

The Importance of Sexual Education for Healthy Personality Development

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Abstract:

Sex education means something much broader than sex education, it means the sufficient valid experience that qualifies the young to adapt well to the various life problems that revolve around the sexual function. Sex education does not mean knowing how to present the anatomy of the reproductive organs and their function to children and adolescents, but rather real sex education is to make them realize that this instinct, like other instincts, must be placed at the disposal of the will and the mind. This is what this research paper attempts to address from the sources and content of sex education, and when to start it with children and adolescents, and its content and the educational and training objectives that the child must learn from sex education.

Keywords: Sex education, its sources, stages and dimensions.

1. Introduction:

The World Health Organization defines sexual health as follows: “It encompasses the physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of human existence that enrich an individual’s personality and enhance his or her social interactions and ability to love.

Experts from the World Health Organization have formulated the following concept of a healthy sexual life: - The ability to enjoy sexual life, to have children, and to regulate one’s behavior according to principles of public morality and personal integrity.

- The elimination of fear, shame, guilt, and myths or false beliefs that interfere with sexual relationships.

- The absence of disorders and physical illnesses that interfere with sexual desire and reproductive function.

In order to educate a child and help him develop these characteristics, it is essential to provide him with knowledge and information about the sexual development of children and adolescents, the disorders of this development, and how to prevent and protect against them.

2. Definition of Sex Education:

Sexual education is a type of education that provides individuals with scientific information, valuable experience, and appropriate attitudes regarding sexual issues, as far as their physical, physiological, mental, and social development allows. It operates within the framework of religious teachings, social norms and moral values

prevailing in society, equipping them for proper adjustment in sexual situations and enabling them to realistically face their sexual issues in the present and future, leading to mental health (Hamed Zahraan, 1977).

The Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Science (1987) adds that although a person inherits many traits, it is those acquired from the environment and through education that shape his personality and its final form. Therefore, sex education is not only about providing children with natural learning opportunities or giving them the right information at the right time; it is part of their growth as human beings and later as spouses (father and mother) (Sultan Salah al-Din, 2008, p. 22).

In the same context, Abdullah Nasih Ulwan (1989) emphasizes that sex education involves teaching boys and raising their awareness about issues related to sex, instincts, and marriage from an early age. By the time a boy matures and understands the issues of life, he should know what is permissible and what is forbidden, and adopt a distinguished Islamic behavior in both character and habit, refraining from succumbing to lust or wandering down the path of moral decay.

According to Wikipedia, “Sex education is a broad concept that includes the teaching and education of sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexual intercourse, sexual health, emotional relationships, reproductive responsibilities and rights, contraception, and other aspects of human sexual behavior. Sexuality education is learned through parents, school curricula, religion, and health awareness programs.

3. Why Sex Education?

Sexual development is an important topic at all stages of growth, and sexual behavior is an important topic in childhood, especially during adolescence when sexual activity peaks. It is noted that there are societies that restrict sexual behavior, some that are semi-restrictive, and others that are permissive, all of which influence the monitoring of sexual behavior.

Adolescents often feel a sense of confusion and contradiction between what they hear and what they see regarding sex and sexual behavior, which leads to several questions: Is sex good or bad? Is it sacred or profane? Does it lead to happiness or unhappiness?

Sexual issues can significantly affect an adolescent's personality and interfere with his or her mental, social, and emotional activities, which in turn affect his or her behavior. This is often the result of ignorance of basic sexual facts and information. In addition, poor communication between adults and children, between parents and their children, and between teachers and students, as well as the perception of sex as a taboo subject, can lead to problems and sexual deviations.

Some may argue that sex education increases students' curiosity and interest in sexual matters or encourages experimentation and excessive sexual behavior. However, this perspective is misguided; there is no shame in discussing these issues in a religious context. The sexual feelings that accompany adolescence, if not properly addressed, can lead to discomfort and anxiety, and possibly to deviance, marital unhappiness, or psychological disorders.

Proper sex education should enlighten us about various aspects of sex, such as maternal and child care, family planning, etiquette in

sexual relationships, sexually transmitted diseases (such as HIV/AIDS), anatomy of the sexual organs, their roles, and sexual orientation.

4. Reasons for the Importance of Sexual Education for Children:

- **Decline in Social Competence:** Children may not recognize boundaries of values, norms, or traditions that govern community life, which can lead them to violate these boundaries without hesitation.
- **Increased Vulnerability to Material Temptation:** For a small material reward or some sweets, children can easily become victims of harm (such as sexual abuse).
- **Weak Willpower:** This makes them susceptible to influence without resistance, rendering them easy prey due to sensory incapacity that distorts certain perceptions, leading to misunderstandings of intentions (such as unexpected or unnatural looks and touches).
- **Ease of Subjection to Threats:** Children may succumb to threats from those who exploit them sexually, which compels them to keep the exploitation and harm a secret.
- **Limited Cognitive Abilities and Low Language Proficiency:** Children may not fully comprehend the actions taken against them, making it difficult to express their feelings either due to a lack of understanding or because they are not allowed to speak about their experiences, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.
- **Limited Physical Ability:** This can lead to compensatory behavior in sensory areas, making them more susceptible to sexual arousal during this stage compared to others (Abla Marjan, 2011, p. 40).

- **Lack of Discrimination Between Public and Private Spaces:** In some cases, neglect in upbringing can result in children not recognizing their surrounding environment.
- **Difficulty in Recognizing Bodily Privacy:** Children may struggle to distinguish their own bodily privacy from that of others.
- **Inability to Communicate with Parents:** Language barriers may prevent children from informing their parents about the sexual abuse they are experiencing, which could help protect them.
- **Weak Self-Regulation:** Especially in situations of sensory arousal, children may find it hard to manage their responses.
- **Fear of Punishment or Assault from Parents:** This fear, along with the worry of being judged or reprimanded by those around them, may lead children to keep silent about their experiences, hiding the sexual exploitation due to feelings of shame.
- **Unawareness of Potential Sexual Harm:** Children may not recognize that they can be sexually harmed even by those close to them (such as babysitters, caregivers, drivers, or friends). Friends, relatives, and household employees may exhibit inappropriate sexual behaviors towards both boys and girls, posing as family friends or the child's allies to carry out their harmful actions.
- **Cognitive deficits:** Children may not fully understand certain topics or types of relationships, which can lead to confusion and distress when exposed to sexual stimuli (Abla Marjan, 2011, p. 41).

5. Sources of Sexual Education

There are multiple sources through which children can acquire sexual knowledge, but the most prevalent and influential sources include:

A. Parents: Research indicates that various sources of sexual education significantly impact children's sexual development, with parents being identified as the most important source of information, despite often being unavailable (Whitake & Miller, 2000). Dialogue with parents tends to be limited. Studies have shown that for some girls, their sexual development can lead to conflicts that hinder communication with their mothers, which pushes them to seek sexual education from other sources. Others emphasize the importance of fathers, arguing that they have a greater influence on children's sexual behavior than mothers (Dittus et al., 1997). However, families often lack the psychological preparation and knowledge necessary for providing sexual education. Consequently, some argue that parents should not be obligated to deliver these programs, as they themselves require knowledge and understanding of the principles and foundations of sexual education.

B. Peers: It has been found that same-age peers are more influential than older peers in conveying essential concepts to children (Abla Marjan, 2011, p. 47).

C. Media: Children are exposed to sexual scenarios through media that may contradict their family values and beliefs. The way media influences children's awareness and development is shaped theoretically by identity-based needs, which determine the messages chosen to capture attention, how information is interpreted, and how it is presented interactively.

D. Schools: There is no consensus in studies regarding the effectiveness of school-based sexual education on children. School

staff may possess some knowledge and understanding of individual differences among students, which can facilitate the implementation of sexual education programs. However, the challenge lies in the lack of continuity of the program implementers, who may disappear or be absent from the child's life at any time for various reasons.

In conclusion, it can be said that this task is a shared responsibility between families and institutions, each according to their capacity and circumstances. This means that roles should be complementary, goals should be aligned, and this relationship should allow for open discussion of any issues the child may be facing without embarrassment or discomfort (Abla Marjan, 2011, p. 48).

6. When to Begin Sexual Education

Infants (0-2 years):

Sexual education begins in the child's first year through the organization of their body parts. Caution should be exercised against relying on caregivers, as some may engage in inappropriate behaviors or use sexual organs to elicit pleasure in the child. Parents should not show disgust toward their child's bodily excretions, as these indicate normal intestinal function.

After the first year, modesty should be instilled in the child, as they begin to develop awareness. Care should be taken to ensure that the child's private parts are not exposed to others, whether they are other children or adults, and that parents or younger siblings do not expose themselves to the child, especially after the age of four.

Do not underestimate the child or believe they are too young to understand what they see. Children are influenced by their

surroundings, even at a young age; the images they see during these early years can leave a lasting impression on their subconscious, shaping their personality, beliefs, and values.

Children (2-6 years):

Body parts should be referred to by their correct names: fingers, mouth, vagina, penis, etc. Avoiding proper terminology sends the message that these parts are shameful. Correct naming helps the child understand the facts about their body. The Quran mentions such terms as well, such as “فرج” (private parts), “حيض” (menstruation), and “نطفة” (sperm).

Children should be made aware that discussions about these body parts are private and should not extend beyond the family. Teach them to respect the privacy of others; for example, one should not enter the bathroom while someone else is using it or sneak a glance at someone who is changing clothes. This teaches children the concept of personal privacy and the importance of respecting others' privacy.

Children should learn to maintain the cleanliness of their underwear and avoid using others' inner garments to prevent the transmission of diseases. If a mother observes her child touching their private parts, she should calmly redirect the child's attention to another constructive activity, such as playing or social interaction.

Children (7-10 years):

During this stage, focus on teaching the child practical religious obligations such as prayer, ablution, and the rules of cleanliness and fasting. It is important to separate children when they sleep, as advised by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Teach the

child the etiquette of asking permission and the importance of lowering one's gaze, especially toward non-Mahrams.

Do not allow children to go out alone at noon or in the evening. Make sure they completely close their room doors when changing clothes and make sure no one can see them. Teach girls to sit properly, making sure they do not sit with their legs apart.

Children (10-18 years):

Explain the reasons behind the prohibition of being alone with a non-Mahram and clarify what constitutes unlawful seclusion. Teach girls the proper methods of purification. Warn boys to avoid girls and boys who distribute sexually explicit movies or phone numbers, and stress the importance of associating with morally upright peers.

When a girl reaches puberty, explain the process of embryo development and that the only permissible context for pregnancy and sexual relations in Islam is within marriage. Discuss with children the meaning of sexual assault and share stories that promote concepts of honor, dignity, and the importance of saying "no" to what is unacceptable.

Encourage children to avoid exposure to materials that may arouse them, such as movies, stories, books, and magazines.

Children over 18: Explain to young adults the importance of marriage and sexual relations, emphasizing their necessity for the preservation of the lineage and the responsibilities of a husband to his wife and vice versa (Noura Bint Mufar Al-Farni, n.d., p. 13).

7. Can We Answer All Sexual Questions?

Regarding children's sexual questions, there is no objection to answering them, but several conditions should ideally be met in the responses:

1. Age-Appropriate and Relevant: Responses should be suitable for the child's age and needs. Questions should be answered promptly rather than postponed, as delaying can harm the child's trust in the asker and waste a valuable opportunity to engage in the topic when the child is eager and receptive, leading to better understanding and acceptance.

2. Comprehensive:

Sexual education should not be limited to physiological and anatomical information, as children's curiosity extends beyond that. It is essential to include other dimensions, such as the religious aspect, by explaining relevant hadiths. For example, when the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) asked, "Is there a reward for satisfying one's desire?" he replied, "What if he were to do so unlawfully; would he bear a sin? Similarly, if he does so lawfully, he will have a reward" (Narrated by Muslim). This means that while discussing pleasure, it should be tied to the necessity of keeping that pleasure within its lawful framework (marriage) to receive rewards from Allah.

3. Ongoing:

It is a common mistake to believe that sexual education comprises a one-time delivery of information. This belief reflects the parents' or educators' desire to quickly conclude what they perceive as an "annoying" obligation. Instead, information should be provided gradually in various forms—such as through books, videos, or

lessons at the mosque—so that it can be gradually absorbed and understood in accordance with the child’s cognitive development.

4. In a calm dialogue environment:

A conducive environment for dialogue is one of the most important conditions for effective sex education. Engaging in a calm and loving dialogue about sexual topics can significantly help children to achieve a correct understanding of the dimensions of “sex” and to reach a level of sexual maturity that is consistent with our Islamic teachings and values (Sultan Salah Al-Din, 2008, p. 25).

8. Key Aspects of Children’s Sexual Health:

1. Biological Aspect:

This includes the formation of genetic or chromosomal sex, gonadal development, hormonal sex, internal and external reproductive organs, hypothalamic sex, and secondary sexual characteristics. The biological aspects of sexual health reflect sexual and physical development.

2. Psychological Aspect:

This includes the development of self-identification, sexual roles, sexual orientation differences, and sexual desire. The psychological aspect of sexual health reflects psychological sexual development.

3. Social Aspect:

This refers to the religious, social, and cultural laws and norms that define sexual education (Nizar Ayoun, 2009).

To achieve a normal level of sexual health for children and adolescents, it is essential to provide organized sexual education that should include the following components:

- Education on appropriate self-identification for the child's gender.
- Teaching gender-appropriate behavior (development of masculinity and femininity in both sexes on psychological and social levels).
- Developing skills and experiences related to sexual culture for both genders.
- Preparing the younger generation to fulfill their marital and parental responsibilities.
- It is imperative that all aspects of sexual education be imbued with ethical rules and principles (Nizar Ayoun, 2009).

9. Dimensions of Sexual Education

Some experts claim that 80% of what a person learns comes primarily from experiences in the early stages of life (from birth to three years). Therefore, it is crucial to focus on sexual health and education during this early period. Key concepts at this stage include the body, individuality, control, safety, and self-confidence.

Childhood is characterized by a child's readiness to understand their own body characteristics, to control their sense of safety, and to accept themselves as a boy or a girl. It also involves the development of psychological openness and trust in others. All of these factors are essential and play a significant role in the child's sexual health throughout his or her developmental stages and become more evident in future marital relationships.

The main dimensions that sexual education aims to achieve during childhood include:

1. Physical Dimension:

- **Body Awareness:** A newborn typically lacks adequate awareness of their individuality, feeling helpless and completely dependent on their parents for everything. However, they begin to recognize their needs when they experience hunger, thirst, or pain, confirming that they have their own body. This realization occurs when their needs are met by their parents, reinforcing their sense of separation from others. Therefore, one of the essential factors that should be developed in a child's growth is their awareness of their body and how it interacts with the surrounding environment (Abla Marjan, 2011, p. 50).

- **Body Control:** During this stage, children gradually learn physical skills and use them in various ways to explore their abilities and surroundings, such as learning to walk. Through these experiences, they test their boundaries and discover their capacity for self-control, which ultimately shapes their future sexual identity. When children are affirmed regarding their body parts, they learn to be independent and confident. It is natural for children to explore and touch their reproductive organs at this stage, and there is nothing wrong with this; caregivers should understand this and not embarrass them, allowing children to transition through this phase smoothly. Additionally, providing love and care is crucial at this age; otherwise, children may compensate for their lack of affection in various ways. For example, children may see touching their genitalia as the only source of sensory pleasure and affection they need.

2. Relational Dimension:

There are fundamental aspects of a child's relationship with their environment that should be established during this phase to build healthy relationships with friends and society, including:

-Safety and Trust: Continuous presence of parents and timely responses to children's basic needs are vital for a child's ability to feel safe and secure, which in turn enables them to establish intimate relationships culminating in marriage and, subsequently, sexual relations.

- Connection and Individuality:

Children may struggle with separation from their parents and may find it difficult to connect with others. Some parents may encourage complete dependence to avoid their own feelings of loneliness, contributing to the development of dependent children, even into adulthood. Excessive reliance on others can diminish the sense of individuality and lead to unhealthy interactions in relationships. Hence, one crucial point parents should remember is that a child's first relationship is with their parents, shaping their understanding of communication patterns that they will later apply in other relationships. While you may not explicitly discuss sexual health with your child, your behavior and communication convey messages that significantly affect their ability to form healthy relationships later (Abla Marjan, 2011, pp. 50-51).

3. Personal Dimension:

An important role of education at this stage is to help the child recognize gender differences in order to understand his or her own and others' sexual identities. Boys are boys and girls are girls. Much

of what we learn about the roles of boys and girls begins at this early age. It is important for children to develop their own sexual identity, so parents should inform them about the differences between the sexes and the roles associated with each.

10. Content of Sexual Education

When developing a plan or program for sexual education, it is crucial to tailor and adjust the messages provided to children or adolescents according to their mental, cognitive, linguistic, and social capacities. Therefore, certain conditions must be adhered to ensure the effectiveness and safety of the messages and their impact on them. These conditions include:

- Using clear and simple language that the child or adolescent can understand while encouraging the use of terms for all body parts.
- Simplifying information and making it relatable to the child's or adolescent's understanding according to their abilities.
- Maintaining honesty, transparency, and truthfulness when answering children's or adolescents' questions.
- Ensuring that dialogue, discussion, and training are ongoing as long as there is a need, using varied methods in a friendly and respectful atmosphere.
- Gradually presenting information and sexual skills.
- Providing information and skills that meet the child's or adolescent's needs while avoiding unnecessary details.

- Using tangible materials and training linked to images and live scenes of animals giving birth or plants, to answer children's or adolescents' questions in a practical, procedural manner.
- Ensuring that the information and skills given to children are accurate and that the answers correspond to the questions asked.
- Considering gender; it is preferable for mothers to engage with daughters and fathers with sons.
- Taking into account the developmental stage the child or adolescent has reached.
- Considering the child or adolescent's language proficiency, including expressive language and independence.
- Considering the nature of the child's or adolescent's environment.

11. Educational and training objectives Children should learn from sexuality education:

- How and when to say "no" to adults.
- Understand the privacy of spaces (e.g., recognizing the privacy of the bathroom for themselves and others and closing the door).
- Not trying to take off peers' clothes or touch their genitals.
- Not undressing or partially undressing in front of others.
- Know the names of their reproductive and sexual organs.
- Understand the difference between the sexes (male and female).

- Recognize what constitutes sexual abuse.
- Know how to protect themselves from sexual exploitation.
- Practice asking permission when entering private spaces and respecting the privacy of others without intruding.
- Knowing which parts of the body can be touched and which parts should not be touched by themselves or others.
- Understand when, with whom, where, and how to kiss or hug.
- Recognize acceptable and unacceptable behavior in sexual contexts.
- Regulate their sexual desires and adhere to values and religious teachings.
- Preparing them psychologically and health-wise for puberty by familiarizing them with the signs of puberty, how to cope with it, and the physical and physiological changes they will experience (e.g., nocturnal emissions, menstruation).
- Teach adolescents how to care for themselves during menstruation.
- Teach adolescents how to manage nocturnal emissions.
- Understand that sexual relations are between a man and a woman within the context of marriage.

Conclusion:

Parents must prioritize sexual education in their interactions with their children. Neglecting this aspect can lead to children becoming victims of sexual abuse or, conversely, becoming individuals who exploit children to fulfill their desires, primarily due to the lack of attention given to their questions when they were younger. This is often the result of not allowing enough time for discussion, which leads them to seek knowledge from inappropriate sources and cultures.

Children are the future and the present; therefore, they must be healthy and vibrant in their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. We must give them the care and protection they deserve and be their support system, guiding them to safety. It is imperative that we do not neglect or become complacent in providing them with the education and upbringing necessary to empower them to take the initiative for building and development.

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