

The Specifics of Communication in Relation to Sexuality II:

Helping Professions in Relation
to Sexuality Including Persons
with Intellectual Disability –
from Empirical Research

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Introduction

“There would be fewer problems if there was more communication about sexuality...”

This publication continues to analyse the issue of sexuality in terms of communication aspects in selected helping professions. The publication is a follow-up to *Specifics of communication in relation to sexuality I: Helping professions in relation to sexuality including persons with intellectual disability* (Štěrbová, D. & Rašková, M., 2014) and focuses on communication and attitudes to human sexuality in the general population and in persons with intellectual disability. The key issue is the acceptance of homosexuality in society and the problem of communication about homosexuality as well as communication with legal guardians about sexuality issues. Focus is also on the issue of continuing education in the area of human sexuality. The authors focused on the environments that are crucial to sexuality: sexual education in schools; healthcare and social services also in relation to persons with intellectual disability.

In the previous publication mentioned above, the introduction to the empirical research included a general analysis of the concept of sexuality, communication about sexuality, and contemporary approaches to sexuality education in the Czech system of education. The present publication provides an overview of the issue on the basis of the empirical research in the context of problems concerning the attitudes and skills of future teachers as representatives of selected helping professions. The authors of the present publication believe that problems concerning communication skills among teachers indicate the need for continuing education in the area of human sexual-

ity. Early elimination of problems, especially during undergraduate preparation, is a premise for a successful career of every teacher or any helping professional.

The authors believe that the topic of the publication has so far not been analysed or published in Czech scientific literature. The issue is based on educational practice and is highly relevant, although it is sometimes considered a taboo and is associated with a diversity of opinions and attitudes. As in the case of the previous publication (see above) some professionals will disagree but the authors believe that this will be a reason for further expert discussions.

In the writing of the publication the authors, being helping professionals themselves, used their expert knowledge based on their long-term experience and of course made references to other professional resources. The authors believe that after reading this publication the readers will be able to think about the basic human needs from the perspective of the current understanding of human sexuality as well as modern education and psychology.

Dana Štěrbová & Miluše Rašková

Part I |

Communication about sexuality

1 | **Communication about sexuality in schools**

MILUŠE RAŠKOVÁ

The word communication comes from the Latin *communicare* (share, consult) and *communis* (common) and has several meanings. The concept of school communication is based on interpersonal communication (especially between teachers, pupils, parents, public). Regarding the two main types of communication (verbal and non-verbal) it is logical that one must consider the existence of communication through visual media referred to as visual communication.

As far as the characteristic of communication is concerned, it takes place exclusively between the actors mentioned above and is referred to as interpersonal communication. It is clear that school communication is affected and sometimes limited by a number of various circumstances. Focusing on mutual communication as an integral part of family-school collaboration, it is desirable to present the contemporary forms of collaboration between the family and the school in the context of influencing or limiting factors.

General specifics of school communication

Teachers should try to search for the key to partnership with parents by means of appropriate communication and a suitable approach because any school activities must be based on a positive teacher-parent relationship, irrespective of the fact that every family is different and has different needs and upbringing approaches. The attitude

of the school should either support or sensitively direct the family, but under no circumstances can ignore the home of the child, unless family upbringing is contrary to the principles of society. There is no doubt that successful cooperation between the school and the parents largely depends on the parents themselves.

In their profession, teachers can communicate with parents directly by means of a personal interview, on the telephone or in written, or indirectly through the child. Direct communication usually takes place in class meetings, consultations, school activities for the public, or in different institutions, etc. A sensitive area of communication is the indirect form which takes place between the school and the family through the child. When children return home from school, they bring along a variety of information but also impressions, feelings, observations, etc. Through these impressions children “inform” their parents about how satisfied or dissatisfied they are, how they are perceived by others, etc. It has been confirmed that parents often see the school through the eyes of their children and are usually very sensitive to their children’s dissatisfaction with any aspect of the school.

Through this communication channel, teachers are also informed about what is happening in the child’s family, whether the child is listened to and supported, and how the child feels because all of this is communicated through the child’s feelings, impressions, observations, etc. There are many ways of children’s communication, including narration, play, or even drawing. Teachers must be highly professional and take care not to misuse any of the information they receive. If parents do not trust the school, mutual cooperation or meaningful communication is impossible. Mutual cooperation between the family and the school may be facilitated by making information available using notice boards or websites, but also surveys, questionnaires, children’s work, public presentations, regional newspapers, magazines, or television.

It is not easy to build a partnership between the family and the school in which both parties respect each other, are helpful, and discuss problems. Trnková (in Rabušicová et al., 2004, 52) is optimistic and believes that although parents are frequently assigned the role

of customers, the perception of parents in the Czech Republic and other Western European countries as equal partners in all matters including child education is increasing.

In terms of their profession, teachers should avoid any myths. These myths tend to be associated with the models of parental relationships and existing barriers to communication. Therefore, they should not adhere to opinions according to which schools compensate for insufficient possibilities or capabilities of child development in the family or provide the family with information using a one-way communication model and define the procedures for child development. Professional teachers should suppress the myth of “problematic” parents, who are identified as bad (do not cooperate, are not interested), too eager (excessive cooperation, they relentlessly flood teachers with suggestions, ideas, and advice), or those who are independent (minimum necessary contact).

Teachers must be able to establish a partnership with every parent and maintain communication and relationships without any invectives. It is not the responsibility of teachers to explain to parents how they should educate their child, but successful cooperation between the school and the family should be based on the fact that parents need to know teachers’ intentions (know and understand their efforts); on the other hand, teachers need to know what is important for parents in educating their child. At the end of the section on the specifics of school communication from a general perspective, the following principle of mutual sharing should be noted: If the family cooperates and helps the school, the school should also make efforts and offer various activities to the family; in addition to parents’ involvement the school must be professional in providing partnership-based activities.

School communication in the area of sexuality education

The issue of human sexuality is presented in the educational process by means of sexuality education. It is an inseparable part of health education. The primary role of the family is not denied but sexuality

education cannot be left to the free choice of the family. Sexuality education must be professionally guaranteed by the teacher (Rašková, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013) and must respect the specifics of children, humanity criteria, and ethical principles (Rašková, 2008, 2011, 2012). Sexuality education should be centred around the family, but there is no guarantee that sexuality education will not become a taboo and that children will receive subjectively and socially appropriate information, attitudes, and behaviour in the broadest sense of sexual behaviour. The teacher should respect alternative attitudes of parents that do not conflict with the principles and norms of society. Without long-lasting and conceptual cooperation including appropriate communication with the child's family and without accepting the family's beliefs except those that are antisocial, sexuality education is not likely to succeed.

The truth is that in the implementation of sexuality education, teachers are not in a directive position. They should respect the principle of mutual cooperation and adequate school-family communication in the area of sexuality education (Rašková, 2008, etc.) In addition, the teacher should be able to present relevant information in a planned or ad hoc manner and teach relevant skills adequately to pupils' age. In the implementation of sexuality education, the teacher should be able to create a friendly atmosphere in which pupils are not afraid to ask any questions of their interest.

In the context of school-family cooperation (Marádová, 2006, etc.), parents should be informed about the course and content of sexuality education and about the methods as well as objectives. Informing parents by the teacher is a moral duty. In this way, parents should not be forced to give their consent. If for any reason parents do not agree with the participation of their child in education, they have the right to inform the teacher. Resolving this situation is the responsibility of the teacher or school administration. It should be noted that most of the information is of a general nature and forms an integral part of general knowledge of every individual and therefore the teacher need not consider the attitudes of parents (let alone elemental knowledge that pupils should acquire in school).