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Introduction

Parents/guardians, educators, and religious communities all face the challenge of creating environments that support and nurture sexual health. Young people need sexuality education programs that model and teach caring, compassion, respect, and justice. Such programs should be holistic, moving beyond the intellect to address the attitudes, values, and feelings that youth have about themselves and the world.

Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9 was developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. As the original and most comprehensive volume, it is the foundational component of the *Our Whole Lives Lifespan Sexuality Education Series*, which includes the following additional curricula:

- Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K–1*
- Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 4–6*
- Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 10–12*
- Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults (Ages 18–35)*
- Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Adults*

Although the *Our Whole Lives* series was developed by two progressive religious denominations, this volume is completely secular and free of specific religious doctrine or reference. However, the underlying values of the program reflect the justice-oriented traditions of both denominations.

Unlike many other sexuality curricula currently available, *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9* is not focused solely on preventing or reducing problems such as high rates of sexually transmitted infections and unintended teen pregnancies. While the program certainly equips youth with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to avoid these consequences, it has the more proactive goal of helping youth to become sexually healthy people who feel good about themselves and their bodies, remain healthy, and build positive, equitable loving relationships.

In an inclusive and developmentally appropriate manner, the *Our Whole Lives* program addresses sensitive topics that are excluded from many sexuality curricula. The program recognizes and respects the diversity of participants with respect to sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disability status. The activities and language used throughout the program have been carefully chosen to be as inclusive as possible of this human diversity.

While the material in this curriculum is intended for students in seventh, eighth, and/or ninth grades, there is much of it that is appropriate for older youth and much more that can be easily adapted for them.

GOALS OF THE CURRICULUM

The overall goal of Our Whole Lives lifespan sexuality education is to create a positive and comprehensive program that helps participants of all ages to gain the knowledge, values, and skills to lead sexually healthy, responsible lives. More specifically, *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9* is designed to help young adolescents

- affirm and respect themselves as sexual persons (including their bodies, sexual orientation, feelings, etc.) and respect the sexuality of others
- increase comfort and skills for discussing and negotiating sexuality issues with peers, romantic partners, and people of other generations
- explore, develop, and articulate values, attitudes, and feelings about their own sexuality and the sexuality of others
- identify and live according to their values
- increase motivation and skills for developing a just sexual morality that rejects double standards, stereotypes, biases, exploitation, dishonesty, and harassment
- acquire knowledge and skills for developing and maintaining romantic and/or sexual relationships that are consensual, mutually pleasurable, nonexploitative, safe, and based on respect, mutual expectations, and caring
- increase knowledge and skills for avoiding unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections
- express and enjoy sexuality in healthy and responsible ways at each stage of their development
- assess the impact of messages from family, culture, religion, media, and society on sexual thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors

BILL OF RIGHTS

Our Whole Lives is based on the belief that youth have the right to

- ask any questions they have about sexuality
- receive complete (and medically accurate) information about sexuality
- explore any issues of sexuality that interest them
- have support in making their own decisions about sexual matters
- express their sexuality in ways that are healthy and life affirming

PROGRAM ASSUMPTIONS

Our Whole Lives is also based on the following assumptions about human sexuality:

- All persons are sexual.
- Sexuality is a good part of the human experience.
- Sexuality includes much more than sexual behavior.
- Human beings are sexual from the time they are born until they die.
- It is natural to express sexual feelings in a variety of ways.
- People engage in healthy sexual behavior for a variety of reasons, including to express caring and love, to experience intimacy and connection with another, to share pleasure, to bring new life into the world, and to have fun and relax.

- Sexuality in our society is damaged by violence, exploitation, alienation, dishonesty, abuse of power, and the treatment of persons as objects.
- It is healthier for young teens to postpone sexual intercourse.

PROGRAM VALUES

While *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9* is designed to be relevant to young people from a wide range of family backgrounds and religious traditions, it's not values-free. The program gives clear messages about key sexuality issues. These issues are organized into four broad topic areas: self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, and justice and inclusivity.

Self-Worth

Every person is entitled to dignity and self-worth and to their own attitudes and beliefs about sexuality.

Sexual Health

Knowledge about human sexuality is helpful, not harmful. Every person has the right to accurate information about sexuality and to have their questions answered.

Healthy sexual relationships are

- consensual (partners agree about what they will do together sexually)
- nonexploitative (partners have equal power, and neither pressures or forces the other into activities or behaviors)
- mutually pleasurable
- safe (sexual activity brings no or low risk of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or emotional pain)
- developmentally appropriate (sexual activity is appropriate to the age and maturity of the persons involved)
- based on mutual expectations and caring
- respectful (partners value honesty and keeping commitments made to others)

Sexual intercourse is only one of the many valid ways of expressing sexual feelings with a partner. It is healthier for young adolescents to postpone sexual intercourse.

Responsibility

We are called to enrich our lives by expressing sexuality in ways that enhance human wholeness and fulfillment and that express love, commitment, delight, and pleasure.

All persons have the right and obligation to make responsible sexual choices.

Justice and Inclusivity

We need to avoid double standards. People of all ages, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, genders, backgrounds, income levels, physical and mental abilities, and sexual orientations must be equally valued and have equal rights.

Sexual relationships should never be coercive or exploitative.

All of the following are natural in the range of human experience: being romantically and sexually attracted to more than one gender (bisexual), the same gender (homosexual), another gender (heterosexual), and/or to those with a more fluid understanding of their own and others' gender (pansexual), and not experiencing sexual attraction (asexual)