

# YOUTH'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION: SUPPORT FOR THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Jessica Wood<sup>1</sup>, Sandra Byers<sup>2</sup>, Alex McKay<sup>1</sup>, & Jocelyn J. Wentland<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Sex Information and Education Council of Canada <sup>2</sup>University of New Brunswick

CONTACT: [jessicawood@sieccan.org](mailto:jessicawood@sieccan.org)

Financial contribution from

## BACKGROUND

- Young people are primary stakeholders in sexual health education, but youth voices are often absent from curricula and program development processes.
- The *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*<sup>1</sup> outline nine Core Principles to inform the planning and delivery of sexual health education programs. Understanding young people's attitudes towards the Core Principles can inform sexual health education policy and program development.

## OBJECTIVE

Evaluate youths' attitudes towards the Core Principles and examine differences in support based on region, gender, and sexual orientation.

## METHODS

- 3551 youth across Canada, aged 16-24
- Online survey examining sexual health education attitudes and needs.
- **Core Principles Index:** 11 statements assessing level of agreement. Overall agreement measured by creating an average score.



## RESULTS

### A large majority of youth agree with all the of Core Principles

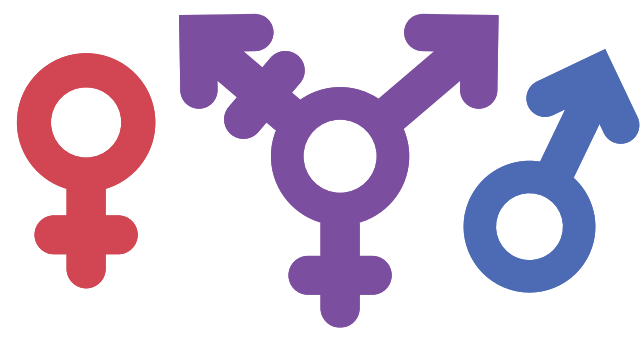


Table 1. Youth agreement with Core Principles of Comprehensive Sexual Health Education

INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS	FULL SAMPLE	GENDER			SEXUAL ORIENTATION	
	N = 3551	Cisgender girl/woman (n = 1708)	Cisgender boy/man (n = 1587)	Trans/ Nonbinary (n = 228)	LGBQ+ (n = 1022)	Heterosexual (n = 2380)
	% agree	% agree	% agree	% agree	% agree	% agree
Access to age-appropriate sexual health education in schools is a basic right for all	82.5%	86.8%	78.2%	81.6%	87.5%	81.4%
<b>Sexual health education should...</b>						
Be inclusive to all students	81.5%	87.3%	75.1%	82.7%	86.8%	80.1%
Be scientifically accurate & use evidence-based teaching methods	81.3%	85.1%	78.0%	75.8%	81.6%	82%
Promote gender equality and the prevention of GBV	82%	87.3%	76.6%	81.8%	86.4%	80.8%
Reduce homophobia	77.8%	83.8%	70.3%	84.0%	85.7%	75.4%
Incorporate a balanced approach	83.8%	88.5%	78.7%	83.8%	86.8%	83.3%
Promote the right to autonomous decision making and respect for the rights of others	85%	89.4%	80.2%	83.4%	87.3%	84.5%
Be relevant and responsive	81.6%	87.7%	74.6%	85.8%	87.3%	79.9%
Be provided by educators who have sufficient knowledge and skills	84.4%	89.5%	79.2%	84.4%	88.2%	83.6%
Seek to reduce transphobia	75.3%	81.9%	67.1%	82%	84.4%	71.9%
Address the broad range of factors that impact sexual health	84.6%	89.2%	80.0%	82%	87.1%	84.3%

## DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS:

- Though effect sizes are small, cisgender girls/women and trans and nonbinary youth report significantly greater agreement with the Core Principles compared to cisgender boys/men.
- Youth with a LGBQ+ sexual orientation report significantly higher agreement compared to heterosexual youth.
- Agreement is high across all geographic regions. However, agreement is significantly higher in the Atlantic provinces compared to Ontario, Quebec, the Prairies, and British Columbia.

Table 2. Core Principles Index- 3x2x5 Analysis of Variance

	Mean	SD	F	p value	ηp <sup>2</sup>
<b>Gender</b>			53.07	<.001	.04
Cisgender girl/woman	4.48	.02			
Cisgender boy/man	4.19	.03			
Trans and/or nonbinary	4.36	.06			
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			48.13	<.001	.02
LGBQ+	4.45	.03			
Heterosexual	4.23	.03			
<b>Region</b>			3.54	.007	.005
British Columbia	4.30	.04			
Prairie Provinces	4.30	.04			
Ontario	4.29	.03			
Quebec	4.35	.03			
Atlantic Provinces	4.49	.06			

## REFERENCES

1. SIECCAN. (2019). *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*. Toronto, ON: Sex Information & Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN).

## CONCLUSIONS



Youth across Canada support comprehensive, age-appropriate sexual health education that is inclusive, relevant, evidence-based, promotes gender equality, and is provided by knowledgeable and skilled educators.