



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

MANDATORY SEXUALITY EDUCATION

I'M INFORMED !



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**"HELPING A CHILD CLARIFY
FEELINGS DOES NOT MEAN THAT
WE AGREE WITH OR SUPPORT
THE FEELINGS OR
THAT WE SUPPORT THEM."**

Adele Faber et Elaine Mazlish

If you have this guide in your hands, it is probably because you feel that you have a role to play in your child's sexuality education. This guide is not a tool that will tell you how to do it, but rather it will try to help you understand why sexuality education is an asset for our youth and how school and family can work together so that your child can thrive.

Faber and Mazlish's [1] quote captures for us an important aspect of sexuality education, that of bringing the young person to discover who he or she is.





*This guide uses inclusive writing to give visibility to all gender identities.
We want everyone who views this guide to feel included and challenged by its content.*





TABLE OF CONTENT

HISTORY OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION
IN QUEBEC

7

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RETURN OF
MANDATORY SEXUALITY EDUCATION

8

CHILD'S PSYCHOSEXUAL
DEVELOPMENT

12

THE VISION OF SEXUALITY ADOPTED
BY THE SEXUALITY EDUCATION
PROGRAM

14

THE DIFFERENT THEMES COVERED
BY THE SEXUALITY EDUCATION
PROGRAM

16

THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
OF THE SCHOOL AND THE FAMILY

18

THE PLACE OF THE PARENT IN THEIR
CHILD'S SEXUALITY EDUCATION

19

PLACING YOUTH AT THE CENTER OF
SEXUALITY EDUCATION

20

RESOURCES

21

BIBLIOGRAPHY

26

HISTORY OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN QUEBEC

The year 2018 marks the return of sexuality education in Quebec as mandatory content in primary and secondary schools. However, it is important to note that sexuality education was not completely absent from the school environment prior to 2018.

The history of sexuality education in schools dates back to the first half of the 1900s. From the early 1930s until the 1960s, sexuality education in Quebec was marked by Catholic discourse [2]. In 1969, following the decriminalization of homosexuality and abortion, demands for sexuality education in the school context, notably by the Fédération du Québec pour le planning des naissances (FQPN), began to be heard. In 1985, a vocational and social training program (FPS) was introduced in primary and secondary schools, including a sexuality education component. This program was aimed primarily at preventing teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) [3]. This course was abandoned when the education reform was implemented in the early 2000s.

As a result of this reform, sexuality education is no longer a mandatory content. It is left to the discretion of teachers, school principals and external resources (CLSC, community). The lack of a framework and guidelines results in uneven and sometimes non-existent sex education [4]. An internal MELS survey in 2012 revealed that 80% of schools offer only partial sexuality education, by not having an institutional strategy or not covering enough topics [4]. In response to this finding, in 2015 the Quebec Ministry of Education implemented a pilot project for a sexuality education program providing a grid of mandatory content from kindergarten through secondary 5 [5]. This program adopts a holistic and positive vision of sexuality and aims to promote students' development as well as reduce their vulnerability to certain issues [6]. This new curriculum has been implemented in schools across the province since fall 2018.



MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RETURN OF MANDATORY SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Sexuality education in the school setting became unequal in Quebec when it was no longer compulsory. This context has had different impacts on the sexual health of the generation that did not receive this education. These include an increase in STBBIs, a high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the emergence of multiple messages about sexuality. Together with the positive consequences of sexuality education, these reasons have contributed to its return as mandatory content.

The increase in sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBI)

In 2017, there was a 65.4% increase in the rate of gonorrhea from 2010 to 2015, with males, adolescents and young adults being the most represented. For its part, chlamydia, the most prevalent STBBIs, is also on the rise and primarily affects young adults. The PIXEL study on the sexual health of young adults [7] conducted by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) in 2017 reports that young adults are not very aware of the modes of transmission and the consequences of STIs. Young people do not really feel at risk of contracting an STBBI, despite the fact that they perceive them to be very serious. In Quebec, young adults represent the age group that has received the most variable sexuality education. These results demonstrate the importance of quality sexuality education for the health of young people.

The prevention of gender-based violence and Sexual Violence (SGBV)

One of the goals of sexuality education is to prevent violence in relationships [8]. The situation reported in the PIXEL is alarming in this regard. The results show that one in ten participants reported having experienced violence in their sexual relationships in the past year. This proportion varies little by age group or gender. 21.3% of respondents have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Among women, it is nearly one in three [7].

Violence can take many forms. It can occur in the context of sexual or romantic relationships. It can take the form of physical, psychological or sexual abuse. Sexual and dating violence can have psychological, social, physical and sexual consequences. It can also have legal consequences for the person who perpetrates the abuse [9]. Having more information on the subject allows young people to be better equipped to recognize and prevent abuse and to have healthier relationships with others.



Multiple messages about sexuality

Young people are increasingly confronted with different messages about sexuality. Some of these messages can be contradictory. First of all, young people pass on information about sexuality to each other. Although some youth recognize that this information is not always accurate, they turn to their **peers** to document topics that may be too sensitive to discuss with adults [10].

Then there is the **media**. Whether in movies, advertisements, or social media, these abound with sexually implicit and explicit messages and images. Good examples are the sexual objectification of girls' and women's bodies and the double standard of social acceptance of boys' versus girls' sexual behaviors. Moreover, the media tends to convey stereotypes and ideals that are far from reality [8]. These misleading messages can include how we think about our bodies, the promotion of stereotypical male or female behaviors, and preconceived notions about communities and sexuality [11].

The **community** can also play an important role in sexuality education. One example is religious communities, which are recognized as trusted and educational figures by many young people and their families [12 and 13]. However, although some religious leaders are comfortable discussing sexuality and are involved in sexuality education for youth in their communities, not all do so [12].

A community, regardless of its nature, may share certain taboos regarding sexuality. This can lead people to avoid talking about these subjects [12, 14 and 15], or to do so by referring to images or symbols, which can be confusing for young people in their search for answers. In addition, the presence of taboos can fuel false beliefs that will be difficult to deconstruct once they reach adulthood.

In addition, **parents**, who are the main influencers in sexuality education, pass on their values, norms and cultural background to young people. However, some parents do not feel equipped to discuss certain sensitive or taboo subjects related to sexuality because of their own sexual education, their cultural mores or simply because of communication difficulties. Talking about sexuality with a child can also make both parent and child feel embarrassed.

School, on the other hand, can be used as educational agents to convey truthful information that is necessary for the child's or adolescent's proper development, while helping them to develop their critical faculties and judgment [8]. The provision of sexuality education in schools also ensures that all students receive the same information [8].

The positive impact of sexuality education

These contextual elements, combined with the positive effects of sexuality education on children, have contributed to bringing it back into Quebec schools as mandatory content in 2018. Moreover, contrary to some false beliefs, one of the effects of sexuality education is to delay the onset of active sexuality by helping young people choose the best time for them. In addition, it allows them to decrease risk behaviors by increasing the use of protection and does not impact the frequency of sexual relations for those who are already sexually active.

Sexuality education, by leading young people to make decisions and adopt behaviors that are consistent with their needs and values, can even help reinforce certain feelings and behaviors that encourage abstinence. It also facilitates conversation and openness among young people and helps them become adults with healthier sexuality [16].



CHILDREN'S PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

The development of the body and mind of young people goes through different stages. Here is a portrait of the different stages they may go through, as suggested by St. Pierre and Viau [17]. However, it should be noted that these stages are only indicative and can vary from one young person to another (arriving earlier, later or even through different periods) without this being problematic.

3 to 5 years old

This is the most active period of psychosexual development before adolescence. It is a period of great curiosity for them. Children at this age develop a passion for body functions (e.g., toileting, body parts). Children will want to show their bodies naked as well as see others naked. These exhibitionist and voyeuristic behaviors are normal. Children of these ages will also naturally discover the pleasure of self-stimulation of the genitals. For them, this stimulation is not eroticized and is different from adult sexuality. It is simply a normal response to pleasure from their bodies. Children will enjoy discussing what their bodies can do with their friends of the same age. They will also enjoy reproducing loving behaviours in their play (e.g. holding hands, kissing, sweet talk).

At these ages, the role of the parent is to give simple explanations about the process of reproduction, birth and body functions. In terms of sexual abuse prevention, it is important to explain the difference between the most intimate parts of the body (such as genitals, buttocks, breasts) and others (e.g. knees, arms, feet). Then, to introduce the essential notion of intimacy, distinguishing "good touches" (gestures that make us feel good, such as hugging, holding hands, running a hand through our hair) from "bad touches" (gestures that make us feel bad, that make us feel weird or negative emotions and that involve intimate parts of the body) can equip children to identify situations in which they feel unsafe. Then, it is possible to discuss with your child who to go to in case of a problem. It is important to identify trusted figures with your child, regardless of the type of problematic situation.



6 to 9 years old

It is possible to notice a decrease in interest in the area of sexuality at these ages. Children will also often show a greater need for privacy. They will develop a certain modesty. This may be reflected in a difficulty in expressing their feelings or an embarrassment when discussing certain sexual topics. Children will also often denigrate romantic behavior, despite the fact that it fascinates them. It is also at these ages that children will begin to socialize with friends of the same gender.

It is important for the parent to respect the child's discomfort with talking about sexual matters. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to show an openness to discussing these topics if the child requests it or shows interest. If the child has questions, it is possible to give slightly more detailed information than at previous ages. It is also around this time that it is possible to start talking about upcoming pubertal changes, such as increased hair growth, weight gain and menstruation. It is a good idea to talk about these changes before they occur so that the child is not surprised or confused about his or her self-esteem or body image.

In terms of sexual abuse prevention, the parent can mention that if someone touches or asks to touch the child's private or sexual parts, this is sexual abuse. The same is true if someone asks the child to touch their private or sexual parts. This is also a good time to make children aware that sexual assault can be committed by someone they know.

10 to 12 years old

These are the ages when young people begin to experience the love and sexual awakening and the physical and psychological changes associated with puberty. They will begin to wonder about adult sexuality and will be interested in learning more about it. It is also at these ages that children will begin to masturbate in private and have their first erotic dreams. This is a time of discovery and awakening that is also characterized by embarrassment that will sometimes lead them to have difficulty expressing their feelings. This situation can lead them to experience mixed emotions in relation to sexuality.

Parents, depending on how comfortable they are with these topics, are encouraged to be open and willing to answer their children's questions. The awakening of love and sexuality is a good time to address the subject of egalitarian relationships between genders and partners. It is also a good time to set the table for family rules around relationships. It's also a good time to discuss in more detail what young people can expect as they enter puberty. It is also a good time to start talking about the risks (STBBIs, pregnancy, etc.) associated with sex. Parents can also talk to their children about the positive aspects of a positive and fulfilling sexuality!

In terms of sexual violence prevention, it is relevant to talk to young people about Internet safety. In addition, it is important to mention that sexual assault may or may not involve touching of the genitals.

THE VISION OF SEXUALITY ADOPTED BY THE QUEBEC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S 2018 SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Quebec sexuality education program adopts a global vision of sexuality and recognizes five dimensions: biological, psychoaffective, relational, sociocultural and moral. It also approaches it as a human dimension that has a positive role in life by representing a source of fulfillment, pleasure, encounter and appreciation of life. Finally, the program recognizes that sexuality begins with birth and unfolds throughout life [6]. The following is a description of the five dimensions of sexuality as presented by the Regional Public Health Directorate [18].

Biological dimension

This is often the concept that is primarily associated with sexuality. It includes the development of the human body (e.g., physical changes, puberty), body functions (e.g., reproduction, sexual response), and sexual and reproductive health (e.g., STBBIs, contraception). All of these are influenced by the other four dimensions of sexuality.

Psychoaffective dimension

This dimension refers to a person's ability to assert themselves in relation to their body image (e.g., perception of one's body), one's gender identity (e.g., feeling of being female, male, non-binary, agender or of another gender of the spectrum) or sexual and romantic orientation (e.g., who one feels sexual desire towards or not). It also concerns the expression of emotions and desires as well as the development of the imagination and of emotional and sexual intimacy.

Socio-cultural dimension

This dimension includes the messages conveyed by the cultural practices and norms of society. These aspects have an influence on the construction and expression of sexuality, identity and interpersonal and intimate relationships. This dimension also refers to the legal framework (e.g., laws, charters) that defines sexual rights and freedoms (e.g., sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination, consent).



Relational dimension

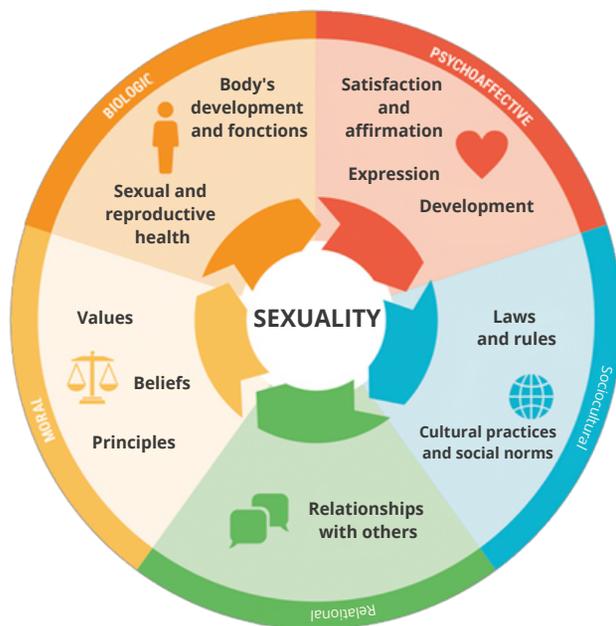
As human beings are sociable by nature, this dimension refers to a person's need to be in relationship with others. It includes the ability to communicate, negotiate and resolve conflicts with others.

Moral dimension

Sexuality is a subject that carries values, beliefs and principles. These influence how a person perceives sexuality, how they interact with others, and how they make choices and behave. They are also the elements that will help define what a person considers acceptable or not in terms of sexuality.

It is therefore by taking into account the interactions of these five dimensions that we can understand how a person constructs and approaches their sexuality. The topics and activities in the sexuality education program are designed to explore these dimensions and their sub-dimensions in order to meet the needs of students and help them better understand the world around them.

5 Dimensions of sexuality



For more information about the five dimensions of sexuality as represented by the Regional Public Health Department (2019) :

[Globalite-of-sexuality.pdf \(santemontreal.qc.ca\)](#)



THE DIFFERENT THEMES COVERED BY THE SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Quebec's sexuality education program [6] runs from kindergarten to grade five. At the elementary level, five hours of sexuality education are provided per year, and at the secondary level, 15 hours are provided per year. The program covers eight themes that address sexuality in all its dimensions. The content is formulated to meet the needs and respect the psychosexual development of students.

Human Sexual Growth and Body Image

Preschool, Grade 2, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6 and Secondary 1

This theme provides an opportunity to discuss with students the different parts of the body, sexual organs and hygiene. It is also the theme that explores body appreciation and pubertal physical and psychological changes as well as feelings related to growing up, body image and the influence of norms on it.

Pregnancy and birth

Preschool and Grade 2

This theme introduces the stages of conception, pregnancy and birth. Students will be invited to discuss the reception of a newborn child as well as the diversity of family models (e.g. two-parent, single-parent, blended, homoparental, etc.).

Globality of sexuality

Grade 1, Grade 3, Grade 6, Secondary 1 and Secondary 5

This theme presents the different dimensions of sexuality, while respecting the development of the child. The youngest students will be presented with the dimensions of the heart, the head, the body and the messages of the young person's entourage, while the older students will talk about the biological, psycho-affective, socio-cultural, relational and moral dimensions. This theme also addresses the construction of a personal vision through the negotiation of these dimensions. It also presents the entry into adolescence and ways of living well with sexuality throughout one's life.



Identity, Roles, Gender Stereotypes and Social Norms

Grades 1, 3, 4, 6, 1 and 3

This theme focuses on gender roles and stereotypes (preconceived and specific ideas associated with the sexuality of a certain group) in society and the media, and on egalitarian relationships. It also draws attention to respect for difference by addressing the topics of sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Finally, it makes connections between puberty and identity.

Sexual Assault and Sexual Violence

Grades 1, 3, 5 and 2

This theme leads children to recognize a situation of sexual assault. It aims to prevent these situations and to help students who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (real and virtual) and its consequences. It addresses the disclosure of SGBV and the myths and prejudices surrounding SGBV. Finally, this theme discusses the boundaries of consent, including the law.

Emotional and love life

Grades 2, 4, 6, Secondary 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

This theme addresses the topic of interpersonal relationships and the expression of feelings. It leads students to discuss the differences between love and friendship in the context of meaningful relationships. In high school, it addresses the awakening of love and sexuality at puberty as well as attraction and feelings of love. Sexual orientation, through the challenges of early dating, is also an anticipated content area. Students will be asked to talk about healthy conflict management, as well as ways to prevent, recognize and deal with manifestations of violence.

Acting Sexually

Secondary 2, 3 and 4

This high school theme deals with respecting one's personal choices and motivations for sexual activity. Students are encouraged to address the themes of desire and pleasure. This theme deals with topics that lead them to experience emotional and sexual intimacy in a spirit of respect for others and for oneself.

STBBIs and pregnancy

Secondary 2, 3, 4 and 5

This theme deals with sexual and reproductive health. It introduces attitudes conducive to protection as well as the functioning of protection and contraception methods. It leads students to discuss safe sexual behaviours and the ethical issues associated with sexuality.



This theme focuses on sexual and reproductive health. It introduces protective attitudes and how protection and contraception work. It leads students to discuss safe sexual behaviours and the ethical issues associated with sexuality.

To view the program:

<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/professionnels/dossiers/education-a-la-sexualite/>



THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL AND THE FAMILY

In sexuality education, the roles of the school and the parent are complementary; they are not in competition.

On the one hand, the school's mission is to educate students by enabling them to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to understand the world, find their place and continue learning throughout their lives. It also has to socialize students by teaching them to live together in respect and tolerance. The school teaches the norms that govern society and the fundamental values on which the community is based. In sexuality education, the school focuses its role and interventions on knowledge and prevention.

On the other hand, the family is a reference for the young person in terms of his or her growth, needs and values.

THE PLACE OF THE PARENT IN THE EDUCATION IN THEIR CHILD'S SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Children need their parents to grow, develop their autonomy, learn and build themselves. With regard to sexuality education, the parent plays an essential role from the earliest age in the construction of the child's sexuality. The parent's role is to transmit values and cultural references, to provide information and to answer the child's questions.

A significant element of parental involvement in sexuality education is communication. Young people report wanting safe spaces to open up without fear of judgment or reprimand [19].

Positive communication (e.g., expressions of love, affection, tolerance and empathy) leads to positive sexuality skills, whereas communication that is perceived as negative (e.g., hostile) can lead to difficulties such as early sexuality or unsatisfying romantic relationships. The more the adolescent feels part of a shared trust dynamic, the more open he or she will be to discussing sexuality with parents.

Some parents, regardless of the type of relationship they have with their child, may not feel comfortable discussing sexuality with him or her. A good way to overcome this discomfort is to seek information about the child's or youth's psychosexual development. An informed parent can then feel better equipped to respond to possible questions from their child or youth.

As a result, parents who get informed about the topics presented in school-based sexuality education can feel included in their children's learning and better equipped to discuss certain topics. Clearly articulating what is and is not permissible allows young people to be aware of family, religious or cultural values regarding sexuality. In their study of adolescent girls from Islamic-influenced cultures, Yahyoui and her team [18] report that when values are known by the girl, they help her set boundaries and feel secure. Setting and enforcing boundaries is as important to the adolescent as being listened to, informed or counseled.



The influence of the parent on the adolescent is significant. The majority of adolescents consider themselves influenced by what their parents have taught them about sexuality and relationships and consider them an important source of information.

Finally, we should not try to oppose the role of parents and schools in educating young people about sexuality. The school's role is to provide essential information, but not to convince or change students' beliefs or values. Thus, these roles are complementary and aim to ensure that responsibility is shared between these different actors. In addition, although there may be differences in perspectives on sexuality or sexuality education, the ability to access a variety of information sources allows young people to develop critical thinking skills and choose to adopt practices that are consistent with their values.

PLACING YOUTH AT THE CENTER OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

One fear that many people identify when talking about sexuality education with young people is that they are given too much information too soon. To achieve quality sexuality education, it is essential to understand young people's views of sexuality [9]. It is important to give them a voice by letting them express their worldviews, their questions and the issues they face regarding sexuality [11]. Especially young children, who are very curious, will ask many questions. Focusing on their questions helps to meet their needs while not going beyond the dimensions of sexuality that they understand at their age. It is important to answer their questions with truthful information or they may turn to other, less reliable sources of information, as mentioned above.

It's normal to not have all the answers, or to not feel comfortable talking to your child about everything related to sexuality. When in doubt, don't hesitate to tell your child that you don't know the answer to his question. You can then either go find the information yourself or redirect him or her to a reliable, age-appropriate source of information (like the resources suggested below). Finally, if discussing sexuality education with your child is a task you are uncomfortable with, listening and being non-judgmental are two key attitudes to have in order to encourage dialogue and show your support for your child.





RESOURCES

FOR ALL AGES

The detailed **contents of the sexuality education program** in Quebec (2018) :
http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/adaptation-scolaire-services-comp/EDUC-Apprentissages-Sexualite-GrandPublic-EN.pdf

Sexuality Education Resources on the **Les trésors en éducation spécialisée** platform, by Marie-Claude Armstrong (2022):
educationspecialisee.ca/sexualite/

The resource bank on the **On SEXplique ça** platform (2022): onsexpliqueca.com

Youth literature to address a variety of topics with your children on the <https://kaleidoscope.quebec> platform (2022) and at constellations.education.gouv.qc.ca/index.php?p=dp&ss=eds

Resources for parents created by the Centre de services scolaire des Découvreurs (2021):
sites.google.com/csdecou.net/educationsexualite-parents/accueil

RESOURCES

The **Guide de sexualité pour les autistes au pays des neurotypiques for parents**

with children with autism or disabilities

(2022): tinyurl.com/mwejdne5

The Fédération des comités de parents du

Québec's **magazine on sexuality education** (2018):

www.cssc.v.qc.ca/application/files/7415/6268/3922/FCPQ_action_parents.pdf

Sex and U, a website by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

(2022): www.sexandu.ca/

The **Ça s'exprime** magazine, by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec (2016 - 2017) :

publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/sujets/ca-sexprime

Tout nu! Le dictionnaire bienveillant de la sexualité by Myriam Daguzan Bernier

(2019), a book available in printed and digital format

Resources and videos for sexual violence prevention from the **Marie-Vincent**

Foundation : marie-vincent.org/en/





RESOURCES

FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The **Sasha et Lou, Ma réalité en 3D** and **#mavie** digital kits, published by the Grand Duc Editions (2022):
www.grandducenligne.com/fr/collections/education-a-la-sexualite-primaire

Stop aux violences sexuelles faites aux enfants, a booklet o talk about sexual abuse with your child (2018) :
www.bayard-jeunesse.com/infos/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Livret-STOP_aux-Violences_Sexuelles.pdf

National Film Board (NFB) **sexual education films selection for the 7 to 12 year olds**: www.onf.ca/selection/education-la-sexualite-au-primaire/

L'enfant de fourrure, de plumes, d'écailles, de feuilles et de paillettes, a non-gendered children's book by Kai Cheng Thom, Wai-Yant Li , Kai Yun Ching, at Dent-de-Lion Editions (2019)

RESOURCES

FOR HIGH SCHOOL

The **Empreinte** sexual assault prevention program, intended for young people, their parents and school staff, by Manon Bergeron, Martine Hébert, and RQCALAQS: programmeempreinte.com/for-parents/

The guide **Entre les transformations, les frissons, les passions... et toutes les questions** for parents to discuss sexuality with their teenager, from the Government of Quebec (2014): publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/document-000079/

The **SexURL** web platform, offering sexoeducational capsules for young and old in search of answers (2022): reflechiraca.co/

The documentary series **On parle de sexe** by Télé-Québec and Tel-Jeunes (2018-2020) : video.telequebec.tv/details/32001





RESOURCES

BOOKS TO TALK ABOUT SEXUALITY WITH YOUR CHILD

Love Your Body: Your body can do amazing things..., by Jessica Sanders and Carol Rossetti at Quarto Publishing (2019)

Clitoris n'est pas le nom d'une planète !
a book by Virginie Cloutier-Naud and Daniel Brouillette published by Les Malins (2021)

C'est beau, le rouge, a novel by Lucia Zamolo published by La Courte Échelle about menstruation (2021)

Le poids des seins by Nathalie Lagacé at Isatis Editions (2021), a book to talk about the breasts development during puberty

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