



POSITION STATEMENT

Comprehensive and Inclusive Sex Education: A Key Tool for Preventing Sexual Abuse

At *Stop It Now!*, we advocate for comprehensive, inclusive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate sex education because it's one of the most effective tools we have to prevent child sexual abuse *before it anyone is harmed*. When children and teens have access to accurate information about their bodies, boundaries, and relationships, they are better prepared to stay safe, communicate clearly, and make respectful, informed choices.

When young people understand the names and functions of their body parts, they're more likely to recognize when something doesn't feel right. And just as importantly, they're more able to tell a trusted adult—clearly and accurately—if they're hurt, confused, or concerned. They will literally have the words needed to make an accurate disclosure and, if needed, a report to child protective services. But too often, kids are given vague or “cutesy” names for their private parts. That can make it harder for them to speak up, and harder for adults to recognize when something is wrong. A child who says a relative touched her “cookie” may be misunderstood or dismissed when she's trying to disclose sexual abuse, even if that's the word adults gave her.

Sex education isn't just about preventing victimization, it's also about preventing harm to children themselves or to others. Children are naturally curious about their bodies and about sexuality. Without safe, accurate, and age-appropriate information, some may act on that curiosity in ways that are unsafe or harmful to others. A child who doesn't understand boundaries or consent may touch a peer inappropriately, not out of malice, but because no one has taught them how to explore their bodies safely. Kids who don't know what's okay and what's not okay can unintentionally harm other children, and that harm has real consequences.

If young people aren't taught about healthy sexual development and consent, they're left to figure it out on their own—often by turning to peers, media, or pornography. These sources are frequently inaccurate, overwhelming, or too explicit for a child's developmental stage. And when adults treat sex and sexuality as taboo, kids internalize that silence and shame. That leaves them vulnerable—not only to abuse by others, but also to crossing boundaries of those around them, sometimes without even realizing they've caused harm.

People who sexually abuse children can exploit these gaps. Kids who think they can't ask questions—or who have been shamed for their curiosity—are less likely to tell someone when something inappropriate happens. They may not even understand that what happened was wrong.

The solution is clear: we need to have honest, age-appropriate and ongoing conversations with young people about their bodies, boundaries, relationships, and respect. Inclusive, comprehensive sex ed teaches children not just how to stay safe, but how to treat others safely, too. It helps raise kids who become safe teens, who grow into safe adults—people who understand consent, communicate clearly, and build healthy relationships.

When we invest in comprehensive and inclusive sex education, we aren't just reacting to sexual abuse—we're preventing it. And we're creating a culture where all children are safer, more informed, and more supported.