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Family Planning Queensland

## Ignorance is not Innocence

**Protective Effects of Sexuality Education for Children Under 5**

Family Planning Queensland  
Presenter Shona Charters  
Author/s: Shona Charters and Chris Abrahams

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## Who Is Family Planning Queensland?

FPQ is a leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services.

FPQ is committed to providing comprehensive sexuality and self protection education to all.

Including:

- Families
- Educators
- Service providers in the early childhood sector

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## Definition of Sexuality

“Sexuality is an integral part of life and it influences personality. It may be denied, repressed or used effectively but it is part of our selves. Sexuality is a process commencing at birth and ending only with death ... Sexuality is culturally defined and thus influenced by family, peers, religion, economics, school, media, law and science.”

The Clarity Collective. (1990).  
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In most other areas of knowledge we try to enlighten children, ... not so with sexuality. Far from providing enlightenment we evade, remain silent, we put children off by saying they are not old enough to understand, we provide partial and misleading information, or we tell downright lies. ... As in other skills and meanings that children acquire, they need gradual and encouraging process of explanation and support in search for sexual meaning.

Goldman, R. & Goldman, J. (1988). P. 216.

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## Childhood Sexual Development

Birth to 18 months a child may:

- Experience genital pleasure
- Explore body parts, including genitals
- Have erections (boys), vaginal lubrication (girls)
- Develop attitudes towards their bodies and body contact
- Begin to develop expected gender roles and behaviours.

Brick, P., Davis, N., Fischel, M., Lupo, T., MacVar, A. & Marshall, J. (1989).  
Darville, W. & Powell, K. (1995).  
Linko, P. (1997).

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## Childhood Sexual Development

18 months to 3 years a child may:

- Begin to develop attitudes about sexuality
- Learn language for genitals and body functions
- Show increased interest in their genitals and genitals of others as well as interest in toileting activities
- Be aware of their gender and gender of others
- Ask questions about babies, sexual activities and body parts

Brick et al. (1989), Darville et al. (1995).

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**Childhood Sexual Development**

3 to 5 years a child may:

- Develop sense of what is considered acceptable sexual behaviour
- Become more certain of own gender
- Masturbation is common.

Brick et al. (1989), Darville et al. (1995)

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Continued

- Demonstrate curiosity about babies, relationships, roles and sexuality
- Develop further language and social skills
- Begin to learn about privacy
- Explore sexuality through play

Brick et al. (1989), Darville et al. (1995)

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**Childhood Sexual Development**

To establish what is 'normal' sexual development - must consider the social, cultural, developmental and familial context of the times.

Child at Risk Assessment Unit. (2000). Larsson, I. (2000).

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**What is Self Protection Education?**

**It is about:**

Giving children the information and skills they need to be safe without making them scared of their world

Teaching children, parents/carers, staff, and services about preventing child sexual abuse.

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**What are Self Protection Skills ?**

Positive Sexuality Education which includes

- Self esteem
- Communication
- Body awareness
- Understanding feelings, relationships
- Different types of touch
- Assertiveness
- Knowing how to get help

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**Do we really have to talk about sexuality with young children?**

Children need to receive positive messages about sexuality

Children who receive comprehensive sexuality education from an early age are more likely to

- Understand and accept with confidence physical and emotional changes
- Feel good about themselves as male or female
- Feel positive about their bodies

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- Appreciate and accept individual differences
- Are capable of communicating about sexual matters
- Understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- Are less vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse

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### Effective Child Protection Programs Supports Parents and Carers To

- Provide accurate, age appropriate information and learning opportunities
- Use 'correct' vocabulary
- Respond to questions and behaviours

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- Develop inclusive approach to gender issues
- Be aware of verbal and non verbal messages given to children about sexuality
- Empower children and their adult network to deal with exploitative situations

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### Resources

Sexual Development in Early Childhood – fact sheet

Communicating about sexuality with children – fact sheet

Feel Safe – Promoting Self Protection - fact sheet

I have a right to be safe – booklet  
I have a right to be safe - flip chart

I Can – Promoting Self Protection Posters

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## Promoting Self Protection Posters

The posters are arranged in two rows of three. Each poster features illustrations and text related to the topic. The topics are: Feelings, Bodies, Touches, Warning Signs, Getting Help, and Feeling Safe.

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**FPQ Contact Details:**



Phone: (07) 3250 0240  
Email: education@fpq.com.au

[www.fpq.com.au](http://www.fpq.com.au)