

Tips for Talking about Sexuality

- **Consider the ways in which the disability of the young person may affect the way in which education is presented.**
All children and young people need sexuality education, but children with disabilities may need information specific to how their disability will affect their sexuality. If the disability affects how they learn, some children may need the information to be presented in a different format.
- **Remember that sexuality education is not just about sex.**
Information about sex is important, but effective sexuality education should include information about feelings, communication, boundaries, private vs. public behaviours and building relationships.
- **The environment must support the messages in the sexuality education.**
Quality sexuality education includes learning to be responsible for one's body and actions. Demonstrating a general respect for an individual's personal space and an ability to make decisions should reinforce the lessons.
- **Clarify your own attitudes and values.**
The roles of parents/families and service providers are to ensure the availability of information and opportunities to develop skills for children and young people. Take time to clarify the difference between factual information and personal beliefs.
- **Preview all materials.**
Look at all materials before using them for education. The resource may not be what you expected and previewing can help you prepare for possible questions. Consider whether the material is age appropriate and suits the learning style and developmental age of the person with whom you are working.
- **Be clear and specific.**
Remember that one of the purposes of sexuality education is to clear up misunderstandings and myths. Even though it may be uncomfortable, you need to use the correct words for body parts and sexual activities. This can be very important for describing and reporting any form of sexual abuse.
- **Include sexuality issues in staff training.**
Be sure that staff are prepared to deal with sexuality issues and know where to direct questions from young people. This means that staff need information on healthy sexuality as it relates to all of the young people with whom they work.
- **Respect the young person's need for privacy.**
Remember that young people need private time to learn about themselves and time with peers to develop relationships.
- **Don't wait for a crisis.**
Many problems with inappropriate behaviour come from a lack of education about sexuality and social norms. Providing basic information about the body, the difference between healthy and abusive touch and the difference between public and private behaviours (e.g. masturbation) may reduce the incidences of harmful or embarrassing activities.