

Sex education strategy at the Schilleroper day care centre

(Please read carefully)

General information

Our day care centre is designed to be a place where every child feels at home. The children therefore can move around the building freely and avail of the activities and toys in the various rooms individually and without adults. Younger children or children who feel unsure are accompanied and supported in getting to know the world of the day care centre.

We believe that it is important for the development of gender identity that girls and boys are perceived as individuals and respected in their role behaviour. Sexual characteristics and an understanding of one's role are discussed in an age-appropriate way. The children are encouraged to examine their gender role and, if necessary, question it. Girls and boys participate equally in all activities and are equally encouraged to contribute to discussions, plans and decisions.

Child sexuality

In the first years of life, "the need for emotional security, tenderness and sensual proximity and enjoyment of one's own body are a priority". Babies and young children investigate their environment, touching and grabbing things, placing them in their mouths. They also get to know their bodies. They notice sensitive parts of the body and discover body orifices. They test how much strength they have and how loud they can scream.

"At preschool age, children become increasingly aware that they are boys or girls. They grapple with their gender role." Both boys and girls like to find out what they themselves and other children look like. Playing "doctors and nurses" or visiting the toilet together so that they can watch each other pee are all part of this stage of development. This type of exploration "helps to clarify questions and satisfy curiosity". Children do not want to experience adult sexuality, even if they mimic sexual intercourse, for example. They reenact what they may have heard or seen. "However, they are not prompted to do so by desire or feelings of lust, feelings that adults would have, but by playful curiosity." (Dorothea Hüssen, Wildwasser e.V., Ina-Maria Philipps, Institut für Sexualpädagogik Dortmund.)

Children are our priority

It goes without saying that one of our responsibilities, as described in the education recommendations for Hamburg, is to prioritise the reality of children's lives. One way in which we do this is by stating quite clearly that the day care centre is first and foremost a place for children. The rooms are open for the children and are not locked. The children should not have to depend on always having an adult sitting beside them. Of course, we are always nearby and regularly check that they are OK.

Another way in which we can fulfil this responsibility is by creating situations and opportunities for playing and learning. We do not interrupt the children when they are playing doctors and nurses but we look at books with them on the subject, discuss the rules of the game with them and suggest role plays. We do not forbid the children from getting undressed but we ensure that they are protected from prying eyes. The children have an opportunity to experience their bodies through activities using materials like finger paints, mud and "bean baths" (designed to enhance sensory perception). Children travel together on a voyage of discovery by playing doctors and nurses or even by playing house. Thus, in the same way that children experiment in other areas, they also experiment with their bodies, touching one another and perhaps kissing one another. They go on a journey of discovering the body. Having knowledge about their own physicality makes children strong and puts them in a position where they can say "no" if boundaries have been transgressed. They learn about their own needs, feelings and boundaries as well as those of others.

We ensure that every child's sense of modesty is respected. Shame develops between the ages of four and seven. When this happens, a child may not like to get undressed in front of others, may only want to go to the toilet by himself or herself and may not even like to be touched at all.

The rules for playing doctors and nurses are therefore very important (these rules apply in principle, our colleagues at “Zartbitter” have listed them):

- Each girl or boy decides themselves who they want to play doctors and nurses with.
- A “no” must be respected.
- Girls and boys stroke and examine one another only to the extent that it is pleasant for themselves and the other children.
- No boy or girl hurts another child.
- Nobody inserts anything into another child’s bottom, vagina, nose or ear.
- Bigger children, adolescents and adults have no place in a game of doctors and nurses.
- Getting help is not telling tales!

Sexual assaults among children

“Child sexuality is a positive, holistic life experience. Trying things out can also lead to transgressions of boundaries. Boundaries can be unintentionally transgressed and the issue can be resolved with an apology. However, sometimes situations arise in which girls and boys are coerced with threats, blackmail or violence. These are referred to as sexual assaults among children.” (Carmen Kerger-Ladleif, qualified educationalist, specialist counsellor and supervisor)

A sexual assault among children occurs when the abusing child coerces others to engage in sexual acts and the affected child is forced to acquiesce or is forced to participate. In such cases, an imbalance in power between the abusing child and the affected child is frequently exploited by exerting pressure through promises, compliments, threats or physical violence. (See also Ulli Freund, Dagmar Riedel-Breidenstein: Sexual assaults among children).

If we in the day care centre believe that a sexual assault has occurred, it is our responsibility as educators to intervene, we are obliged to do so under the statutory child protection mandate. Our focus is first of all on the affected child who receives our undivided attention. The child must be secure in the knowledge that adults will support him or her, and that he or she is not “at fault”. The child must be given space for its feelings and must be reassured that these feelings are justified. This attentive approach can help the child to get over the incident quickly.

The abusing child is then confronted with its behaviour. The child sees that its power ceases to be effective as soon as a responsible adult becomes involved and who uses his or her positive authority to help the affected child. When dealing with the abusing child in this way, the aim is to help the child to gain an insight into its wrongdoing. The experts’ view is that this is the best protection for the affected child and also the only way for the abusing child to desist from such behaviour of his or her own volition. (For more on this subject, see also Ulli Freund, Dagmar Riedel-Breidenstein, Strohhalm e.V.)

Of course, a meeting will be sought with the parents of both children as soon as possible. They are informed of what has happened and advised, or if necessary referred to a counselling service.

Including parents in our educational work

Parents have different parenting styles, values, attitudes and points of view. We would like to discuss the various concepts about child sexuality with parents, make them aware of their children’s needs and give them as much clarity and certainty as possible when dealing with child sexuality. It means that together we will be able to talk openly to the children about sexuality, facilitate their sexual development and at the same time ensure that there are boundaries when dealing with one another. We arrange parent evenings with experts in this area and if necessary we can provide contact details for counselling services. Parents are welcome in our day care centre. We invite you to visit us during the day so that you can see for yourselves what your child does during the day.

Sources/references

Freund, Ulli, Strohhalm e.V. “Kindliche Sexualität zwischen altersangemessenen Aktivitäten und Übergriffen” (Child sexuality from age-appropriate activities to assaults)

Hüssen Dorothea, Wildwasser e.V.

Kerger-Ladleif, Carmen, “Kinder beschützen” (Protecting children)

Philipps, Ina-Maria, Institut für Sexualpädagogik Dortmund

Riedel-Breidenstein, Dagmar und Freund, Ulli, Strohhalm e.V., “Sexuelle Übergriffe unter Kindern” (Sexual assaults among children)

