



# Sexuality education in the Netherlands

Rutgers

For sexual and  
reproductive health  
and rights

# Dutch attitudes and approaches

The Netherlands is among the world leaders in sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The Dutch way is:

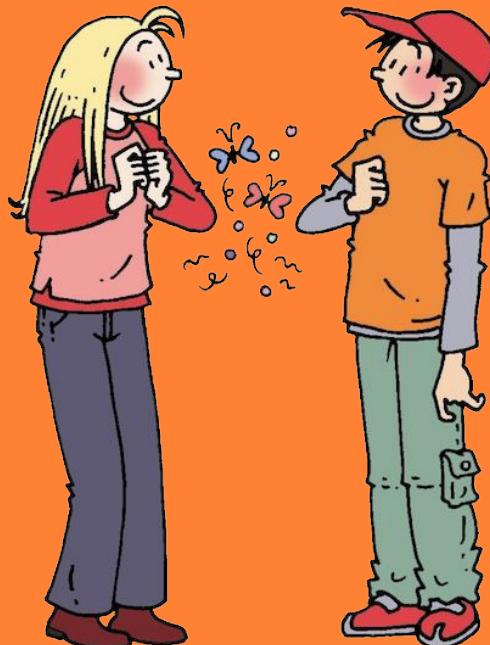
- to have positive attitudes and approaches towards sex and sexuality
- to start teaching about these topics at an early age

As a result, young people grow up better prepared for their sexual lives. They also have a better understanding of sexual and gender diversity, relationships and sexual health.

Dutch teens generally start having sex later than in other European countries or the United States.

Most 12 to 25-year-olds in the Netherlands say they had 'wanted and fun' first sexual experiences.

Data from the World Health Organization shows Dutch teens are among the top users of the contraceptive pill.



# Sexuality education in schools

Good education about sexuality and relationships makes these things much easier to talk about. It promotes sexual health and gives young people an understanding of diversity and sexual pleasure. It also helps to prevent problems such as sexually transmitted infections, HIV and sexually transgressive behaviour.

Young people are curious about sexuality and sexual development. They need, want and have a right to accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health, to help them make safe and healthy choices about sexuality and relationships based on consent.

In the Netherlands, this means clear, direct, attractively-designed and inclusive sexuality education in language young people can understand. And greater awareness about the more positive and pleasurable personal aspects of sexuality.

Our sexuality education stimulates the communications skills young people need to talk about personal choices, needs and boundaries within relationships. Also, it enables them to make healthy, well-informed personal choices in a challenging real and virtual world with many varying norms, values and ideas about sexuality and relationships.

# Primary school

ages 4 to 12

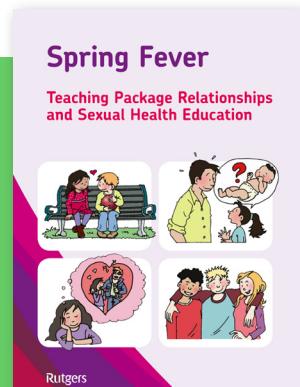
By law, all primary school pupils in the Netherlands must receive sexuality education. The system allows for flexibility, but they must learn some core principles – including sexual diversity and sexual assertiveness.

## Teaching method: Spring Fever

*Kriebels in je buik* (literally translated as ‘butterflies in your belly’) is a commonly-used teaching method in the Netherlands to support relationships and sexual health education in primary schools. The English version *Spring Fever* has been adopted in the UK by Warwickshire County Council.

The method enables children aged between 4 and 12 to develop their sexuality in a safe and healthy way by focusing on developing their knowledge, attitudes and skills. The lessons teach the sexual development of children in an age-appropriate way using fun methods.

More information and order: [rutgers.nl/spring-fever](http://rutgers.nl/spring-fever)



## Spring Fever week

Every year we organise the *Week van de Lentekriebels* (translated as Spring Fever Week) to promote lessons in sexuality education in primary schools using specific teaching materials. During this week, all children on participating schools (which is 43,2% of all primary schools) get at least one lesson each day in sexuality education. Parents are also involved in the project, by joining a parent meeting and hearing what is taught.

## Evaluation: a positive change

Every year we evaluate Spring Fever Week among 10 to 12-year-olds primary school children. Our studies show an increase in knowledge around sexuality, a more positive attitude towards homosexuality and greater assertiveness. Schools who delivered lessons in sexuality education notice the benefits. Teachers say children are more open about relationships and sex and find it easier to speak to their classmates if they demonstrate undesirable behaviour. There is less unease at school and fewer problems in the interaction between boys and girls.



# Secondary school

ages 12+

Sexuality education is also compulsory during the first years of secondary schools (middle school) in the Netherlands.

## Teaching method: Long Live Love

The *Lang Leve de Liefde* (translated as Long Live Love) curriculum for second year students at secondary and vocational schools is about love, relationships and sexuality. It is developed by Soa Aids Nederland and Rutgers. The teaching pack consists of six lessons, and additional teaching materials.

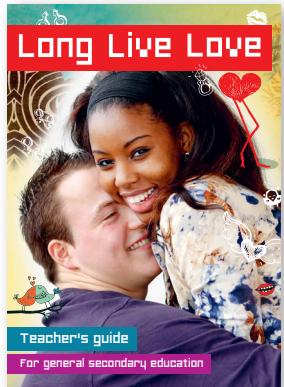


**More information:** [longlevedeliefde.nl/docenten/english](http://longlevedeliefde.nl/docenten/english)

The curriculum is also available in Dutch for 12 to 18-year-olds with learning disabilities, while a new special needs education version is being developed, specifically for young people with behavioural disorders.

## Week of Love

Every year, Rutgers and Soa Aids Nederland celebrates the *Week van de Liefde* (Week of Love), where we promote lessons in sexuality education in secondary schools using approved curriculum. During this week, all students on participating schools (5% every year, 13% some years) get at least one lesson each day in sexuality education.



# Parents

Parents and caregivers play an important role in the sexuality education of their children. Research shows children in the Netherlands prefer to get information about relationships and sexuality from their parents (school comes second). Parents should be included in sexuality education at school.

All children benefit from clear information about relationships and sexuality, which must be in line with their needs, development and context. Parents must always be told the reason for sexuality education in schools. That it is meant to provide children with basic information and the communications skills they need for safe and healthy development. That it is provided with respect for different values, not meaning to challenge those but to make children comfortable in a world where views on relations and sex may be opposing.

Around the world, parents often believe sexuality education promotes early sexual activity. The evidence doesn't back up this view. It is more often the case that comprehensive sexuality education makes young people delay their first sexual experiences, as they know what they need for a positive experience that matches their sexual health needs and values.

## **Brochure for parents: Sexual development and the upbringing of children**

In this brochure, the sexual development of children is described through illustrations and short text passages, which also makes it suitable for less literate parents. The brochure makes it clear why parents are important in their children's sexual development and offers tips for and examples of sexuality education.



**Download free or order:** [rutgers.nl/brochure-sexual-development-of-children](http://rutgers.nl/brochure-sexual-development-of-children)



# Young people

It is also important that young people have direct access to transparent and clear information about sexuality and relationships. The internet is an easy way for them to get answers to their questions. But as there is also a lot of misinformation on the internet, the existence of websites with accurate information has become more important.

## **Sense.info: website for young people about sexuality**

**Sense.info** is a website in both Dutch and English for young people (12 to 25-years-old) about sexuality, relationships, consent and sexual diversity. Young people will find answers to their questions about sexuality and topics like falling in love and relationships. Visitors can ask questions anonymously about relationships, sexual pleasure, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, contraception and sexual diversity, norms and values.



**Visit the website:** [sense.info/en](http://sense.info/en)

## **Can You Fix It?: a gaming platform**

The aim of **Can You Fix It?** is to reduce sexually transgressive behaviour among young people aged between 12 and 18. In the Dutch game, young people see short films about different sexual situations and can intervene to make sure things end well for the characters. They hear the thoughts of the character they choose, giving them a better understanding of different perspectives to a situation. As players receive instant feedback on their actions, they learn to recognise risky situations and develop skills to intervene.



**Visit the game:** [canyoufixit.nl](http://canyoufixit.nl)



# Still work to be done

People in the Netherlands have access to contraceptives, safe abortion and a government that supports sexual rights and sexuality education. But there is still much to be done around gender equality and stopping sexual violence. More than half the women in the Netherlands have experienced gender-based violence and young people are not satisfied with the sexuality education offered in schools. Since 2012, schools have been obliged by the national core education objectives to pay attention to sexuality, including sexual diversity. But schools are free to interpret this, so the extent of attention and the content of lessons vary from school to school and sometimes even from teacher to teacher.

## Sexuality education in schools must improve

There needs to be a structural focus on sexuality education, with sexual pleasure as the starting point. It is important for young people to learn to respect each other's wishes and boundaries and understand diversity. All young people should have access to the same important information and experience school as a safe place where they can be themselves. Especially in secondary schools, many students are still dissatisfied with sexuality education classes. They want diverse sexuality education for all ages, where teachers address the pleasurable, social and relational aspects of sex, not just during biology lessons in the third year.

## How are we going to change this?

Together with young people, teachers, educational organisations and centres of expertise, Rutgers has written a manifesto for better sexuality education, calling on the government to enable better sex education in schools. It highlights the importance of improving key objectives (for primary education and lower secondary education) and including relationships and sexuality in the attainment targets (for higher secondary education), as well as the use of effective teaching materials, better tools for the implementation and review of social safety at schools and the need for investment in the promotion of expertise and teacher training.

# About Rutgers

Rutgers has worked with young people on sexual and reproductive rights for more than 50 years. In 29 countries, we work on sexuality education and information, access to contraception and safe abortion and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

At Rutgers, we talk about sexuality openly, positively and practically. We want young people to be free to enjoy their sexuality and relationships while respecting the rights of others in a gender-inclusive society. Our mission is to connect, support and engage with young people and those around them to make this a reality.



For more information visit [rutgers.international](http://rutgers.international)



## Contact us

For questions about our work, sex education materials or collaboration, please contact us at [communicatie@rutgers.nl](mailto:communicatie@rutgers.nl)



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