



Comprehensive Sex-Ed and Human Rights

What is a human rights-based approach?

A human rights-based approach provides a framework for addressing laws, policies, and programs in a way that protects, respects, and fulfils the human rights of all people. Human rights includes economic, political, social, cultural, and civil rights, including the right to health. All governments in Canada have international, national, and subnational human rights standards they must uphold. By holding them accountable to these standards, we can dismantle the inequalities and discriminatory practices that contribute to violations of human rights.

What do human rights have to do with CSE?

Scientifically accurate, evidence-based, non-discriminatory, age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a recognized right of all young people. CSE is essential for lifelong sexual and reproductive health and it works to end gender-based discrimination and violence, including homophobia and transphobia.

CSE builds on and promotes an understanding of universal human rights – including the rights of children and young people. CSE touches on the rights of everyone to health, education, information, and non-discrimination. CSE means raising awareness among young people, encouraging them to recognize their own rights, acknowledge and respect the rights of others, and advocate for those whose rights are violated. Equitable access to CSE is part of fulfilling their rights to the highest attainable standard of health, sexual choices free of coercion or violence, and to access the information that they need to live healthy lives free from violence and discrimination.

The Government of Canada has signed various international human rights treaties like the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Subnational governments like provinces, territories, and municipalities also have a responsibility to uphold all people's rights to health, well-being, and equality. This requires the delivery of unbiased, scientifically accurate sexuality education.

Human rights provide a framework to effectively, fairly, and respectfully deal with conflicting views that may arise when teaching and discussing sexuality and sexual health. It's important to recognize that a diversity of experiences, identities and values will exist within any province and every classroom.





Every student should see themselves in teaching materials and get the information they need (and are entitled to) to make, and act on, decisions related to their health, lives, bodies, and relationships.

A human rights-based approach moves us out of personal opinions and partisan or political leanings about what should be taught, and toward a framework where every young person's human right to information, to health and to non-discrimination is upheld.

Interested in what treaties and institutions recognize CSE as a human right? [Learn more on the Action Canada website.](#)

Case Study: Ontario's Curriculum and Human Rights

In 2018, the Government of Ontario announced its plan to cancel the 2015 sex-ed curriculum and revert back to the outdated 1998 curriculum. Action Canada, in collaboration with The 519 and SHORE Centre, submitted an urgent appeal to the UN's Special Procedures to draw attention to the human rights violations this caused.

The Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts who monitor the situation of human rights around the world, contribute to the development of international human rights standards, and act on complaints of alleged human rights violations. This can include asking that violations are prevented, stopped, investigated, or that action is taken. In December 2018, Canada received an official communication endorsed by UN human rights experts demanding Canada take immediate steps to ensure compliance with human rights obligations.

The message to Canada from the UN was clear: failure to ensure access to sex ed is a violation of human rights. Federal and provincial governments must make sure all young people have access to adequate sex-ed.

[Read more about the Ontario curriculum case and human rights on our website.](#)

