

# Family Life Education 2023

## *Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents*

**Pope Francis says, “The Joy of the Family is the Joy of the Church!”<sup>i</sup>**

Welcome Parents and Guardians! We have news about a new Family Life Education curriculum for grades 1 – 8 in Catholic schools in Ontario.

### **Why is there a new Family Life Education curriculum for grades 1 to 8?**

All curriculum is reviewed and updated from time to time. The Family Life Education curriculum for grades 1 – 8 was last updated in 2012. Educators and theologians work together to make the updates and the final curriculum is approved by the Catholic Bishops of Ontario.

### **What does Family Life Education teach about families?**

Family Life Education focuses on families as a gift from God. It teaches that families are good for the people in the family, including the children, and good for the wider community. We recognize that, especially in elementary school, there is no family more important for the child than their own family. Students learn that God loves their family and that God is with their family helping and guiding them.

### **How is faith talked about in Family Life Education?**

Family Life Education is complementary to Religious Education in Catholic schools. This means that the lessons in Family Life Education work with the lessons in Religion to present an age-appropriate education about the Catholic faith inspired by Gospel values. Typically, there are four lessons in Religion and one lesson in Family Life each week.

In Family Life Education we learn about the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph – as an example of family life. Students learn that the family is called the ‘little’ church or the ‘domestic church’. Students learn about different cultural celebrations and how families celebrate the Catholic faith around the world. In families, we learn to live, love, and pray.

### **What does Family Life Education teach about relationships?**

Students learn about the many relationships in a family – like relationships with brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles – and also about friendships and marriage. They learn about the gift of children in marriage. They learn about healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries. They also learn about the importance of forgiveness and mercy in relationships. They learn about mental health and how God wants us to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit.

### **What is taught about marriage?**

Students learn that marriage is a very special relationship. They learn that marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church, which joins a man and a woman in a lifelong commitment of love. They learn that sexual activity is reserved for marriage. Students also learn the difference between a civil marriage and a sacramental marriage.



## **What does Family Life Education teach students about themselves and others?**

Students learn what it means to be created in God's image. All people share a special dignity because every person is made in God's image. Students learn about life as a gift; they learn about human development from conception to natural death. As they grow older, they learn about their changing bodies at puberty. They learn that all stages of life are beautiful.

Students also learn that everyone has a vocation – that is, a special purpose for their lives. They learn that their families, their school, and their parish all help them discover their gifts and their vocation.

## **What does Family Life Education teach about gender and sexuality?**

When students are younger, they learn about their bodies, about similarities and differences between males and females, about what is private, and what is important for care of their body.

As students get older, they learn about how they may begin to experience attraction to others. They are encouraged to value patience, modesty, and chastity that help young people respect their own bodies and those of others. They learn about privacy and intimacy and why sexual activity itself is reserved for marriage.

Students learn that, in a diverse world, there are many views about sexuality and gender. They are presented with the Catholic view of the human person and how our deepest identity is in Christ. They are reassured that God is with them as they develop.

## **What approach is used in teaching?**

The new curriculum emphasizes that children in elementary school are young and need gentle accompaniment in learning about Family Life. Learning in Family Life Education is gradual, with a particular focus on age-appropriate content.

## **Are schools still using *Fully Alive*?**

The new curriculum will begin to be used in September 2024. This gives teachers and everyone involved time to learn about the updates.

Until a new program can be published, Catholic schools will still use *Fully Alive*. The Institute for Catholic Education is creating resources to help teachers until a new program is ready.

The *Fully Alive* program includes letters for parents at the beginning of each unit. When a new program is ready, it will have the same kinds of letters so parents will know what topics will be taught in an upcoming unit.

## **Where can I find out more?**

The Institute for Catholic Education has many resources on its website for parents to learn more. Click here for further information: [www.iceont.ca](http://www.iceont.ca)

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<sup>i</sup> Pope Francis' document called *On Love in the Family* or, in Latin, *Amoris Laeinita*, 2016

