

## Frequently Asked Questions

*...for educators who want to improve adolescent development and sexuality education programs at their schools.*

### **Q. Why is the Netherlands a leader in adolescent sexual health outcomes?**

- A. Many researchers attribute the positive health and behavior outcomes in Dutch adolescents to the lack of stigma around sexuality in the Netherlands. Teachers and parents expect that developing adolescents will become sexually active adults, and information on puberty, relationships, reproduction, sexuality, risk-reduction, and contraception is available in schools and through the healthcare system.

### **Q. Why is it important to provide comprehensive sexuality education to young people?**

- A. Knowledge is power! Teens who understand the importance of respectful relationships, potential ramifications of sexual activity, and how to avoid sexual risks can make better decisions about their own behavior. Information about healthy choices can become a shared norm among adolescents, promoting preventive behavior and interpersonal respect.

### **Q. What does the research show?**

- A. Numerous studies over the past twenty-five years prove that abstinence-based sex education does not decrease teen sexual behavior, and can even increase it. Teens with access to information and health care have lower incidence of all negative measures of public health, like unexpected pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections, and sexual harassment and assault. Teens with more education tend to delay initial sexual behavior and limit risky behaviors like unprotected sex and having multiple partners.

### **Q. Who should provide instruction on adolescent development in schools?**

- A. In the Netherlands, sexuality is part of the biology curriculum, tied with reproduction and addressed several times over the course of secondary school. In the US, state laws and school policies vary regarding sexuality education, but research supports having trained sexual health educators or health care professionals provide comprehensive

sexuality education. Teachers who are familiar with the subject and armed with an evidence-based curriculum can effectively provide programming and support with health classes, a common practice in the US.

**Q. What about parents who are against comprehensive sexuality education?**

- A. Many parents are apprehensive about their children learning about development and sexuality. Some have religious views that prescribe specific sexual mores, or they may feel that the topic is too mature for their child. Clear communication about the program and any curricular requirements will help allay concerns. State regulations regarding curriculum and content should be consulted to ensure that the school follows legal expectations, which vary widely across the US. Some states allow families to “opt out” of sexuality education programs on religious or personal grounds. Reliance on evidence-based practices and carefully-selected curriculum will bolster school programs that face parent objections.

**Q. Why not use a Dutch curriculum, like the award-winning *Long Live Love*?**

- A. While there are strong curricula available from the Netherlands and other countries, the cultural context of the community you live in will influence what will be successful. Researchers recommend using a multi-step program development protocol to thoroughly consider all aspects of a potential new curriculum or approach to sexuality education for best outcomes, including community response and sustainability. Finding or designing a program that fits the needs, goals, and culture of your school community will maximize its chances of success.

**Q. How can I start improving the sex ed program at my school?**

- A. You don't need to reinvent the wheel! Peruse the academic literature for an understanding of best practices and research findings regarding sexuality education. Evidence-based curricula have undergone analysis to assess their effectiveness and have proven successful. Inform yourself about the many resources available and prepare to engage in discussion with all stakeholders in the school community.

## Steps towards improved sexuality education programming at your school

The points below outline a plan for improving sexuality education and associated outcomes. Based on research from the fields of education, public health, and behavioral science, these steps will lead the community through appropriate decision-making processes in considering, adopting or developing, implementing, and sustaining an enhanced program. A cohort of administrators, teachers, students, and parents should collaborate on the process. (Kok, 2015; Mevissen, et al., 2018; Schutte, 2017)

### 1. Meet with key players in the school

Identify interested parties and communicate about the scope of the conversation to reach out to potential participants

*Who wants to work on this issue?*

### 2. Hold parent/community forums

Invite and inform parents so they can engage as they want to

Acknowledge role parents play in school and adolescent development

*What do parents want?*

### 3. Do a needs assessment (for example, Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool or Intervention Mapping protocols)

Target priority areas, consider involved parties, assess resources

*What are the needs within the school?*

### 4. Create a position statement

Define goals, values, and priorities with input from all parties; set focus for efforts

*What is the goal of this effort?*

### 5. Make an action plan

Determine what actions will be taken and by whom; select or design curriculum; identify outside resources, speakers, experts to call on; set date for program evaluation

*What needs to be done?*

### 6. Put it into practice

Incorporate plans into practice; facilitate learning in context; adjust as needed with goals in mind

*How will it happen?*

### 7. Keep evaluating it over time

Solicit community input on process; evaluate results qualitatively; consider effectiveness; recalibrate as needed

*How is it working out?*