

# Puberty: the Wonder Years

A circular badge with the word "Grade" in a small font above the number "6".

## **“I Wonder What Happens Next”**

- Promoting Appreciation and Respect for the Amazing Changes Experienced by Self and Others
- Equipping Young People to Postpone Sexual Intercourse

by Wendy L. Sellers, RN, MA, CSE, FASHA  
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ISBN 978-1-7340085-5-5

Published by Wendy L. Sellers

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## Dedication

To my parents, Jack and Carol Roost, who suffered through years of "inappropriate" dinner conversations.

To my children, Brooke and Justin, whose lives ignited my passion to make this world a better place, whose questions hone my skills, and whose searches for understanding make me a student as often as a teacher.

To my nine grandchildren, whose arrivals have been the catalyst for my urgency to see that every child receives the knowledge and skills they need to be safe from sexual coercion, feel free to express their sexuality without fear, and make healthy decisions regarding their sexual behavior.

## Acknowledgements

This curriculum would never have been "conceived" if it weren't for the total confidence my friend Gail Anderson has in me. Thank you for daring to reach beyond my hesitancy to help me see the possibilities.

Thank you, John Frisch and Paula Nettleton Parise, for daring to partner with me when this adventure began in 2002. The adventure would have ended in 2014 if it weren't for Kirby Milton suggesting that I run a Kick Starter campaign that made self-publishing possible. I'm grateful to Nan Pearson who first uttered the phrase "Less Shame, More Wonder!" Natalie Chupil, your creativity and formatting skills helped make this curriculum guide teacher friendly.

I am so grateful to Laurie Bechhofer...your unquenchable optimism paid off! Your tireless commitment to quality sex education is making a positive impact nationally, and your support of this curriculum make you my best agent.

Thank you, Bill Knapp, for sharing your business acumen and your belief that this project is vital. Your confidence showed me that *Puberty: The Wonder Years* can be much bigger than I imagined. Your partnership in work and fun inspires me to reach further.

The largest debt of gratitude I owe to my mentor, Mary Ann George Doty. She has unselfishly shared her experiences, insights, and opportunities. Because of her ongoing guidance and coaching, my path has met many open doors. Without her support, the seeds of this project would still be collecting dust in "the black hole." Thank you... words cannot represent my gratitude to you.

I would like to thank the teams of reviewers, named and un-named, who gave so generously of their time and energy in providing feedback on the drafts and made this curriculum better by sharing their professional insights. Thank you to all the teachers who implement these lessons and give their feedback to improve it.

Finally, I am so thankful to the hundreds of young people, parents, and educators who have taught me, sometimes through their expertise and other times through their ignorance, how to be a better sexuality educator. You have shown me the importance of viewing issues and information from multiple perspectives so that health messages can be sent as clearly and respectfully as possible.

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**About the Author:**

When I began my career as a Registered Nurse, I was repeatedly amazed at the lack of knowledge my patients had about their bodies and how to care for them. I was convinced that preventing health crises would be more productive than trying to fix them. So, I quickly moved into prevention education.

For more than 30 years, I worked with dozens of school districts, charters, and nonpublic schools and thousands of educators... helping them adopt and implement effective health education curricula, including sex education. Providing professional development was one of my favorite responsibilities, especially when it involved equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to implement sex education in K-12 schools. During this time, I co-authored the nationally recognized *Michigan Model for Health*, the K-12 comprehensive health curriculum that is on the prestigious National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices as an evidence-based drug and violence prevention program.

As a parent, I volunteered to teach sex education in my children's school for many years. One of my favorite greetings from my former students was "Hi, Puberty Lady!" Among my favorite activities are answering students' questions about sexuality and equipping others to be "ask-able" adults. I'm an advocate for skills-based, comprehensive, sex education that starts early, involves parents, and meets students' needs.

Working with educators, I learned that very little material existed to help teachers with the challenge of delivering sex education in upper elementary grades. So, I developed *Puberty: The Wonder Years* to fill that void, giving educators the tools that are so desperately needed to provide our children with the knowledge and skills they need for a healthy life.

When the American School Health Association (ASHA) named me the 2014 National Health Coordinator of the Year in 2014, I was thrilled. After many years of involvement with ASHA, they named me a Fellow in 2019. In 2020, I completed the Sexual Health Certificate Program at University of Michigan. Next, I became a Certified Sexuality Educator, an international certification earned via the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT).

Most importantly, I parented two children who safely navigated their way through adolescence. And now, I find myself with nine grandchildren; some who are on the brink of puberty! I look forward to supporting their healthy development in the coming years.

I'm happy to support educators, parents, and other trusted adults as you guide children through puberty and promote healthy childhood sexual development. After all, our goal is to help children develop into sexually healthy adults.

*"If I had heard this information in school, it would have been so much easier."*

– Teacher

*"Thank you for teaching these classes. The homework caused us to talk about something we haven't known how to begin. We had a great conversation at the dinner table."*

– Parent

*"A lot of emphasis was put on the social-emotional components of being a young adolescent. This curriculum not only taught about the reproductive health side of puberty, but also taught the social-emotional side of puberty. I had many students thank me for teaching them about puberty and they told me how they feel better about growing up and puberty."*

– Teacher

*"Do you like talking about this?"*

– Students

## Setting the Stage for Teaching

### Assumptions and Guiding Principles for *Puberty: The Wonder Years*

- Sexuality is an aspect of every individual. Each individual is unique.
- Sex is pleasurable, especially when it occurs within optimal conditions including the presence of consent, respect, and communication, and the absence of risks.
- Sensual and sexual feelings are normal. Ideally, feelings inform, but do not override, decision-making.
- Sex education begins informally at birth and continues throughout life. It occurs in the modeling and messaging of family and friends, and in the norms, values, and expectations of society. Formal sex education can help interpret the informal modeling and messaging in which young people have been immersed and provide them with tools to choose their paths toward sexually healthy adulthood.
- School-based sex education is most effective when implemented in partnership with parents/caregivers, so it will provide information, tools, and resources for them to have ongoing conversations with their children.
- Positive sex education enhances the development of sexually healthy and empowered youth and adults. Characteristics and strategies are based in research and best practice.
- Negative sex education contributes to the development of sexually unhealthy youth and adults. Characteristics and strategies might include any of these: shaming, blaming, stereotyping, scare tactics, misinformation, partial information, biases, forced pledges, cognitive-only approach, developmentally inappropriate information or strategies, relevant exclusively to the dominant culture, ignores the intersectionality of each learner.
- Skill development is vital to equipping children and youth for navigating life. The skills needed are identified in the National Health Education Standards and the National Sexuality Education Standards.
- Communication skills are vital for young people as they talk with parents/caregivers and other trusted adults, form healthy relationships with peers, seek reliable information, and access health services.
- Trauma is endemic in youth and impacts their ability to learn and thrive. Therefore, sex education must not only help young people avoid and manage traumatic events and relationships, it must also incorporate trauma-informed approaches to teaching.
- Optimal sexual behavior for young people in grades 4, 5, and 6 is expressing romantic or sexual feelings in developmentally appropriate ways as puberty begins. Also optimal is delaying partnered oral, anal, or vaginal sexual intercourse until they are mature enough to avoid the risks of coercion, unintended pregnancy, and infections. Sadly, some young people have had sexual intercourse without their consent; therefore, sex education must avoid shaming these individuals and, instead, empower them to develop skills for self-determination in the future.

## Why Talk About Puberty

Puberty education is a part of sex education. It focuses on the changes that occur around the onset of puberty and includes the physical, emotional, and social changes that occur once sex hormones are produced in the body. When done well, it also teaches skills students need to have a positive puberty experience, such as communication, refusal, media literacy, and accessing reliable information.

Since puberty is beginning at younger ages than in prior decades, it is important to begin instruction before children begin showing signs of puberty. Some girls begin puberty as young as ages eight or nine; boys begin approximately two years later. This means puberty education is needed early so that children are not frightened and confused by unexplained changes in their bodies and emotions.

Sex education is sometimes viewed as a controversial and divisive topic. It can provoke strongly divergent opinions about the best way to teach the subject, or whether it should be taught at all. Also, educators may fear conflict from parents or community groups who oppose sex education.

However, avoiding sex education altogether has produced even more disastrous results. In what other topics do we encourage ignorance? None. However, when it comes to sex education, we prize ignorance over education. It's as if we think our young people will be protected if they don't know what sex is; we certainly don't want to admit sex can be pleasurable! In fact, ignorance about sex places children at greater risk for being victimized.

And so, schools often teach sex education by emphasizing the potential negative risks that come from having sex. Many resort to using scare tactics to try to keep young people from having sex. This approach doesn't work.

It is time for a paradigm shift. In the past, we have taught sex education through a "Freedom From" lens. This approach emphasizes the negative aspects of sexuality. It is time to teach through a "Freedom To" lens that focuses on the positive aspects of sexuality later in life. Here is how this looks.

**Freedom To** (notice the focus on positives):

- Enjoy childhood before taking more responsibilities
- Focus on personal mental, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual development
- Try out a variety of hobbies and interests
- Develop healthy relationships with peers and adults
- Practice asking and giving or denying consent for borrowing possessions and entering personal body space
- Reach goals for completing education
- Get the job desired
- Learn how to manage money
- Decide on the best timing for parenting

**Freedom From** (notice the focus on negatives):

- Pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Ruined reputation
- Disappointing parents
- Heartbreak
- Going against personal, family, or religious values

## The Costs of Ineffective Sex Education

Ineffective sex education is common for many reasons. For example, it results when people intentionally avoid or oppose teaching sex education because of personal values or when they try to avoid any controversy. It also results when the sex education is taught in a way that is not supported by research. Finally, it results when people put sex education off until young people are already engaging in sexual relationships without the benefit of the knowledge and skills needed to make thoughtful decisions.

Teaching sex education ineffectively costs a lot in terms of financial expenses and personal prices paid. These data illustrate the need for sex education that is timely and relevant.

- One in four girls and one in seven boys have been sexually abused by age 18.<sup>1</sup>
- The average age of marriage is 27.4 for females and 29.5 for males.<sup>2</sup> The time span between puberty and marriage requires young people to manage sexual feelings for 15-20 years prior to marriage.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly half of male college students report viewing pornography by age 13.<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly half of all new STDs are among 15-to-24-year-olds.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Nearly all pregnancies to teens were unplanned.<sup>6</sup>
- Although it has dropped significantly since 1990s, the U.S. adolescent pregnancy rate is the highest in the developed world.<sup>7</sup>
- Sexual behaviors reveal concerns among U.S. ninth-grade students:<sup>8</sup>
  - One in five has had sexual intercourse.
  - One in eight has had sexual intercourse in the previous three months.
  - One in five used alcohol or other drugs before last sex (of the currently sexually active).
  - Two out of five did not use a condom at last sexual intercourse (of the currently sexually active).
  - Four percent had their first sexual intercourse before age 13.
  - One in twenty had been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to.
  - One in twelve experienced sexual dating violence.

Read more at my blog, "How Can We Remain Silent About Puberty?"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2015). [https://www.nsrvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications/nsrvrc\\_factsheet\\_media\\_packet\\_statistics\\_about\\_sexual\\_violence\\_0.pdf](https://www.nsrvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications/nsrvrc_factsheet_media_packet_statistics_about_sexual_violence_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 2017 US Census. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html>

<sup>3</sup> Dines, Gail (2017) "Growing Up With Porn: The Developmental and Societal Impact of Pornography on Children," *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*. Vol. 2, Iss. 3, Article 3. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1073&context=dignity>

<sup>4</sup> Adolescent Development and STDs. OAH. <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/reproductive-health-and-teen-pregnancy/stds/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Information for Teens: Staying Healthy and Preventing STDs. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/tife/stages-populations/YouthandSTDs-Dec2017.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Teen Pregnancy, Power to Decide <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/why-it-matters>

<sup>7</sup> Adolescent Pregnancy and Its Outcomes. Guttmacher. <https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/factsheet/fb-adolescent-pregnancy-outcomes-worlds-countries.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <https://pubertycurriculum.com/how-can-we-remain-silent-about-puberty-part-1/> and <https://pubertycurriculum.com/how-can-we-remain-silent-about-puberty-part-2/>

## How Students Learn Healthy Sexual Behavior

### Education Standards

Teaching young people about their developing bodies, reproduction, sexuality, relationships, and ways to stay safe and healthy is vital to their lifelong health and happiness. Yet, educators and parents often wonder what they should teach kids and when to begin. Out of concern that they teach kids something that isn't developmentally appropriate, parents and educators often err on the side of teaching too little, too late.

Fortunately, several resources are available that help guide sex education to ensure that it is age- and developmentally appropriate and addresses all the topics that will equip young people to develop into sexually healthy adults. Review this partial list of some of the resources that help establish some guidance for teaching sex education across the school years:

- Developmentally appropriate approaches to teaching sex education: *Ages and Stages of Healthy Childhood Sexual Development*<sup>16</sup> and *Talk with Your Kids*<sup>17</sup> are two sources that focus on healthy sexual development instead of having a focus on sexual abuse prevention.
- National Sex Education Standards, 2nd edition, 2020.<sup>18</sup> These are considered the baseline for teaching sex education and were developed by a national panel of sex education experts.
- State department of education health education standards: Many, but not all, state departments of education have education standards for all subjects taught in K-12 schools. Check with your own state department of education to find out if they include sex education, growth and development, sexual health, or reproductive health among their standards. Check this partial list of state standards for sex education.<sup>19</sup>

### Adapted Health Belief Model

Research has shown that knowledge alone will not change behavior. To ensure healthy behavior, these four factors must be present:

- **Knowledge:** Students need functional knowledge about their bodies, reproductive anatomy and function, what to expect during puberty, and potential consequences of sexual behavior.
- **Self-Efficacy:** Students need to have a sense of vulnerability for negative consequences, balanced with a sense of control over their personal decisions.
- **Skills:** Students must be able to practice and perfect the skills they need to behave in a healthy manner, such as communication and refusal skills for sexual situations.
- **Environmental Support:** Students must have support for their healthy choices from their families, friends, school, and community in order to maintain healthy behavior.

*Puberty: The Wonder Years* provides students with information, builds self-efficacy, teaches skills, and encourages the use of those skills outside the classroom.

<sup>16</sup> <https://pubertycurriculum.com/ages-stages-of-healthy-childhood-sexual-development/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.talkwithyourkids.org/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://futureofsexed.org/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://pubertycurriculum.com/state-specific-resources-educator/>

### Skills-Based Instruction

Sex education curriculum must guide students in developing skills that allow them to behave in ways that promote positive sexual development and prevent the negative consequences of sexual activity. To be most effective, lessons should teach skills by following a four-step process called skills-based instruction:

- Explain the skill and motivate the student to learn it.
- Model or demonstrate the skill.
- Have each student practice the skill and receive feedback that helps perfect the skill.
- Apply the new skill to real life.

For students to put these skills into daily practice, we must also elicit cooperation between home, school, and community to provide an environment for young people that is supportive of these desired behaviors. Given that parents and families are the primary sex educators, and the ones who teach family values and set the expectations for behavior outside of school, *Puberty: The Wonder Years* engages families in the modeling and reinforcement of the information and skills taught.

### Characteristics of Effective Sex Education

Effective sex education programs prevent or reduce risky sexual behaviors by helping young people postpone sexual intercourse and increasing the use of risk reduction methods in those who are sexually active. Research has shown that such programs have the following characteristics:<sup>20</sup>

The first set of characteristics is found in the process of developing the curriculum:

1. Involved multiple people with expertise in theory, research, and sex and STD/HIV education to develop the curriculum.
2. Assess relevant needs and assets of the target group.
3. Used a logic model approach to identify health goals, behaviors affecting those goals, risk and protective factors related to the behavior, and activities to change the risk and protective factors.
4. Designed activities consistent with community values and available resources, such as staff time and skills, facility space, and supplies.
5. Pilot-tested the program.

The second set of characteristics pertains to the contents of the curriculum:

6. Focused on clear health goals: prevention of HIV/STD, pregnancy, or both.
7. Focused on specific behaviors leading to these health goals, gave clear messages about the behaviors, and addressed situations that might lead to them and how to avoid them.
8. Addressed sexual psychosocial risk and protective factors that affect sexual behavior and changed them.
9. Created a safe social environment for young people to participate.
10. Included multiple activities to change each of the targeted risk and protective factors.

<sup>20</sup> Kirby, D. (2007). *Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. <https://powerofchoice.org/sites/default/files/resources/primary-download/emerging-answers.pdf>

11. Used instructionally sound teaching methods to actively involve participants, help them personalize the information, and change targeted risk and protective factors.
12. Used activities, instructional methods, and behavioral messages that were appropriate for culture, developmental age, and sexual experience.
13. Covered topics in a logical sequence.

The third, and final, set of characteristics addresses the process of implementing the curriculum:

14. Secured at least minimal support from authorities.
15. Selected educators with desired characteristics, trained them, and provided monitoring, support, and supervision.
16. Implemented activities to recruit and retain participants and overcame barriers to their participation as needed.
17. Implemented virtually all activities with reasonable fidelity.

To assess whether a curriculum has incorporated these characteristics, refer to the Tool to Assess the Characteristics of Effective Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs (TAC).<sup>18</sup>

## Best Practice

*Puberty: The Wonder Years* incorporates the following “best practice” strategies and techniques:<sup>19</sup>

- Is research-based and theory-driven
- Focuses on clear health goals and specific behavioral outcomes
- Provides functional knowledge that is basic, accurate, and directly contributes to health-promoting decisions and behaviors
- Provides opportunities to reinforce essential skills that are necessary to adopt, practice, and maintain positive health behaviors
- Addresses individual values, attitudes, and beliefs and group norms that support health-enhancing behaviors
- Focuses on increasing personal perceptions of risk and harmfulness of engaging in specific unhealthy practices and behaviors, as well as reinforcing protective factors
- Addresses social pressures and influences
- Builds personal competence, social competence, and self-efficacy by addressing skills
- Uses strategies designed to personalize information and engage students
- Provides age- and developmentally appropriate information, learning strategies, teaching methods, and materials
- Engages in cooperative and active learning strategies

<sup>18</sup> <http://recapp.etr.org/recapp/documents/programs/tac.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Future of Sex Education Initiative. (2020). National Sex Education Standards: Core Content and Skill, K-12 (Second Edition). Page 12

- Incorporates learning strategies, teaching methods, and materials that are trauma-informed, culturally inclusive, sex positive, and grounded in social justice and equity
- Provides adequate time for instruction and learning and for students to practice skills relating to sex education
- Provides opportunities to make connections with other influential persons, such as parents, caregivers, and other trusted adults
- Encourages the use of technology to access multiple valid sources of information, recognizing the significant role that technology plays in young people's lives
- Includes teacher information and a plan for professional development and training to enhance effectiveness of instruction and student learning.

## Legal Issues and Sex Education

Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring sex education in public schools.<sup>20</sup> Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring HIV/STD education in public schools. Only 22 states require that, if provided, sex and/or HIV education must be medically, factually, or technically accurate. It is important for teachers to know their state's laws related to teaching sexuality education in schools before teaching any sex education curriculum.

Generally, nonpublic schools are not bound by the laws that impact public schools. However, these laws can provide safeguards protecting the rights of parents, students, and teachers, so they might be helpful to consider as nonpublic schools plan their programs.

## Names for Sex Education: It Matters

All sex education is not equal. Many divergent approaches and philosophies exist, so it's important to pay attention to the words used. The following are some of the names and descriptors for sex education that are being used at the time of this printing:

- **Sex Education:** This term is the most widely used by the general public. It does not describe the approach or philosophy of the program being used.
- **Sexual Health Education:** This term is another term for sex education that represents the biopsychosocial view of sexuality that includes biological, psychological, and social aspects. It is more often used by practitioners in the fields of science, such as therapists, nurses, and doctors.
- **Reproductive Health Education:** This term is often used as a euphemism for sex education in order to avoid the word “sex” in the title. However, reproductive health is just one topic among many that are included in sex education.
- **Growth and Development:** This term is often used as a euphemism for sex education in order to avoid the word “sex” in the title. However, growth and development is just one topic among many that are included in sex education.

*“Knowledge is power.”*

*True, but...*

*“Knowledge with skills is empowering!”*

<sup>20</sup> State Policies on Sex Education in Schools, National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx>

- **Family Life Education:** This term is often used as a euphemism for sex education in order to avoid the word “sex” in the title. However, family life is just one topic among many that are included in sex education.
- **Abstinence-Only, Abstinence-Centered, Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage:** These programs teach that abstinence is the only acceptable option for young people. They often leave out information about or inflate the failure rates of contraception and condoms.
- **Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA):** This is a newer term for abstinence-only sex education programs.
- **Abstinence-Based, Abstinence-Plus, Abstinence-Plus-Risk-Reduction:** These programs teach abstinence, and also teach about using contraception and condoms at the point in time a person decides to have sex.
- **Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE):** This term is used to describe sex education that includes the broad range of topics related to sexuality: growth and development; puberty; relationships; interpersonal skills; abstinence; condoms and contraception; sexual behavior and expression; gender identity and expression; sexual orientation; identification of personal, family, and spiritual values; and how to access reliable information and health services.
- **Sex and Relationship Education (SRE):** This is the most commonly used term in the United Kingdom. It is designed to equip children and young people with the information, skills and values to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships and to take responsibility for their sexual health and well-being. Due to political pressure, it was changed to Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in 2017.

*Research shows that providing accurate information does not increase sexual activity among youth, nor does it encourage early sexual activity.”<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/factsheets/talking\\_teens.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/factsheets/talking_teens.htm) and <https://powertodecide.org/sites/default/files/resources/primary-download/emerging-answers.pdf>

## Getting Ready to Teach

### Curriculum Organization

As in any academic subject, puberty education is most effective when it is taught in a sequential, age-appropriate manner, beginning when students are young and continuing through the twelfth grade. *Puberty: The Wonder Years* includes curriculum for students in grades 4, 5, and/or 6. The teacher-friendly lessons are designed to be taught as a unit for students in each grade, ideally for three consecutive years. Repetition from year to year is helpful, even desirable. Because individuals develop according to their unique timeline and pace, the information is likely to be assimilated differently each year. Each grade level of curriculum reinforces some of the information taught at the previous grade level, but also adds new information that sets the stage for the following grade level.



Additional optional lessons are available separately

*Puberty: The Wonder Years™* teaches students the knowledge and skills needed to lay a foundation for developing into sexually healthy adults. Surveys of student behavior, such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey,<sup>17</sup> confirm that the vast majority of young people in grades 4, 5, and 6 are not engaging in intimate sexual behavior. *The Puberty: The Wonder Years™* curriculum provides the knowledge, skills, and supports students need to delay sex as they focus on developing healthy attitudes and relationships.

Each school district's curriculum council or sex education advisory committee will determine which lessons should be taught at each grade. Because each community is unique, local districts may choose to adapt the curriculum. They may decide to teach one, two, or all three years of the curriculum. Or they may choose to teach the curriculum at a different grade level than the one designated by the curriculum guide. Review the *Puberty: The Wonder Years* student learning objectives for grades 4, 5, and 6 at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com/curriculum/](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com/curriculum/).

<sup>17</sup> Youth Risk Behavior Survey, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbhs/index.htm>

## Teaching Materials

A variety of teaching materials are used with these lessons:

- Lesson plans are provided in this teacher curriculum guide.
- Masters for duplication, slides, evaluation rubrics, answer keys, and teacher background information are provided in the Online Teacher Resources that are housed on the *Puberty: The Wonder Years* website at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com) and can be downloaded for use with the lessons. Teachers receive login credentials to access these resources.
- Additional educational materials, such as videos and models, are not included and must be acquired prior to implementing the curriculum.
- Some materials are readily available in most classrooms and must be gathered for use with the lessons.

A complete list of materials used in *Puberty: The Wonder Years* is included in the "Implementation" tab in this curriculum guide. In addition, each lesson identifies the specific materials utilized for that lesson.

While the lessons suggest specific videos, multiple options are available. Your local district's curriculum council or sex education advisory committee should select the appropriate resources which meet your community's needs. Visit [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com) for an annotated list of recommended videos and materials.

## Online Teacher Resources

With each *Puberty: The Wonder Years* curriculum guide, one educator will receive access to the Online Teacher Resources. After registering for their account, educators will log in at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com). They can select the resources for the grade(s) they are teaching and download them to their computer or flash drive. Because these resources are updated as needed, educators should check annually for updates.

## Information and Support for Teachers

*Puberty: The Wonder Years* tries to be as teacher friendly as possible. Therefore, many supports are available for educators who are implementing the curriculum.

1. This introduction to *Puberty: The Wonder Years* provides information about the curriculum and effective instruction.
2. Log in to the Online Teacher Resources at the *Puberty: The Wonder Years* website and review the following resources:
  - a. **Preparation folder:** This folder includes resources needed before implementation of the lessons, including parent information to introduce the curriculum and a list of recommended videos and other educational materials to use with the lessons.
  - b. **Lesson folders:** One folder is available for each lesson in the curriculum. They include the student worksheets, answer keys, family resources, and slides for use with each lesson. They also provide appendices with background information teachers will need to teach the lessons.
  - c. **Making Connections folder:** This folder includes correlations to important education topics. It also provides a list of websites for organizations that offer resources on the topics of puberty and sex education.

3. The newsletter sends updates and tips to your inbox about once a month. Sign up at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com).
4. The blog provides ongoing current information about puberty education and related topics. Find it at <https://pubertycurriculum.com/blog/>.
5. Social media posts provide updated information about puberty education. Join us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and/or Pinterest.
6. Professional development can increase your confidence and competence in teaching puberty education and other sex education topics. Find a professional development option that works for you at <https://pubertycurriculum.com/professional-development/>.

For many teachers, teaching this topic feels comfortable and rewarding. However, for some, anticipating potential student questions and presenting sensitive information makes teaching these lessons a challenge. Many teachers ask the question, "How do I answer students' questions honestly and respectfully?" Appendix B contains tips for answering questions and Appendix I suggests answers for typical student questions.

You are not expected to be an expert in order to teach about puberty. While your role is critical in helping students develop positive attitudes and skills related to puberty, all you need is a willingness to be open to discussions, to share your knowledge, and to assist your students as they develop the skills needed to promote their health and postpone sexual activity. Your body language and comfort level speak more loudly to your students than the words you use. Therefore, if you truly do not want to teach these lessons, please enlist the help of someone who does.

*You don't have to be an expert on puberty to do an excellent job teaching your students about puberty.*

To support your preparation as a puberty educator, become familiar with these excellent resources for sex educators:

- National Sex Education Standards, K-12 (NSES),<sup>20</sup> Future of Sex Education
- National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sex Education,<sup>21</sup> Future of Sex Education
- Professional Learning Standards for Sex Education (PLSSE),<sup>22</sup> Future of Sex Education
- "Principles of Gender-Inclusive Puberty and Health Education,"<sup>23</sup> Gender Spectrum
- Sexual Health Education Guide,<sup>24</sup> Michigan Department of Education

In addition, you will become familiar with these topics as they relate to teaching sex education:

- Trauma-informed approach
- Inclusivity
- Intersectionality
- Social justice
- Reproductive justice

Information about each of these resources and topics can be found by searching [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com).

<sup>20</sup> <https://educatorsfor youth.org/media/future-of-sex-education/national-sex-education-standard-second-edition/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://futureofsexed.org/national-teacher-preparation-standards-and-tools>

<sup>22</sup> <https://futureofsexed.org/professional-learning-standards-for-sex-education-from-the-sex-education-collaborative>

<sup>23</sup> [https://gender-spectrum.cdn.prismic.io/gender-spectrum/2f2ab3b6f1-314f-4e09-89d8-d5d8ad6511a\\_genderspectrum\\_2019\\_report\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://gender-spectrum.cdn.prismic.io/gender-spectrum/2f2ab3b6f1-314f-4e09-89d8-d5d8ad6511a_genderspectrum_2019_report_web_final.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://pubertycurriculum.com/sexual-health-education-guide/>

## Family Engagement

Parental influence is one, and possibly the single greatest, of the major factors in determining the sexual behavior of young people. Therefore, *Puberty: The Wonder Years* includes many activities that encourage parents to talk with their children about family values and guide their children toward behavior that is consistent with their beliefs and values. To engage parents, guardians, families, caregivers, and other trusted adults, *Puberty: The Wonder Years* includes many family engagement resources. Read about them in the section titled "Forming a Family-School Partnership."

## Parent/Guardian Notification

It is important to know your school's policy and your state's laws related to parent/guardian notification prior to implementing this curriculum.

If parental consent is required in your school district, make sure this has been completed prior to beginning classroom instruction. Two kinds of consent are common:

- Passive consent occurs when the district sends a letter to parents to notify them what will be taught in puberty or sex education class. Parents only need to respond if they do not want their children to participate. In that case, a parent may return a form or send a note requesting that their child be excused from one or more of the lessons.
- Active consent occurs when the district asks each parent to sign a permission letter indicating whether or not their child has permission to participate in the puberty or sex education lessons. Only children whose parents grant permission by returning the form may participate.

Parent/guardian notification resources are provided in the Online Teacher Resources that come with *Puberty: The Wonder Years*.

## Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment of student learning is a vital part of any curriculum. *Puberty: The Wonder Years* provides many assessment strategies that can be used for formative assessment or summative assessment. Some strategies are also amenable for grading, if needed. Some of the assessment strategies are embedded within the lessons; others are activities that may be added to the lesson to ensure that assessment occurs. Rubrics are also provided to assess student learning of the skills taught in the curriculum.

Pretests and posttests are useful for evaluating the effectiveness of instruction. Pretests and posttests are available for each grade level of the curriculum. They should be given anonymously to assess the learning of the whole class. If administered with a unique identifier, the results can be calculated by individual student.

Rubrics and pre- and posttests are accessed online at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com).

## Integration

Puberty education is most effective when it is an integral part of a comprehensive health education program. As students learn about their social, emotional, and physical health and how to care for themselves, it is natural for them to learn information and skills related to their sexual health and development into adulthood.

For example, *Puberty: The Wonder Years* integrates well with the *Michigan Model for Health*.<sup>25</sup>

When *Puberty: The Wonder Years* is integrated with the academic core curriculum, it helps address academic standards and benchmarks. Students have many opportunities to make connections to the world beyond the classroom because puberty is such a relevant topic for them. The classroom discussions involve students in substantive conversation, and the problem solving and role playing activities require higher order thinking as students apply these skills to their lives.

Even though the content area is health education, it also helps address Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. The lesson activities are especially helpful for teaching students how to read, synthesize, and write informative and explanatory texts, an area that tends to be weak among many students.

Read "Making Connections"<sup>26</sup> for details about how *Puberty: The Wonder Years* lessons correlate to the following important issues in health and education:

- National Health Education Standards
- National Sex Education Standards
- Common Core Standards for English Language Arts
- Language Arts Integration: Vocabulary
- Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets
- Adolescent Risk Behavior Prevention

*Be cautious about teaching young people about puberty and sexuality in the context of disease prevention or as a social problem. It will benefit them to learn that sexuality is a positive facet of individual health and happiness when it is managed well.*

*As teachers implement *Puberty: The Wonder Years*, they are not simply teaching about body changes, they are promoting the academic success and physical, social, and emotional health of the whole child... for today and the future.*

<sup>25</sup> Michigan Model for Health™ <https://www.michiganmodelforhealth.org/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://pubertycurriculum.com/making-connections-implementation-integration/>

## Forming a Family-School Partnership

### Partnership Strengthens the Message

Parents, caregivers, and other family members are each child's primary sex educators. For years, they have been communicating, both verbally and nonverbally, messages about sexuality. Students have acquired attitudes and behaviors without consciously knowing that they have been learning about puberty and sexuality.

Parents, caregivers, and other family members are also responsible for setting the expectations for behavior outside of school. They often wonder if the limits they have set and the disciplinary consequences they enforce are reasonable because children love to say "everyone else is allowed to..."

When families and schools work together to teach young people what to expect during puberty and how to postpone sexual activity, they create a protective factor for young people. Research shows that young people are more likely to delay sexual activity when they have this protective factor. Here are some encouraging facts:

- Teens consistently say that parents most influence their decisions about sex.<sup>27</sup>
- Young people who feel connected to their family and/or their school are less likely to become sexually active.<sup>28</sup>
- Young people who receive sex education from both parents and schools are less likely to have sexual intercourse than those who learn from neither source or only one source.<sup>29</sup>
- When young people have sex education before the onset of sexual activity, in late elementary or middle school, they are more likely to delay sexual intercourse.<sup>30</sup>
- Effective sex education programs actually delay the initiation of sexual activity, increase the use of condoms, or both.<sup>31</sup>
- Parents, educators and policy makers can play important roles in ensuring that young people get sex education that is effective in helping teens make educated sexual health decisions.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Survey Says: Parent Power, Power to Decide. 2016. <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/resource-library/parent-power-says-2016-survey-says/>

<sup>28</sup> Reducing the Risk: Connections That Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth. Blum & Rinehart. 1997. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED412459.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Minnesota Department of Education Prevention and Risk Reduction Unit. 1992. Reflections of social change. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED363837.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Sex Education Linked to Delay in First Sex. Guttmacher Institute. 2012. <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2012/sex-education-linked-delay-first-sex>

<sup>31</sup> Emerging Answers 2007, Kirby. Power to Decide. <https://powertodecide.org/files/default/files/resources/primary-download/emerging-answers.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Abstinence-Only Education and Teen Pregnancy Rates: Why We Need Comprehensive Sex Education in the U.S., Stanger-Hall & Hall. 2011. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3194601/>

## Partnership Opportunities

This partnership is accomplished in several ways. One strategy is to promote family engagement by maintaining ongoing communication between school and home. The following resources are provided in the Online Teacher Resources at the *Puberty: The Wonder Years* website at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com):

- Parent Notification: Before implementing the curriculum, inform parents about the upcoming lessons by sending home all the following. They are available in English and Spanish.
  1. Parent Letter: It explains this puberty education program and notifies parents and guardians of their rights. It can be personalized and placed on school stationery.
  2. Outline of the Curriculum: They describe the lessons and topics that will be taught each year.
  3. Passive Permission Form: It explains how to exclude students from instruction if that is the school policy or state law.
- Preview Meeting Flier: Invite parents and other family members to attend a meeting at the school to learn about *Puberty: The Wonder Years*. This provides parents an opportunity to preview the media, review the curriculum, ask questions, and meet the school staff who will implement the lessons. A sample invitation flier has been provided.
- Family Partnership Fliers: These informational fliers describe the topics covered in the lessons and provide families with helpful tips and resources for supporting their children during puberty. They are available in English and Spanish.
- Family Activity Sheets: These homework assignments encourage students to discuss issues related to puberty and sexual behavior with their families. Many parents and guardians are grateful that these activities are a tool for beginning discussions about growing up, sex, and family values at home. If a parent or guardian is not available for these assignments, students are asked to identify another trusted adult with whom they can talk. Be prepared to help students identify a trusted adult or to be that trusted adult if asked. Students are more likely to follow through with their homework if points or privileges are awarded for completion. They are available in English and Spanish.
- Student Activity Sheets: These classroom activities are completed in school but may be sent home with students and used as additional discussion starters.

Additional partnership strategies are built into *Puberty: The Wonder Years*:

- Offer parents and guardians the opportunity to excuse their children from any lessons they find objectionable, but first make sure they know exactly what will be taught. Meet with parents to discuss the reasons they are considering have their children excused. Often, with an opportunity to see the material and talk more about the topics that will be offered, parents will reconsider. By respecting each parent's right to decide what is appropriate for their child, you are also maintaining the integrity of the curriculum that was selected by the school district as being most suitable for the community.
- During the lessons, issues or topics that are not approved for classroom discussions may arise. At times like these, the students are encouraged to ask their families for help in clarifying the topic.
- Consider describing your district's puberty education curriculum in a newsletter article to further communicate with families and communities. Schools may subscribe to receive ready-made newsletter articles at [www.PubertyCurriculum.com](http://www.PubertyCurriculum.com).

- Including a variety of parents and community members on a district sex education advisory committee is the initial step in gaining the parental and community involvement needed to support implementation of these lessons. Committee members often act as ambassadors to other parents in reinforcing healthy sexual norms and behaviors in the home and community.
- Community involvement can also support or enhance this puberty curriculum. Resources, such as guest speakers, financial support, or sites to host parent meetings, can strengthen the environmental support for healthy sexual behavior.