



Health Standards Talking Points for *Parents and Caregivers*

WHY YOUNG PEOPLE NEED EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION

- If someone is old enough to ask, they are old enough to hear the correct answer and learn the correct words. We, as parents and caregivers, honor young people's curiosity while also providing important guidance around the information sought.
- Parents and educators need to be credible communicators, and we must provide young people with a consistent source of clear and accurate information. If the trusted adults in their lives, either parents or educators, provide young people with misinformation, our students will lose trust in us.
- It is not enough for programs to include discussions of abstinence and contraception to help young people avoid unintended pregnancy or disease. They also need to be introduced to essential, age-appropriate concepts such as gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and safety lessons on consent and safe touch to minimize sexual abuse. Comprehensive sex education provides young people with honest, age-appropriate information and skills necessary to help them take personal responsibility for their health and well-being.
- Health standards that reflect all students' identities create affirming and protective school environments that are linked to emotional well-being and academic success.
- Health education should occur throughout a student's grade levels, with information appropriate to students' development and cultural background.

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS ROLE IN SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION

- As parents, we are the primary educators of young people and we understand that youth want to discuss sex, relationships and healthy relationships with trusted adults. As caregivers, we have to remove barriers to accessing complete and age-appropriate information that will help answer young people's questions and supplement the health education that they receive from credible educators in safe school environments.
- As parents, we support education that empowers youth to make healthy choices. This includes respecting young people, acknowledging their need for accurate information and believing they can and will act responsibly when they have the tools and information they need to make responsible decisions.
- Health education that is age appropriate and complete, honest and inclusive should be the standard for all students in Nebraska. Early, age-appropriate conversations protect students' well-being and their ability to make informed decisions about relationships in their lives.
- Nationally, parents and caregivers overwhelming support instruction on abstinence, birth control, STIs, healthy relationships, sexual orientation and puberty in both middle and high school. Effective health education is age-appropriate, complete, honest, inclusive and equitable.

FACTS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Parents and caregivers, as the main educators of young people, now have the opportunity to advocate for high quality, effective health education that supports their physical and emotional well-being.

Effective health education helps young people navigate sexual development and become healthy adults. It builds on a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception and disease prevention. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is leading a group of educators and experts in developing the **Nebraska Health Education Standards**, creating a framework for K-12 health education in our state. NDE is led by an elected board, who will ultimately vote on these health standards in fall of 2021.

Effective school-based health education provides resources and support to enhance parent-child communication. Access to effective health education improves health outcomes of young people by:

- **Delaying the age of first sexual intercourse;**
- **Reducing unprotected sex** and increasing use of condoms and contraception;
- **Reducing unintended pregnancy and STD rates;** and
- **Preventing dating and intimate partner violence and child sexual abuse.**

Decades of research is conclusive—effective health education that is scaffolded across grades, embedded in supportive school environments and across subject areas, can improve sexual, social and emotional health and academic outcomes for young people. **Age-appropriate introductions to a range of concepts reduce bullying, child abuse, discrimination and dating violence;** topics such as gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and safety lessons on consent and safe touch are vital to a students' K-12 health education.

When young people have all the needed facts and the opportunity to have open and honest conversations with a supportive adult, they are **capable of protecting their health and planning for their futures.**

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

The Nebraska Board of Education needs to hear from you!

As caregivers, **your advocacy helps remove barriers to accessing accurate and age-appropriate health information** and will be instrumental in **creating safe school environments.**

Take Action!

Contact your Nebraska State Board of Education member to let them know that you support inclusive, complete, honest and equitable health education standards. Share your expertise or personal experience.

The State Board of Education meets on the first Friday of every month, except in July. They will tentatively vote on the health standards in fall 2021. Your consistent support for this process is needed to ensure that all young people have access to effective health education in Nebraska.

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION



1 in 3

high school students experiences dating violence by the time they turn 18.



17.7%

of all Nebraska high school students seriously consider attempting suicide with

60.1%

of these students identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning (LGBQ).



93.1%

of a representative sample of Omaha Public School parents supported the teaching of abstinence and pregnancy prevention; and



70%

of parents supported instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity.