



## PARENTS' ROLE

- Be sure that you know adequate and accurate facts and that you use correct vocabulary.
- Be normal, natural, loving, sincere, and don't be worried if you feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics with your child.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Then look-up the answer, with your child if possible.
- Establish two-way communication by giving and receiving information that destroys myths and distortions that your child may have learned from others.
- If your child asks no questions, use everyday events to bring up important subjects. Talk about T.V. shows, ads, friends and experiences.
- Show interest in your child as an individual. Provide time for your child to express his or her ideas.

## RESOURCES

Learning about sexuality is a lifelong process. No one knows it all.

A wide variety of books are available at local libraries and book stores. We have included several examples, but it is most important that you select a resource with which YOU are comfortable.

Also, be aware of community resources. Visit the Health Museum in Cleveland, or watch for programs sponsored by local churches or groups, such as Girl or Boy Scouts, that offer learning opportunities for parents and/or children.



## WHAT INFLUENCES CHILDREN'S DECISIONS?

Many influences can positively or negatively affect the decisions that a young person makes. Commonly referred to as internal and external influences, they include:

### EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

- Peers and family members
- Role models
- Mass Media
- Social & physical environment
- School
- Church

### INTERNAL INFLUENCES

- Self-Image
- Ability to communicate effectively
- Self-confidence
- Feeling in control of one's life

These influences affect the many health and safety issues in children's lives and how they learn to make personal choices for a happy and healthy life. Parents need to be aware of these influences and how they affect their children as they provide guidance for them.



# Family Life Education Parent Guide



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## WHAT IS FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION?

Family life Education is the sexuality education program offered by Summit County Health District for fifth grade students. The program has been ongoing since 1950. The purpose of the program is to help girls and boys gain knowledge about their growth, development and reproduction, including changes that will occur during adolescence. The content is family centered, and children are encouraged to share information at home giving parents an opportunity to share their family moral and religious beliefs. Specially trained registered nurses from Summit County Health District teach the course to more than 600 Summit County students each year.

### FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION GOALS FOR STUDENTS

- To acknowledge the uniqueness and importance of each child.
- To understand the basic structure and function of the human reproductive systems.
- To develop positive attitudes and minimize anxieties relative to their own growth and development.
- To develop communication skills to enable children to share thoughts and feelings, to discuss sexuality and to obtain answers to their questions from appropriate resources.
- To develop an understanding and appreciation for attitudes, values and beliefs which provide children with a rational basis for making responsible decisions.

## Classes

The following statements indicate subject areas covered in classes.

### UNIT 1 Family Life Education – An Introduction

The most basic unit of life is the cell.

Chromosomes are responsible for our gender.

Egg and sperm cells are reproductive cells that combine at fertilization.

Traits are passed on and the combination of genes determines our uniqueness.

### UNITS 2-3 Reproductive Systems, Puberty & Adolescence

It is important to know correct terms for the parts of the body.

The reproductive systems are special and personal but not secret.

Children grow at their own rate.

Adolescence is a normal stage of growth and development. There are physical, social and mental/emotional changes for both boys and girls.

A growth spurt is one of the first changes and usually begins between 10-13 years for girls. Boys' growth spurt often begins 1-2 years later than girls.

### UNITS 4-5 Just for Boys, Just for Girls

It is important to communicate with a responsible adult when questions about sexuality arise.

The reproductive systems develop during adolescence. Menstruation for girls and night emission for boys are normal functions and signs that the reproductive systems are maturing.

The reproductive systems help the young grow and mature to full size and work together to create new life.

### UNIT 6 Development & Birth of a Baby

Prenatal development and the birth of a baby is an amazing, complex, natural process.

### UNIT 7 Planning for Health

Health includes physical, social, and mental components.

Heredity, environment and our personal choices affect our health.

Healthy habits include: adequate sleep, eating fruits/vegetables, good hygiene and staying physically active.

### Common Questions Parents Ask

#### Q: Aren't they too young?

**A: No**

Children learn about sexuality from birth, and learning is a continual process. Most parents of fifth-graders would be surprised at how much their children know and how much of their knowledge is not correct. Children learn information in bits and pieces and often come up with very inaccurate or biased conclusions.

Whether we like it or not, our children are bombarded by all types of images and messages regarding sexuality in everyday life.

We are often shocked by the facts we see and read in the media. Unfortunately, it is impossible to shelter children completely from the unpleasant or inaccurate information they receive. Parents are naturally concerned about the effect these messages have on their children.

Many parents have ambivalent feelings. They don't want their children to grow up too quickly, but they do want them to receive the information that they need to prevent victimization and to grow into happy, healthy adults.

Some parents worry that if their children learn too much, too soon, this knowledge encourages sexual activity. Studies show that this is not true. In fact, appropriate sexuality education can give students the support they need to make responsible

decisions and communicate appropriately with trusted adults.

#### Q: Will the classes be coed?

**A: Yes**

This is the normal learning situation for boys and girls, and the curriculum is written for coed classes. Information the class learns together tends to decrease unwholesome curiosity and gossip among the children.

It is important for boys and girls to learn to respect and understand one another. Learning in a coed setting helps them toward this goal.

One class is taught to boys and girls separately. This enables the nurse to discuss menstrual hygiene issues with the girls and gives students an opportunity to ask questions in a single sex class setting.

#### Q: Aren't the children embarrassed?

**A:** There is no reason to anticipate that your child will be embarrassed. The classes are carefully structured so the children will not feel forced to participate.

Some children may feel apprehensive at the beginning of the series, so the instructors explain the purpose of the class and the rules. Once the children know what to expect, they are interested in learning and act appropriately in class.

#### Q: How do most people learn about sex?

**A:** Recent polls indicate that most young people look to their parents for information about sex. Friends and school are next, and television ranks fourth as an important source of information.

About 66% of young people say that they have talked to their parents about sexuality.

In contrast, less than 20% of adults say that they talked to their parents about sex, and often they had very little formal sexuality education. It is little wonder then, that in numerous surveys of adults, most report that they are uncomfortable discussing sexuality.

It is important for parents to get past this discomfort and think through what they want to share with their children. One fact is clear: It is very important for parents to talk to their children.

#### Q: What about values?

**A:** Values are very important and help children put facts in perspective. The values that are integrated into the Family Life Education course are universal, such as responsibility and good health.

Parents need to share their family values and religious beliefs with their children. They also should establish goals and work toward them with their children.

## Resources for Parents

- Talking With Kids About Tough Issues, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now. [www.talkingwithkids.org](http://www.talkingwithkids.org)
- Your Child's Development from Birth thru Adolescence, Richard Landsdown & Marjorie Walker, 1996.
- Parenting Your Teenager, David Elkind, Ph.D.;1993.
- Raising a Son, Don & Jean Elium, 2004.
- Raising a Daughter, Don & Jean Elium, 2003.

## Resources for Students

- Dr. Ruth Talks to Kids, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, 1993. Where you came from, how your body changes and what sex is all about.
- Lets Talk About...s-e-x, Sam Gitchel & Lorri Foster, 2005. A read and discuss guide for children ages 9-12 and their parents.
- The New Teenage Body Book, Kathy McCoy and Charles Webblesman, M.D., 1992.
- The Period Book, Karen Gravelle, 1996, Discusses menstruation, menstrual hygiene choices and changes in puberty for girls and boys.
- Preparing for Adolescence, Dr. James Dobson, 2000.
- What's Happening to My Body? Book for boys, Lynda Madaras, 2000.
- What's Happening to My Body? Book for girls, Lynda & Area Madaras, 2000.

## Websites:

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/grow/index.html>

<http://www.bam.gov/>

<http://aap.org/parents.html>

<http://health.discovery.com/centers/kids/kids.html>