

Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week

February 7 – 14, 2021

Do you remember how you first learned about sexuality and reproductive health? Were you aware that the topic was sexuality? Had you'd ever heard words being used or what they meant? When you think back, was it from eavesdropping on an older sibling talking to their friends? Was it the friend who 'knew everything'? Or was it a movie or something you saw online that didn't quite make sense, but you felt you had an inkling of to what it was about? Did you first hear about reproductive health and sexuality in health class? Was there any discussion about healthy relationships and caring yourself or others or was it only a review biology of it and how things work? Were your parents comfortable in giving you 'the talk'? Or like many of us that grew up in the 60's & 70's did you navigate those unfamiliar scary and yet exciting times on your own? According to research, the majority of youth want to be learning not just about the biology, but about how to have healthy, consensual, and happy relationships, including sexual relationships.

Sexual and reproductive education is essential in order to gain the skills and knowledge needed to develop healthy behaviours and attitudes about sexual health. Having open conversations about sexual health is particularly important right now as we are seeing increases in many sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI).

Health literacy skills are essential when seeking out *credible* sources of information, especially with the spread of misinformation online. Parents, health care providers and educators play an important role in providing youth with accurate information, tools and resources. Having open, respectful, and non-judgmental dialogue and using proper terminology for the anatomy, which agreeably can be uncomfortable for both parties, will help normalize sexual health discussions and lead to safe and positive health outcomes.

Comprehensive sexuality education is an approach to sex education that is more than the stereotype of putting a condom on a banana. Rather than a technical focus on biology or contraception, it needs to be presented in a holistic approach. This includes equipping people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and understanding of their own values, that will enable them to develop respectful relationships. It will empower individuals to make choices, keeping all parties safe, while being mindful of their own rights and the rights of others. At the most basic level, comprehensive sex education gives people the knowledge and the skills to make better decisions and to take better care of our health. Studies have shown that this approach results in reduced rates of sexually transmitted infections and of unplanned pregnancies.

Historically, individuals opposed to sex education believed that it somehow leads to increases in risky behaviour, but in fact research has repeatedly debunked this myth.

Most of sex education curricula assume learners that are straight, cisgender and white. Even in the subset of curricula that actually mentions sexual orientation and gender identity, those topics tend to be dealt with brief and as discrete topics, rather than integrating the need to address LGBTQ experiences throughout. Changing this would not only make sure that *all* youth have the information they need, but would help to create cultures of acceptance and care that push back against those sorts of marginalization.

Part of why sexual and reproductive health teachings are more than lessons in how to put a condom on a banana, is because our ability to decide on what safer sex measures to take in a given encounter is about far more than having one in your pocket and knowing how to put it on. Sexuality is intimately bound with how we connect with other people and the world. Educating and working with youth to prevent sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence, challenges the phobias that are dangerous, and it is about learning the skills to navigate our relationships in ways that respect our own rights and the rights of others.

What does LGBTQ+ mean?

- LGBTQ+ | An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer; the "plus" is intended as an all-encompassing representation of sexual orientations and gender identities
- LGBTQQIP2SAA | An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit (2S), androgynous, and asexual

For more information on LGBTQ and other acronyms please visit the Bloomington Pride website at <https://bloomingtonpride.org/glossary>

For more information and resources on speaking about healthy sexuality and reproduction please visit:

Klinik at <http://klinik.mb.ca/> for health care, crisis support, wellness and support
1-204-982-7800

SERC (Sexuality Education Resource Centre) at <https://serc.mb.ca/> 1-204-784-4090

Taking care of yourself and those in your life is so very important. If you or someone you know is in need of resources for mental health and or is in crisis, please call:

24 Hour Crisis Line toll free 1-866-427-8628

Mobile Crisis Unit Adult & Youth Team toll free 1-877-499-8770

Crisis Stabilization Unit toll free 1-888-482-5361

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