Title: Our Whole Lives. Sexuality Education for Grades 4-6

Type of document: Material for Trainers

Year of publication: 2000

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Abstract:

"Our Whole Lives. Sexuality Education for Grades 4-6" was published jointly by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministry in 2000. It is an eight-session curriculum designed to provide responsible sexuality education for 9 to 12 years old children. The document promotes the following concepts: to provide children with appropriate information about human sexuality, reproduction and gender identification, to help children develop the interpersonal skills (decision-making and problem-solving skills) that will keep them safe and healthy, and to strengthen parents' role as their children's most important educators. This material covers a broad range of topics such as health and safety, love and family, puberty and growing up, sex and gender, communication and decision making, in age-appropriate language. Activities, stories, and resources set the context for learning about diversity and practising respect. The document consists of eight sessions: 1) values and sexuality; 2) family relationships; 3) puberty: physical and emotional changes; 4) gender identity and sexual orientation; 5) lovemaking and reproduction; 6) health and safety; 7) communication; 8) decision making. It also contains a list of leader resources, a list of handouts, a list of homelinks, a parent meeting program, a parent/child orientation program and a glossary. Each unit has a list
of the goals and learning objectives for the session and offers a detailed session plan. Time allocation and checklist of necessary materials are also indicated.

Note:

"Our Whole Lives for Grades 4-6" is one of the six programs in the Our Whole Lives Lifespan Sexuality Education series. The other of five programs are "Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K-1", "Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7-9", "Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 10-12", "Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults, ages 18-35" and "Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Adults". For more information or to order a copies of these documents, please visit http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/curricula/ourwhole/

Strengths

1) The document is clear, comprehensive, well structured, relevant and non-discriminatory. Therefore, the manual obtained high results in this appraisal. It is not an official document made by the Ministry of Education of United States. It is part of the Our Whole Lives curricula series, developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Church Board for Homeland Ministries. Although the Our Whole Lives curricula were developed by two religious organizations, the leader’s guides are completely secular and free of specific religious doctrine or reference.

2) The document includes educating institutions (religious communities, community organizations, and schools) and parents in order to form meaningful partnerships to provide positive and responsible sexuality education. Before the course begins, a parent meeting is held to introduce the curriculum, to give parents the opportunity to choose among several approaches to providing sexuality education for their children, and to answer parents’ questions. The title Our Whole Lives was chosen in the belief that sexuality is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and values
about identity and relationships, intimacy and health, so it is clearly based on a long-
term process of behaviour change.

3) The curriculum covers a broad range of topics – health and safety, love and family, puberty and growing up, sex and gender, communication and decision making – in an age-appropriate language and in a realistic time period. The document contains eightsession covered in a logical sequence and each last approximately 1-2 ½ hours. The curriculum is very adaptable and the time spent on one theme may vary depending on the group, the teaching style and the developmental level of the children.

4) The goals of the material are clear and precise. The document supports the «three Rs» of childhood sexuality education: Respect, Relationships, and Responsibility. Its specific goals are: to strengthen and support each child’s sense of self and self-esteem; to help children understand the place of sexuality in human life and loving; to encourage children to appreciate their bodies as good and beautiful, private and special; to provide children with accurate, developmentally appropriate information about human sexuality, reproduction, and gender identification; to prepare children for the normal changes they experience as they grow and develop; to help children develop the interpersonal skills – including communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills- that will keep them safe and healthy; to help children learn to make responsible decisions that show respect for themselves and others; to help families communicate openly about all life questions, and to strengthen parents’ roles as their children’s most important sexuality educators.

5) The document is appropriate for the 9-12 years old children, these ages are an important time for sexuality education. Indeed, at this age, most young people are completely open to new information. Therefore, sexual education helps to lay a firm informational foundation and give young people the skills they need to make informed decisions about their behavior in the very near future. Nevertheless, although the material is suitable for children in grades 4, 5, and 6, the three grades should not be
taught together because of the wide difference in age, experience, and maturity among children at these ages. The authors state that ideally, the grades should be taught separately; alternatively, fourth and fifth, or fifth and sixth grades may be combined.

6) Each unit of Our Whole Lives has a list of the goals and learning objectives for the session and offers a detailed session plan. Checklists of necessary materials, HomeLink activities that help parents and children talk together about sexuality, handouts, and additional resources for leaders are also provided. Each session begins with gathering time to welcome participants and respond to questions. Most sessions include a reading from “It’s Perfectly Normal”, another leader’s guide that should be used in conjunction. Group activities and discussions follow each lesson to help children process what they have read, to go beyond the information that appears in the book, and apply what they have learned to their own lives. Activities that offer open-ended responses and provide time for discussion and reflection are promoted for this age group.

7) The curriculum states that each person is unique and special, with her/his own perspectives and world view, and that this diversity is to be celebrated and appreciated. It promotes respect for self and respect for each person. It aims to provide participants the ability to defend or support their own positions on a issue even when their view differ from those of friends and peers. It will help youth appreciate themselves for who they are, resist to peer pressure, understand the destructiveness of stereotypes and prejudice and recognize ways of combating the discrimination cause. An entire activity is devoted to the understanding of prejudice and stereotypes in order to make youth able to identify ways of combating the discrimination they cause. Children are invited to talk about what happens when people don’t recognize other people’s uniqueness, individuality, and worth.

8) The session “Health and Safety” is a part devoted to sexual health and safety issues. It provides information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), self-protection, and seeking assistance in sexually abusive situations. Therefore, the children should be able
to recognize and end abusive or potentially abusive sexual situations, and to identify strategies to protect themselves from STDs, sexual abuse, and unplanned pregnancy. They will also provide at least two trusted people from whom they could seek help in a sexually risky or abusive situation. The session offers a definition of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, STD, HIV, AIDS, condom and herpes. Finally, the document also warns children of staying away from substances that will harm their bodies, such as tobacco, alcohol, and drugs like marijuana, cocaine, and heroin.

9) The document provides a romantic definition of sexual intercourse by focusing on the importance that lovemaking can play between two people. One of the objectives of the "Lovemaking and Reproduction" session is to make participants able to demonstrate their understanding of the things that are important to consider before deciding to make love. It briefly introduces the word contraception as a form of birth control to avoid pregnancy resulting from sexual intercourse.

10) Because preteens experience increase pressure to conform to stereotyped gender role, the document focuses on the importance to teach in an anti-bias environment that includes diverse and inclusive images, books, and materials. The document focuses on diversity of gender identity which is important to affirm. The document focuses on the idea that males and females are more alike than they are different. The session “Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation” introduces the concept that gender roles do not need to be rigid and that people should have many choices about how they behave and live their lives. It also encourages awareness and appreciation of a range of gender identities. Therefore, participants are invited to think about what it means to be gay or straight, to foster empathy for individuals who may be struggling with their sexual orientation, and to consider how they would behave if faced with homophobia.

11) The documents affirm diversity and encourage sensitivity to the different family configurations, sexual orientation and gender identity. It introduces non-judgmental and non-discriminatory attitudes towards homosexuality.
12) The manual presentation is attractive, clear, simple and readable. The paper is in a standard quality so the material can be quite durable and be reproduced economically. The content is well-designed and it generally makes good use of the available space. A clear overview is available at the beginning of the manual in order to facilitate its use.

**Weakness / aspects to be improved**

1) The session “Health and Safety” briefly explains the ways of transmission of HIV and challenges some myths but don’t develop this theme further. Even if the curriculum is not specifically a document about HIV and AIDS education, it focuses too briefly on HIV and AIDS.

*Suggestions for improvement*

→ The document suggests one relevant activity to think about children reaction if they were confronted to someone living with HIV/AIDS which is a good point, but it could insist more on this subject in order to be sure that learners have good knowledge on the ways of transmission and protection of HIV, the relation between drugs and HIV, the treatment, the physical, psychological and social difficulties that people affected by HIV and AIDS have to endure. Those are essential and basic issues that should be included in sexuality education programme when focusing on attitudes and behaviours, sexuality, care and support, preventing STIs, decision making or empathy for example. Children and young people represent the window of opportunity. It is worth doing everything to prevent new infections. It is important that HIV & AIDS education starts at an early age and be sustained throughout secondary school because it is easier to adopt new values and behaviours than to change them once they are acquired. If we teach children very early to know and respect their feelings and their body, as well as the others, they will be more likely to adopt protective behaviours. By receiving quality HIV & AIDS and reproductive health education which are gender-sensitive, children will be more likely to adopt future low risk sexual practices. This is particularly important if the document is
adapted for a context or country, where there are many children affected or infected by HIV and AIDS.

2) Even if the material offers an interesting place to personal reflection activities, it would have been useful to include means to assess learners before the program and allocate some time before each unit to evaluate what children already know about the subject.

Suggestions for improvement

→ It should be important to add an evaluation form at the beginning and of each session to assess learners before the programme, so that they can compare their responses and see if they improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour after the end of the session.

Internal consistency

The first introductory pages provide many information and guidance for the use of the entire curriculum. The target group of the manual is clear and activities are adapted to young children. Both language and images are gender sensitive. The contents of the manual are in line with the learning objectives/outcomes.

Transferability issues and more suggestions for adapting the manual

The document is appropriate to the society and context of United States (names and cases studies are more related to North American society) but in general it is a generic manual and don’t refers specifically to children from United States The sessions addressed are very relevant and can serve as model on how to teach about sexual education for preteens. It includes a wide range of activities which could be used as examples for teaching sexuality education with 9-12 years old children. The document promotes age and developmentally appropriate, positive, honest and open discussions
regarding sexuality education with children. Sexuality is considered as a natural and healthy part of living. Nevertheless, this approach doesn’t reflect the whole United States conception about sexuality education for children, in particular conservative one.