in the United States. Similar sex education is available and advocated in Britain:

"They overwhelm the child with concepts beyond his ability to comprehend, undermine parental authority, invade family privacy, disturb the development phases and borrow concepts from psychotherapy which are extremely dangerous for classroom use. They exhibit a lack of understanding of the thoughts, feelings and interests of children at every level of development, and of the processes by which children learn". (22).

In 1972, the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists warned:

"Practically nothing is known about the effects of sex education programmes, either in regard to the future health and happiness of the individual children or in relation to unplanned pregnancy. It was suggested that wrongly orientated sex education could be having a result which was the exact opposite of what it was desired to achieve, in that it was arousing curiosity and the desire to experiment. The rapidly rising incidence of unplanned pregnancies in the young age group gives some support to this idea. (23).

In 1978 Prof. Eysenck and Dr Nias wrote:

"Sex education . . . is potentially dangerous . . . little is in fact known about the advantages and the dangers of sex education". (24).

In 1981 Prof. Thomas Szasz, child psychiatrist said:

"... sex education, as presently practised, is a mass of misinformation, misrepresentation, and outright fraud. The term 'sex education' conceals far more than it reveals. It conceals the specific social, educational, and economic policies used to implement sex education, the moral values secretly encouraged and discouraged; and, last but not least, the problems that derive inexorably from involving the school system — and hence the government — in defining what constitutes education in human sexuality. The upshot is that many thoughtful and well-meaning people now endorse sex education (especially in schools) as a good thing. They should, instead, oppose it as one of the most deplorable consequences of the combination of 'liberal' policies with medicalised morals". (25).

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- 5 *Sexual Experience of Young Unmarried Women in the United States*, Family Planning Perspectives, 4 No. 4 1972, 9-18
- 6 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25, para 3
- 7 *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, Principle 7
- 8 *European Treaty of Human Rights*, Article 7
- 9 *1944 Education Act*, Sec. 23
- 10 " " " " Sec. 8
- 11 " " " " Sec. 7
- 12 " " " " Sec. 76
- 13 " " " " Sec. 99
- 14 *The School Curriculum*, Department of Education 1981, HMSO
- 15 *1980 Education Act*, Sec. 8
- 16 *Statutory Instrument 1981 630*, Sch 2, Part 4, Sec.C
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- 18 *Handbook of Health Education*, Department of Education HMSO 1968
- 19 *Health Education in Schools*, Department of Education, HMSO 1977
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- 21 *Half our Future*, The Newsweek Report, 1965
- 22 *The Child, The Family & The Outside World*, Dr. D. W. Winnicott, Pelican, 1975
- 23 *A Psychoanalytic View of The Sex Education Controversy*, Dr Rhoda L. Lorand, Journal of the New York State School Nurse Teachers Association, Vol 2, No. 1, Fall 1970
- 24 *Unplanned Pregnancy*, Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, 1972
- 25 *Sex, Violence & The Media*, H. J. Eysenck, D.K.B. Nias, Temple Smith 1978
- 26 *The Case Against Sex Education*, Prof. Thomas Szasz, British Journal of Sexual Medicine, December 1981

Printing Errors:

Please note that the reference numbers on page 12 should be 23, 24, 25 and 26, not 22-25.

Suggested reading:

The Illusory Freedom, Graham Heath, Heinemann Medical 1978

The Vulnerable Generation, Elizabeth Manners, Cassell 1971

The Betrayal of Youth, Rhoda Lorand, Education Update, Vol. 3, No. 3

Responsible Society Publications:

But Where is Love? a discussion paper for teenagers, 20p

Children in Society, State of Emergency, Barbara Nash, 20p

Dear Parents & Teachers, about the pressures on the young, 25p

Saying 'No' Isn't Always Easy, a leaflet for teenagers written by young people, 3p each, £2.75 for 100 copies

Sex Education, Its Uses and Abuses, K. H. Kavanagh, 20p

Sex, The Child & The Family, The Role of the Teacher, Elizabeth Manners, TD MA, 15p

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