

# Ontario HPE Curriculum 2015 Questions and Answers

## **When was the revised HPE Curriculum released?**

The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) released the revised curriculum for Health and Physical Education, [Grades 1 - 8](#) and [9 -12](#) on February 23, 2015, for implementation in September 2015.

## **Who was involved in the revision process?**

The curriculum is based on current research and advice from recognized experts in the areas of public health, mental health, sexual health, physical education and kinesiology. As a part of the curriculum review process, the government sought input and feedback from parents (including People For Education, Ontario Parents in Catholic Education, Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, and Parents partenaires en éducation), students (including the Minister's Student Advisory Council, Ontario Student Trustees Association, Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities), teachers, faculties of education, universities, colleges and stakeholders such as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Ontario Public Health Association and the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition.

As with all curriculum reviews, focus groups were held with educators and school board staff from both the public and Catholic systems, and face-to-face sessions were held with parents and students. Subject matter experts reviewed the technical content of the curriculum. More than 70 health-related organizations contributed to reports that were submitted for Ministry consideration, and a school council parent representative from each of Ontario's 4,000 elementary schools (public, Catholic, French and English) was invited to provide their input through an online survey.

## **Does the Catholic system have a separate health curriculum?**

No. There is one Ontario curriculum for both the public and Catholic systems. Teachers in the Catholic system are required to teach all of the same learning expectations as the public system but do so through the lens of the Catholic faith, according to Catholic teachings. The Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) and other Catholic education partners are developing supplementary materials to enable educators in Catholic schools to implement the updated curriculum in the context of Catholic values. The Ministry will continue to work with these education partners to help ensure that educators in Catholic schools have the resources and support that they need for their school environments.

## **What has changed in the revised HPE Curriculum?**

The revised curriculum has been updated to reflect current realities of children and youth. It includes updated content related to important issues – healthy relationships, consent, mental health, online safety and the risks of sexting – and is more inclusive of Ontario's diverse population than the previous version of the curriculum.

The revised curriculum promotes the healthy development – physical, social, emotional and cognitive – of all students, and helps students build the skills and knowledge they need to lead and promote healthy, active living, now and in the future.

## Why was it necessary to revise the HPE Curriculum?

The government reviews all curricula on a cyclical basis to ensure that it remains current, relevant and age-appropriate for all students. It has been 17 years since the health and physical education curriculum was last fully updated and the world has changed significantly in that time for young people. The research tells us:

- 45% of students access the internet using a smart phone. (mediasmarts.ca)
- 25% of grade 4 students, 50% of grade 7 students and 85% of grade 11 students own their own phone. (mediasmarts.ca)
- 51% of students want to learn how to tell if online information is true. (mediasmarts.ca)
- About 14% of grade 11 students with cell phones say they have sent a sext. (mediasmarts.ca)
- About 31% of students report being threatened online. (mediasmarts.ca)
- Most school classrooms in Canada likely have at least one or more students who are not heterosexual. ([Sexual Health Education in the Schools, Questions and Answers, Updated Ontario 2015 Edition, SIECCAN](#))
- 27% of Ontario students are born outside of Canada. (OECD, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, 2011)
- Estimates suggest that 15 to 20% of children and youth struggle with a mental health problem. (*Supporting Minds*, Ministry of Education, Draft Version 2013)

What students learn at school needs to reflect and keep pace with the challenges and opportunities they face in the world.

## About Topics in the HPE Curriculum

### **Children in Grade 1 are too young to learn the correct names for body parts (including genitalia). Why is this information included in the revised curriculum in grade 1?**

Young children need to know the correct anatomical names of body parts in order to communicate clearly and get help if needed, in cases of abuse, illness or injury (see page 93, section C1.3, of the *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum*). Sexual health experts recommend presenting information related to human development and sexual health in the same way as all health topics, as a normal, natural part of overall healthy development. Omission of this factual information may contribute to confusion or feelings that the human body is shameful. Educators are professionals and will use their judgment and understanding of their students to teach this material in a way that is sensitive to the age and needs of the students.

### **Will a Grade 1 child be shown graphic pictures when learning about body parts?**

The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing curriculum policy, which identifies what students learn in each grade and subject. Implementation of the curriculum is the responsibility of school boards. Under the direction of the school board and principal, teachers plan units of study, develop a variety of teaching approaches, and select appropriate resources to address the curriculum expectations, taking into account the needs and abilities of the students in their classes.

The *HPE Curriculum* document includes guidance for educators about approaching some topics (including those relating to sexual health) with additional sensitivity, care and awareness because of the personal nature of the subject matter and the potential connections to family values, religious beliefs, or other social or cultural norms.

### **How does the curriculum help students learn about diversity?**

All revised curriculum policy documents include a section on equity and inclusive education (entitled Antidiscrimination Education in documents released before 2010), which provides guidance to educators on how this relates to the particular subject or discipline. The principles of equity and inclusive education are also embedded throughout the curriculum in the learning expectations, teacher prompts and examples.

It is important that all students see themselves reflected in their learning at school. Fostering safe, inclusive and accepting schools for all students is a continuous process grounded in raising awareness, building understanding, and respecting and valuing the full range of our diversity. Throughout the curriculum, there are examples and prompts to stimulate teachers' thinking about the diversity that exists within their classrooms and about how to meet the diverse needs and interests of their students. As part of the ministry's recent consultations, students emphasized their desire for enhanced opportunities for students to build awareness and understanding about gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. The updated *HPE Curriculum* reflects this feedback as well as current education and human rights law and policy.

### **Does the new curriculum teach students about dating?**

The curriculum promotes the development of skills for positive and healthy relationships during changing times in children's lives. Peer relationships are addressed in grade 4 because they become more important for students in junior grades. Students continue to develop their self-awareness and awareness of others and learn how to interact responsibly and respectfully both in person and online. For example, one of the student responses says the following:

*"Relationships with friends can change, because sometimes people start being interested in different things at different times. Some people start 'liking' others. They want to be more than 'just friends' and become interested in going out. Sometimes people treat you as if you are older than you actually are because of how you look. Sometimes classmates, friends or family make comments or tease you about the changes." (See page 141, section C1.5, Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum)*

It is important for students to understand the changes they are experiencing. Students in grade 4 learn to describe the physical changes that occur in at puberty (e.g., growth of body hair, breast development, changes in voice and body size, production of body odor, skin changes) and the emotional and social impacts that may result from these changes. (See page 141, section C1.5, Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum)

### **Why does the curriculum address same-sex relationships?**

The Ontario government is committed to equity and inclusive education. All children and young people, including those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, should be able to see themselves and their families in the curriculum. The curriculum is designed to reflect the diversity of Canada. Through the *HPE Curriculum*, students learn to understand themselves, treat others with respect and to celebrate inclusivity. In grade 3, students are learning to describe how visible and invisible differences make each person unique, and identify ways of showing respect for differences in others. (See page 124, section C3.3, *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum*)

Students in the grade 6 will learn about the effects of stereotypes, including homophobia and assumptions regarding gender roles and expectations, sexual orientation, gender expression, race, ethnicity or culture, mental health and abilities, on an individual's self-concept, social inclusion and relationships with others. They also propose appropriate ways of responding to and changing assumptions and stereotypes. (See page 177, section C3.3, *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum*)

### **At what age do students learn about masturbation? Why is this topic included?**

Students are not required to learn about masturbation. The term is referenced in grade 6 in an optional prompt, which is included in the curriculum to help teachers anticipate student questions that might arise in class (see pages 174-175, section C2.5, *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum*). Students in grade 6 are building on their understanding of, and strategies to respond to, the social, emotional, and physical changes that occur during adolescence, and the topic of masturbation may come up in class as students are learning about these changes. Consistent with current research, the focus of learning in the curriculum is on providing factual and straightforward information and de-stigmatizing concepts associated with sexuality.

### **Is consent addressed in an age-appropriate manner?**

Yes. From an early age, children start learning and negotiating what they can and cannot do within their families, at school and in the community. As children grow, their skills and knowledge about consent need to grow too. These skills help them handle different situations and relationships that can sometimes be complicated.

The *HPE Curriculum* helps children and youth understand what consent means and learn the skills they need to stand up for themselves, and have respect for themselves and others. The concept of sexual consent is not introduced until students are older but learning foundational skills, such as developing healthy respect for themselves and others, begins at a young age.

### **Does the curriculum teach about love, or is it only about the act of sex?**

The *HPE Curriculum* focuses on the knowledge and skills that help students develop and maintain healthy relationships. The language relating to healthy relationships is intentionally inclusive, so that what students learn in this area can be applied to all of their relationships, with friends and peers, family members, and, as they get older, with potential romantic interests or a partner/husband/wife in the future.

In grades 9 and 10, students learn about skills for healthy relationships, including intimate ones. They also learn to consider a broad range of factors when making decisions around sexual activity and intimacy, such as personal values, having limits and being able to communicate them, being aware of and respecting the limits set by others, peer and family expectations, having physical and emotional desires, media messages, myths and norms related to sexual activity or safer sex practices, participation in activities such as substance use that impair judgement. (See page 124, section 2.5, *Gr. 9-12 HPE Curriculum*)

This curriculum will not be replacing the role of parents in educating their children. Parents and families are responsible for sharing their values, morals, cultural and religious beliefs with their children.

### **Is abstinence education in the revised curriculum?**

Yes. In developmentally appropriate ways, the curriculum includes learning about

- the physical, emotional, social, and psychological factors that can impact decision-making about sexual health
- communicating with one's partner about decisions to engage in, delay, or abstain from, different forms of sexual activity
- safer sexual activity and risks associated with different sexual activities (e.g., oral, vaginal, anal intercourse) and
- prevention of pregnancy and STIs.

The term “abstinence” may be understood to mean different things to different people. Rather than simply using the term “abstinence”, language is used in the curriculum to identify specific behaviours and the associated risks.

### **Why are students being taught about anal and oral sex?**

These concepts are included as examples within the context of learning about delaying or abstaining from sexual activity and preventing transmission of STIs. Students in grade 7 learn to identify ways of preventing unintended pregnancy and STIs, including HIV, by means such as delaying first intercourse and other sexual activities until a person is older, abstaining from sex and using condoms consistently if and when a person becomes sexually active.

The terms “oral-genital contact” and “anal intercourse” appear as an optional example to highlight to teachers that there are risks to different forms of sexual activity. This information also helps teachers anticipate questions that might arise in class. Discussion of these concepts in class may occur within the context of discussing the risks of sexual activity and delaying or abstaining from sexual activity. (See pages 195-196, section C1.3, *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum*)

Experts advise that students need access to information before a time when they may need to use the information to make a decision, whereas having the information after the fact is less effective (or ineffective). Current research indicates that the focus should be on providing factual and straightforward information and de-stigmatizing concepts associated with sexuality.

## **Parents want to know how they can support their child as they learn about sexual health.**

As in all other curriculum areas, communication between home, school and community is valued and a critical part of supporting student learning. The curriculum identifies the critical role of the parent and acknowledges the value of parental involvement in children's education. The Ministry has produced a range of parent materials that include information on the curriculum and ideas for what parents can do to support their child's learning at home. (See [Parent Resources](#) below)

## **How will this curriculum be addressed in combined grades?**

Teachers know their students well, and teach all material, whether in health and physical education or any other subject, with sensitivity to their students' unique needs and interests. Students are evaluated based on the overall expectations, which remain the same in the HPE curriculum from grade to grade. Teachers may use many different strategies to teach students in combined grades. They may

- introduce a common topic then give each grade a different task or component of the learning
- break students into groups to study different aspects of the learning and report back to the class. These groups can be flexible and include students with varied interests and skills
- bring students together for learning in some areas such as physical education and the arts
- plan ways of differentiating instruction to meet the needs of individual students just like teachers of single-grade classes and
- develop open-ended assignments with various entry and exit points.

The Ministry has developed strategies that help teachers reach a range of learners. For example, teams from every school board in Ontario have received professional learning opportunities related to differentiated instruction, an approach that involves tailoring instruction to the individual learning needs of each student. The teacher can then identify the range of needs in the classroom and plan a program that meets the needs of all the students. (Source: [An Introduction to Combined Grades](#), Ontario Ministry of Education)

## Staff Questions About Implementation and Resources

### **I'm planning to meet with some concerned parents. What are some parent resources about the HPE Curriculum that I can share with them?**

The Ministry has developed several resources specifically for parents that describe what students will learn in Health and Physical Education. They also provide excerpts from research, background information and ideas for supporting the learning at home.

These parent resources have been translated into the following languages: Arabic, Chinese (Traditional), Chinese (Simplified), Farsi, Korean, Polish, Punjabi, Somali and Urdu. A link to the

English resources and brief descriptions are provided below:

- [\*A Parent's Guide to the Revised Health and Physical Education Curriculum, Grades 1-12\*](#)  
This guide is four pages in length. An example of a curriculum expectation is included to illustrate how the curriculum is structured and how optional prompt and examples differ from a mandatory learning expectation.

- [\*A Parent's Guide: Human Development and Sexual Health in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum, Grades 1-6\*](#)

This guide is seven pages in length. An overview of what students will be learning about Human Development and Sexual Health is given for primary and junior grades with specific examples used from grades 3 and 5.

Ideas for supporting children's learning at home and where to find more information are found on the last two pages.

- [\*A Parent's Guide: Human Development and Sexual Health in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum, Grades 7-12\*](#)

This guide is six pages in length. It includes an overview of what students will be learning about human development and sexual health as they move from grade 7 to 12. Specific examples from the grade 7 and 8 curriculum documents are included.

Ideas for supporting children's learning at home and where to find more information are found on the last two pages.

- Grade-by-Grade Guides:

[Gr.1](#)   [Gr.2](#)   [Gr.3](#)   [Gr.4](#)   [Gr.5](#)   [Gr.6](#)   [Gr.7](#)   [Gr.8](#)

Two- page overviews of what students learn at each grade level in Health and Physical Education. Ideas for supporting children's learning at home and where to find more information are found on page one.

- Grade-by-Grade Guide for Grades 9-12:

Four-page overview of the *HPE Curriculum*, including a detailed overview of what students learn in grade 9 Healthy Active Living Education.

- [\*Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Online Safety, including Risks of Sexting\*](#)
- [\*Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Healthy Relationships and Consent\*](#)
- [\*Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Mental Health\*](#)
- [\*Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Concussions\*](#)
- [\*Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Staying Safe\*](#)

- [Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Active Transportation](#)

These Quick Facts documents are two pages in length and outline what younger and older students will learn, define the concepts and offer strategies that parents can use to engage in conversations with their children.

### **Where can I find more research about sexual health education?**

- [Sexual Health Education in the Schools: Questions and Answers, Updated Ontario 2015 Edition.](#)

Sex Information and Education Council of Canada – <http://www.sieecan.org>

- [Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education](#)

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2008)

- [Lessons in Learning: Learning about Sex and Sexual Health.](#)

Canadian Council on Learning. (2009)

- [Gender Identity and Gender Expression.](#)

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2014)

### **What are living skills and how should I be teaching them?**

Integrated throughout the curriculum are curriculum expectations called “Living Skills”. With Living Skills, students develop self-awareness and coping skills, social skills and communication skills for healthy relationships, and critical thinking skills including ways to solve problems, set goals and make decisions. These are woven throughout the curriculum so that students can develop these skills in different settings and contexts.

Teachers are encouraged to review the detailed outline of the component elements of the Living Skills provided on page 24 of the *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum* document.

### **What are the Fundamental Principles of the HPE Curriculum?**

The Fundamental Principles reflect the key elements of an effective health and physical education program. The revised Health and Physical Education curriculum is founded on these principles. Educators are encouraged to reflect on an ongoing basis about how these principles are evident in their instruction and teaching.

The principles are:

1. Health and physical education programs are most effective when they are delivered in healthy schools and when students’ learning is supported by school staff, families and communities.
2. Physical activity is the key vehicle for student learning.
3. Physical and emotional safety is a precondition for effective learning in health and physical education.
4. Learning in health and physical education is student-centred and skill-based.
5. Learning in health and physical education is balanced, integrated and connected to real life.



A description of each principle can be found on pages 9 and 10 in the curriculum. Reflective questions for educators about the principles can be found on page 51 of the *Gr. 1-8 HPE Curriculum*.

### **Where can I go for more Health and Physical Education resources?**

The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) has updated their resource [\*Sexual Health Education in the Schools: Questions and Answers \(2015\)\*](#), which incorporates Ontario-specific data and updated research on sexual health education.

A Grade-by-Grade Guide for Muslim parents with Questions and Answer Regarding: the Revised Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum, with input from  
Dr. Aisha Sherazi, Muslimlink.ca  
Mr. Jeewan Chanicka, M.Ed. Principal of Public School  
Iman Sikander Haashmi, Kanata Muslim Association

Compiled by Mrs. Anela Janunandan, Member of the GTA Muslim Community