

PRESS STATEMENT:

Sex Education: Time to move forward

Yet again steps to constructively inform our youth via sexuality education have been blocked. The reaction of the Home Ministry to remove from bookshops, the publication "*Where did I come from*" is another example of why little progress has been made in Malaysia in this field.

Since the end of the last century, it has been recognised that Malaysian parents need to improve on how they communicate about this fundamental aspect of life with their children. Each time we hear about child sexual abuse, or the risk of HIV, or unwanted pregnancies, there are calls for teaching youngsters about the facts of life.

But each time it is attempted, some throw up their hands in horror and say it is against our culture and thwart the introduction of courses in school or -as has now happened – access to educational materials. Could it be they are just uncomfortable talking about the facts of life and sanction this view by calling it culture?

If we are not prepared to break with the old ways then we will see more youths vulnerable and isolated due to ignorance and our refusal to reach out to them. To progress we have to find ways of having discussions with our children.

As many parents don't know where to start, they look for books which they can read with their children. Experts in the field advise sharing, in an age appropriate way, from young. Children are less embarrassed before puberty and can grow up feeling comfortable to ask trusted adults about anything they are puzzled about. They also learn they can ask for help if anyone tries to have sex with them. Remember children under 5 have been sexually abused.

Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS) therefore calls on the Home Ministry to review its decision and let parents be the people who decide what books they will purchase for their children. In this day and age our children can switch on the internet and find pornographic sites showing all sorts of sexual activity yet our politicians are worried that they might see illustrations or drawings in a child-friendly book which has been in publication for 28 years.

If we are to protect our children we have to learn to stop thinking that any frank discussion on sex is obscene and find ways where both the child and parent feel comfortable explaining how babies are formed or where babies come from. Or do we want them to think they will only become pregnant if the stork delivers them a child!

SWWS

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Contact Points (For Press Only – not for printing):

- Margaret Bedus (President – email: sarswws@gmail.com) or
- Ann Teo (Vice-President – hp: 0168604998)