

23 May 2007 Health experts launch new programme to help parents and carers talk about relationships and sex

Sex and relationships Education (SRE) is crucial to helping young people develop and maintain emotional and physical health, but school sex education is a very limited part of the current curriculum and sex education needs to be the joint responsibility of both the home and the school.

Now a new learning programme developed by Coventry University and the Coventry Teenage Pregnancy Partnership called 'What Should We Tell The Children About Relationships and Sex?' is helping parents and carers to improve their communication with their sons and daughters around sex education.

The six-week programme works with parents and carers to provide them with the skills they need to help them feel more confident talking about issues. The series of classes includes an information booklet and portfolio for parents of children aged 5-14, and a training toolkit for professionals.

Researchers from the University held consultations with diverse parenting groups and a South Asian women's support group to help identify the issues that needed be addressed.

The programme features age-related group discussions and activities such as 'What We Know'? An activity where parents open up and discuss what they know about sexual health and relationships as well as their own general experiences before professionals fill in any gaps in their knowledge or correct any misconceptions.

Professor Louise Wallace from Coventry University's Applied Research Centre in Health and Lifestyle Interventions wants to see sex and relationships education shifted up education, political and parental agendas. Currently, sex education is only compulsory as part of the science curriculum, but making Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) compulsory and encouraging parents to communicate with their children would improve provision.

She said: "School-based sex education alone is not enough to reduce unwanted pregnancies. The delivery of sex education has to be the joint responsibility of both the home and the school. We know that children who can talk with their parents about sex are less likely to take risks. We also know that whatever the parents themselves feel about sex themselves, they almost all feel uncertain and sometimes down right embarrassed when trying to talk about sex with their own child. "What Should We Tell the Children about Relationships and Sex?" enables them to do this in a way that is comfortable for their family."

Julie Bayley, Senior Researcher at Coventry University added: "Parents and carers attending the course will learn how to open the lines of communication with their sons and daughters about relationships and sexual health."

'What Should We Tell The Children' educates young people about relationship and sexual health issues by informing and working with parents. Parents attend weekly group meetings that are run by trained facilitators who look at a wide range of issues such as 'how to talk to young people of different ages', 'how to cope with being put on the spot', 'facts and figures about sexual health' and 'how to make the most of everyday opportunities for discussions'.

Parents who join the group each receive their own portfolio which features useful facts and information, including where to go for further information and advice.

What Should We Tell The Children having successfully been piloted in Coventry is soon to be rolled out in other areas.