



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
OFFICE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**THE
TEACHING
OF
HUMAN
SEXUALITY**

**GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

*This document has been approved by the
Catholic Bishops of Western Australia*

INTRODUCTION

One area where students in Catholic schools need to be educated with special care is human sexuality. This is especially so in a society where students are confronted daily by the media and other influences of society which unnaturally isolate human sexuality from the person.

Catholic Schools, in so far as they are entrusted by parents with the care and education of children, have a complementary role in educating growing children in the true meaning of human sexuality.

It is the role and responsibility of the Principal in a Catholic school to provide overall educational and spiritual leadership. This leadership is essential in the implementation of the principles and guidelines of teaching human sexuality. The Principal needs to ensure that teachers have an understanding of what is appropriate in a particular school both developmentally and culturally for the students. All materials and programs for teaching human sexuality need to have the support and approval of the Principal.

When teaching about human sexuality in Catholic schools more than the physical, observable facts need to be explained. It must be emphasised that sexuality is integral to the total human person, that it reflects God the Trinity who brought human life into being to share divine life.

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

Principle One:

Catholic faith sees human sexuality as integral to the whole human person. Accordingly, education in human sexuality is inseparable from its moral, emotional and social dimensions.

- 1.1 Human sexuality should not be taught in isolation.
- 1.2 Information about human sexuality should always be imparted in the context of faith and Catholic Moral teachings leading to the formation of Christian conscience.
- 1.3 Teaching and classroom materials should always promote the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of a loving God.
- 1.4 Curriculum materials need to be monitored and planned so that the development of all dimensions of the human person (intellectual, moral, social and spiritual) can be integrated with physical development.
- 1.5 The staff in all curriculum areas need to consult and cooperate in the presentation of content in the area of human sexuality.
- 1.6 Teachers should have the opportunity to clarify their understandings and attitudes in light of the Church's teaching in the area of human sexuality.
- 1.7 The 'values clarification approach' should not be used as it implies that all values are equal and it neglects the objective reality of moral law, and disregards the development of the formation of conscience.
- 1.8 Teachers need to have an understanding and acceptance of the reality of human weakness and 'sinfulness'.

Principle Two:

A truly Catholic Approach to human sexuality will be rich and life-affirming. It will include the many facets of the mystery of human sexuality.

- 2.1 The positive aspects of the Catholic approach to human sexuality education must always be portrayed. These include:
 - the acceptance and celebration of sexuality as characterised by tenderness, warmth and joy
 - that human sexuality is a gift from God
 - human procreation as being both life-giving and love-giving

- the understanding of chastity as the Christian virtue of expressing faithful loving within human relationships and friendships
 - the integration of sexuality into the whole person
 - the unity of body and spirit
 - the Catholic understanding of commitment, fidelity and marriage
 - the complementary and equal dignity of men and women.
- 2.2 Teachers should avoid portraying human sexuality in extreme ways. These include:
- suggesting that sexuality is dirty, dangerous or a source of anxiety
 - suggesting that the popular images of sexual experience and sexual satisfaction are acceptable.
- 2.3 The presentation of Catholic teachings must always include what the Church teaches and explanations for these teachings in the area of human sexuality, such as:
- respect for the dignity of the human person
 - faith in Christ
 - the value of human life
 - the formation of Christian Conscience.

Principle Three:

Since parents are the first educators of their children, the family is the preferential place for the education of young people in human sexuality.

- 3.1 Parents must be informed when the school plans to present materials in the area of human sexuality. The information which goes out to parents must be clear and easily understood by all parents. Parents need to be consulted with, and informed of the materials presented.
- 3.2 Parents have the right to withdraw their children from classes on education in human sexuality. Parents who withdraw their children have the duty to provide adequate formation to them. The school has a responsibility to ensure that these students are occupied in a meaningful, educational manner.
- 3.3 With parental consent, children can be prepared for the onset of puberty by the school. The provision of guidelines and educational opportunities for parents is the responsibility of the parish and of the wider Church community. The education of parents is not the prime responsibility of the school.

Principle Four:

In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, the school has a supportive and complementary role in assisting parents with the education of children in human sexuality.

- 4.1 Teachers must be given appropriate training and professional development to enable them to deal with teaching human sexuality in a Catholic context.
- 4.2 All parents must be made aware of the Catholic values taught in Catholic schools so that they can make informed choices about the education of their children.
- 4.3 Teachers must be instructed of their role as witnesses of Christ and that their behaviour and attitudes are critical in imparting a Catholic character to students.

Principle Five:

Education in human sexuality must be related to the age and developmental level of young people.

- 5.1 Teachers need to be aware of the readiness of the children in their classes and adapt instructions accordingly.

- 5.2 The treatment of particularly sensitive issues in human sexuality should be carefully planned. Such issues ought to be treated in an appropriate way at the appropriate age and level of the students. Questions from students about abnormal sexual practice should be dealt with sensitively and the students should be encouraged to refer the questions back to their parents. Students need to be able to distinguish the difference between what the Church teaches about *persons* and what the Church teaches about *actions*.

Principle Six:

Education in human sexuality must take sensitive account of the social and cultural context in which it occurs.

- 6.1 Teachers must be aware of the social and cultural context of the particular school in which they teach.
- 6.2 Students need to be encouraged to analyse and critique appropriate material from society and the media, so that they can learn to be critical and value-centred.
- 6.3 Teachers must be aware of the cultural composition of their classes and take this into consideration when planning and conducting lessons. This includes:
- an awareness of the cultural difference in ages and stages of sexual awareness in children
 - the need to be sensitive to the ethics and morals of different races and religions
 - the need in certain cases to send home information in a language other than English.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The information presented in this document is drawn from Catholic Church teachings presented in the following documents:

Educational Guidance In Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1984)

The Catholic School.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1977)

Catechism of the Catholic Church.

(Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1994)

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family.

Pontifical Council for the Family. (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1996)