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# Parents: Learning about birds and bees at early age may sting kids

**Masami Mustaza**

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The announcement on teaching sex education in primary schools from next year drew a mixed reaction from parents, with some saying that it was too early for kids to know about the birds and the bees.

Business manager Dian Azmi, from Gombak here, said she didn't agree that sex education should be taught in primary schools.

"It is too early for children to learn about sex education but the authorities could start it in Year Six because that is when children hit puberty and may experience sexual urges," she said, adding that she would not talk about sex with her 7-year-old daughter.

"I now teach her what is right and what is wrong, like not letting strangers or boys touch her body. I will talk with her about sex and relationships when she gets her period."

SJK (T) Tun Sambanthan parent-teacher association chairman S. Murali also didn't agree with teaching sex education in primary schools.

Seth Yahya, a father of three, who is a former SK Bukit Damansara PTA chairman, said getting primary schoolers started on sex education was a good idea but the module should focus more on sexual awareness and safety.

"They don't need to learn so much about sex but on how they can be protected, such as knowing when they are being violated. It will also become a foundation and prepare them for sex education in secondary school.

"For primary schoolers, the school is a happy place to play with their friends. Topics like sex and relationships have yet to enter their minds. I don't think it would be effective to

teach them at that age.

"It's acceptable if it is taught to Year Five or Six students because that's when they start thinking about relationships and wanting to have a boyfriend or girlfriend."

University Malaya Medical Centre psychiatrist Dr Jesjeet Singh Gill said parents had nothing to worry if the sex education module for primary schoolers was appropriate for their age.

"The syllabus will have to be planned properly and tailored to their needs, starting with things like differences in gender, and gradually moving on to the more technical things that they will learn in secondary school."

He said he didn't feel that children would be encouraged to seek out sex if they were exposed to sex education at a younger age.

"Children will always be curious but exposing them to sex education will provide answers to questions they may have."

On the other hand, several secondary school students were all for sex education in schools as they acknowledged that what little was taught about reproduction was not enough.

Muhd Nur Muzakir Kamaruddin, 14, of Sekolah Kiblah, Bangi, said basic sex education was taught during religious lessons at his school but it wasn't effective as most of his friends treated it as a joke.

"Students don't take it seriously because they feel they know more than what the teachers are telling them.

"It would be more effective if sex education was taught without assuming that we're ignorant about it."

Amirul Asraf Azmi, 14, of SM Bandar Tasik Puteri, Rawang, said there were times when he wanted to find

out more about sex but felt that adults were quick to brush aside his questions.

"When I ask my parents, they clam up. My teachers are more open about it but there are some questions that

I'm too embarrassed to ask.

He added that sex education as a school subject would clarify information that he and his friends had learnt from the Internet.

His schoolmate, Mohd Nezrin Mohideen, said they learnt about the reproductive system in science classes but that it wasn't enough to cover all there was to know about sex and relationships.

"It's all basic. Hopefully, sex education will give youths a clearer picture and convince them about the dangers of premarital sex and other social ills."

Nurul Iman Zamri, 15, of SMK Agama Kuala Lumpur, said sex education should be taught to students in Form 4.

"I don't think younger students are ready for sex education as they are not mature enough to realise its importance or understand what is being taught."

Kameni Vicky, 15, of SMK Bandar Baru Sentul, said her parents had told her about the birds and bees when she was 13.

"They taught me to be wary of boys whom I don't know very well. They also told me that I could get pregnant if I had sex with a boy.

"My teachers do talk about sex in class but they don't fully explain things."

She said she would appreciate a sex education module that answered all the questions on sex that students wanted to ask but couldn't.

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## The sex education story

**JANUARY 1991:** The National Union of the Teaching Profession disagrees with a suggestion to allow films and videotapes depicting sexual scenes to be used for educational purposes.

**SEPTEMBER 1992:** The cabinet committee on AIDS proposes that sex education, with emphasis on AIDS prevention, be taught to Form Two student.

**OCTOBER 1992:** The Education Ministry decides not to use the term 'sex education' for the subject on sex as it can be misconstrued by the public. It will be known as "family health education" and taught only to secondary school students.

**DECEMBER 1994:** Sex education will not be introduced as a subject called "family life education" for students from Forms Two to Five beginning from the 1995/96 school term, says Deputy Education Minister Tan Sri Dr Fong Chan Onn.

**SEPTEMBER 1998:** The proposal to include sex education in schools is perceived negatively by some parents and groups, says the Federation of Family Planning Associations.

**APRIL 2000:** Sex education is taught in Penang under a pilot project involving Form 3 students in 15 schools.

**DECEMBER 2003:** Teachers will get guidelines on how to approach subjects on sexuality early next year, says the National Unity and Social Development Ministry.

**DECEMBER 2006:** The cabinet gives the green light to introduce sex education at all levels, says the Education Ministry. A sum of RM20 million has been allocated to provide training, campaigns and promotional materials for sex education, says Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

**MARCH 2007:** A plan to expand the scope of the sex education programme beyond students holds back the roll-out of the guidelines.

**MAY 2008:** Sex education and the dangers of HIV and AIDS will be introduced under the National Service training programme starting in October, says Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen.

**NOVEMBER 2008:** Sex education is unlikely to be introduced in the National Service training as feedback from some quarters have not been received, says National Service Training Council chairman Datuk Dr Tiki Lafe.

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Muhd Nur Muzakir Kamaruddin, 14, says his friends treat sex education as a joke



Amirul Asraf Azmi, 14, says his parents clam up when he asks them about sex