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# Outrage over WHO advice on sexuality for infants

Guide argues that 'sexuality education starts from birth'

By Michael Murphy  
13 May 2023 • 8:38pm

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Sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ enjoyment and pleasure when touching one's own body, early childhood masturbation</li><li>■ discovery of own body and own genitals</li><li>■ the fact that enjoyment of physical closeness is a normal part of everyone's life</li><li>■ tenderness and physical closeness as an expression of love and affection</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ gain an awareness of gender identity</li><li>■ talk about (un)pleasurable feelings in one's own body</li><li>■ express own needs, wishes and boundaries, for example in the context of "playing doctor"</li></ul>
Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ different types of love</li><li>■ "yes" and "no" feelings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ feel and show empathy</li><li>■ say yes/no</li></ul>

The WHO guidance says that children aged four and under should be taught about 'enjoyment and pleasure when touching one's own body, early childhood masturbation' | CREDIT: WHO

The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) is under pressure to withdraw guidance for schools recommending that toddlers "ask questions about sexuality" and "explore gender identities".

The guidance says that "[sexuality education](#) starts from birth" and is described as a "framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists".

Its advice on how to "talk about sexual matters" with young children was aimed at policymakers across Europe, and was translated into several European languages and promoted at national and international events, according to the WHO.

The document was also consulted by Welsh ministers who last year rolled out a [mandatory sexual education syllabus to schools in Wales](#), and has led to a [backlash from the Government, MPs and activists](#).

The advice proposes that four-to-six year olds should be taught to "talk about sexual matters" and "consolidate their gender identity".

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0-4	Information Give information about	Skills Enable children to	Attitudes Help children to develop
Relationships and lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>different kinds of relationship</li> <li>different family relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>talk about own relationships and family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a feeling of closeness and trust based on the experience of bonding</li> <li>a positive attitude towards different lifestyles</li> <li>the awareness that relationships are diverse</li> </ul>
Sexuality, health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>good and bad experiences of your body/what feels good? (listen to your body)</li> <li>if the experience/feeling is not good, you do not always have to comply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>trust their instincts</li> <li>apply the three-step model (say no, go away, talk to somebody you trust)</li> <li>achieve feelings of well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an appreciation of their body</li> <li>the awareness that it is ok to ask for help</li> </ul>
Sexuality and rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the right to be safe and protected</li> <li>the responsibility of adults for the safety of children</li> <li>the right to ask questions about sexuality</li> <li>the right to explore gender identities</li> <li>the right to explore nakedness and the body, to be curious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>say "yes" and "no"</li> <li>develop communication skills</li> <li>express needs and wishes</li> <li>differentiate between "good" and "bad" secrets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an awareness of their rights which leads to self-confidence</li> <li>the attitude "My body belongs to me"</li> <li>the feeling that they can make their own decisions</li> </ul>
Social and cultural determinants of sexuality (values/norms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social rules and cultural norms/values</li> <li>gender rules</li> <li>social distance to be maintained with various people</li> <li>the influence of age on sexuality and age-appropriate behaviour</li> <li>norms about nakedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>differentiate between private and public behaviour</li> <li>respect social rules and cultural norms</li> <li>behave appropriately according to context</li> <li>know where you can touch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>respect for their own and others' bodies</li> <li>acceptance of social rules about privacy and intimacy</li> <li>respect for "no" or "yes" from others</li> </ul>
■ main topic (new)   ■ main topic (consolidation)   • additional topic (new)   • additional topic (consolidation)			

WHO Regional Office for Europe and BDIH Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe

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The guide recommends that children under the age of four should be told they have 'the right to ask questions about sexuality' and 'the right to explore gender identities' | CREDIT: WHO

It recommends that children under the age of four should be told they have "the right to ask questions about sexuality" and "the right to explore gender identities".

The WHO guidance also says that children aged four and under should be taught about "enjoyment and pleasure when touching one's own body, early childhood masturbation".

These topics are described as the "minimal standards that need to be covered by sexuality education".

A government spokesperson said: "The UK Government does not recognise this WHO guidance and we don't agree with its recommendations. We have not distributed or promoted it to schools.

"We offer our own guidance to help schools to teach children and young people about relationships and health."

However, the WHO guidance, first published in 2010, was cited in a 2017 report commissioned by Welsh ministers entitled "Informing the Future of the Sex and Relationships Curriculum in Wales".

## Legally enforceable in Wales

The report was commissioned to "inform the development of the future Sex and Relationships (SRE) curriculum", which became legally enforceable in Welsh schools last year, although it did not adopt all of the

recommendations in the report conducted by Cardiff University.

Laura Anne Jones MS, shadow minister for education in Wales, said the WHO “needs to rescind the advice immediately”.

Ms Jones also called for the Welsh government to “distance themselves” from the “frankly disturbing” WHO guidance.

She added: “We must stop this pushing of harmful gender ideology into sex education in Wales and the UK, with immediate effect. The WHO needs to rescind the advice immediately.”

A Welsh government spokesperson said it did not “endorse” the WHO guidance, adding: “What is taught in schools is set out clearly in the RSE Code. The code gives very clear direction to schools so that children only learn about things that are appropriate for their age and development.

“At a younger age children will be taught about treating each other with kindness and empathy.”

### ‘Premature sexualisation’

However, the laws have been condemned by MPs, parents’ organisations and activist groups concerned about the premature sexualisation of children in Welsh schools.

Tanya Carter, a spokeswoman for Safe Schools Alliance, who campaign for child safety, has demanded an “urgent enquiry” into whether there is a link between “RSE curriculum in this country” and sexual education guidance issued by UN organisations such as the WHO and UNESCO.

“An urgent inquiry is needed into how this ideology... has come to influence so much public thinking,” Ms Carter added.

A WHO spokesman told The Telegraph the organisation it stands by its guidance and it remains accessible.

The spokesman added: “Our guidelines reflect established psychological facts about children’s understanding of their bodies and psychosocial development based on decades of research.”

The document asserts that children embark on sexual education from birth.

It reads: “From birth, babies learn the value and pleasure of bodily contact, warmth and intimacy. Soon after that, they learn what is ‘clean’ and what is ‘dirty’.”

It then goes on to conclude: “In other words, they are engaging in sexuality education.”

### ‘The WHO should know better’

A spokeswoman from Safe Schools Alliance UK said this approach “re-conceptualises children’s entire existence,

and all their relationships, as somehow connected to their sexuality and sexual behaviours”.

John Hayes, MP, said: “The WHO should know better than to toy with the sensitivities of children and the concerns of parents in this way.

“Childhood is a time of innocence; for imagining, fairy tales, and play and joy. A lot of these people have a very warped understanding of the character of childhood and it’s actually much simpler than they claim in their guidance.”

The WHO document presents three models of sexual education – “Types” one, two and three – which range from an “abstinence-only” approach to encouraging children to pursue “sexual growth and development”.

It advocates the most liberal approach, which it refers to as “Type 3” or “holistic sexuality education,” as a source of “unbiased” and “scientifically correct” information on “all aspects of sexuality”.

However, it depicts the most conservative model, which it refers to as an “abstinence-only” approach, as having been proven to have “no positive effects on sexual behaviour” or the “risk of teenage pregnancy”.

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