

**Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum
Policy Document, Grades 1-8**



Family Life Education

Summary

2012

Introduction

The curriculum in Ontario Catholic schools is understood not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but necessarily in terms of values, attitudes and actions informed by reason and faith. The critical relationship between learning and believing, between knowledge and faith, is fundamental to understanding the mandate of our Catholic schools.

The family life education curriculum is based on the vision that the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values acquired in the program will benefit students throughout their lives and help them to thrive in an ever-changing world by enabling them to acquire a Christian vision of personhood, relationships, and sexuality and to develop the comprehension, capacity, and commitment needed to lead fully human lives.

In Ontario Catholic schools, the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values acquired in the family life education program complement those instilled by families, and reflect a distinctively Catholic view of human life, sexuality, marriage, and family. The focus of family life education is the developing person, its content is an extended exploration of what it means to be human, and its core message is hope: The God who created you, the Son who redeemed you, and the Holy Spirit who lives within you will not abandon you.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

Students

In Ontario Catholic schools, students continue to grow in the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values articulated by the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations*. The family life education curriculum not only fosters in each student a deeper understanding of what it means to be a human person, made in the image of God to live in relationship, but it also supports the ongoing development of each student who, upon graduation, is expected to be:

- *a discerning believer;*
- *an effective communicator;*
- *a reflective, creative and holistic thinker;*
- *a self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner;*
- *a collaborative contributor;*
- *a caring family member;*
- *a responsible citizen.*

In the early grades, the achievement of these expectations may seem very far off, but the journey toward Christian maturity begins at birth and continues long after formal education has been completed.

Parents

Parents are the primary educators of their children with respect to learning about values, appropriate behaviour, and ethnocultural, spiritual, and personal beliefs and traditions, and they act as significant role models for their children. It is therefore important for schools and parents to work together to ensure that home and school provide a mutually supportive framework for young people's education.

Catholic parents are aware of their great responsibility as their children's first and most important teachers. They know that it is through them that their children first learn of God's love of life. Within the family, the generous and unselfish love of parents provides children with lessons in life that cannot be learned anywhere else. Catholic schools, in partnership with the Bishops of Ontario, want to do all that they can to help parents fulfill their great responsibilities.

In Ontario Catholic schools, teachers regularly send home parent letters prior to beginning a new strand of the family life education program to inform parents of the upcoming material that their children will be learning. Parents may also become familiar with the family life education curriculum by accessing the Online Family Resource of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (www.acbo.on.ca/englishweb/fullyalive.htm). The Online Family Resource supports and encourages parents in their special role as the first teachers of their children. Here, parents are provided an overview of the curriculum as well as detailed descriptions of the content of each of the family life education strands, grades 1 to 8.

Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children and no place is this statement more true than in the areas that are introduced and explored in family life education. Parents, however, do not teach in the same way that classroom teachers do. Their teaching is informal rather than formal. It is a normal part of raising children.

Teachers

In Ontario Catholic schools, the family life education curriculum attempts to reflect both the learning needs of students and the special roles of parents and teachers in family life education. Classroom activities should be student-centred and attempt to draw upon each student's unique life experience. The teacher needs to ensure that there is a careful balance between inviting students to share their special perspective and respecting family privacy. Activities that involve the participation of the home should be a regular feature of the family life education program. These are intended to support and enhance communication within the family.

In Ontario Catholic schools, parent letters have been provided to educators to be sent home prior to the commencement of each strand in the family life education curriculum. These letters provide an overview of the content to be discussed in the particular strand and provide parents "Working together at home and at school" suggestions so that parents may support and extend opportunities for family life education. Parents and educators may access these letters on the ACBO website and, as such, the home, school and church provide a mutually supportive framework for young people's education.

Principals

In Ontario Catholic schools, principals can provide support for the successful implementation of the family life education curriculum by emphasizing the importance of this curriculum within the distinctive Catholic culture of the school. The principal, and those who are called to share leadership in Catholic schools, model the core concepts of the family life education curriculum by:

- creating a school environment that reflects the value and dignity of each individual;
- striving to fulfill the responsibilities of his or her role in a conscientious and wholehearted manner;
- cooperating with one another out of a spirit of mutual respect as sisters and brothers in Christ;
- recognizing the power of day-to-day personal encounter as a witness to faith;
- communicating the joy and hope of our Catholic faith.

(Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, *Fulfilling the Promise*, 1993)

In Ontario Catholic schools, the principal is responsible for ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate in family life education. It is the principal's responsibility to ensure that adequate time for family life education is included in the timetable. Family life education is intended to supplement the religious education curriculum. The principal will ensure that there will be at least four religious education classes for every one in family life education.

THE PROGRAM IN FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

The *overall expectations* describe in general terms the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that students are expected to demonstrate by the end of each grade.¹ There are three overall expectations for each strand in family life education.

The *specific expectations* describe the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in greater detail. The specific expectations are organized under numbered subheadings (sometimes referred to as “subgroups” or “suborganizers”), each of which indicates the overall expectation to which the group of specific expectations corresponds. The organization of expectations into groups is not meant to imply that the expectations in any one group are achieved independently.

Taken together, the overall and specific expectations represent the mandated curriculum.

The expectations for family life education are organized into five distinct but related strands – Created and Loved by God, Living in Relationship, Created Sexual: Male and Female, Growing in Commitment, and Living in the World.

The expectations for each strand are grouped under three subheadings, as follows:

Appreciating God’s Goodness focuses on the students’ awareness and appreciation that humans have been created in the image of a loving God.

Exploring Human Nature focuses on the students’ awareness and understanding of the ways in which humans are both unique and share a common human nature with each other.

Reflecting, Responding, and Analyzing focuses on the students’ awareness and application of the unique and shared aspects of human nature in personally relevant contexts.

Strand A – Created and Loved by God²

What does it mean to be human? To be human is to be part of God’s gift of creation. It means to love and be loved, to live in a family, to have friends, to be male or female, to make choices and

¹ While it is *expected* that students will demonstrate the knowledge and skills described by the overall expectations in family life education, it is *hoped* that students will demonstrate the attitudes and values associated with these expectations. These attitudes and values are part of faith and constitute the Catholic stance within the world. Because they depend on the interaction between God’s Spirit and the freedom of the individual student, they cannot be evaluated or used for assessment purposes.

² The strand descriptors in this section find their source in the Grade 1 to 8 *Fully Alive – Renewal Edition*, Pearson Canada Inc.

promises, to be happy and sad, to work, to succeed and to fail, to participate in society. The list is endless. All of these facets of human life are explored in the family life education curriculum. The first strand of the curriculum, Created and Loved by God, is the foundation of the curriculum and affirms the Christian belief that each person is made in the image of a loving God as the starting point in the search for answers about human existence.

Strand B – Living in Relationship

Human existence is lived out with others. We are so deeply social by nature and so profoundly dependent on each other that we absorb our closest relationships into our very identities. We describe ourselves as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, and friends. In the Living in Relationship strand, the exploration of the meaning of human existence continues with a focus on the significant relationships of family and friendship.

Strand C – Created Sexual: Male and Female

To be human is to be sexual. Sexuality, expressed in our maleness and femaleness, is an essential component of personhood. For this reason, education in sexuality is education in the whole person.

Students have learned that males and females are physically different and that these differences are related to our potential for motherhood and fatherhood. The students learn that new human life begins with conception, and they trace its development from a single cell created by the union of sperm and ovum to the birth of a baby.

Beyond this information about sexuality, students also bring with them their attitudes, which are shaped by the home, the school, and the wider society, in particular, by the media. Sexuality is deeply relational, and in homes where parents co-operate, appreciate the work each does for the family, and show their affection and respect for each other and for their children, positive attitudes about the complementarity of males and females are developed. The Catholic understanding of marriage and family, with its stress on commitment and generosity, is also explored.

But there are other influences in society that degrade sexuality, making us less than we are intended to be. The media often both reflect and create an understanding of sexuality that is less than human. Its relational dimensions appear casual, uncommitted, and frequently exploitive, and its procreational dimensions are either ignored or rejected. All students, to a greater or lesser extent, are exposed to and influenced by this distorted image of sexuality. The Created Sexual: Male and Female strand provides an opportunity for them to examine the messages they are receiving and for teachers to begin speaking about the importance of modesty and chastity.

Strand D – Growing in Commitment

To be truly human is to be committed. The first three strands of the family life curriculum have explored ideas about what it means to be a person. In this strand, and in the one that follows, the focus shifts slightly and another question appears – how can we be faithful to the Christian vocation of love? The Growing in Commitment strand is concerned with the integrity of our daily lives as persons who live in relationship with others.

Strand E – Living in the World

To be human is to be a member of society. The Living in the World strand continues to explore the meaning of human life but this time from the perspective of the responsibilities we have as members of small communities, brothers and sisters within the whole human family, and caretakers of the earth. The students are encouraged to recognize that they have a unique contribution to make to the world, one that cannot be made by anyone else.

CROSS-CURRICULAR AND INTEGRATED LEARNING

Educators in Ontario are guided by the mandate of the Ministry of Education to implement a common curriculum. Catholic educators are further charged to translate the ministry curriculum to more explicitly reflect a Catholic world view.

“A Catholic world view is a way of looking at the world through a Catholic Church lens. This world view is derived from Catholic Church teachings, scripture and Catholic Church traditions. These teachings, scripture and traditions form the basis of what is taught in Catholic schools.

The perspective of the Catholic Church permeates all of the content that teachers present in each subject area. Teachers make the students aware of the Church’s position during lessons, discussions, and other curriculum activities. The integration of our faith into all aspects of our curriculum, demonstrates the oneness of ourselves, our world and God’s vision for us.”

(Catholic Curriculum Cooperatives of Ontario, *Writing Catholic Curriculum*, 2006, p. 7)

The challenge for Catholic educators is to continually seek opportunities in which this vision of Catholic education, viewing human life as an integration of body, mind, and spirit, can be realized in the content and instruction in each subject area.

To limit curriculum to Ministry definitions such as “a plan for student learning which is implemented in schools” is to reduce curriculum to little more than society’s latest educational menu, solely pragmatic and utilitarian in nature, and void of any effective and convincing interpretation of existence... It (Catholic curriculum) is a distinctive worldview committed to the enterprise of educating the soul.

(Institute for Catholic Education, *Educating the Soul: Writing Curriculum for Catholic Secondary Schools* 1998, p. 12)

HEALTHY LIVING EXPECTATIONS AND FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

In Ontario Catholic schools, educators will find that a number of health expectations in the healthy living strand can be met through the family life education curriculum. Though connections may be made across all strands of the family life education curriculum, connections to the health curriculum are perhaps most evident in the Created Sexual: Male and Female strand. Key concepts within this strand include human growth and development, human

sexuality, and human fertility and reproduction. A sense of responsibility for lifelong health is understood in the context that human life is a gift from God entrusted to our care.

The health and physical education document (excerpted from the 1998 curriculum document) states:

Growth and development education is more than simply teaching young people about the anatomy and physiology of reproduction. For example, growth and development education focuses on an understanding of sexuality in its broadest context – sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, abstinence, body image, and gender roles. Acquiring information and skills and developing attitudes, beliefs, and values related to identity and relationships are lifelong processes.

(The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education, Interim Edition, 2010 (revised), p. 33)

In Ontario Catholic schools, the family life education curriculum also seeks to foster an understanding of sexuality in its broadest context. To be human is to be sexual. Sexuality, expressed in our maleness and femaleness, is an essential component of personhood. For this reason, education in sexuality is education in the whole person. Catholic educators will present human sexuality within the fullness of the family life education curriculum that teaches the value of persons, human relationships, commitment, and social responsibility. Thus, the family life education curriculum may be used to integrate learning with the healthy living expectations of the health and physical education curriculum while bringing students to an understanding of the ways they may lead healthy lives that are fully human.

Catholic educators who seek additional ways to integrate family life education with the ministry's health and physical education curriculum should consult *Curriculum Links Between The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education, Interim Edition, 2010 (revised)* and the *Fully Alive Program and Other Catholic Education Resources*, Institute for Catholic Education, 2010 (<http://iceont.ca/page16605050.aspx>).