
Secondary School Teachers with the Peel District School Board,

In the year 2000, The Healthy Sexuality Program at the Region of Peel partnered with the Peel District School Board (PDSB) in order to improve the health of schools in our communities. Superintendents and administrators were asked to identify health issues that were most important in their schools. Their thoughts were published in the Survey Report entitled, “*Creating a Comprehensive School Health Partnership*” (2001). Healthy Sexuality was established as a key issue: Administrators in over half the surveyed schools identified Healthy Sexuality and Relationships as one of their top three concerns.

Since the new Ontario Curriculum Guidelines have been implemented, Healthy Sexuality has become a mandatory part of the Physical and Health Education Program. Classroom teachers who are expected to impart information on sexual health, expressed frustration with the lack of quality educational resources available to them. In response to these concerns, Peel Health, in collaboration with PDSB, agreed to develop several units of study related to healthy sexuality.

Since its conception, two units of study have been developed for Peel District School Board teachers. The first, entitled *Changes In Me*, assists teachers of students in grades four, five and six to educate them on the subject of puberty and adolescent development. The second, entitled *Hepatitis B: A Resource For Educators*, is designed for use with grade seven students. It helps link the curriculum guidelines regarding sexuality to the grade seven hepatitis B immunization program.

This third unit of study, *Helping Teens To Make Healthy Decisions About Sex and Relationships*, has been created for use by grade nine health and physical education teachers. Education Specialists with Peel Health, have tried to bring a balanced approach to this curriculum. Keeping in mind the time limitations facing teachers, the *HelpingTeens* resource is designed to simplify the task of teaching students about sexuality. Since this subject can be a sensitive one, teacher guides have been provided to better prepare you for the challenge. Research on adolescent sexuality has been completed for you. The unit includes detailed lesson plans, handouts, visual aids, student-centred activities, evaluation tools, a video, overheads and further resources.

In planning the activities for this teaching unit, consideration was given to pedagogical and methodological issues in learning. Thirty years of educational research confirms that children have different learning styles. Thus, any comprehensive teaching unit must include activities that appeal to a variety of learners. This allows each student the opportunity to engage in learning activities that are best suited to his/her learning style.

The educational research of Bernice McCarthy, David Kolb, Kathleen Butler and David Hunt, has become the basis for the development of the 4MAT model. This curriculum development model accommodates each type of learner, as identified in academic literature. Theories of right and left-brained learning indicate that there are four main types of learners and that each will have either a right or a left-brained partiality. This means that an inclusive unit must include at least eight learning activities that correspond to these different learning styles.

By using the 4MAT model for unit creation, teachers are able to best serve their students; allowing them to demonstrate skills that are already strong and to develop those that require enrichment. This is the theoretical basis of differentiated teaching and learning – a concept that has been adopted by the Peel District School Board. The 4MAT curriculum development model was employed in the creation of this teaching unit to ensure that the resource accommodates all students and that it will complement initiatives on differentiated learning.

The 4MAT model consists of teaching strategies that address the ranges of learning modes including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Each of these learning modes is found in all individuals to varying degrees. By combining a balanced mix of these teaching strategies, Peel Health's teaching units on sexuality, such as *Helping Teens*, will nurture an active learning environment that encourages positive outcomes for both students and teachers. An example of the 4MAT unit-planning model is included for your reference. It is also worth mentioning that this educational resource includes the specific curriculum guidelines and expectations mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The *Helping Teens* educational unit offers an integrated approach to sexuality; one that places priority on accurate information, encourages students to form healthy relationships and allows them to hone their decision-making skills. Two main objectives are sought; that educators will become more confident when teaching sexuality education and that students will become empowered to make sound decisions regarding their own sexual health.

As teens navigate through adolescence, they come to understand themselves as sexual beings. There are things you can do to make this transition easier. Teachers are extremely important sexuality educators of children. When young people know more about healthy sexuality, they can start to make wise choices for themselves. When you provide them with knowledge, you empower your students. By facilitating activities that are both fun and informative for your students, you will help them grow into confident and sexually healthy adults.

Should you wish to provide feedback about your experiences in using this teaching unit, or if you require further information, please feel free to contact the Peel Health, Sexuality Education Specialist. Any suggestions that would assist in future unit creation would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Peel Health,
Healthy Sexuality Program

Sexuality Education Specialist
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