

Age-appropriate sexuality education in Finland

Raisa Cacciatore Raisa.cacciatore@vaestoliitto.fi

MD, Child Psychiatrics, Adolescent Health Specialist

Väestöliitto, Family Federation of Finland (FFF)

Sauna



A foreigner's view of the Finns saunas in 1799. Giuseppe Acerbi, the Italian traveler.



General situation in Finland around CSE

- Atmosphere in Finland open-minded (Sauna!)
- Good feedback, apart from some single negative comments
- Väestöliitto is a trusted organization
- Know your battle: study the needs, obstacles, fears, & risks
- Make positive, approving, respectful responses in advance



Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, Family affairs unit

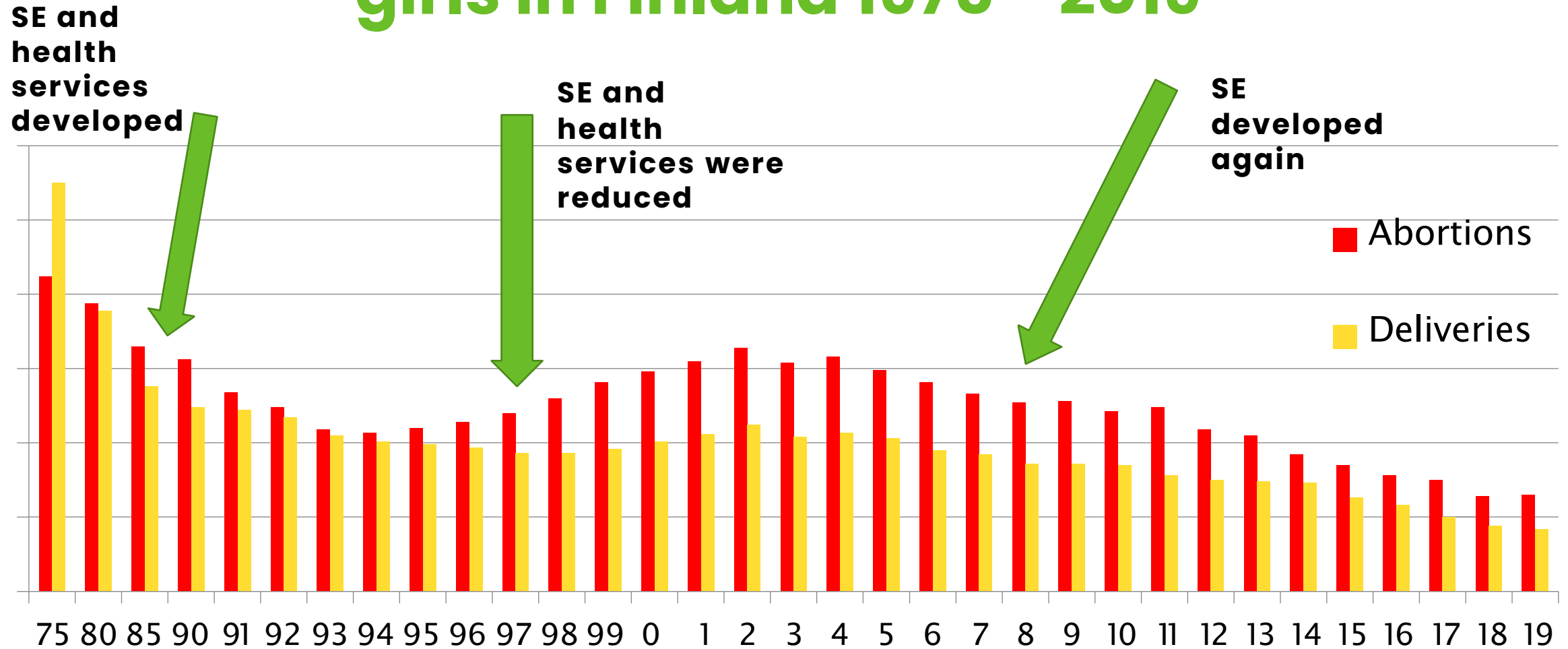
- Direct contact with the Lutheran Church (Lutheran 68%, Orthodox 1.1%, others 1.7%, none 29%)
- Church is supportive of CSE
- Confessional schools for youth teach CSE



Finland 1975–1990

- The Abortion Law 1970, contraceptive counselling became obligatory
- The Public Health Law (1972) guaranteed free primary health care and preventive counselling for all
- Contraceptive counselling units were founded throughout the country.
- SE was integrated in school programs in 1970 to ensure practice of safer sex, which refers to avoiding pregnancy and STI, and to enable the development of a positive sexuality.
- School health developed, school health nurses participated in SE
- Close connection between school SE and youth health services
- Economical crisis from 1990- >

Abortions and deliveries (per 1000) in 15-19 y girls in Finland 1975 - 2019



Based on: D Apter, Recent development and consequences of sexuality education in Finland. BZgA FORUM 2011, 2, 3-8

Finland 2000: CSE in schools has been a part of a larger topic: **Health Education**

- Planning and producing textbooks
- Training of teachers
- A normal topic among others (infections, social skills, emotion management, friendship, preventing violence, well-being, pregnancy, contraception, values and norms etc.)
- Tests in Matriculation examination
- Teachers interested, self-select
- Works well!
- Emergency contraception prescription-free

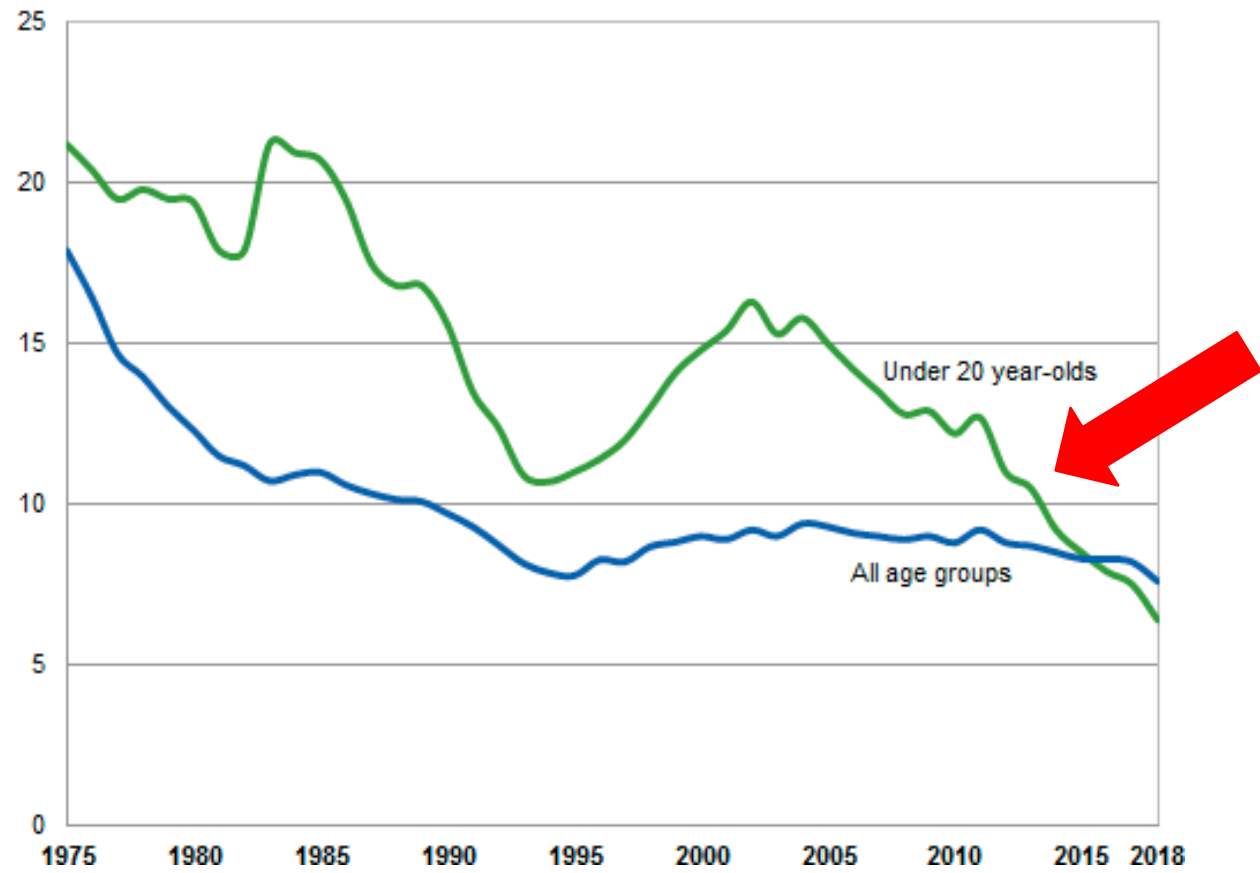


National Core Curricula

Legally binding norms, define the objectives and core contents

- **9-12y (grades 3-6)**
 - Health Education integrated into Environmental and Natural subjects
 - “**Sexual** development and human reproduction are dealt with in accordance to the age level.”
 - “Me as a human being. ...the structure of the human body and core bodily functions, ...human development. ...current developmental changes”
- **13-15y (grades 7-9)**
 - **114 lessons of Health Education (including CSE)** as an independent subject over 3 years, of which about 20h CSE.
 - Comprehensive: integrated contents

Induced abortions (per 1000) in 1975–2018



Young Children's CSE in Finland



Positive atmosphere to childhood CSE

- NAE (National Affairs of Education) funded
- EEC staff training projects in FFF
- Common seminars and materials with NAE
- We comment on NAE's documents
- STEA (Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations) funded
- 3y EEC staff training project for FFF
- -> 3 persons working since 2019
- Public attitude
 - January 2021 two main media articles of childhood CSE -> No opposition but hundreds of "likes".



*Important topic but
maybe I would not yet
tell*

int **At least I told to my 6y-
old! A safe adult must
tell these topics.**

Non-Violent Childhoods

Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children 2020–2025

- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
- Demands continuous, ageappropriate, mandatory CSE to all age-groups
- Chapter 7.4 "Safe body-emotion education and sexuality education".
- In English: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-8351-9>



National web survey on situation and needs in Finland (2013–14, FFF)

DAY-CARE PROFESSIONALS (nurses, preschool teachers) for 0-6-year olds
2013, N=507

5 background questions
91 multiple choice questions
13 open questions

PARENTS of 0-6-year-old children
2014, N=614

14 background questions
85 multiple choice questions
25 open questions

- **If and what kind of expressions children show**
- **What children ask and how adults respond**
- **What are problems in supporting and protecting healthy (sexual) development**

Web page for parents 2015 with child-centred pictures and words

Child-centred words

CSE

➤ Body-emotion education

Penis

➤ Pippeli

Vagina

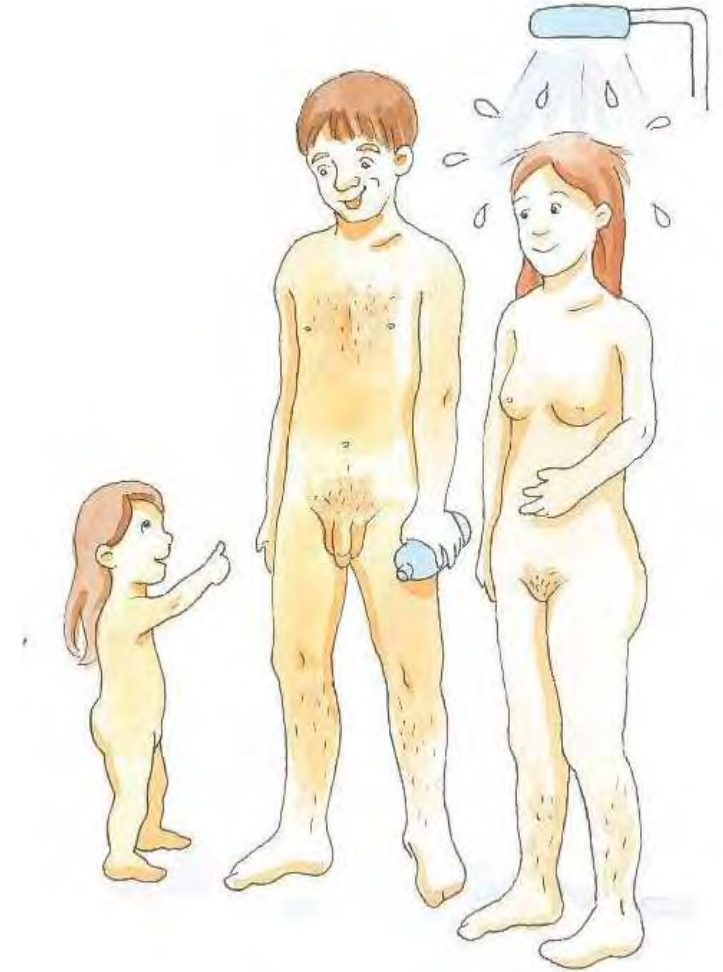
➤ Pimppi

Masturbation

➤ Unnutus

Sexual violence

➤ Safety skills



Difficult issues for adults:

1. Reproduction / fertilization
2. Dangerous adults / safety skills
3. Masturbation / self touching



What did we learn?

- Adults constantly face children's sexuality-related expressions and questions.
- Currently, support for children's sexuality is uneven and sporadic.
- Parents and professionals lack models and information.
- Parents and professionals discuss the matter narrowly, if at all.



Barriers towards implementation: ignorance, fears, misconceptions

IGNORANCE

- What is childhood sexuality?
- What is good-quality, developmentally adequate SE?

FEARS

- There is an innocence that is destroyed with any information.
- Giving information inspire children to do adult-sexual acts.
- Providing SE to children predispose children to sexual abuse.

MISCONCEPTIONS

- Children should be answered only if they ask and the thing they ask.
- Sexuality is a private issue, not possible to teach about.
- Sexuality starts only in adolescence.

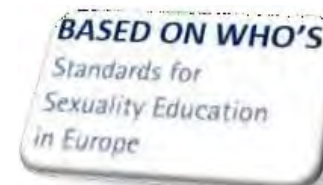
POSTER: Age-and development appropriate CSE for ages 0-6y (7-12y)

- Childhood sexuality is different than that of young or adults.
- Development of the child -> What the child may do or ask? -> How one can support and guide the child?

<https://www.vaestoliitto.fi/ammattilaiset/lasten-kehotunnekasvatus/verkkokurssit-ja-materiaalit/materiaalit-mallit-ja-tyokalut/>

English, Russian, Estonian, Swedish, German, Finnish

Smaller leaflets of a all ages



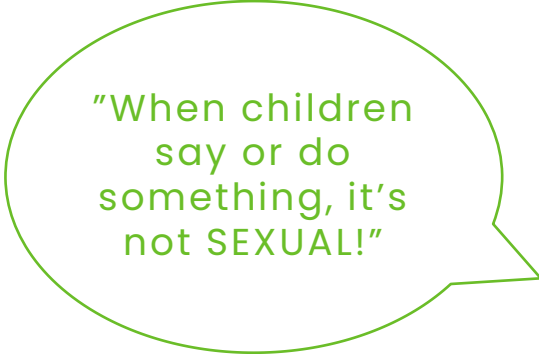


Let them be kids!

Positive, respectful responses

- **Let them be kids** so that they can grow on their age level, safely, well being, in a child's way.
 - Parents and EEC staff need to know what it means to be a child. It is playful, open, shame-free, natural and curious learning about the body, emotions, good manners, and safety.
 - This is childhood sexuality, which we protect.
 - Adults must be able to protect and support the health and well-being of a child, ie childhood sexuality.
- **Knowledge destroys children's innocence.** Childhood innocence is playful, curious, shame-free and a natural way to be in one's body and to learn about emotions and rights, and to be safe.
 - That is childhood sexuality.
 - We protect this childhood sexuality and innocence.

27 critical comments of the term 'sexuality'



"When children say or do something, it's not SEXUAL!"

-> Using less sex-loaded terms (as Health education, Relation education, Life-skills education or Youth education) have in several countries made possible to start SE even for young people.

-> "Body-emotion-education" = childhood CSE (based on our survey)

- Cacciatore, R., Ingman-Friberg, S.M.L, Lainiala, L.P. & Apter, D.L. (2020), Verbal and Behavioral 'Expressions of Child Sexuality Among 1-6-Year-Olds as Observed by Daycare Professionals in Finland', Archives of Sexual Behavior, vol. 49. Describes child sexuality expressions (verbal and behavioral) using the WHO's Standard's eight topics of sexuality education. It illustrates that emotions as infatuations, as well as the body and norms, are essential parts of early childhood sexuality and CSE.
- Cacciatore, R., Ingman-Friberg, S., Apter, D., Sajaniemi, N. & Kaltiala, R. (2020), 'An Alternative Term to Make Comprehensive Sexuality Education More Acceptable in Childhood', South African Journal of Childhood Education. The specific terms for childhood sexuality and CSE help to promote sexual education, sexual health, sexual rights, sexual well-being and sexual safety of young children.



Adults' negative emotions

- Own sexual history and education
- Sexuality – taboo to talk
- Child & sexuality – even more taboo
- No words, traditions, training, no instructions
- What people say?
- Different cultures & religions
- Disturbing fears and beliefs



Naughty words!

- In the past, children's mouths were washed with soap if they said "bad words".
- Today, the genitals (+pee+poo) are called "toilet words", which are only allowed in the toilet.
- This makes children silent.
- This keeps the taboo in talking sexuality.



Shame on you!



- Shame has developed to protect oneself from exclusion of a group.
- Shame is linked to the disapproval of the community. Or at least to fear this. (*-> Now everyone thinks I'm bad or stupid!*)

What you can't say, you can't protect!



- Children/young people don't talk about harassment to adults!
- It's time to start positive education instead of shame education!



YOUNG CHILDREN: mandatory National Core Curricula for EEC

- **0–6y (early education)**
 - New, 2016, renewed 2019
- **6y (pre-primary education)**
 - 2016 (2021 new 5–6–y, experimental, and only for 10 000 children)
- **7–8y (grades 1–2)**
 - 2014, Health Education integrated into Environmental and Natural subjects
 - *“Safety skills; emotional skills; understanding of body parts and lifespan; Familiarization with the basic requirements of life.”*
- **The term sexuality is not mentioned** for 0–8y old's

Local EEC curricula with CSE

- 22 municipalities in Finland
- 45% of 0-6y children
- Since 2017 the number increasing



NEW!

Experimental curriculum for 5-6yo's (2021-24)

- First only in few municipalities (10,000 children)
- **Sexuality, safety-skills, digital safety-skills, of body-esteem and body image are included!**
- *"In education the child is guided to a positive sense of body esteem and body image."*
- *"Children's age-appropriate curiosity about sexuality and the body is guided respectfully."*
- First time that the word 'sexuality' is mentioned in EEC by NAE
- In Finnish <https://bit.ly/36SFxXe> and Swedish <https://bit.ly/3rwGoVf>

What we do?



Web pages for professionals and parents

Lasten kehotunnekasvatus



- Mitä on pienten lasten kehotunnekasvatus?
- Mitä kaikkea tarkoittaa lapsuuden seksuaalisuus?

- Online courses
- Online lectures, videos, tasks
- Materials and models free, printable

www.vaestoliitto.fi/ammattilaiset/lasten-kehotunnekasvatus/

Hyvakysymys.fi/lapsijaseksuaalisuus

Printable posters provide knowledge, tools to discuss

- English
- Russian
- Estonian
- Swedish
- German
- Sami
- Arabian
- Finnish
- Easy Reading



www.hyvakysymys.fi/artikkeli/turvataidot-ja-lapsen-keho-juliste/

SAFETY SKILLS AND YOUR BODY
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDE

THE NAMES OF BODY PARTS

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Tell the child about all parts of the human body.
Teach the child the names of various body parts.
Help the child get familiar with the human body by various means: by looking at pictures, by drawing, by playing.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child knows that it is all right to talk about all body parts, with grown-ups and with other children.
The child is able to talk about his or her own body.
The child can use appropriate and acceptable words about body parts.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
All parts of the human body are equally good.
It is important that you appreciate your body and take care of your body.
All kinds of bodies are equally good.
It is a good thing that there are different kinds of bodies.

THE SWIMSUIT RULE

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Tell the child that the body parts under the swimsuit are private things. Only the child may decide about them.
Nobody may touch the body parts under the swimsuit or look at them if the child does not want to.
Help the child get familiar with the Swimsuit Rule by various means: by looking at pictures, by drawing, by playing.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child knows which body parts are private and that they should not be shown to anyone if the child does not want to.
The child knows that looking and exposing things under a friend's swimsuit is all right only if both of you feel it's all right and comfortable.
The child knows the Swimsuit Rule and can say no if someone tries to break the rule.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
There are different body parts. Some of them are special, private and valuable.
You may and you should protect them.
You don't let everyone see them, even if they are good and valuable.

THE TOUCH BALL

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Tell the child about various ways you can touch others.
You may only touch if your hand feels that it is nice and that it is all right.
Touching should not make you feel bad about your body or make you uncomfortable.
You know best yourself how you feel about being touched and if you want to, feel so close everyone else.
A good touch is not a secret.
Good touching makes you feel comfortable and gives you a nice feeling.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child learns that before touching someone else it is best to ask if it is all right, for example by asking to touch someone's private body parts.
The child knows that there are different kinds of touching and that a touch can give different feelings.
The child can recognize his or her own feelings.
The child is able to say no to unwanted touching.
The child accepts that another child says no to touching.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
The child can decide who may touch the child's body.
You must always respect the body of another person.
Everyone has the right to decide about one's own body and this right must always be respected.
Nobody may use foul words about another person's body as that may hurt and give bad feelings.

THE THREE-STEP RULE

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Help the child learn the Three-Step Rule.
If you get a bad feeling in some situation or when someone touches you:
1. Say NO.
2. Get away.
3. Go to a grown-up person you know and trust, and tell about it.

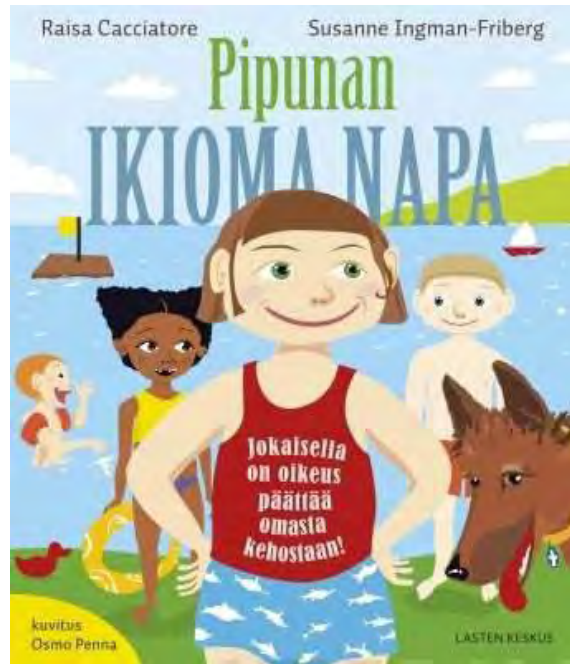
WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child knows what to do if the situation is scary or gives a bad feeling.
The child is able to recognize a bad touch or uneasy situation.
The child is able to say no.
The child knows how to ask for help.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
The child has the right to feel delicate.
Grown-ups help the child to follow the Three-Step Rule.
The child can also say no and grown-ups for help.
It is a good thing to talk to a grown-up if a touch gave you a bad feeling.

vaestoliitto.fi/lapsijasexualisuus

Väestöliitto PLAIN ENGLISH Emma & Elias

Safety skills in picture books



Tools to facilitate discussion of CSE topics: 21 cards & guide



21 different cards



Teacher's Guide

For parents,
professionals and
children:

Take a picture, start
and learn to
talk!

Body-emotion education courses

Basic

- **Basic information and tools for starting body emotion education**
 - free, plain-language, self-paced course.
 - Information, videos and tasks
 - Advices to deal with young children, for example, the body, sexuality, emotions and rights.

www.vaestoliitto.fi/ammattilaiset/lasten-kehotunnekasvatus/verkkokurssit-ja-materiaalit/a-peruskurssi-ja-tyokalut-kehotunnekasvatukseen/

Advanced

- www.vaestoliitto.fi/ammattilaiset/lasten-kehotunnekasvatus/verkkokurssit-ja-materiaalit/laaja-kurssi-kehotunnekasvatukseen/

Courses for parents and grandparents

- www.hyvakysymys.fi/kurssi/lapsen-kehotunnekasvatus-verkkokurssi/
www.hyvakysymys.fi/kurssi/isovanhemmille-lasten-kehotunnekasvatus-kurssi/

Expert lectures and short videos

● Luennot ja videot



Täältä löydät lyhyitä tietoisuuksi ja tekstitettyjä koulutusvideoita eri kehotunnekasvatuksen aiheista. Monissa ovat mukana myös diat.

Näitä saat vapaasti käyttää itseopiskelussa sekä näyttää koulutuksissa tai vanhempainilloissa. Ne ovat hyödyllisiä myös kollegojen kesken opiskelussa tai keskustelun virittämisessä.

Luennot on jaoteltu kahdeksan kehotunnekasvatuksen aiheen mukaan.



- Over 65 subtitled expert lectures (15–60 min)
- Topics include shame, prevention of harassment in young children, child fondness, safety skills, addressing awkward topics, and more.
- Short 1 min videoclips

www.vaestoliitto.fi/ammattilaiset/lasten-kehotunnekasvatus/verkkokurssit-ja-materiaalit/luennot-ja-videot/

Curiosity of sexuality: What is normal and what is worrying behaviour in young children

- Educators', social and health professionals' and parent's guide
- Kids are great. Their immediate and natural interest in the world around them, others and themselves is admirable. Children are also interested about sexuality.
- It is good for us adults to know the child's sexual development. Then we can best support it. Sexual development in children often also involves curious wonderings, questions, or behavior. Child sexual behavior can awaken questions in adults. Sometimes even worries.
- A free, online downloadable information sheet provides information about child's normal development and behavior. You will also find information on behavior for which you should seek advice from an expert.



Visits with the Minister of Education 14.2.2020 Li Andersson 22.2.2021 Jussi Saramo



Why CSE for young children?

- Knowing the childhood sexuality and sexual development helps
 - To understand and support the child
 - To identify normal and worrisome behavior
 - Children to talk openly
-
- A child is born valuing themselves, accepting their body, and trusting in intimacy
 - CSE attempts to maintain these characteristics, “the childhood innocence”
 - CSE aims at children’s safety



Laura Cacciatore, 4y
"A woman in love"

THANK YOU !

Raisa.cacciatore@vaestoliitto.fi

Resistance against SE

- Because of the misconceptions and fears,
- parents & professionals have difficulties promoting CSE and the sexual health of children.
- Discussion between adults is rare/impossible (but children like the topic!)
- Responding to children's needs, teaching safety skills, positive body esteem & empowering children are mostly missing.

Fighting the barriers: Constructing information for parents & professionals

- **Positivity, openness**
- **Opening myths, misbeliefs**
- **Child-centered, new and old words**
- **Child-centered drawings**
- **Web info for parents**
 - Own studies
 - Easy Reading
 - Difficult topics
 - What is normal
- **Picture books**
- **Posters, videos, lectures**
 - To increase knowledge
 - As a tool to start talking

BASED ON WHO'S
Standards for
Sexuality Education
in Europe



Parents are afraid of bad sexuality education, such as

- Shame and guilty around sexuality and own body
- Telling lies
- Judging and punishing attitude
- Being shocked
- Hypocritical attitude
- Narrow, unequal gender roles
- Distressful, frightening information
- Too early information
- Information that suggests too early actions



Parents want to protect childhood sexuality, which is

- Innocent intimacy
- Without shyness
- Physical and loving
- Positive and valuable
- Fine and beautiful
- Natural and normal
- Poo and pee stuff



- Affections between children
- Joyful, foolish
- Wondering, experiencing and realizing
- Pleasure and joy of oneself
- To be a child for as long as possible