

Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

Safeguarding young people in care

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Safeguarding young people in care

Input from young people

'Safeguarding young people' focusses on stimulating healthy sexual development of youth in residential care and foster care.

Research reveals an increased risk of sexual abuse for children and youth who grow up in residential care or foster care. To help prevent sexual abuse, professionals should talk with children and youth about relationships, intimacy, and sexuality, just as parents at home should. Many professionals find this troublesome, just as parents at home do.

On the basis of interviews and focus groups with youth in residential juvenile care, information was collected concerning the question of how the youth would like to be supported in their sexual development. This factsheet describes the vision of the youth.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THE YOUTH?

Young people just want to be able to talk with group leaders about being in love, intimacy, and relationships. They have questions about kissing and sex, for example about how to please the other. They also have practical questions about contraception, STDs, and pregnancy. In addition, they need support with regard to boundaries; discovering where one's own boundaries and those of the other lie and learning how to constructively discuss this in their relationships, or as a youth expresses it: "Learning where your boundaries are and daring to say 'no'".

Discovering where one's own boundaries and those of the other lie and constructively discussing this within relationships.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

In order to dare to talk about sexuality, young people need professionals to create the conditions necessary for feeling safe and heard. The youth need to be allowed to determine for themselves with whom they talk about sexuality, and when and how. Young people find it important to be able to trust the professional – i.e. *to have a trusting bond*. They report that this works best with someone with whom they feel at ease and with whom they have a 'click'.

In addition, the youth want "cozy hugging on the couch, holding one another's hands, or giving each other a kiss" – just like youth outside residential care.

COMPETENCIES

To achieve this, professionals need certain skills. One competency that the young people often mention in connection with talking about sexuality, is the competency to normalize sexuality. This means being able to discuss sexuality in a lighthearted way, without a tense or uneasy atmosphere arising. *Without it becoming uneasy.*

In addition, young people report nine more general competencies that are important with regard to discussing sexuality:

1. Showing understanding
2. Being culturally sensitive (taking into account the differences in background and culture of the youth)
3. Differentiating (taking into account the differing needs and development phases of the youth)
4. Respecting one another
5. Using humour
6. Having empathy
7. Listening
8. Having an open and non-judgemental attitude
9. Showing sincere interest

WHEN DO YOU TALK ABOUT SEX?

Some of the young people prefer that conversations about sexuality take place spontaneously, and others prefer for the conversations to take place during planned thematic meetings. This preference differs per youth and per situation. Some prefer to talk about sexuality in a group, whilst others prefer a private conversation with a professional.

Spontaneous (at mealtime) or planned (during a thematic group meeting): preferences differ per individual youth.

Individual conversation	Group discussion
"It is nice to talk one-on-one about sexuality; that feels more natural and is less confronting."	"It is nice to talk in a group; then not all of the attention is focussed on you."

This factsheet is based on information derived from student projects of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Avans University of Applied Sciences and Artesis Plantijn University College and on information from a focus group in the context of the LEAP project at Stichting Alexander.

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