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Fifteen Domains of Healthy Sexual Development

Healthy Relationships with peers, family, partners and the wider community are vital. An ability to communicate openly and to develop and maintain meaningful, trusting relationships is important. This also includes being able to express love and intimacy in appropriate ways. Achieving healthy interpersonal relationships in general leads to achieving healthy sexual relationships.

4. Understand how to build, maintain and negotiate healthy relationships

Overview

Sexual consent involves a clear, conscious, active, on-going, mutual consent to participation in intimate and sexual activity. Developing understandings of consent is vital. Respect and consent must be taught from the early years through the idea that our bodies are our own and that we have the right to say no to any unwanted touch.

What is sexual consent? A clear, conscious,

In 2010 Alan McKee *et al* published *Healthy Sexual Development: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Research*\*. This ground-breaking article set out the fifteen areas of focus for research into healthy sexual development. The RSE Hub identified the value of the fifteen domains for establishing a manifesto for Relationships and Sex Education: the fifteen areas that we all need to be able to develop in order to flourish and mature in our sexuality and sexual lives.

\*McKee, A., Albury, K., Dunne, M., Grieshaber, S., Hartley, J., Lumby, C. & Mathews, B. (2010) *Healthy Sexual Development: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Research*, International Journal of Sexual Health 22:1, 14-19

7. Understand own values/beliefs and how they impact on decision-making and behaviour

Curiosity about developing sexuality and sexual feelings is natural. We need to feel able to explore our feelings with, and seek help and information from supportive, well-informed and trusted sources, including friends, family and professionals. We need to be able to make informed choices. Learning about and developing our sexuality does not stop if or when sexual intercourse begins; we continue to learn about our sexuality throughout our lives.

We need to be able to recognise how values arise and how they affect sexual attitudes and behaviour. We all need the ability to identify and understand the values and beliefs of peers, families and communities, and to express sexuality in ways that are consistent with our own values.

5. Openness to exploring sexuality, gaining knowledge and asking for help as part of life-long learning

An understanding of how our bodies work in relation to our anatomy, puberty, arousal and pleasure, masturbation, orgasms, sex and reproduction, fertility/infertility, pregnancy and abortion. This learning should begin at an early age, led by the age and stage of the child or young person.

2. Understanding of anatomy, physiology, dysfunction, fertility and sexual response

1. Respect and understanding of consent

Developing an awareness of sexual pleasure and the ability to enjoy and express sexuality by ourselves and with others. It is important to recognise that we can enjoy sexual feelings without necessarily acting on them. Sexual expression should always be a choice and enjoyable and consensual for all parties.

6. Celebrate sexuality, pleasure and the joy of sexual relationships

Acquiring knowledge and understanding of laws and rights relating to sexual activity; risks of STIs; different forms of contraception; how to practise safer sex. Enjoying freedom and protection from unwanted sexual activity, sexual abuse, and manipulative or exploitative relationships.

3. Ability to maintain safety (legally, physically and emotionally)



Developing an understanding of sexual orientations and gender identities and their expression, and especially that these may not be fixed throughout life. Understanding of the meanings of heterosexuality, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, trans, and of the diversity of family formations (including same-sex parents and families with more than two parents) and respecting the sexual orientation and gender identities of others.

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Developing an understanding of solo and shared sexual behaviours; including same-sex sexual activity. Sensuality, pleasure and fantasy. Having an awareness of sexual fluidity and of asexuality.

Critically examining biases based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, identity and expressions, culture, class, dis/ability, ethnicity and race and how they can affect how we perform our sexual identities. Having an awareness of power and control in society and its impact on us.

It is important to develop resilience in the face of outcomes, such as sex that doesn’t meet expectations, relationship breakdowns, rape or sexual assault, and unintended pregnancy. Developing risk management skills, a personal sense of agency, communicating wants and needs, and understanding how and where to get help, can all contribute to this.

10. Build resilience to be able to manage any unwanted outcomes

It is important to learn to identify, negotiate and clarify boundaries in relationships and in society, and to manage our own and our responses to others’ boundaries. We need to be able to recognise the difference between public and private expressions of sexuality.

8. Ability to comprehend, establish and respect boundaries

Building an understanding of agency and autonomy: that we are in control of and can make choices about our bodies and sexuality. Gaining a confidence to resist peer pressure. Learning to communicate effectively, and to develop assertiveness, negotiation and decision-making skills, with an ability to ask for help. Being able to discriminate between life-enhancing sexual behaviours and those that are harmful to self and/or others.

9. Developing personal skills

Gaining an ability to apply critical analysis to media representations of sex, sexual orientation, relationships, body image, gender, and sexual expression. We need to develop competence in mediated sexuality, so that we can have a sense of its potential impact on us and others, and are able to be critical of and challenge particular representations.

13. Appreciation of the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identities

It is important to develop a positive attitude towards our own sexuality and well-being and how this may change during our lifecourse. We need to be able to appreciate our body, to accept ourselves and feel accepted, even if our sexual and gender identity and expression does not conform to someone else’s ideas of what it should be.

15. Developing a positive attitude to own concept of self

12. Understanding of varying gender roles in cultures and societies

11. Having an awareness of the diversity of sexual behaviour throughout the lifespan

14. Applying critical analysis to media representations