

**QUICK READ:**  
**Guidelines for Integrating  
Gender-Based Violence Prevention  
within School-Based  
Comprehensive Sexual Health Education**

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Women and Gender  
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# Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Prevention within School-Based-Comprehensive Sexual Health Education

## WHY IS IT CRITICAL TO ADDRESS AND PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

**Gender-based violence (GBV) is a fundamental violation of human rights.**

**GBV is a significant concern within Canada and has substantial implications for the physical, sexual, and mental health and wellbeing of young people.**

### **GBV:**

- Is violence that is committed against someone based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2022).
- Can take many forms (e.g., physical violence, sexual violence, technology-facilitated violence, gender/sexual identity-based bullying, human trafficking, intimate partner violence etc.).
- Exists on a continuum (e.g., more subtle forms such as rape jokes or transphobic comments, and more overt forms such as harassment and sexual assault etc.).
- Occurs in many types of interpersonal relationships (e.g. peer, romantic, family etc.) and in many settings (e.g., home, school, public, private, and online space etc.).
- Occurs as a result of many intersecting factors, including gender inequality, social attitudes (e.g., restrictive norms and stereotypes about the way women, men, and nonbinary people should act/be) and systems of oppression (i.e., forms of injustice that devalue certain groups and privilege others; Crenshaw 1991; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Weber et al., 2019; Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2022).
- Impacts people of all backgrounds and in all communities. However, the intersection of different identities and social characteristics (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, class) can increase a person's vulnerability to discrimination, oppression, and the experience or perpetration of GBV (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2020; Exner-Cortens et al., 2023; Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2022).

**It is critical that all young people have access to GBV prevention education that increases their awareness and understanding of GBV, and the skills/information needed to prevent it.** Trauma-informed educational approaches are needed to address and prevent GBV and support/centre youth who are victims/survivors. A trauma-informed educational approach accounts for historical and ongoing systemic oppression and requires holistic approaches that engage schools and broader communities (Wright, 2021).

## THE ROLE OF SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN PREVENTING GBV

Comprehensive sexual health education is one critical component in creating systemic change by teaching young people important GBV prevention skills and concepts and increasing their awareness and understanding of GBV.

**School-based sexual health education is a critical entry point for youth to begin learning about important GBV prevention concepts such as consent, power dynamics in relationships, sexual rights, and pleasure, among other topics.** School-based sexual health education can help young people expand their understanding of gender and reduce GBV (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2020; SIECCAN, 2019).

**GBV prevention in sexual health education is critical to help reduce and prevent violence perpetrated against 2SLGBTQINA+ youth.** Sexual health education programs that include efforts to reduce homophobic harassment and break down stereotypes related to sexual and gender identities can decrease bullying, encourage empathy, and promote a safer school environment for all students (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2020).

Youth want to learn more about specific GBV prevention topics (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019; Larkin et al., 2017; Walters & Laverty, 2022). However, research suggests that sexual health education programs in Canada are not adequately addressing critical GBV prevention concepts and skills (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019; Almanssori 2022a; 2022b; Crann et al., 2022; MacDougall et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2019; Schalet et al., 2014; SIECCAN, 2022; Vanner & Almanssori, 2021; Whitten & Sethna, 2014; Wong et al., 2017).

**It is imperative that school-based sexual health education effectively incorporates GBV prevention. Sexual health education cannot be considered comprehensive if it does not meaningfully address GBV prevention concepts.**

# GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION WITHIN SCHOOL-BASED COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

The *Guidelines for Integrating GBV Prevention within School-Based CSHE* are part of a larger and sustained effort by institutions and community organizations in Canada to reduce and prevent GBV.

The *Guidelines for Integrating GBV Prevention within School-Based CSHE* complement and act as a companion document to the *2019 Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education* (SIECCAN, 2019). The *2019 Guidelines* provided summary information on the importance of sexual health education in addressing GBV. The current document extends that work by focusing on the role of sexual health education in GBV prevention in greater depth.

The goals of the *Guidelines for Integrating GBV Prevention within School-Based CSHE* are in line with the objectives of the *2019 Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*. That is, the *Guidelines for Integrating GBV Prevention within School-Based CSHE* aim to offer educators, program planners, and policy and decision makers a clear understanding of the key components, research, frameworks, topics, principles, and recommendations to deliver CSHE, with a focus on GBV awareness, reduction, and prevention.

## The specific goals of the *Guidelines for Integrating GBV Prevention within School-Based CSHE* are to:

1. Support educators (and other school staff), program planners, and policy and decision makers to integrate effective GBV prevention within school-based sexual health education programs in Canada.
2. Offer educators (and other school staff), program planners, and policy and decision makers a clear understanding of the guiding principles, frameworks, and key recommendations for integrating GBV prevention within sexual health education.

The *Guidelines for Integrating GBV Prevention within School-Based CSHE* were developed using information from five sources: 1) the results from an online consultation of people working in the fields of sexual health education and/or GBV prevention in Canada, 2) the contributions and feedback from both a working group and a reviewer group, 3) discussions with young people about their sexual health education experiences in Canada, 4) national survey research with approximately 1500 young adults aged 18-24, and 5) updated, relevant scientific research on sexual health education and GBV prevention.

The Quick Read version includes a list of all the Guideline statements. To see the research and evidentiary support for each of the Guideline statements, and detailed information regarding the development of the Guidelines (including the members of the working and reviewer groups) please see the full version here: [www.sieccan.org/gbv](http://www.sieccan.org/gbv).

**The Guidelines statements are informed by:**

1. A human rights perspective;
2. Evidence and research;
3. The experiences of those who have been impacted by GBV; and
4. Professionals who work in the field of GBV prevention and sexual health education.

# GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION WITHIN SCHOOL-BASED COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

The following Guideline statements provide direction, guidance, and recommendations for policies that can create structural support for incorporating GBV prevention into sexual health education.

## Guideline Statements\*

- 1. GBV is a form of gender discrimination that violates fundamental human rights. Comprehensive sexual health education can reduce negative attitudes that contribute to GBV and improve knowledge and skills that act as protective factors. Therefore, governments in Canada should create and support effective policies that help integrate GBV prevention into school-based sexual health education.**
- 2. Provincial/Territorial Ministries of Education should ensure that effective GBV prevention programming is provided in elementary and secondary schools.**
- 3. National benchmarks for the provision of GBV prevention information and skills within sexual health education are needed to ensure youth across Canada have access to consistent, effective, and inclusive CSHE.**
- 4. Educators, administrators, and other relevant school staff should have access to appropriate and sufficient resources and training opportunities to understand GBV and/or provide sexual health education that effectively incorporates GBV prevention.**
- 5. Educators should have school board, administrative, and pedagogical support to effectively incorporate GBV prevention within sexual health education.**
- 6. To effectively integrate GBV prevention concepts, sexual health education curricula should be updated regularly and supported by opportunities for cross-curricular engagement.**

## Guideline Statements\*

- 7. Educators, program planners, and school boards should collaborate with credible regional GBV prevention and sexual health community organizations/ health professionals to identify needs for external support and available external resources to meet the GBV prevention sexual health education needs of youth.**
- 8. Educators and school support staff should have the support and resources to easily link students to GBV support services and health care providers.**
- 9. A holistic, comprehensive school health approach is needed to effectively address GBV prevention and support key concepts and skills learned in sexual health education programs.**
- 10. To ensure that GBV prevention efforts in sexual health education are effective, school-wide policies to address and prevent GBV are necessary.**

\* The Guidelines are numbered for ease of reference but are not listed in any hierarchical order.

# GUIDELINES FOR GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION WITHIN SCHOOL-BASED COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The following Guideline statements provide direction, guidance, and recommendations for: 1) key approaches to consider for incorporating GBV into sexual health education, and 2) considerations for the development of program content and implementation.

## Guideline Statements\*

- 11. To be effective, the incorporation of GBV prevention within sexual health education should include alignment with the Core Principles of Sexual Health Education (SIECCAN, 2019).**
- 12. The incorporation of GBV prevention in sexual health education should reflect a foundational, building block approach to the introduction and learning of key GBV prevention concepts and skills.**
- 13. To respect and meet the needs of all students, sexual health education programs should incorporate a trauma-informed approach.**
- 14. To be effective, the integration of GBV within sexual health education programs should address systemic factors by incorporating intersectional and anti-racist approaches.**
- 15. Sexual health education programs must focus on human rights as a fundamental component of GBV prevention.**
- 16. GBV prevention in sexual health education should incorporate, and support culturally safe programs created and led by Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth, communities, and scholars.**
- 17. GBV prevention in sexual health education should be culturally responsive.**
- 18. To be effective, sexual health education in schools should avoid shame or fear-based approaches to GBV prevention and include the enhancing aspects of sexual health and wellbeing (e.g., pleasure).**



## Guideline Statements\*

- 19.** To be effective, GBV prevention in sexual health education should aim to be inclusive while also recognizing and addressing the specific needs of young people who are disproportionately at risk of experiencing GBV, such as young women and girls, 2SLGBTQINA+ youth, Indigenous youth, racialized youth, newcomer youth, and youth with disabilities.
- 20.** To develop effective GBV prevention sexual health education programs, collaboration with young people and others with lived experience is needed.
- 21.** GBV prevention in sexual health education should include a focus on gender, power dynamics, and deconstructing the gender stereotypes and social norms that contribute to GBV. Challenging restrictive gender norms is critical and necessary to addressing gender inequality.
- 22.** GBV prevention in sexual health education must focus on providing youth with the knowledge and skills to understand and communicate about sexual consent and to positively respect and accept the boundaries of their sexual partner(s). Understanding that everyone has the right to give, refuse, and withdraw consent for sexual activity is fundamental for the development of equitable, safe, and respectful interpersonal relationships and the prevention of GBV.
- 23.** The effective integration of GBV prevention within sexual health education requires a focus on technology facilitated sexual violence (TFSV), digital media literacy, and the development of respectful and ethical communication technology skills. Digital media literacy skill development is critical to help students differentiate between positive and problematic representations of sexuality and relationships in media that can contribute to GBV.
- 24.** Sexual health education programs should consider and address the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's sexual health, and their ability to access sexual and reproductive health and GBV support services.
- 25.** Students should be linked to credible print and online sexual health resources that address GBV prevention concepts and provided with education on how to find and verify reliable sources for themselves.
- 26.** To be effective, educators teaching GBV prevention within sexual health education should consider using a variety of teaching methods and approaches.

## Guideline Statements\*

- 27. To be effective, sexual health education programs must meaningfully engage boys and young men in learning about GBV prevention concepts and skills (e.g., using a gender transformative approach to challenge and change harmful gender norms that contribute to GBV). Boys and young men have an important role in reducing and preventing GBV.**
- 28. Engagement with families, caregivers, and community supports is needed to: 1) ensure that young people have support outside of the classroom, 2) provide families and caregivers with opportunities to give feedback on the GBV prevention sexual health education needs of their children, and 3) provide families and caregivers with opportunities to learn about GBV prevention within school-based sexual health education.**

\* The Guidelines are numbered for ease of reference but are not listed in any hierarchical order.

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