

People have many opinions about sexuality education. Here are some common objections and informed responses.

This information is adapted from Goldman, J. 'Responding to parental objections to school sexuality education: a selection of 12 objections', Sex Education, vol 8, no 4, 2008, pp.415-438

Objection

'Children are too young to understand about sex until they are 16.'

Response

Research shows children who receive systematic sexuality education are capable of understanding at five to seven years old how babies begin; pregnancy and birth; sex differences between boys and girls, and between men and women; and about 100 other sexuality topics. And waiting until secondary school is too late to help children understand the physical and emotional changes they have already begun to experience as they move through puberty.

Objection

'If teenagers are taught about sex, they will go out and do it. Sex knowledge will tempt young people into premature sexual activity.'

Response

Research shows comprehensive sexuality education can help young people delay sexual intercourse, reduce the frequency and number of partners, reduce the number of coerced teen marriages, reduce rates of STIs and increase the use of condoms and effective contraception.

Objection

'Because different people have different values about sex, we should only teach biological facts.'

Response

Teaching biological matters without any guidance about decision-making is poor preparation for young people who will begin to engage in sexual

activity. Research shows teenagers really want values education and learning experiences that help them learn understand their emotions and desires and equips them to make good choices for their sexual behaviour.

Objection

'Parents alone should provide sex education to their children'.

Response

In Australia, 95% of parents believe the home should be the primary place for sex ed, but only 35% initiate frequent discussions with their child. US research shows about 50% of 8–11 year olds can't recall the conversations their parents report having with them about puberty, HIV/AIDS and reproduction.

Objection

'Because children mature at different rates, it is impossible to devise sex education curricula to meet their differing intellectual, emotional and physical needs'.

Response

School curricula cater for a wide range of children's abilities based upon the experience and needs of each age group...Children are interested in what is happening to themselves and to others in their peer group. They also need reassuring that early and late development are both 'normal' occurrences...they are not physical freaks '.

Objection

'School sexuality education leads to moral decline, increased teenage pregnancies and increase spread of STIs.

Response

Research shows European countries with compulsory, comprehensive sexuality education have much lower teenage fertility rates. In 2004, France had approximately 10 births per 1000, Sweden had 7, and the Netherlands had 4.8 – compared to Australia with 16.3.