

AGE-APPROPRIATENESS FOR SEXUAL CONTENT IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS AND/OR LIBRARIES

1. [The SMARTool and Healthy Relationships Act of 2017](#) use the following definition of age-appropriate- “appropriate for the general development and social maturity of the targeted age group (as opposed to the cognitive ability to understand a topic, or the atypical maturation, of a small segment of the targeted population).”

2. [The Social Security Act Sec 510- Separate Program for Abstinence Education](#) defines “age-appropriate” as “suitable (in terms of topics, messages, and teaching methods) to the developmental and social maturity of the particular age or age group of children or adolescents, based on developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the age or age group.”

3. [Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development](#) offers four stages of development: Sensorimotor (Birth to 2 years), Preoperational (2 to 7), Concrete Operational (7 to 11), and Formal Operational (12+). Before the formal operational stage, children process information concretely, as opposed to more abstract learning. Children in the concrete operational stage struggle with understanding and processing abstract and hypothetical concepts, as applied to themselves and a growing awareness of how others’ may think and feel. Objective (concrete) information as opposed to subjective or ideological (abstract) information is not fully processed for personal application or logical decision making until the formal operational stage.

4. [Brain development in childhood and adolescence](#) indicates frontal lobe development and associated executive function, including reasoning and logical processing is not complete until the mid 20s. Gray matter volume peaks near 11-12 years, which speaks to the plasticity of the brain in establishing stimulus and response patterns. Early adolescent children are vulnerable to receiving advance, complex, or graphic information without the discernment and decision-making ability to respond to or apply it in safe and appropriate ways.

5. [Freud’s psychosexual development theory](#) refers to five stages of development. The fourth is for children ages 6-12 and is termed the “latency phase.” Prior to the hormonal changes which are followed by the physical, emotional and relational changes of puberty, children are developmentally “latent” and are not interested or stimulated sexually. “Much of the child’s energy is channeled into developing new skills and acquiring new knowledge, and play becomes largely confined to other children of the same gender.” Graphic sexual content can threaten this “peaceful” time and stimulate curiosity or interest without the impulse control in place to respond in safe and appropriate ways.

6. [Contextual consideration](#) should be considered for both school libraries and classroom settings. From the [K-12 Standards for Optimal Sexual Development](#)- “are written for use in classroom instruction, as opposed to individual counseling or clinical intervention. While some of the topics addressed are personal, they are written to be taught in a public setting...Some subjects are sensitive or complex, and may be better addressed with individual attention to maintain student privacy confidentiality. Students are always encouraged to discuss sexual topics further with parents and family members, and to seek individual counseling or clinical help when needed.”