

WISER SCHOOLS PROGRAMME (Junior & Senior)

The WISER programmes have been designed to promote a positive, respectful approach towards relationships and sexuality that enables and empowers young people to make knowledgeable choices with regard to their sexual health and personal relationships.

Access to accurate, balanced sex education – including information about contraception and condoms – is a basic human right of young people. Such education helps young people to reduce the risks of potentially negative outcomes, such as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) affecting them. Such education can also help young people to enhance the quality of their relationships and to develop decision-making skills that will prove invaluable.

In line with the vision of the Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020, the WISER programmes support the aims of sexual health promotion, education and prevention initiatives, which are:

“to encourage the development of a healthy sexuality throughout life; to enhance people’s lives and relationships; to reduce negative outcomes such as STIs and crisis pregnancies; and to create an environment that supports sexual health and wellbeing”.

The WISER programmes use effective teaching approaches that are participatory, helping students personalise information and strengthen their communication, decision making and critical thinking skills. Our programmes are constantly evolving as we keep up-to-date with current research within sexual health education and we fully support working in partnership with parents and schools to promote a safe environment within which young people can learn and develop.

Theories Underpinning WISER programmes

Two theories which are useful in framing the WISER Junior & Senior workshops are the Health Belief Model (Becker, 1974) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1991) both of which illustrate the importance of working on attitudes and knowledge. This in turn, enhances the likelihood of a participant having the self-efficacy to carry out an action for e.g. having the knowledge and skills to use a condom appropriately.

Child Protection

All staff have received Children First Training. If an incident occurs, organisational Child Protection Policies are followed and Children First Guidelines adhered to.

A 'little' WISER (Primary School, 6th class)

The most valuable learning about relationships and sexuality come from the home. Families are in the best position to teach their children values and attitudes towards relationships and sexuality. Although most parents want to be the primary educators for their children, many express concern about saying the wrong thing and hindering their child's healthy sexual development. When families talk openly with children, it contributes to greater openness about sex and sexuality and improves sexual health among young people (Ingham & Van Zessen, 1998). Schools often share the same anxieties as parents, but they also have an essential role to play. As well as facilitating this aspect of students' learning, school programs have been found to increase parent-child communication regarding sexual health information

Why we should talk about Relationships and Sexuality Education with Primary School Children?

1. *Many children want to know*

Many younger children are curious about how babies grow and how they 'started'. Children should know before they start post-primary school how a baby is conceived. While some children have no interest in the subject of sex, most have some and talk with their friends about sex and body functions. Sexuality education provides the opportunity to learn the anatomically correct vocabulary, which gives them a better chance to frame questions and express themselves.

2. *Sexuality education provides preparation for puberty and beyond*

Good sexuality education plays an important part in helping children manage the physical and emotional changes that puberty brings. Children most frequently ask, 'Am I normal?' and, 'When will it happen?' A chance to hear what to expect and that physical changes and processes affect everyone can be self-affirming. Learning how to manage these changes is also part of helping children to become independent and confident.

3. *Some children enter puberty earlier*

The process of puberty can start as young as eight among some children. The different ages at which children start puberty can make it difficult for children as

they observe themselves or their peers changing. All children need to know about puberty before it happens.

4. *Sexuality education helps young people make healthy choices*

Children whose parents discuss values and attitudes towards sexuality and who receive good sexuality education at school are more likely to engage in sexual activity later and less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmissible infection. Reducing these negative outcomes is not the only purpose of sexuality education but it is an important one (Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, 2008)

5. *Children are saturated with sexual messages*

Almost daily they hear messages about bodies, privacy, birth, menstruation, sexual feelings, shame, being a boy or a girl and friendship, just to name a few. These messages influence their capacity to manage their health and relationships as they grow older. In the absence of formal sexuality education this process continues unguided and unsupported (Collyer, 1995).

6. *Gender stereotypes begin to affect children's choices and options*

By the age of eight, children will display a sense of the rules about gender. For example, 'girls can't play soccer' or 'boys don't cry'. Sexuality education helps children to separate fact from fiction about being a boy and being a girl. A safe space and time to question gender rules in society can help broaden their options and make it easier for the children who don't fit the stereotypes

7. *Sexuality education can be protective against sexual abuse*

Many important messages and skills that contribute to children's safety are part of a comprehensive sexuality program. They include:

- Teaching children about the correct names of their body parts
- Giving children permission to talk and ask questions about sexual body parts
- Explaining the qualities of respectful relationships and appropriate sexual relationships
- Identifying a support network of teachers and parents to whom they could turn to
- Understanding personal safety, that is, safety for our bodies and how to keep ourselves safe.

For more information on our Primary School Programme (6th class) please contact our office or email lorraine@aidswest.ie

Other Workshops

We develop workshops for Youthreach Organisations, youthgroups, the prison service, direct provision centres, LGBT+ groups and any organisation/group who want to enhance the capacity of their staff in dealing with sexual health related issues. Please contact AIDS West office or lorraine@aidswest.ie for more information.

References:

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Tusla 2011. Children First Guidelines Available from: <http://www.tusla.ie/children-first/roles-and-responsibilities/organisations/children-first-training>

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