

MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION -“EDUCATING TO PREVENT”

ROLE OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN FOSTERING SEXUAL HEALTH

The Mexico City Ministerial Declaration “Educating to Prevent,” is a strategic tool to strengthen HIV-prevention efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) by ensuring access to quality, comprehensive sexuality education as well as sexual and reproductive health services. The Declaration also seeks to foster engagement of families and communities in the efforts to better educate youth to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

...We, the Ministers of Health and Education of Latin America and the Caribbean ...Recognize the decisive role that families play in the development of our present and future generations, as well as the need to ensure that HIV and STI prevention efforts include all relevant actors in society.

-PREAMBLE, MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION
“EDUCATING TO PREVENT”

Families and Communities Support the Sexual Health of Young People

Adolescence is a time when young people develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to become sexually healthy. As they grow and mature, young people need access to accurate information about their sexuality. Young people learn about sexuality from friends, television, music, advertisements, and the internet. However, their attitudes and deeply-rooted values are strongly influenced by their parents and other family members, as well as the adults in local faith communities, community-based organizations, and schools.

Adults have an opportunity to help shape this learning process to equip young people with the skills and knowledge needed to make safe and informed choices about their sexuality. However, silence, omission of information, or attitudes of shame and disgust may instead result in negative health outcomes. The health and well-being of young people depends on the support and guidance of families and community members. Building networks among these adults and ensuring they have mutually reinforcing goals and access to resources to realize those goals are critical elements to preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Fundamental Concepts: Supporting Sexual Health

Comprehensive sexuality education will have a broad perspective that is based on human rights and respects the values of a democratic, pluralistic society where families and communities thrive... to promote respect for differences, reject any form of discrimination, and foster responsible and informed decision-making among youth regarding their sexual debut

PROVISION 3.2, MEXICO CITY
MINISTERIAL DECLARATION,
“EDUCATING TO PREVENT”

The Ministerial Declaration seeks to contribute to highest standard of health and quality of life. Comprehensive sexuality education and access to quality sexual health services are the foundation of curbing the HIV epidemic in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regardless of who is involved, whether a classroom educator, parent, or member of a faith community, sexuality education should always embrace a set of core concepts which support the sexual health and well-being of young people.

- Sexuality is an essential part of being human and it is expressed throughout one’s lifetime.
- It is important to share knowledge and build skills among young people before they engage in sexual activity. Sexuality education will not accelerate sexual debut, in fact studies demonstrate that it will delay it.
- Information should be scientifically accurate and age appropriate.
- Messages should be culturally sensitive, drawing from cultural knowledge, awareness, and participation of local communities to make change effective and sustainable.

Sexuality education begins at home. From the moment of birth, children begin learning about different aspects of sexuality—body development, affection, gender, touch, and relationships—and this learning continues throughout their lives. Infants and toddlers learn about sexuality when their parents talk to them, dress them, show affection, and teach them the names of the parts of their bodies. As children grow into adolescents, they continue to receive messages about sexual behaviors, attitudes, and values from their families.

DATA ON IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Parents are often the first and most important sexuality educators of young people and serve as a critical bridge for reinforcing the lessons and concepts taught in schools, communities, and faith settings. Parental involvement directly impacts the sexual health and well-being of young people, as demonstrated by studies exploring this relationship. Parents often overestimate the influence of their children's peers and the media and underestimate their own influence. Youth often say that they want to discuss sex, love, relationships, sexual health, and related topics with their parents—parents are their preferred source of information on these subjects.

Research shows that, when teens have a parent or other trusted adult to talk to about sex, sexuality, and protection, they are less likely to engage in early and/or unprotected sexual intercourse than are teens who do feel that they are not able to talk to their parents or a trusted adult. Studies also show that youth with the least accurate information about sexuality and sexual risk behaviors may experiment more and at earlier ages compared to youth who have more information.

Finally, research shows that parents' communication to their children about sex and sexuality, particularly their values and attitudes, can help young people establish values, develop positive attitudes, and make healthy and safe decisions.

Parents and caregivers are—and ought to be—the primary sexuality educators of their children. What parents say and how they say it—and what they don't say—all send messages about our values and beliefs. It is vital that communication between parent and child is both open and positive—and that it start as early as possible. However, many parents may not feel comfortable discussing issues about sex and sexuality with their children. This is perfectly understandable because they may not have been prepared for these discussions. Given the proper guidance and tools, they can develop the necessary confidence and skills to have open, frank, and respectful discussions.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

- Find teachable moments—opportunities to discuss sexuality issues with children in everyday activities. Don't wait to have one "big talk."
- Share your values about sexuality with your children and support them as they learn to form their own beliefs and values.
- Be an "askable" parent who your children see as approachable and open to questions. Rewarding a question with, "I'm glad you came to me" will teach children to come to you when they have questions.
- Reach out to educators and school administrators to learn about the curriculum being used to teach sexuality education in the school. Ask how you can reinforce this learning at home.

10 TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Start early.
2. Initiate conversation with your child.
3. ...Even about sex and sexuality.
4. Create an open environment.
5. Communicate your own values.
6. Listen to your child.
7. Try to be honest.
8. Be patient.
9. Use everyday opportunities to talk.
10. Talk about it again. And, again.

*Courtesy of Children Now,
www.childrennow.org*

Parents and families often need help and encouragement in educating their children about sexuality. Faith-based institutions, community-based organizations, and schools all play important roles in supporting the sexual health of young people. Individual behaviors and decisions are greatly influenced by the broader social norms within a community, which determine the scope of choices available to a young person. Community members can embrace positive behaviors and attitudes to reinforce young people's healthy decision-making.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

- Foster public dialogue around sexual health, shifting away from sexual health as only an individual or family concern and interest, to one of the entire community.
- Sponsor a media campaign focused on parent/adolescent communication.
- Create service directories of youth-friendly services, including hours of operation, location, directions, and payment options (e.g., free/sliding scale, options for uninsured).
- Create materials and messages explaining adolescents' rights relating to access to sexual health care information and services.
- Religious and faith leaders can incorporate messages which support the sexual health of young people into religious announcements and sermons.
- Build collaborative partnerships and inter-organizational alliances.

Role of Schools

School-based sexuality education is critical for equipping young people with accurate information, positive models, and self-esteem to make safe and responsible decisions and prevent the transmission of STIs, including HIV. School-based sexuality education should complement and augment the sexuality education children receive from their families, religious and community groups, and health care professionals and reflect the values and beliefs of the community. Comprehensive sexuality education programs have four main goals:

- Provide scientifically accurate, age- and developmentally appropriate information on human sexuality;
- Provide opportunities for young people to develop and understand their values, attitudes, and insights about sexuality;
- Help young people develop healthy relationships and interpersonal skills; and,
- Help young people exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships, which includes addressing abstinence, pressures to become prematurely involved in sexual intercourse, and the use of contraception and other sexual health measures.

Educators and school officials can also serve as the catalyst to engaging non-traditional partners in the learning process and to reinforce lessons-learned.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

- Learn about organizations in the community to identify potential allies.
- Conduct an assessment of the community to evaluate the availability of sexual health information and services for young people.
- Invite community groups to participate in or co-sponsor events, building critical relationships with local partners and engendering shared responsibility for young people's well-being.
- Promote inter-generational events to foster and strengthen communication (e.g., parent/child, mother/daughter, father/son, grandparents, and other adults).

What is the Mexico City Ministerial Declaration?

The Mexico City Ministerial Declaration represents a partnership between Ministries of Education and Ministries of Health, marked by the establishment of joint planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow up, as well as facilitating involvement of other key sectors. It represents a synergy between Ministries of Health and Ministers of Education to develop and deliver the information, education and counseling needed to reverse the HIV/AIDS epidemic, promote healthy life styles through comprehensive sexuality education as well as sexual health related services.

GOAL: Reduce by 50% the number of adolescents and young people who are not covered by health services that address their sexual and reproductive health needs appropriately

GOAL: Reduce by 75% the number of schools that have failed to institutionalize comprehensive sex education

ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND WEBSITES

Families are Talking/La familia habla

Offers encouragement and support to parents/caregivers in talking with their children about sexuality. Available in English and Spanish.

<http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=632&nodeID=1>

Parents' Sex Ed Center

Information and resources for parents to begin talking with their children about sex.

http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=206

Talking with Kids...Before Everyone Else Does

A Guide to talking with children (ages 8-12) about sex, HIV/AIDS, drugs, and alcohol.

http://www.childrennow.org/uploads/documents/twk_english_1999.pdf

There's No Place Like Home

Information for parents about having important conversations about sexuality with their children. Available in English and Spanish.

<http://www.noplacelikehome.org/>

THE TEXT OF THE MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION CAN BE FOUND:

In Spanish at:

<http://www.censida.salud.gob.mx/descargas/pdfs/declaracion.pdf>

In English at:

http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080801_minsterdecl aration_en.pdf

Parents and families play a vital role in shaping the way we understand our sexual and social identities. Parents need to be able to address the physical and behavioural aspects of human sexuality with their children, and children need to be informed and equipped with the knowledge and skills to make responsible decisions about sexuality, relationships, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

- MICHEL SIDIBÉ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNAIDS