

Welcome! This newsletter is for families and is offered to you by The Fourth R program. The Fourth R is a healthy relationship curriculum that your teen receives at school. The goal of the newsletters is to provide practical and usable information, resources, and strategies related to health education that aligns with what your teen is currently learning in class.



The Fourth R Program – Healthy Relationships, Safe Choices, Connected Youth

The Fourth R promotes healthy relationship skills and reduces risk behaviours

Your teen's health class consists of four units of study. This newsletter is related to the third unit of study: **Human Development and Sexual Health**.

What is your teen learning in health class?

- Skills and strategies for healthy relationships
- Factors that influence understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation
- Stereotypes and support
- How to prevent STIs and unintended pregnancy
- Understanding consent and sexual responsibility
- Practice communication Skills
- Practice decision-making skills



Parent involvement matters

Sexual health is an important part of a person's health and wellbeing and influences a person throughout their life. In health class, your teen is learning about important topics around what needs to be considered when making decisions related to sexual health, as well as the value in practicing abstinence. In addition, your teen will learn about some of the common sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and unintended pregnancy. Your teen is also learning about consent as it relates to sexual relationships, the rights and responsibilities involved in a relationship, and some consequences of sexual violence, including sexual assault. These topics may be relevant to your teen now or they may be a consideration later in life. Either way, it is important to think about decisions, factors, and consequences related to sexual health **before** being in a situation when it may be a concern.

High school can be a difficult time and present many challenges for students. For individuals who are questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation, or feel that their gender role doesn't conform to society's expectations may experience more challenges and pressures. Now more than ever your teen needs to know that they can come to you for support about anything they may be feeling or experiencing. Having knowledge of local resources can be useful so your teen can know where to go if they want to seek support elsewhere or the problem is more complex than you feel comfortable dealing with.



Parent To-Do: Ask your teen to consider what makes a good relationship? How are relationships different? You can begin the conversation by telling your teen the qualities you look for in relationships (e.g., honesty, respect, humour)

What should you talk to your teen about when it comes to sexual health?

Values and Beliefs: Before you start discussing sexual health with your teen, reflect on your personal and family values. Once you understand these, share them with, and model them for, your teen.

Dealing with Pressure: At some point your teen will face pressure from their peers to engage in behaviours that may be risky or that they don't feel comfortable with. It is helpful to speak with your teen about how to be assertive in these situations by saying no, or coming up with an excuse or delay tactic to avoid the uncomfortable situations.

Relationships: It is not realistic that you will get to know everyone your teen spends time with. It is important to teach your teen about the qualities a positive friend or intimate partner should have.

Decision-making: Your teen negotiates decisions every day in the context of relationships. Find ways to help them develop the skills they need to navigate these complex relationships and stay safe and healthy.

Did you know?

Providing an atmosphere where open, honest and two-way communication can take place is a major way parents can assist their teens in avoiding problems with sexual decisions and peer relationships. Research has shown that teens who have talked with their parents about sex are more likely to post-pone sex and be safe when they do begin.

Did you know?

Adolescence is a critical period in the development of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviours. Teenagers may start experiencing challenges related to peer-group expectations, puberty, and they may receive mixed messages about sex. Your teen may become attracted to individuals of the opposite sex, same sex, or both. They may try speaking with you about these things and it is important to be there for them during this time.

How can parents help?

Parents have a chance to

Answer questions honestly. Parents are the preferred source of information when it comes to sexual health. Answer questions honestly. Be honest when you don't know the answer and take advantage of educational resources.

Help your teen build healthy friendships. Friends have tremendous influence on whether youth engage in risky behaviour. Friends may directly or indirectly put sexual pressure on your teen. Help your teen find different ways to say no to potentially dangerous situations.

Keep the lines of communication open. Try and discuss sex and sexuality as you would any other subject. Encourage your teen to ask you questions and help them feel comfortable while discussing sensitive topics. If your teen doesn't come to you with questions you may start a discussion with them. If they aren't interested you can postpone the discussion, which shows them that they are able to bring that subject up with you at any time.

For more information about the newsletter or the Fourth R Program, please contact:

Centre for School Mental Health

Western University, Faculty of Education

1137 Western Road, Room 1154

London, ON, Canada, N6G 1G7

Phone: (519) 661-2111 X25154

Email: thefourthr@uwo.ca

Web: www.youthrelationships.org

