Age-appropriate sexuality education

Raisa Cacciatore
Child Psychiatrist,
Adolescent health specialist,
Expert Physician of Family Federation of Finland
(raisa.cacciatore@vaestoliitto.fi) 20.9.2017
Finland 70 years ago

- There was a poor country, suffering the consequences of war
- STIs were common
- Contraception hardly existing
- Women dying of illegal abortion
Since 2003 sexuality education has been a part of a larger topic: Health education (HE)

- Possibilities for planning and producing text books for HE
- Possibilities for training of HE teachers, as there are teachers of mathematics, languages and other topics.
- HE teachers interested self-select into this topic
- Works well!
Abortions and deliveries (per 1000) in 15-19 yr old girls in Finland (1975-2016)

Sex.edu and health services developed

Sex.edu and health services were reduced

Sexuality education developed again

D Apter, Recent development and consequences of sexuality education in Finland. BZgA FORUM 2011, 2, 3-8
Young children’s Sexual Health & Sexual Rights?
How can we promote / guarantee young children’s Sexual Health & Sexual Rights?
Children express, adults interpret

**CHILDS PERSPECTIVE**

- Alone
- Between each other
- Openly

**ADULTS PERSPECTIVE**

- **Training rules SE model**
- Adults own glasses: knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, experiences, socio cultural obstacles, taboos, fears...
- OK!
- NOT OK!
Young children’s sexuality education
Our studies in Finland 2013 - 2014

• Situation analysis
• Needs assessment
• Among parents and professionals
DAY-CARE PROFESSIONALS (nurses, preschool teachers) for 0-6-year olds  
2013, N=507

5 background questions  
88 multiple choice questions  
13 open questions

PARENTS of 0-6-year-old children  
2014, N=614

14 background questions  
85 multiple choice questions  
25 open questions

• If and what kind of expressions children show

• What children ask and how adults respond

• What are problems in supporting and protecting healthy (sexual) development
Studies of childhood sexuality

EUROPE

- Lindblad et al. 1995, Preschoolers’ sexual behavior at daycare centers: An epidemiological study, SWEDEN
- Volbert & Homburg. 1996, Was wissen zwei bis sechsjährige kindern uber sexualitet. GERMANY
- Davies et al. 2000, Children’s sexual play and behavior in pre-school settings: Staff, s perceptions, reports and responses. UNITED KINGDOM
- de Graaf & Rademakers 2011, The psychological measurement of childhood sexual development in western societies: Methodological challenges, review THE NETHERLANDS
- Larsson & Svedin. 2002, Teachers and parents reports on 3 – to 6-year-old children’s sexual behavior – a comparison, SWEDEN
- Lopez et al. 2002, Prepubertal sexuality, SPAIN
- Sandnabba et al. 2003, Age and gender specific sexual behaviors in children. FINLAND
- Kakavoulis 2007, Early childhood sexual development and sex education: A survey of attitudes of nursery school teachers. GREECE
- Miragoli et al. 2017, Child sexual behaviors in school context: Age and gender differences. ITALY

USA

- Gordon et al. 1990, Age and social-class differences in children’s knowledge of sexuality, USA
- Friedrich et al. 1991, Normative sexual behavior in children, USA
- Kaeser et al. 2000, Sexual behaviors of young children that occur in schools. USA
- De Lamater & Friedrich. 2002, Human Sexual Development. USA
- Friedrich 2003, Studies of sexuality of nonabused children. USA
- Horner 2004, Sexual behavior in children: Normal or not? USA
- Martin 2014, Making sense of children's sexual behavior in child care: An analysis of adult responses in special investigation reports, USA

AUSTRALIA

- Davies & Robinson. 2010, Hatching babies and stork deliveries: Risk and regulation in the construction of children's sexual knowledge, AUSTRALIA

CANADA

Result: There is a need

• Lack of information
• Terms, words; They do educate, but don’t like the word “sexuality education”
• Professionals and parents don’t talk about SE with each other
• No models
• Misbeliefs and ignorance
• Own sexuality education history
2010 WHO’s Regional Office for Europe together with BZgA (Federal Centre for Health Education)
WHO’s Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe 2010

Age-appropriate contents, with 8 topics of SE

0-4 year olds
4-6 year olds
6-9 year olds
9-12 year olds
12-15 year olds
> 15 year olds
Knowledge

• How to take care of your body and hygiene
• Names to all body parts
• Bodies are diverse
Skill
If someone touches or behaves towards you in an unpleasant way

1. Say NO!
2. Go away!
3. Tell an adult you trust!
Positive attitude

• My body is my own!
• Different kind of bodies are equal and must be respected
• All body parts are important and worthy
• Under the swimsuit are the most own and valuable places
Demands respect for the views of the child

Children’s rights include having their needs and opinions taken into account

An acces to age-appropriate information.
Who gives SE to young children?

- Older children and youth
- Parents, relatives, other adults
- Day-care staff
- Health and social workers
- Media, internet
- Peers
• SE occurs in day-care occasionally, usually unplanned.

• The WHO’s Standards are not known by professionals or parents.
Day-care professionals’ ways to respond to the need of SE

1. Active
   - Common, important
   - Normal part of the work.

2. Enabling
   - Reactive
   - Atmosphere to make it possible for children to ask.

3. Passive, Reactive
   - Only if the child asks.
   - Limited answers, only to that child.

4. Denier
   - In day-care SE is not needed.
   - Family issue.
According to our study:

• Adults' competencies and willingness to implement SE vary

• Children will not receive age-appropriate responses and knowledge to ensure safe sexual development and well-being

• Normal sexual behavior and curiosity may even be punished

• Symptoms of health problems or abuse may remain ignored or judged. This is not safe for children and families!
Parents want to protect child sexuality, which is:

- Without shyness
- Physical and loving
- Positive and valuable
- Poo and pee stuff
- Affections between children
- Wondering and understanding
- Pleasure, joy of one self
Parents were afraid of bad quality education, as

• Judging and punishing attitude
• Shame and guilty around sexuality and own body
• Unequal gender-roles
• Frightening information
• Too early information
• Information that suggests too early actions
Difficult issues for adults:

1. Reproduction / fertilization
2. Dangerous adults / safety skills
3. Masturbation / self touching
How to cope with disappointment?
Resistance against SE

- What is childhood sexuality?
- What is good-quality, developmentally adequate SE?
  
- There is an innocence that is destroyed with any information.
- Giving information inspire children to do adult-sexual acts.
- Providing SE to children predispose children to sexual abuse.
  
- Children should be answered only if they ask and the thing they ask.
- Sexuality is a private issue, not possible to teach about.
- Sexuality starts only in adolescence.
Resistance against SE

Because of these misconceptions and fears, parents have difficulties to promote sexual health of children. Discussion is rare. Children’s needs and empowering of children are missing.
What did we learn?

• Adults constantly face children’s sexuality-related expressions and questions.

• Currently, support for children's sexuality is uneven and sporadic.

• Parents and professionals lack models and information.

• Parents and professionals discuss the matter narrowly, if any.
Our aims

• To empower parents & professionals
• To create evidence based tools
• To increase public awareness
• To promote sexuality education
• To improve sexual health and well-being
Information DATABASE online

‘Child and sexuality’

www.vaestoliitto.fi/lapsijaseksuaalisuus

BASIC ON WHO'S
Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe
Age-appropriate SE in PICTURE BOOKS

Relationships

Body

Reproduction
POSTER: “PROMOTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT”
Age-appropriate sexuality education of 0-6-yr olds

- Development of the child
- What the child may do or ask?
- How to support and guide the child?

Several languages
POSTER: "SAFETY SKILLS AND YOUR BODY"
- knowledge, skills and attitude

• Names of body parts
• The swimsuit/underwear rule
• The touch rule
• The three-step rule

Several languages
Problem of term: It is not ‘sexual’

Many said that children’s behaviour is not ‘sexual’. Not in the way that adults understand the word. That is true.

Child sexuality differs from adolescent and adult sexuality:

• Curiosity
• Learning to respect own and others body
• Exploring emotions and pleasure
• Names to all body-parts
• Learning accepted behaviour and norms
• Basic safety-skills
NEW TERM: "Body-emotion-education"

Talks in day-care

What questions or talks have you witnessed in day-care? (% of professionals)
(daily, weekly)
Opinions: the word ‘body-emotion-education’

Day-care professionals (N=63)

- Better than ‘SE’: 50
- Worse than ‘SE’: 10

Sexuality educators (N=17)

- Better than ‘SE’: 30
- Worse than ‘SE’: 5
In the beginning, the term felt “stiff”. But, I believe that as it becomes more familiar, it will become more “flexible in use”. I agree that we need a new term for SE among small children. It’s wonderful that this is being addressed, and a new term is being developed!
Opinions: the word ‘body-emotion-education’

Day-care professionals % (N=63)

- I might use
- I wouldn’t use

Sexuality educators % (N=17)

- I might use
- I wouldn’t use
Training Day for Professionals

- Lectures, video taped to web page
- "Learning cafe" group works
- Follow up contacts
- Supervised chat’s

Published in WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA: Training matters: A framework for core competencies of sexuality educators. Training of sexuality educators: examples of good practice across the European region. Case Finland. 2017
HANDBOOK for professionals “Body and play”

• Content based on our surveys

• Written by 17 experts

• Research / Knowledge / Skills
Finnish curriculum and WHO’s topics

To understand of and to manage with the body.
To respect and protect their own and others' bodies.
To take care of their health and personal hygiene.
Child's views and wishes taken into account. Play is a way to be and to perceive the world.
To explore the world with all senses and entire body. Variety of emotions are allowed in safe.

Finnish curriculum and WHO’s topics
Strengthen equality and gender equality.
Allow breaking of gender stereotypes.
Family identity and family relationships supported.
Every child’s family is valuable.
Safety in everyday situations practiced and reflected.
To ask and seek help.
To operate safely in different situations.
To develop the cooperation and communication skills.
Criticism towards media.
To develop skills and make choices, regardless of gender, ethnicity, cultural background etc.
Encouraged to ask questions, and children's questions are answered.
Good education, care and encouraging feedback. Receive information in many ways in order to deal with emotions and conflicts as well as to learn new things. Express themselves, their opinions and ideas, and to be understood by the means of their expressions.
Finnish National Curriculum for Early Education is legally binding norm, set by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

It defines the objectives and core contents to be included.

National programs and agreements are needed.
Children grow up happy, when they learn to respect and protect their own and others' bodies and to take care of their health.
Laura Cacciatore, 4 years old:
"A woman in love"

THANK YOU!