

Sexuality Education

Guidelines for Catholic Schools

In South Africa, in the context of an HIV/AIDS pandemic, it's extremely important to teach HIV/AIDS Education, Sexuality Education, and Lifeskills to learners. However, for the Catholic School, several concerns commonly arise – the points listed under the various headings below address these.

1. National Policy & Curriculum

- The *National Policy on HIV/AIDS, for Learners and Educators in Public Schools, and Students and Educators in Further Education and Training Institutions* (10 August 1999) requires the teaching of HIV/AIDS, Sexuality, and Lifeskills Education. It also requires schools to inform parents of the content, values, skills, and methodology of the programmes they offer.
- The National Curriculum (C2005 / RNCS) places most of this in Life Orientation.

2. The Catholic School

- The *SACBC HIV/AIDS Policy for Catholic Schools* endorses the National Policy, but asks that HIV/AIDS, Sexuality, and Lifeskills Education be explicitly placed in the context of Catholic teaching, and that schools have a pastoral care programme in place.
- Catholic schools need to foster and maintain their ethos; this should inform the whole life of the school, including the values dimension of the curriculum.
- Schools could ask the RE Co-ordinator to co-ordinate and help shape the HIV/AIDS, Sexuality, and Lifeskills Education taught at the school.

3. Teachers

- Teachers develop the learning programmes; they are free to use materials of their choice when designing these. But these programmes need to reflect the ethos of the school, and should be deeply informed by Catholic teaching on marriage, and the place of sex in this.

3.1 Working with materials

- Materials provided to teachers by the Department or NGOs, or bought from publishers are not prescribed.
- Look for what is good in the materials – much will offer valuable information to teachers, and ways of encouraging learners to reflect on healthy relationships and their responsibility to self and others. It is often presented in ways respectful of learners, and tries to promote responsible decision-making on their part.

- Look, too, for what you, or the Catholic Church will have difficulty with. Consider how you can recast it, frame it within the ethos of the school and the parameters of Church teaching, or make a decision to leave it out.
- Usually, these materials do not encourage teenagers to become sexually active – a frequently stated aim is the intention to promote a delay in the onset of sexual activity, but the materials do recognise that some teenagers are sexually active.
- But, much material takes the South African Constitution and the national curriculum as its point of reference and does not pose critical questions of these – something that teachers need to be aware of and consider when discussing issues involving human rights, lifestyles, contraception, and abortion.
- And, while materials might ask teachers to be sensitive to cultural and religious contexts, they often do not offer examples where learners can draw on their cultural or religious traditions as a source of wisdom and morality for everyday life – for example, participation in a religious community can provide learners with a vision for marriage and family life, and provide valuable support for a commitment to abstinence.

3.2 Learning Programmes

- Affirm sexuality as an intrinsic aspect of being human, and that it's a broader concept than sex – it's part of who we are as individuals; it's part of how we relate to others.
- Remember that Life Orientation, and its Lifeskills component, are larger than HIV/AIDS and Sexuality Education. Thus, a wide range of relationships – with family, friends, peers, work colleagues, etc. – should be covered, along with a broad concern with a range of lifestyle issues, including alcohol, drugs, and materialism / consumerism.
- Provide opportunities for learners to reflect on and deepen their understanding of healthy relationships; introduce them to ways of engaging in moral inquiry, including the consideration of consequences that flow from decisions that they might make.

3.3 Introducing Catholic Teaching

- Affirm the caring intention of the Church (as with other religious communities) – like a good parent or friend, it wants people to be safe and wants to promote life-giving behaviour among its members and society at large.
- Present the church’s teaching on the sanctity of marriage, and that sex is understood as an expression of mutual self-giving and deep communication, open to life, between husband and wife; that in this way the Church seeks to uphold the family as the foundation of community and social life; that stability, good parenting, and family life provide the basis on which the future of that community and society can be secured.

4. Learners

- Respect the learners – but encourage them to think deeply about healthy relationships, the consequences with regard to themselves, their futures, their families, of the decisions they make.
- When learners who might be sexually active bring concerns to you, try to place these in a pastoral context – i.e. where a learner can be asked what they are able to do in their situation (i.e. what is the most responsible step they are able to take at that time) and where it’s recognised that easy answers can’t be imposed.

5. Parents

- Encourage parents to take an interest in the curriculum and in the lives of their children.
- Keep them informed of the content, methodology, and values of any HIV/AIDS, Sexuality, and Lifeskills Education that takes place in the school.
- Listen carefully to any concerns they might bring to you; but be clear in your own mind about your approach.

6. Department of Education

- Look for opportunities to build relationships with people in the Department of Education, particularly if your school is a public school on private property, so that officials are aware that you are a Catholic School, and that this distinctive ethos must be maintained and fostered in terms of the Deeds of Agreement – a handy supply of school brochures to give to officials can be helpful in this regard.

7. Service-providers

- Welcome service-providers of HIV/AIDS, Sexuality, and Lifeskills Education to the school, but, wherever possible, try to meet with them to introduce them to the context in which they will be doing their work. Many will be willing to adjust their programmes in ways that accommodate the religious character of the school.