





Singapore

Secondary students to learn how to guard against online predators under sexuality education revamp



education". A national review of women's issues is also under way to change perceptions about gender equality. Tan Si Hui reports.

By Tan Si Hui 09 Oct 2020 10:18AM (Updated: 09 Oct 2020 10:31AM)



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SINGAPORE: Secondary school students will soon learn new topics such as how to protect themselves from crimes such as cyber flashing and voyeurism, as part of changes to sexuality education next year to stay relevant in a digital age.

There will also be a greater emphasis on moral values, cyber wellness and understanding the importance of respecting boundaries for self and others - both online and offline.

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In a statement to CNA, the Ministry of Education (MOE) said it regularly reviews sexuality education to ensure its relevance to students' "changing needs".

"Through sexuality education, our schools equip students with age-appropriate knowledge and skills to develop positive self-identity, maintain healthy relationships, and make informed and responsible decisions on sexuality matters," the statement said, adding that sexuality education is part of the Character and Citizenship Education curriculum.

"Students also learn social and emotional skills such as regulation of their emotions, having a better understanding of their own feelings and actions through developing a sense of perspective, having empathy for others as well as treating others and themselves with respect."

Themes such as sexual grooming and abuse as well as cyber flashing are expected to be covered at the lower secondary level. As students get older, themes are expected to include gender stereotypes, and how to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections.

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Schools are free to customise the lessons, subject to approval from MOE.

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Assoc Prof Jason Tan of the Policy, Curriculum and Leadership (PCL) Department at the National Institute of Education (NIE) noted that the key values that underpin the existing sexuality education curriculum, such as self-regulation and responsible decisionmaking, will be retained in the new curriculum.

But several factors lend an urgency to the revamp.

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"There are growing reports about the use of digital technologies for voyeuristic acts and the rise of social media has brought along with it offences such as online sexual grooming," he said.

"These factors have probably alarmed many people out there as well as the Ministry of Education into highlighting, even more than before, the dangers associated with strangers online," Assoc Prof Tan added.

Deterring sex crimes and violence against women are part of the focus of an ongoing national review of women's issues, which aims to bring about greater gender equality.

The review will culminate in a White Paper to be delivered to Parliament in the first half of 2021.

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IMPLEMENTATION IS KEY

Parents, counsellors and education policy experts largely welcome the new curriculum, which they agree helps children be more savvy to the dangers posed by sex predators.

But they believe the key lies in how the lessons are taught.

Assoc Prof Tan said: "One of the major difficulties that I see is that human sexuality is contentious, controversial, and also uncomfortable, or even taboo for some people.

"This means that it is often very difficult for educators to engage with their students in a very frank discussion of issues related to sexuality education."

Ms Constance Lai, a parent of two school-going children, expressed concerned that students may become curious after the lessons.

"There may be kids who may think 'Oh, this is something I never thought about'. They may explore," she said.

"They (may also) ask 'Why did this person end up doing such a thing?' These are questions that teachers must be able to explain."

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Mr Martin Chok, who works with young victims and sex crime offenders, said there must be ground rules for group settings to ensure students and teachers can communicate effectively.

Opportunities should be also be created for deeper sharing, said Mr Chok, who is assistant director at Care Corner Youth Services.

"There needs to be a very trusting relationship between the educator and the student," said Mr Chok.

"They certainly must not feel that they have been judged, or for victims, if they have fallen prey to voyeurism or cyber flashing, there must be an outlet for them to share.

"Otherwise, it might lead to things like self-blame."

Mr Chok also stressed that schools must not lose sight of imparting fundamental moral values, which govern notions of sex and marriage.

This would help provide a foundation for discussions on more specific topics.

Experts added that schools are not the only influences in students' lives and must consider the messages they receive from parents and peers.

MOE said parents play a critical role in imparting values and providing guidance on sexuality-related matters. It encourages schools to work closely with them to support their children.

MOE

Source: CNA/kv

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