

Introduction

This curriculum is designed for use in special education and mainstreamed classrooms. It was written based on years of practical teaching experience in this subject area and provides functional teacher tools for students with diverse learning challenges. **Special Education F.L.A.S.H.: Secondary** has been piloted in a wide variety of classrooms. It is an adaptation of the **5/6, 7/8, and 9/10 F.L.A.S.H.** (Family Life And Sexual Health) curricula written by Beth Reis of the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, Family Planning Program.

The goals of the curriculum are to assist in the education of persons:

- who are knowledgeable about human development and reproduction,
- who respect and appreciate themselves, their families and all persons,
- who will neither exploit others nor allow themselves to be exploited.

A word about philosophy...

No curriculum is neutral and objective. Education itself implies a certain philosophy (i.e., that knowledge is preferable to ignorance). Neutrality is not even the ideal. If education could be stripped of beliefs, the skeleton would be of little worth.

The schools DO, however, have an obligation to reflect community beliefs, and they must be honest about the particular premises of the curriculum. Where there is no general agreement on a particular issue in the community, the teacher's place is to point that out, to explain honestly the several conflicting viewpoints, and to encourage the students to discuss these at home.

The primary beliefs inherent in this curriculum supplement are these:

- A person's unique qualities are to be celebrated.
- Everyone is entitled to talk and to be taken seriously.
- Everyone is entitled to "pass" (not share personal beliefs, feelings or information in class).
- The human body is precious and beautiful.
- Everyone needs to love and feel loved.
- No one is entitled to treat another person simply as a means of selfish gratification; coercion and manipulation are wrong.
- Premature sexual intimacy can hurt a person physically, emotionally and socially.
- Honest communication is fundamental in all relationships (parent/child, friend/friend, boyfriend/ girlfriend, etc.)
- People have a responsibility to learn as much as possible about themselves and the people they care about. In order to meet this responsibility, they must have the opportunity to receive honest answers to honest questions.

How to Use Special Education F.L.A.S.H.

A. Starting With the Student

Chances are your students are already letting you know through their behaviors that they are ready for this component of their education to be addressed. When we look beyond behaviors, to the communicative intent beneath, we see many questions and concerns... "What's happening to me?" "Why do I feel like this?" "Where did I come from?" "Am I normal?", etc.

It may be tempting, as a teacher, to tackle the most obvious "problems" first. After all, they seem to be the most pressing. But if we focus only on the student's deficits and needs, we miss some very exciting positive aspects of this type of teaching. That's why it is so important for you, as the teacher to consider your student's strengths, and the positive goals of this unit first. Your teaching will address both needs and learning challenges, but your focus must remain firmly positive.

It may be hard to determine "how much is enough" for some of your students. The level of information you choose to provide will depend largely on your sense of your student's ability to understand the information. Keep in mind that if you teach at "too high a level", in most instances, your students will let you know through their behaviors, questions or by "tuning out" that you missed finding the appropriate level for your approach this time. Sometimes it takes more than one pass, before the plane finds the appropriate altitude in order to land...and it may take more than one effort on your part to make the material understandable, learnable for your class.

Like the airplane, flying at too high an altitude to land will not do any harm; you'll just need to try again. Flying at too low an altitude can be more of a problem. Condescending does more damage in the long run than having unrealistically high expectations of student's sophistication level. But there are some tools that can help you gauge the appropriate level for your teaching on the first pass.

B. Assessment

Pretests and Posttests provide useful information for teachers in all subject areas. Pretests identify gaps of knowledge, and posttests can help to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning that occurs. Assessments also provide useful documentation for student files, and can be used as learning experiences in and of themselves.

The assessment tool included in *Special Education FLASH* (Appendix i) is a written test, designed for students used to expressing themselves on paper. It is easily modified to a verbal question and answer format, or may be administered using pictures from within the curriculum for more challenged or visual learners. It covers all of the class objectives and can be administered as both pre and post test.

Another assessment approach involves the use of anatomically correct dolls. Allow the student to explore the dolls and ask questions about the anatomy and functions of the various parts of the body. Use the dolls to role play and discuss social situations. Record your observations. Discuss your perspectives and conclusions with family members and other adults who know the student. Base your teaching plan on what you have learned about the student.

C. Getting Started

1. Class Structure

It is helpful to establish a routine for each class to build familiarity and structure. The following routine has worked well in the past and is recommended; with the added consideration that each individual teacher must feel free to add to this structure per his/her own creativity or the circumstances of the day.

- a. **Warm-up exercise.** This sets the mood or tone for the class, lends focus and calms everyone down. Some of the exercises suggested in *100 Ways to Enhance Self Esteem in the Classroom* (by Jack Canfield, Jack and Harold Wels, Prentice Hall, 1996) or develop your own exercise.
- b. **Discuss the student's socialization experience.** This may be a burning issue for some students and it will help to get it discussed and out of the way so that they can focus on new information.
- c. **Relaxation exercise.** Preferably a relaxation skill that can be used in other parts of the day, but even just a simple group stretch will do - something to say "we're going to get serious now, folks."
- d. **Review the previous lesson's material.** Be sure that you don't cover new ground that requires prior understanding until the students have a firm grasp of the previous material; otherwise you risk confusion and frustration for everyone.
- e. **Presentation of new materials.** Only cover as much as you feel is being absorbed. If this means that you don't finish your lesson plan, that's okay. The important thing is to be flexible and student-oriented. Make a commitment personally to follow-up with anyone who appears confused about the material after class.
- f. **Questions & Discussion Time.** This should be class oriented discussion and can reinforce the day's teaching. This is also the time to explore socialization options for the coming lesson. It's a good idea to emphasize (and re-emphasize) the rules for the first few week's lessons; a gentle reminder that discussion is private and confidential may prevent catastrophes and confusion.
- g. **A Cool Down Exercise.** This can once again focus the class and send each individual out into their world with a positive perspective about themselves. Again, see "100 ways to Enhance Self Concept" or create your own.

2. Sample Self-Esteem Exercises.

- Have students share with the class one success they have had this week.
- Ask each student to say one nice thing about the person sitting next to them.
- Have students complete the following sentences:
 1. My favorite color is...
 2. My favorite time of year is...
 3. My favorite holiday is...

For more ideas, a wonderful resource book by Jack Canfield and Harold Wells is called **100 Ways To Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom**.

3. Sample Relaxation Exercises

- Have students tense all the muscles in their hands to make a fist. Have them hold that fist tight for a count of ten. Then release. Repeat. Have students describe how their hand feels.
- Have students stick out their tongue as hard and as far as they can for a count of ten. Then relax. Repeat. Have them describe how their tongue and mouth feel.
- Have students sit in a circle, and set a timer for 3 minutes. Students will rub the shoulders of the person in front of them, while their shoulders are being rubbed at the same time.
- Have students pair up. Set a timer for 2 minutes. Students will give each other a hand massage.
- After the timer goes off, switch roles. Talk about how good it feels to give and to receive.
- Have students take a deep breath and then let it out. Have them sit with their hands relaxed in their laps. Have them put their head down trying to put their chins on their chests and just let them hang. Rock the head back as far as it goes easily, then let it hang back down again. Next have students put their ear to their shoulder, one at a time. Finally, have them lift their shoulders high, hold for a moment, and then let them drop and relax.

For more ideas see Joseph R. Cautela and June Grodin's Book **RELAXATION - a comprehensive manual for Adults, Children and Children with Special Needs**.

D. Using F.L.A.S.H. in the Classroom

- Special Education F.L.A.S.H. offers a broad range of activities with suggestions for adaptations to fit specific learning styles and challenges of all students. In the lessons, the left-hand column has adaptations for more challenged learners. The teacher, as a facilitator of learning, is in the best position to select activities that will work to accomplish the learning objectives for each individual student. Working together with teaching assistants, other support staff members, families and other regular and special education FLASH implementers, will greatly add to the effectiveness of this teaching.

- Plan on teaching FLASH more than once to any group of students. Since repetition is key, the course (or portions of it) may need to be repeated annually or more frequently. Consider adding a regularly scheduled FLASH period throughout the year.
- Teaching can occur intensively (daily lessons with daily opportunities for practice across settings) or less rigorously (once or twice/week spanning the whole year with opportunities for practice across settings occurring less frequently). Use the approach that works for your specific situation.
- We have found that the role of families and trusted adults in the teaching of social skills and sexuality education is critical. The ability to transfer skills learned in the classroom into skillfulness in community settings is key to social success for students in special education. Therefore, there are "trusted adult" letters and activities included in each lesson.

E. Including *F.L.A.S.H.* in the I.E.P.

State laws and school district mandates differ on the teacher and parent's legal obligation to include sexuality education (especially AIDS prevention education) for all students. Find out what the regulations are in your school. (Washington State Guidelines are found in Appendix C). Remember that the I.E.P. is a legal document. If a social skills/sexuality goal or learning objective is included in the student's I.E.P., then it must be taught. F.L.A.S.H. provides learner objectives for each lesson. More global learner objectives for each section are included below. These may be useful when planning and writing IEPs.

Introduction:

The student will actively participate in activities designed to establish a safe, comfortable learning situation for the study of social skills and sexuality.

Public & Private:

The student will be able to recognize and discriminate between public and private places, types of clothing and behaviors, and will understand the natural consequences of inappropriate public behavior.

Relationships:

The student will be able to identify and describe different types of relationships (self, family, friend, date, helper, acquaintance, stranger) and identify social skills and behaviors that appropriately accompany each type of relationship.

Communication:

The student will develop functional, appropriate, assertive communication and decision-making skills in the following areas: non-verbal communication, making requests and refusals and handling rejection.

Exploitation:

The student will be able to recognize exploitation and exploitive situations including sexual abuse and exploitation and will be able to respond appropriately and effectively.

Understanding the Body:

The student will develop a functional understanding of human anatomy, body and feeling changes of puberty and sexual health and hygiene.

Reproduction:

The student will develop a functional understanding of both the biological aspects of human reproduction and the responsibilities involved in parenting and sexual decisions.

HIV & other STDs:

The student will develop a functional understanding of how STDs (including HIV) are contracted, how they are prevented, and how to respond effectively and responsibly in the event that an STD is contracted.

Resources & Review:

The student will be able to identify and access available resources for further learning and discussion of social skills and sexuality related topics, and will be able to identify interest areas for future study.

F. Using Anonymous Question Boxes (cans, envelopes)

- Introduce them as in lesson #1.
- Read the questions in advance to give yourself time to consider how you want to answer them.
- Anticipate five types of questions:
 1. requests for information
 2. "am I normal" questions
 3. permission-seeking questions
 4. shock questions
 5. value questions

1. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION ¹

If you know the answer, fine. If not, it's okay to say "I don't know", and then refer the student to the appropriate source.

Is the question, although informational, one which you consider inappropriate for classroom discussion? Problems can be avoided if you have established in the context of the class ground rules, an agreement such as: "All questions are valid. However, I will have to make the final decision about the appropriateness of each question for total class discussion. If you turn in a question anonymously which I choose not to answer, it is not because it is a bad question. I may feel that it is not of interest to all students or that I am not prepared to lead a class discussion around that issue. Please see me at the end of class if this happens so that I can try to answer your question privately."

¹ Reprinted with permission from Beyond Reproduction: Tips and Techniques for Teaching Sensitive Family Life Education Issues, published by Network Publications, Santa Cruz, CA. 1981

2. "AM I NORMAL" QUESTIONS ²

These questions generally focus on adolescent. Concerns about their bodies and the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing.

Validate their concern, e.g., "Many young people worry that..." and provide information about what they can expect to happen during the adolescent years. Refer them to parents, clergy, family physician, community resources, school counselor for further discussion, if appropriate.

3. PERMISSION-SEEKING QUESTIONS ³

These come in two common forms, and may seek your permission to participate in a particular behavior, e.g.: "Is it normal...?" or "Did you...when you were growing up?"

Avoid the use of the word "normal" when answering questions. Normal for some is morally unsanctionable for others. Present what is known medically, legally, etc. (the facts) and discuss the moral, religious and emotional implications, making sure all points of view are covered. Refer students to parents and clergy for discussion of moral/religious questions.

Establish in the content of class ground rules, an agreement related to discussion of personal behavior, such as: "No discussion of personal behavior during class." If and when you get a question about your personal behavior, you can remind students of this ground rule and redirect the discussion to one of the pros and cons (religious, moral, medical, emotional, legal, interpersonal, etc.) of the particular behavior in question. Again, refer student to parents and clergy for further discussion of moral/ religious questions.

4. SHOCK QUESTIONS ⁴

Again, remind students of the class ground rule related to appropriate questions for classroom discussion. Sometimes the shock comes not from the content of the question, but the vocabulary utilized. You can reword the question to defuse it, especially if you have previously established in the context of class ground rules, a rule related to vocabulary, such as: "In this class I will be trying to balance two conflicting goals: I want to communicate with you. Sometimes you may not know the correct word for something you have a question about. Use whatever word you know to ask that question and I will answer using the correct (acceptable) word."

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

Values Questions

It is not possible, or desirable, to provide value-free education. Questions which have a value component must be answered with care -- expressing your own personal values might hurt or offend a child and their family. With some values, it's perfectly appropriate for you to express your opinion. These are those we call "relatively universal." Relatively **UNIVERSAL** values are those shared by 95% of families, values which the teacher should feel comfortable, and is in fact, **OBLIGATED** to teach.

Examples of relatively **UNIVERSAL** values:

- Forcing someone to have sex with you is wrong.
- Knowingly spreading disease is wrong.
- It's safest and healthiest for school-age kids not to have sex (this is NOT controversial, what IS controversial is when it's fine to have sex).
- Taking care of your reproductive health is important.
- Sex between children and adults is wrong.
- Adultery is wrong.

Values that are **CONTROVERSIAL** are those *without* consensus in the community. These are issues about which the teacher should **NOT** teach or express a **particular belief**. Providing information or facilitating discussion about the issues is fine.

Examples of **CONTROVERSIAL** issues that have a wide range of values in the community:

- Abortion
- Birth control
- Masturbation
- Homosexuality
- Sex outside of marriage
- Cohabitation
- What age/under what circumstances it's acceptable to start having sex

NOTE: Parents, unlike teachers, should feel free to ask your child about his or her beliefs and to share yours. In fact, this sort of dialogue within families is very important. Employees of public schools and other public agencies have an ethical obligation *not* to side with one family or one religious perspective or one child over another. But children absolutely need a chance -- at home -- to explore feelings and beliefs with adults they love, just as they need a chance to learn factual information and to have universal, community values reinforced at school.

However, just because it's inappropriate in a public school setting to teach **particular values** on controversial issues, that does *not* mean one can't teach **about** the issues. It just means that it must be done with respect for the diversity of opinion within your community. For example, you can discuss abortion - what it is, the fact that it is legal in this country, where abortions are performed, etc., but it is not appropriate to share your beliefs about whether or not abortion is a correct choice.

Therefore, when answering a value question you should follow the *F.L.A.S.H.* values question protocol.

Values Question Protocol:

1. Read the question (verbatim, if you can) or listen to it carefully.
2. Legitimize the question.
3. Identify it as a belief question.
4. Answer the factual part, if there is one.
5. Help the class describe the community's range of beliefs.
6. Refer to family, clergy, and other trusted adults.
7. Check to see if you answered the question.
8. Leave the door open.

SAMPLE Q: I masturbate. Is that ok?

SAMPLE A: That's a great question, a lot of kids wonder about masturbation. Masturbation is when a person strokes or touches their genitals for pleasure. I can't share my own beliefs about whether or not it's ok to masturbate because families have really different beliefs about masturbation. Some families believe it's ok, as long as you're in a private place. Other families believe it's never ok. You need to check with your families, or another trusted adult to find out how they feel about it. If that's not what you meant, feel free to leave another question in the box or you can talk to me after class.

You will eventually tailor your use of the protocol, only using **every** step the first time masturbation, for example, comes up. For now, you should practice the protocol step by step -- until it becomes a natural part of your teaching.

Values Question Protocol in more detail:

1. Read the question:

Read it verbatim, if you can. Use your judgment, of course, but even reading aloud relatively crude language -- as long as you do it with a serious tone and facial expression -- conveys your respect for the child who asked the question. It is likely to promote respect in return. If the language is too crude to repeat, even with a red face and an explanation ("*Someone used slang, but let me read it for you as they wrote it before I translate it.*"), then don't read it directly. But when you paraphrase it, make sure you are clear enough that the author of the question will recognize it as his or hers.

2. Legitimize the question:

"I am glad someone asked this one."

"That's an interesting question."

"People ask me this one every year."

"This one is really thoughtful (compassionate, imaginative, respectful)."

This will encourage your students to keep asking even as it discourages snide remarks about whoever asked that particular question.

3. Identify it as a belief question:

"Most of the questions you've been asking have been 'fact questions' where I could look up an answer that all the experts agree upon. This one is more of a 'value question' where every person, every family, every religion has a different belief."

Teaching your students to distinguish facts from opinions (and from feelings) is at least as important as any content you will convey.

4. Answer the factual part, if there is one:

Thus, for instance, if the question is about the rightness or wrongness of masturbation, you need to make sure that your class understands that -- values notwithstanding -- no physical harm results from masturbating:

"Before we get to differing beliefs about masturbation, let me just make sure you know it doesn't cause people to go blind or mentally ill or to grow hair on their palms or anything like that."

Even questions that are fact questions on their face may need a discussion of the underlying values, but always start by answering them:

"Can you get birth control without your boyfriend or husband's knowing? Yes, legally in our state, you can. Now let's talk about the different beliefs people might have about couple's communicating about birth control."

5. Help the class describe the community's range of beliefs, not their own.

On sensitive issues such as sex and religion, it can be really unfair (and, in Washington State, illegal) to ask individual students their own beliefs. But it is very appropriate to generalize:

"Tell me some of the things you've heard that people believe about that."

Prompt the group with a stem sentence:

"Some people believe ___?"

"Um, hmm, and some people believe ___?"

In a class that is used to thinking about the range of community values, you will be able to draw a full assortment of answers from the students. In other groups, especially younger ones, you may draw only a dichotomy ("*Some people believe abortion is wrong.*" and "*Some people believe it is right.*") In any case, your role is two-fold: (1) to make sure that every belief gets expressed -- or paraphrased -- respectfully, hopefully just as the person who believed it might express it and (2) to make sure that a complete a range of beliefs gets expressed, even if you have to supplement the few values the group can think of:

"That's right, some people believe that it is wrong under any circumstances. And some believe it is right under any circumstances, as long as the woman and her doctor think it's

best. Some believe it is OK to have an abortion if you have been raped or if your life is in danger, but not otherwise. Some believe, it is OK to have an abortion if there's something seriously wrong with the fetus, and it is doomed to a life of pain. Some think it is best for teens to have abortions, rather than to raise babies when they are still growing up themselves. Others disagree. Some feel it is better to have an abortion if you already have as many children as you can afford or take proper care of. Again, others disagree. They may feel that abortion is the same as murder. Whereas, some people think it is not really a separate human being with rights until it is developed enough to have feelings or until it is actually born."

6. Refer to family, clergy and other trusted adults.

"Because people have such different beliefs about this, I really want to encourage you to talk with your families -- your parent or guardian, grandparent, auntie, uncle, stepparent, mom's or dad's partner -- or with somebody at your community of worship, if you attend a church or synagogue or temple -- or with some other adult you love and whose opinions matter to you. That could be your babysitter, your best friend's parent, a counselor, or whoever will listen to your opinions and honestly share theirs. Have a conversation within the next week if you can."

Notice that this encouragement didn't assume that every child has a parent they can talk with. Some may have only been newly in a new foster home and don't yet have that kind of relationship with their new "parents." Also, notice that we shouldn't assume that every child goes to church.

What if the family is likely to convey values that the child will feel hurt by (a teen who has come out to you as gay, for instance, but whose family is strongly opposed to homosexuality)? Still, knowing one's family's beliefs is developmentally important for young people. But help them think of other trusted adults, as well.

7. Check to see if you answered the question.

"Is that what you were asking?"

"Do you all think that was what the person who wrote this question was asking?"

8. Leave the door open.

"If that isn't what you really wanted to know, you can drop another question in the box. Or come talk with me in private. You can also get a friend to ask it aloud for you or to explain to me what you meant. Just keep asking until I understand and tell you what you need to know."

Finally, if you can do it sincerely, thank the class -- or in a one-on-one situation, the student -- for their maturity or curiosity or compassion or whatever positive qualities the Q & A session has helped them to demonstrate. That will not only increase their retention, it will improve the odds of their repeating the positive behavior on the next occasion.