



# REPORT OF THE CONSULTATIONS

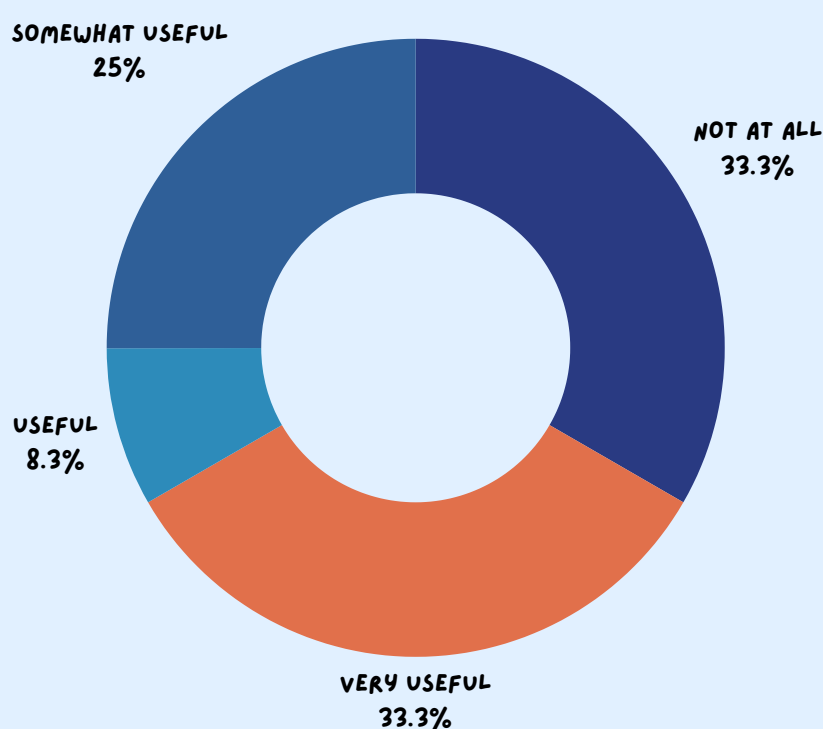
## on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education



In November and December 2024, two consultations took place with 11 children and adolescents to advise the Council of Europe on developing a Recommendation on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education.

The participants were from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Moldova, Northern Ireland (UK) and Spain. They filled a survey before the consultation and those results are also included in this report.

At the consultation, they started talking about how useful was what they learnt at school so far...

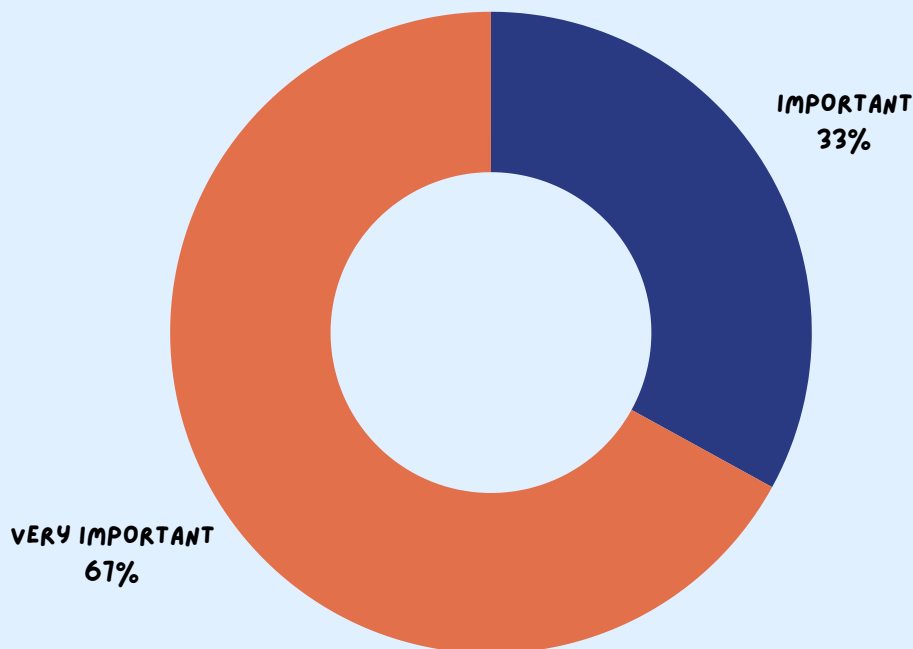


This year I'm in secondary school, and I just started talking about it a little. Before, I didn't know where babies came from or even about menstruation.



# Why to teach sexuality education at schools?

Because it is important for children and adolescents. Let's look at the results of the survey filled out by the participants about how important sexuality education is for them:



But there are many other reasons too!

## Why?

“Children learn everything else at school, while they go through lots of biological changes... This kind of knowledge helps them not be scared.”

“It helps us to prepare for and manage physical and emotional changes.”

“Sexuality will happen to everyone, it will be experienced by everyone in their life.”

“In 1st and 2nd years, we should learn what you should and shouldn't do. After that, learn more! We shouldn't send people out into the real world without knowing anything.”

“We only learn about anatomy; we don't learn about sex, relationships, pregnancy, or contraception. Many people of my age and older think they know how to act, but they don't know how to react to pregnancy, for example.”



# What should be covered by age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education at schools?

We can start with the survey! The participants were asked what sexuality education mean to them:

- Sexuality and reproductive health (e.g. contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases) 
- Gender equality, gender identity and sexual orientation
- Relationships, feelings and emotions 
- Anatomy and body changes during puberty
- Respect, consent and boundaries, recognizing harmful behaviours and reporting abuse 

While agreeing about the importance of all these topics, at the consultations they shared more ideas:

What?

We should cover all, especially because it's comprehensive sexual education, so it should cover all bases.

It should cover all the things that are happening to the children and their peers growing up, what is the next step in their lives and how to be safe.

Consent is important and learning how to say NO because in real it is more complicated.

What healthy relationships look like!



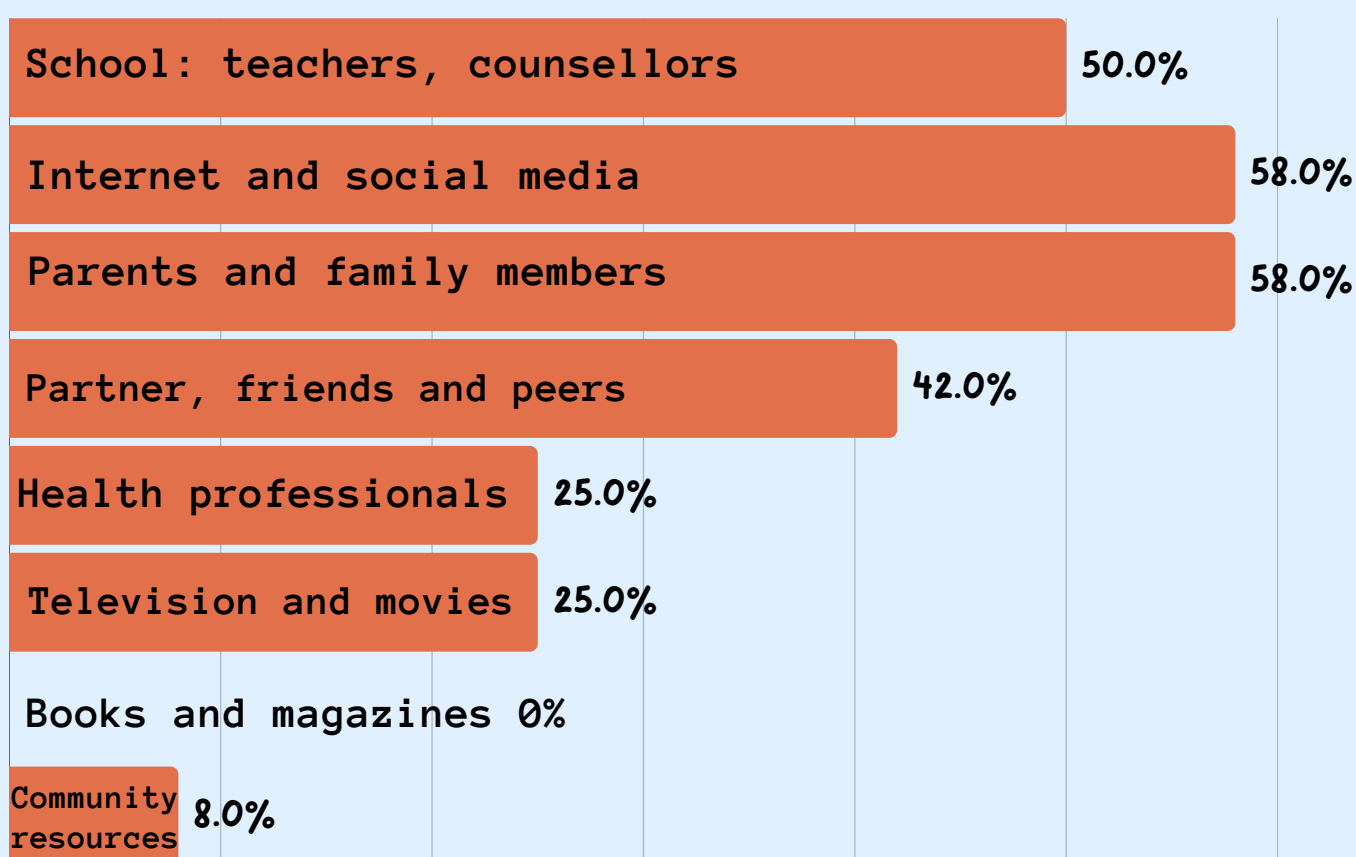
Service available in the country. Just to know where to go if you are needing some extra support.

Online safety regarding sexual education [should be included] : it's completely different. There is so much to it, and there are so many risks online, especially around this topic.

# Where children should learn about comprehensive sexuality education?



At the survey, they said their main source of information about sexuality is...



Sexuality education is important to be learned at school. Sometimes in the class, there are people that aren't mature enough; they're not prepared enough. We need to learn at home as well.

The internet should not be the primary source of information, because its better to not know something then know something wrong.

Where?

Information on the internet is manipulated.

We have to watch out if something is suspicious on the internet.

Internet and social media is the most dangerous because it's the opinion of people you don't know.

We have to improve it because we are using it the most. Health professionals could prepare and share real and good information.

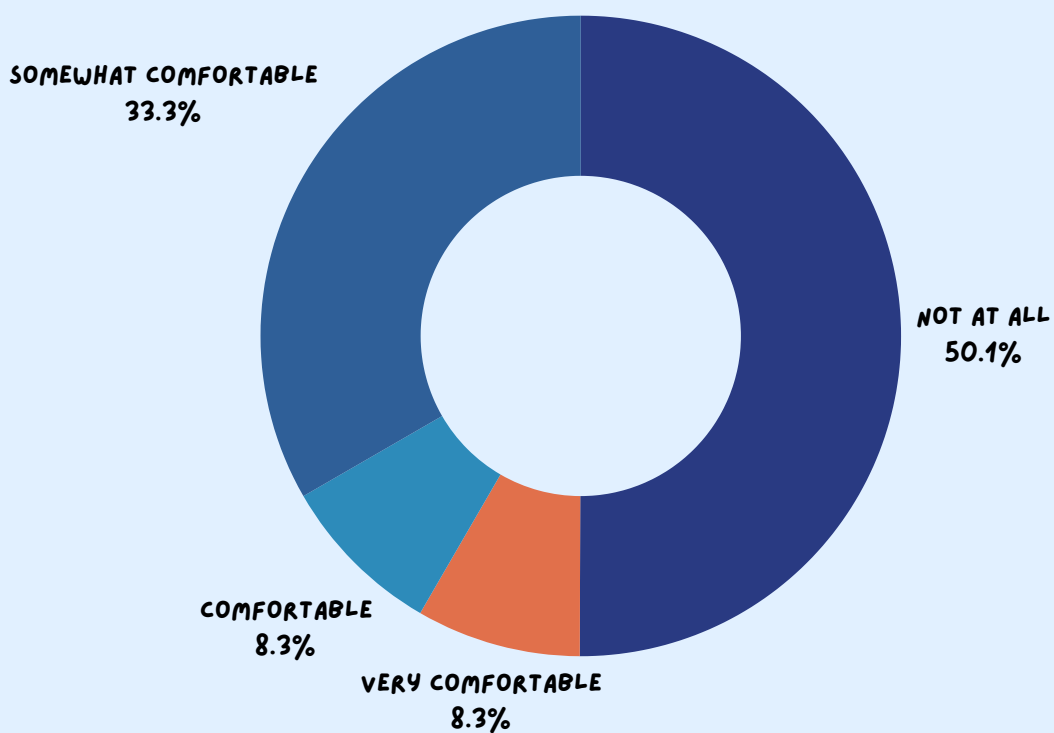
Health professionals are very important, they know a lot about this topic.

NGOs and public health clinics could also organise events to teach [about this ].



# Who should teach/inform children about sexuality education?

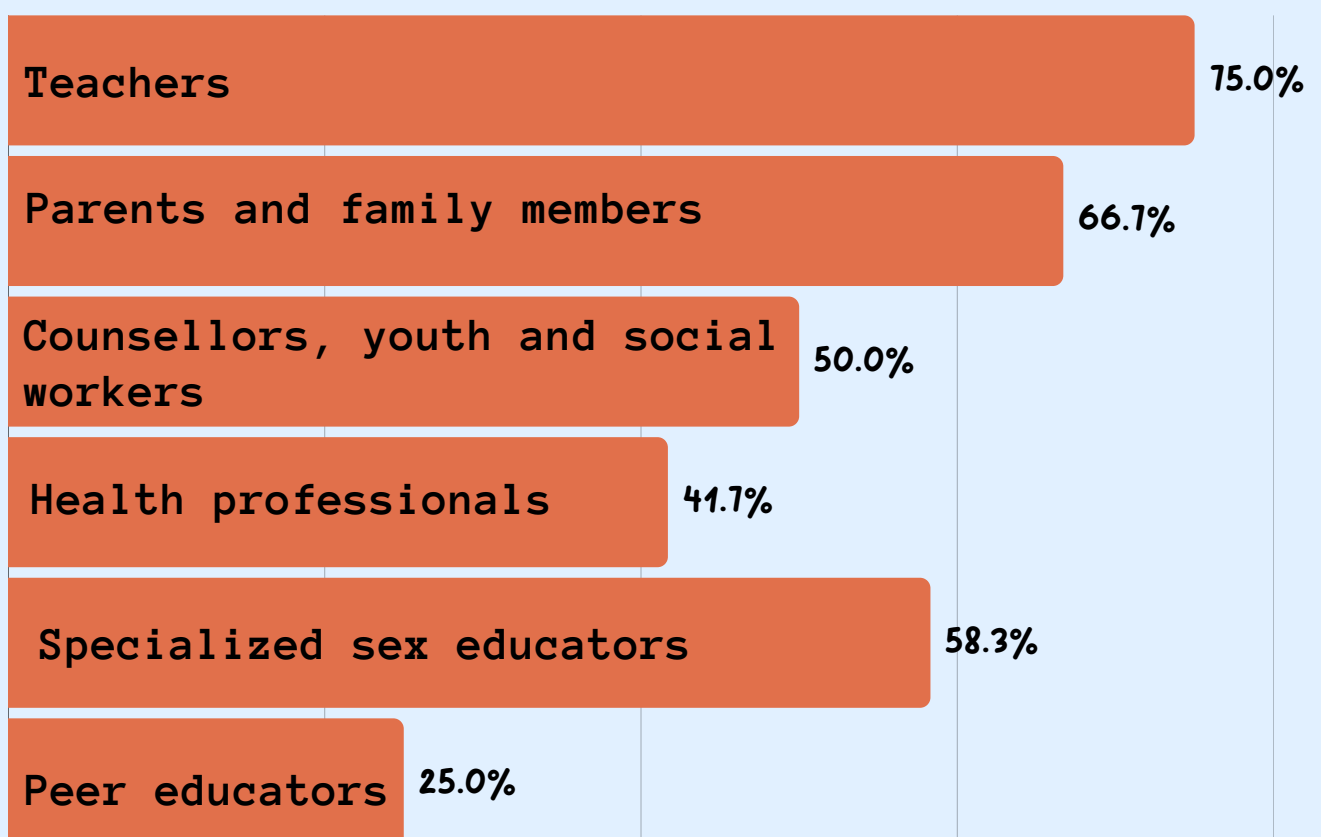
Let's start looking at the survey how comfortable the participants feel to talk about sexuality with adults...



“ Lots of children are embarrassed by this. It is just like that. But no one should be embarrassed about this. ”

“ I think that even if the students are laughing, they do it to seem "cool" but are still understanding the topic. ”

At the survey, the participants chose their preference who should teach/inform children about this topic:



Who?

“For me, the most important thing in this class is the teacher. They have the obligation to make sure everyone feels OK.”

[We can talk about this] with adults we trust.

It's a better idea if you don't know this person. If you have a relationship with them, you can get embarrassed, or not know if you can ask them, or even make them feel bad.

Having younger teachers would make it less awkward for people.

It doesn't matter what age they are as long as they're properly trained and unbiased.

In my country, you learn about sex education from people that aren't qualified. They might not even understand what they're saying. There is a whole lack of education in the teachers.

It's better if they have some knowledge if they're going to teach about these subjects.

Parents know their child the best.

I don't think learning at home should be the only source. People might not have very open parents.

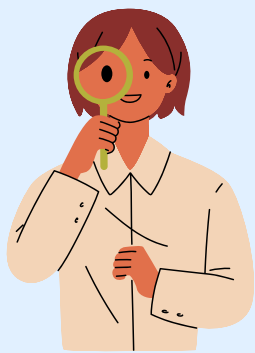
Parents are ignorant sometimes or don't agree to some topics like LGBTQI, so they don't teach them.

There are things in the modern day that our parents could be ignorant about. You can't teach something that you weren't taught at school.

Maybe we should have a guide for parents.

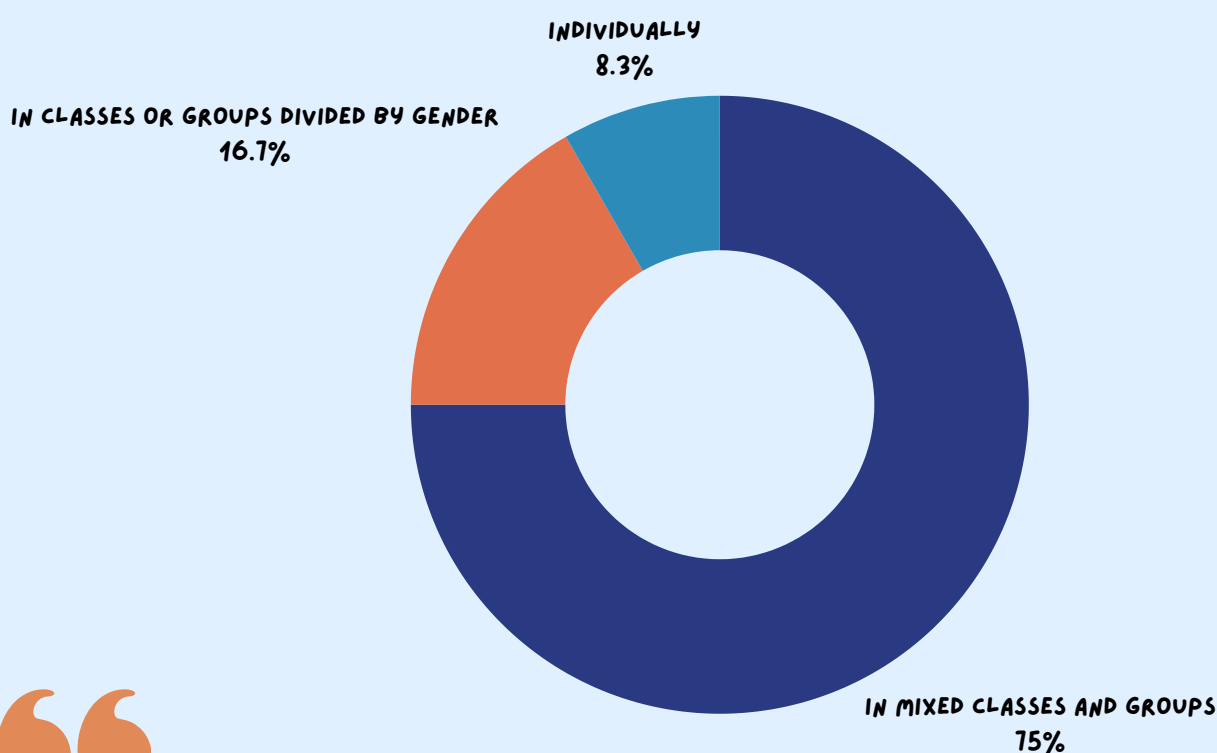
I would feel more comfortable with someone closer to my age.

Peer to peer education is very important because people won't be laughing as much and would probably open up more.



# How sexuality education should be taught?

The survey results showed they would prefer to study sexuality education ...



It's important to have mixed classes because eventually, you will be speaking to the other genders.

I think mixed classes are a good opportunity for both genders to learn about each other and understand more. The information should be mixed because when there is more information, people learn more.

Some topics be shared in a mixed settings and some in segregated settings, because boys and girls are different. Different settings allow their feelings to be respected.



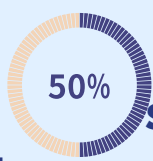
For those who did not feel comfortable, they could educate themselves in a smaller group or one-on-one, because it is important that they learn this information but also in a manner that they feel comfortable.

We can have classes in school but also individual sessions. Some are embarrassed to ask questions in front of their friends. Important things that you need to know. We must do this because there are so many people in classes that aren't there to learn; they just keep laughing at people.

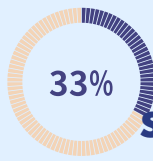
Individual classes could be beneficial. Having the opportunity to turn to someone for individual counselling is important.



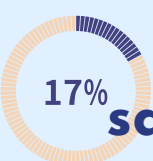
The survey asked the participants whether sexuality education should be compulsory or not:



said there should be a possibility to be opt out from sexuality education classes without justification.



said it should be compulsory for all students.



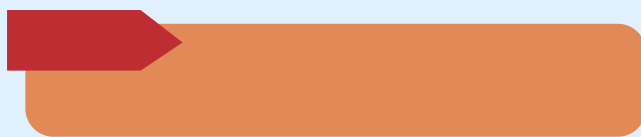
said that it should be possible upon request of the parents with justification.



We were divided on this, because parents know their children and always look out for them. So in some cases, it is okay if they opt out of some information, as parents would know what is the right information to share at the right time.

We should not let parents choose for their children to take or not take sexuality education. Everyone needs to know.

I discussed this with my mom. Parents should be allowed to opt out. Maybe some don't agree with LGBTIQ topics, so they should have the choice.



What if the parent doesn't want the child to learn about something, and the child wants to?

I disagree. Even if I don't agree with certain topics, I should learn about them. More education can help make the world a safer place.

We can have both options. One class that is mandatory, where we talk about the topic but not in depth. If your parents don't want to introduce you to every topic, they should be able to opt out. But there must be a minimum.





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Most definitely it should be felt closer to the students – not as a lecture but more of a way to connect to them. Maybe making a few stands and everyone visiting them and having 1:1 conversation... a world cafe would be a great way to learn about this topic.

”

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Workshops would be a good idea. Subgroups would allow for more direct conversations.

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# How?

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Having a place where you can anonymously ask questions, but the answers are shared with everyone, could be useful.

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We can make everything age-appropriate.

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It's important to make people comfortable so people can really engage in the lesson.

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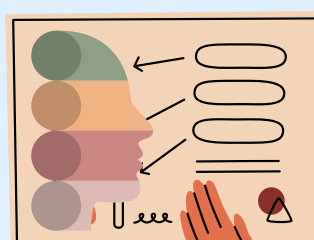
It would be helpful if within this project a small guide on how to act and cope with sexual abuse would be developed, for example whom to address in these situations, especially if you don't have family or a community around you. It should help the victims to talk more openly about abuse and whom they can turn to.

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Impartial education not biased by someone's belief.

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# When children should study sexuality education?

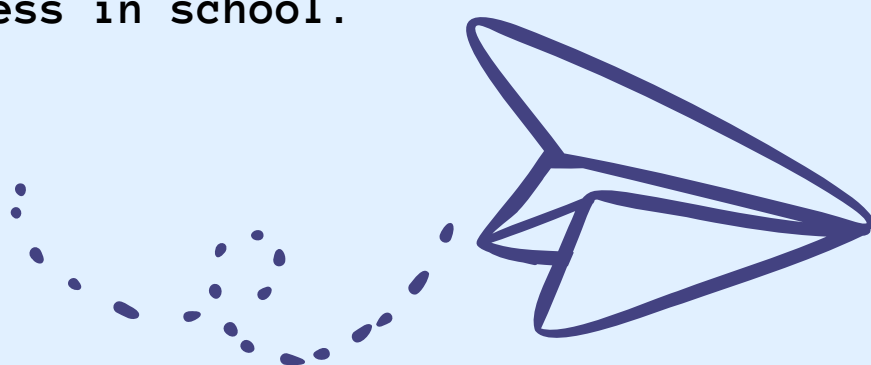
“If we teach it from a young age, it will help us be less embarrassed; it would just be another topic.

When we are younger, we can learn about basic things like saying no, but in our older years, we can move on to other more complex topics.

In 1st and 2nd years, we should learn what you should and shouldn't do. After that, learn more! We shouldn't send people out into the real world without knowing anything.

I think it's important to teach sexuality education from a young age, especially specific things, like other types of families that aren't stereotypical.

We need to teach the basics from a young age. It should get more complex as you progress in school.



In my school, there was no sexuality education in any class. When you're 12-13, you should talk about this because they need this information. The teachers must consider the age of their students.

In my school, you only learn a bit in third year. After that, we don't learn anything. I don't learn anything at all. I'm going to be confused when I go into the adult world. It's wrong that they're teaching the young children more than the older ones.

We shouldn't stop in high school. We should have it in university and college.



# How can children be involved around this topic in the future?



“ Child should be consulted about how to implement this document [Recommendation]. ”

“ Child participation is important because it's beneficial for the future. It impacts young people, so it's normal that they should have a say about it. ”

“ Child should participate in the making of laws but not only about education, also about online safety. ”

“ Child participation is important. The laws should be better because the risks are high, and children should be consulted. ”

“ It must be in the laws. ”



“ Meetings like this are good to talk about the importance of sexuality education. In some schools, it's not considered important. ”

This report was prepared by Zsuzsanna Rutai from Child Rights Connect in cooperation with the children who participated at the consultations.