



# The Role of Parents in Introducing Sex Education to Early Childhood

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## Abstract

The spread of cases of sexual violence against children committed by those closest to them shows that they need to introduce early childhood sex education. Parents paid less attention to the introduction of sex education for children because they felt that sex education was taboo and did not need to be introduced to children from an early age. Most parents leave their children's education to school, this understanding makes parents pay less attention to the education that children receive, including sex education, even though parents are the closest and most trusted people to children. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection was carried out using interviews, observation, and documentation. The research subjects used 15 parents who worked and had children aged 3-6 years. The validity of the data used by data triangulation. The results showed that the implementation of sex education in early childhood should start from the closest person, parents provide introduction and learning using various methods to make the process of introducing sex education easier for children. Providing an understanding of children related to sex education is expected to protect children from the dangers of sexual violence.

## INTRODUCTION

Parents are the front line for their children. They are role models and examples for their children. Therefore, parents must deepen their scientific knowledge and references to continuously upgrade the knowledge they will pass on to their children (Coto et al., 2019). One area of knowledge that parents need to understand is sex education for children. In Indonesia, most parents still feel that sex education for early childhood is taboo; understanding of sex education is not considered appropriate for early childhood (Harahap et al., 2025; Mahmood et al., 2021). There is a lack of transparency regarding appropriate information about sex in

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society and a growing tendency to allow sex to be considered immoral and taboo when discussed openly. (Avin & Ira: 2015). Most parents struggle to answer their children's questions about sex. Parents tend to divert these difficulties into less rational topics, leading children to become increasingly curious about more complex questions (Hasibuan et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2019).

Cases of child sexual abuse perpetrated by those closest to them demonstrate the importance of understanding sex education for children. Children even obtain sexual information from peers or the internet (Cirik et al., 2023). It is not uncommon for electronic media such as TV, videos, films, cell phones, and other pornographic media to be accessible to all levels of society (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021). The Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK) reported 350 cases of child sexual abuse in 2019 (Harian News.detik: 2019). The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) reported 123 child victims of sexual abuse in educational institutions in 2019 (Harian Merdeka, 2019). Entering 2020, data on child sexual abuse has not decreased. Several cases of child sexual abuse continue to occur. One case of sexual abuse involved 12 elementary school students in Yogyakarta (Lokadata: 2020). These cases occur because children do not yet understand sexual activity and therefore do not realize they are victims of sexual abuse (Astle et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of sexual violence against children demonstrates that children have increasingly limited freedom of movement. A child's world should be filled with joy, guidance, and the instilling of good character, but the current situation presents a bleak picture and a portrait of fear as children become victims of sexual abuse. The importance of introducing sex education from an early age can help children understand themselves (Schneider & Hirsch, 2020).

## METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with parents of young children in Bandar Lampung. The sample consisted of 15 working parents with young children aged 3-6 years (Engkizar, Jaafar, et al., 2022). The purpose of this study was to determine parents' understanding of sex education for young children. This study was conducted over a period of approximately one month. Data collection used a snowball sampling technique using three methods: interviews, documentation, and observation (Engkizar, Jaafar, Masuwd, et al., 2025). The interview format used in this study was a standardized, open-ended interview, which was used to reduce the possibility of variation in questions when researchers collected information about sex education introduced to children aged 3-6 years (Engkizar, Kaputra, et al., 2022).

This study uses an instrument with 10 questions based on the theory of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2014) as a reference. The data sources used by researchers in this study are: a) primary data sources in the form of data and information obtained from direct interviews with research subjects or so-called key informants, b) secondary data sources, namely in the form of additional supporting data and information originating from various sources or literature, such as theories from textbooks, scientific publications, research results from previous studies (Engkizar, K, et al., 2023). The data analysis used is the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1984) in the form of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. The data validity checking technique used is the data validity developed by Moeloeng (2007) namely extended participation, persistent observation, and data triangulation (Engkizar et al., 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews with 15 working parents of young children aged 3-6 years old revealed that children are often introduced to intimate parts of the body using informal terms or real names (McKibbin & Humphreys, 2020; Wallis & Woodworth, 2020). The 15 parents were asked questions about how they explain sex education to their children. Results showed that 85% of parents still consider sex education taboo for young children and believe it's unnecessary to explain it to children of that age (Engkizar, Jaafar, Muslim, et al., 2025).

The perception that parents don't prioritize explanations regarding sex education is what leads to children being less educated about sex education. Parents rely on school for their children's education (Holman et al., 2023). Factors such as busy schedules and lack of time to interact with their children contribute to this low level of explanation regarding sex education (Guiney et al., 2024). Another fact shows that fathers or husbands tend to leave their children's development to the mother, as fathers tend to delegate childcare to the mother (Engkizar, Jaafar, et al., 2023).

Other results show that 15% of parents recognize the importance of sex education for their children (Simon et al., 2020). This ranges from actively asking teachers at school to explaining questions about sex to their children. Examples of questions outlined by a mother, identified as "DA," include:

Mommy, why is there a baby in her stomach?

Why is there a little brother?

Mrs. "DA" explained in general terms the question of why there was a baby in her stomach to her child. Initially, Mrs. "DA" was confused about how to explain the process. Mrs. "DA" explained that after her child's question arose, she had to increase her reading references because she felt many things were difficult to explain due to the child's limited understanding. She also consulted with the school and community (Haley et al., 2019; Kloess et al., 2019). Introducing sex education to children can also be done through various approaches such as conversations, storytelling, singing, watching educational videos, or drawing body parts together between parents and children. The use of intermediaries can make it easier for parents to explain sex education to children, so that children are indirectly introduced to sex education (Cooper & Pugh, 2020; Johnston & Sullivan, 2020).

Numerous previous studies support this research, such as studies explaining the importance of introducing sex education to children. Correct knowledge and understanding of sex will help children develop a sense of responsibility from an early age (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019; Katz, 2020). Sex education for early childhood must utilize various methods to achieve its goals. Nugraha and Wibisono (2016) explain that there is no harm in having dialogues about sex with boys and girls simultaneously, because after all, boys need to learn more about girls, and vice versa (Malvaso et al., 2020; Prikhidko & Kenny, 2021). Nugraha and Wibisono (2016) also state that sex education can be introduced from birth by asking permission from the child when undressing or changing their diaper. Also, make it a habit to change children's clothes in a closed room, even if they are still babies and cannot yet respond (Finkelhor et al., 2022; Razi et al., 2020). Through this simple habit, children will learn to respect their bodies and the bodies of others. Then, teach children how to care for and clean their genitals, for example after urinating or defecating. As toddlers, introduce the gender differences between boys and girls (Engkizar, Jaafar, Hamzah, et al., 2025).

Other research related to sex education for preschool-aged children was also presented by Handayani (2008), namely: 1) Ages 18 months to 3 years, at this age children begin to learn to recognize their body parts. When introducing them to children, remember that giving each body part the correct name is important. Replacing a body part with another name will make the child think there is something wrong with the original name of the body part (Briere et al., 2020; Papalia et al., 2021). Therefore, there is no need to replace the term penis with "bird" or overreact when the child points to his genitals, just as you would use the name for other body parts. Equally important in introducing sex at this age is explaining to children so they understand which body parts are allowed to be seen by others and which are not. 2) Ages 4 to 5 years, at this age children begin to show interest in basic sexuality such as their own intimate organs and the organs of the opposite sex. Children will begin to ask questions such as where babies are born. Children also want to know why male and female bodies are different. On some occasions, children may touch their genitals and show interest in the genitals of other friends. At this age, touching the genitals cannot be considered a sexual activity, but is still within the framework of normal interest (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; Steely & Ten Bensel, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The increasing number of cases of violence against children, particularly sexual violence, has become a unique phenomenon in today's modern society. Children are vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual violence due to their high level of dependency, while their ability to protect themselves is still limited. Understanding sex education at an early age is expected to enable children to obtain accurate information about sex. The use of increasingly accessible media can teach children about sex education, so children can obtain inaccurate information from the media. The role of parents is very strategic in introducing sex education to children from an early age. Parents are the closest people to children, so it is hoped that the flow of information can be conveyed accurately. By introducing sex education to children, it is hoped that children can protect them from the negative risks of sexual behavior and deviant behavior.

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