

Age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in Finland: Delivery, advocacy and building support

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Legislation in Finland

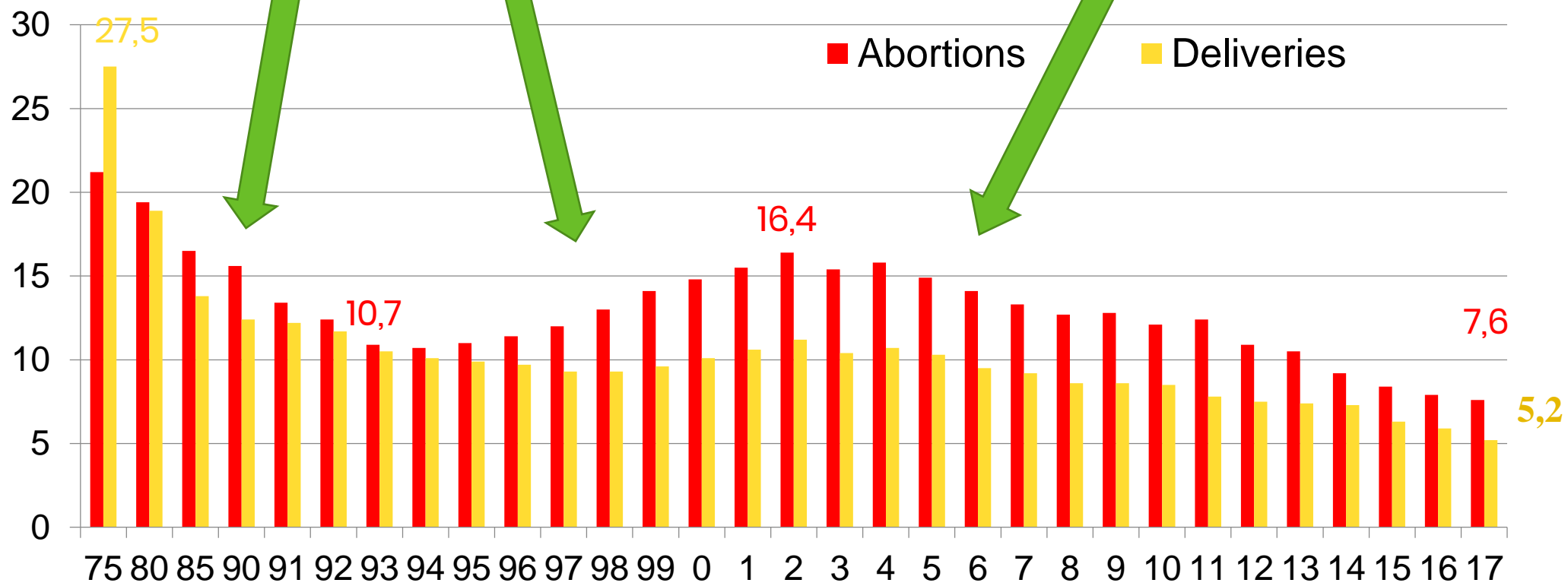
- The Abortion Law 1970, contraceptive counselling became obligatory
- The Public Health Law (1972) guaranteed free primary health care and preventive counselling for all
- Contraceptive counselling units were founded throughout the country.
- SE was integrated in school programs in 1970 to ensure practice of safer sex, which refers to avoiding pregnancy and STI, and to permit the development of a positive sexuality.
- School health developed, school health nurses participated in SE
- Close connection between education and services

Abortions and deliveries (per 1000) in 15-19 yr old girls in Finland 1975 - 2017

SE and health services developed

SE and health services were reduced

SE developed again

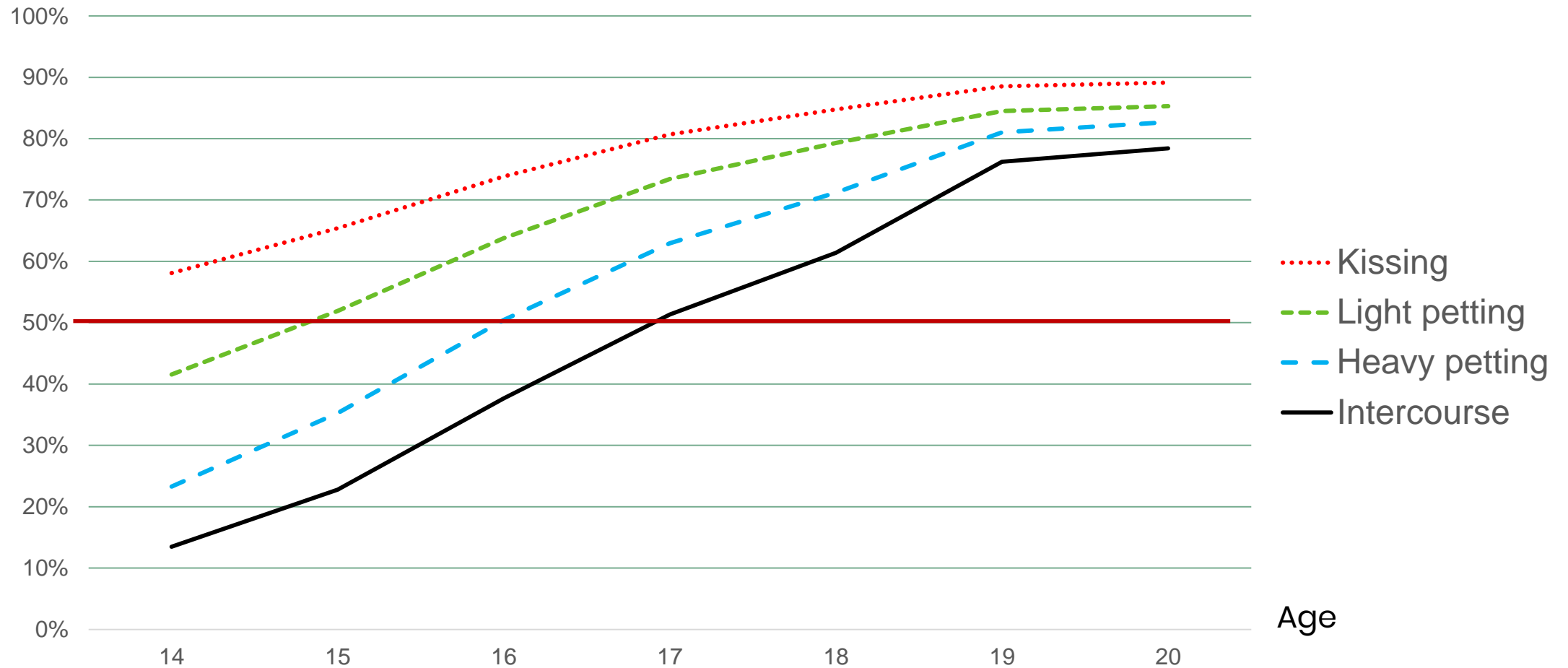


Based on: D Apter, Recent development and consequences of sexuality education in Finland. BZgA FORUM 2011, 2, 3-8
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Since 2003, SE has been a part of a larger topic: Health Education

- Planning and producing text books
- Training of teachers
- A normal topic among others (tests in Matriculation examination)
- Teachers interested, self-select
- Works well!

Sexual experiences of 14–20-year-olds in Finland





National Core Curricula

Legally binding norms, define the objectives and core contents

- **0-6-y-olds (Early education & Pre-primary education)**
 - New curriculum 2016-18
- **7-8-y-olds (Grades 1-2)**
 - Health Education integrated into Environmental and Natural subjects, 2014
 - *“Safety skills; emotional skills; understanding of body parts and lifespan; Familiarization with the basic requirements of life.”*



National Core Curricula

Legally binding norms, define the objectives and core contents

- **9–12–y–olds (Grades 3–6)**

- *“**Sexual** development and human reproduction are dealt with in accordance to the age level.”*

- **13–15–y–olds (Grades 7–9)**

- 114 lessons of Health Education as an independent subject over 3 years, of which about 20h SE.
- **Sexual health** core contents consist of human relations, sexuality, behavior, values and norms.

Lobbying for SE

Early Education curriculum



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

- Direct contact to the Agency to include SE to the curriculum

➔ **National** core curriculum includes elements of age-appropriate SE (all 8 topics of WHO's Standards'), however without the word 'sexuality'.

- Municipalities were obliged to construct local curricula.

➔ 16 municipalities have written SE into their **local** curriculums.

National curriculum for Early education 2016.

What there is?

- Children will be taught to respect and protect their own and others' bodies.
- Children are encouraged to ask questions, and children's questions are answered.
- Children must have the opportunity to explore the world with all their senses and with their entire body.
- The child has the right to receive information in many ways in order to deal with emotions and conflicts as well as to learn new things.
- The learning environments are designed and developed in such a way that they strengthen equality and gender equality. This allows for the infringement of traditional gender stereotypes.

Young Children's (0-6 years) SE in Finland



Situation analyse and needs assessment studies 2013-14

DAY-CARE PROFESSIONALS (nurses, preschool teachers) for 0-6-year olds
2013, N=507

5 background questions
91 multiple choice questions
13 open questions

PARENTS of 0-6-year-old children
2014, N=614

14 background questions
85 multiple choice questions
25 open questions

- If and what kind of expressions children show
- What children ask and how adults respond
- What are problems in supporting and protecting healthy (sexual) development

*BASED ON WHO'S
Standards for
Sexuality Education
in Europe*

What children say?



According to our study:

- SE occurs occasionally, usually unplanned.
- The WHO's Standards are not known by professionals nor by parents.
- Children often do not receive age-appropriate responses.



According to our study, adults' challenges for SE

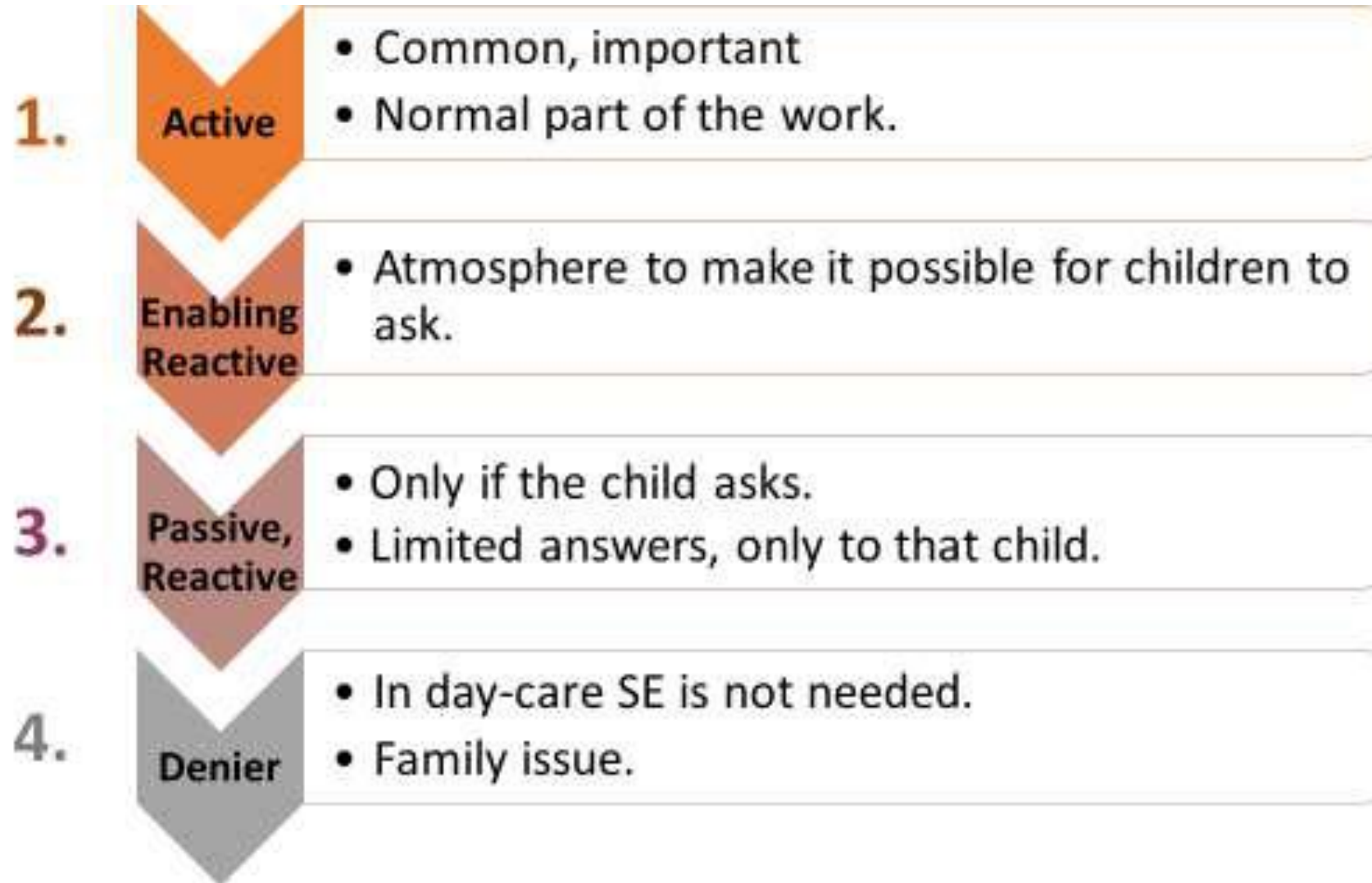
- Lack of information, models & materials
– even the words
- People provide education, but don't like the word “sexuality education”
- Professionals and parents don't talk about SE with each other
- Own SE history



According to our study:

- Adults' competencies and willingness to implement SE vary.
- Normal sexual behavior and curiosity may even be punished.
- Symptoms of health problems or abuse may remain ignored or judged. Not safe for children and families!

Day-care professionals' ways to respond to the need of SE



27 critical comments of the term 'sexuality'

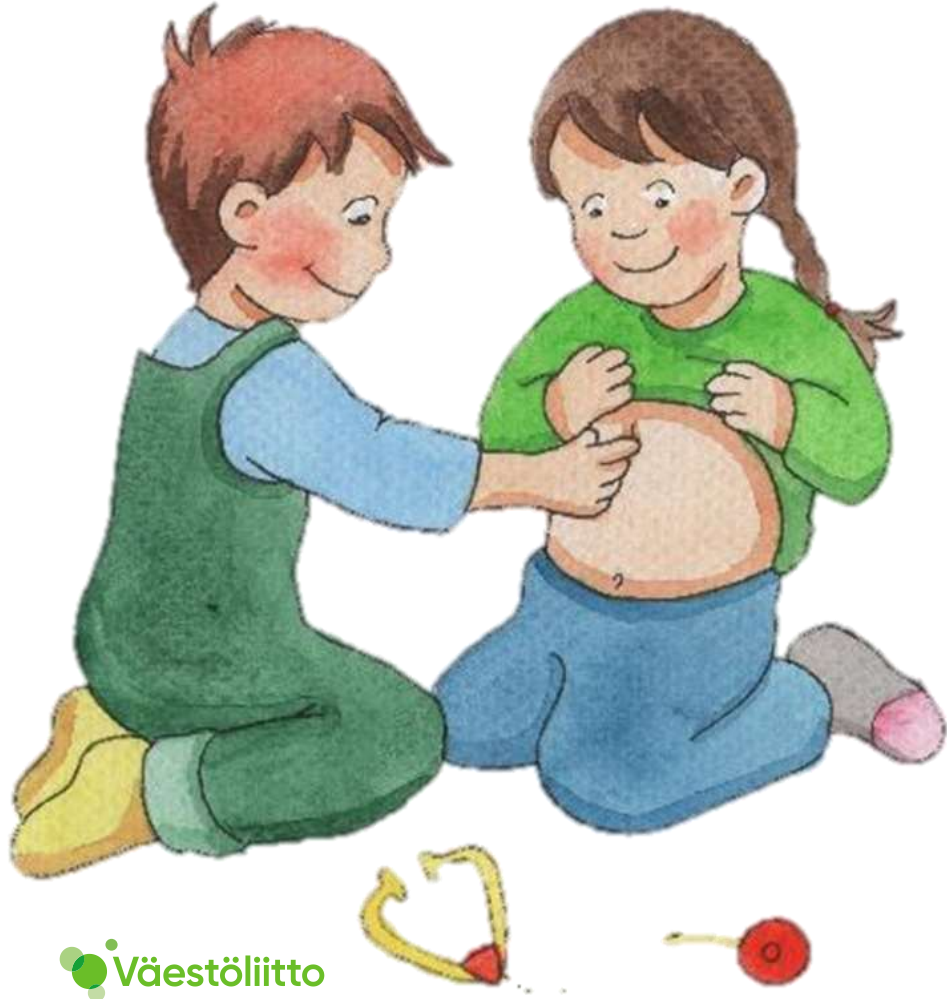
9 from professionals, 18 from parents

Comments in order of prevalence:

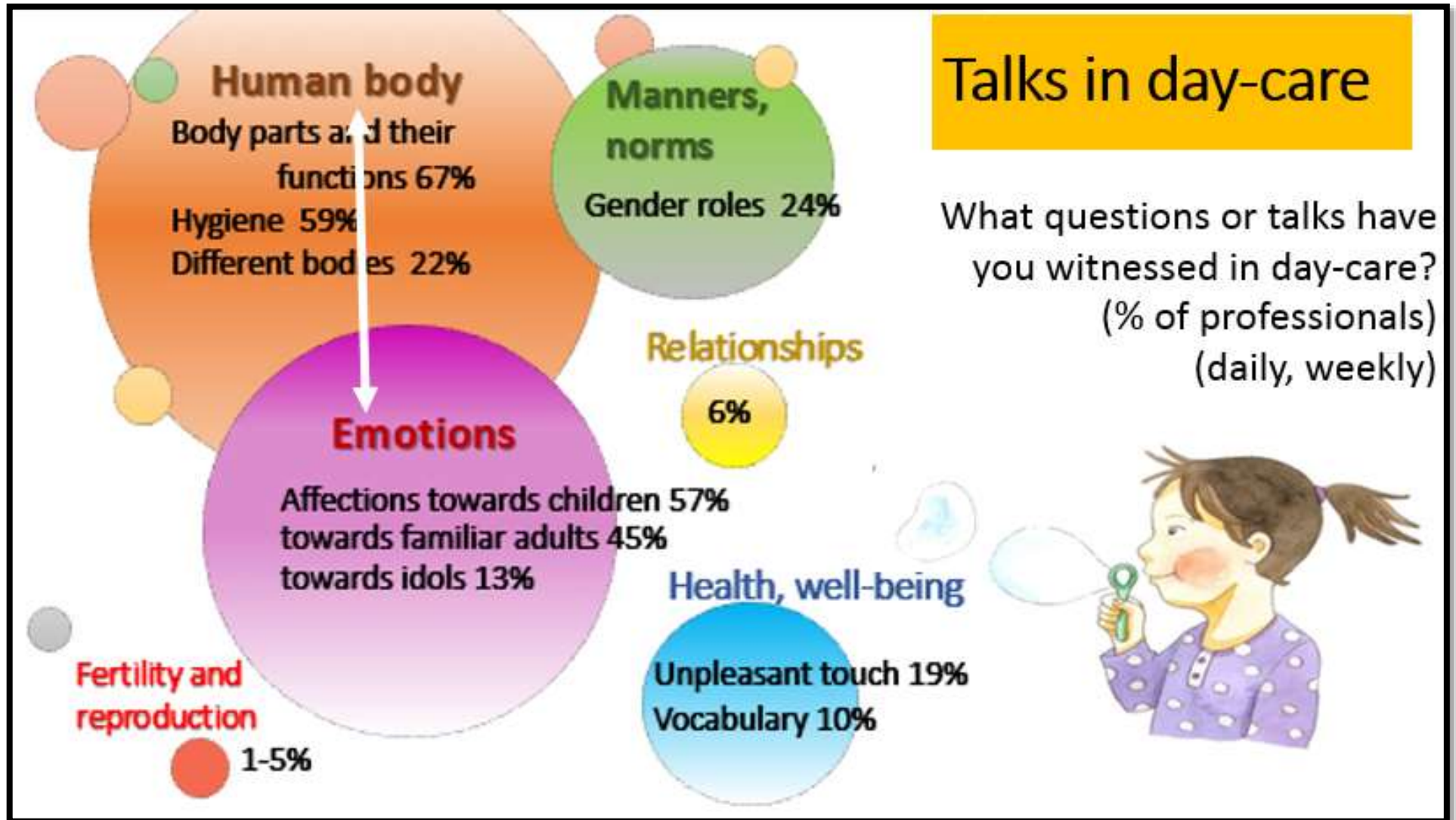
1. No 'sexual tone' in children's actions
2. Children's actions are natural, not 'sexual'
3. 'Sexuality' has adult connotations
4. 'Sexuality education' is too complicated as a term for children
5. Children already receive too much information of sexuality

Let them be kids!

- > Using less sex-loaded terms (as Health education, Relation education, Life-skills education)
- > "Body & Emotion education"



NEW TERM: "Body & Emotion Education"



Barriers towards implementation: ignorance, fears, misconceptions

- What is childhood sexuality?
- What is age-appropriate, developmentally adequate SE?
- Innocence is destroyed with any information.
- Information inspire children to do adult-sexual acts.
- SE predispose children to sexual abuse.
- Children should be answered only if they ask and the thing they ask.
- Sexuality is a private issue, not possible to teach about.
- Sexuality starts only in adolescence.

In 90 years no development?

“My child is too young.”

“My child is not interested in such things.”

“I don’t believe a child’s mind should be burdened with such things.”

“The type of neighborhood in which we live counteracts the need for consideration of this subject.”

“My child is too good. She would not listen to sex discussions.”

“I believe my own mother’s policy of silence was best.”

“Won’t information stimulate curiosity?”

“I give close supervision to my child. I know just where she is all the time.”

“Don’t you think sex knowledge just comes intuitively?”

“If the subject is once opened won’t the child ask too many questions?”

“Won’t information stimulate experimentation?”

“My husband thinks it is unnecessary to give this information.”

Resistance against SE

Because of the misconceptions and fears, parents & professionals have difficulties to promote sexual health of children.

Discussion is rare.

Responding to children's needs and empowering are missing.

Fighting the barriers: Constructing information for parents & professionals

- **Positivity, openness**
- **Opening myths, misbeliefs**
- **Child-centered, new word**
- **Drawings**
- **Web info for parents**
 - Own studies
 - Easy Reading
 - Three "hot potatoes"; What is normal
- **Series of picture books**
- **Posters**
 - To increase knowledge
 - As a tool to start talking



Posters provide knowledge, tool to discuss

English, Russian,
Estonian,
Swedish, German,
Sami x3, Arabian,
Finnish
Easy Reading

SAFETY SKILLS AND YOUR BODY
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDE

NAMES OF BODY PARTS

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Tell the child about all parts of the human body.
Teach the child the names of various body parts.
Help the child get familiar with the human body by various means: by looking at pictures, by drawing, by playing.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child knows that it is all right to talk about all body parts, with grown-ups and with other children.
The child is able to talk about his or her own body.
The child can use appropriate and acceptable words about body parts.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
All parts of the human body are equally good.
It is important that you appreciate your body and take care of your body.
All kinds of bodies are equally good.
It is a good thing that there are different kinds of bodies.

THE SWIMSUIT RULE

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Tell the child that the body parts under the swimsuit are private things. Only the child may decide about them.
Nobody may touch the body parts under the swimsuit or look at them or talk about them if the child does not want to.
Help the child get familiar with the Swimsuit Rule by various means: by looking at pictures, by drawing, by playing.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child knows which body parts are private and that they should not be shown to anyone if the child does not want to.
The child knows that looking and exposing things under a friend's swimsuit is all right only if both of you feel it's all right and comfortable.
The child knows the Swimsuit Rule and can say no if someone tries to break the rule.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
There are different body parts. Some of them are special, private, and valuable.
You may and you should protect them.
You don't let everyone see them, even if they are good and valuable.

THE TOUCH RULE

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Tell the child about various ways you can touch others.
You may only touch if your friend feels that it is nice and that it is all right.
Touching should not make you feel bad about your body or make you uncomfortable.
You know best yourself how you feel about being touched and if you want it. And so does everyone else.
A good touch is not a secret.
Good touching makes you feel comfortable and gives you a nice feeling.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child learns that before touching someone else it is best to ask if it is all right, for example before kissing or before touching private body parts.
The child knows that there are different kinds of touching and that a touch can give different feelings.
The child can recognize his or her own feelings.
The child is able to say no to unwanted touching.
The child accepts that another child says no to touching.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
The child can decide who may touch the child's body.
You must always respect the body of another person.
Everyone has the right to decide about one's own body and this right must always be respected.
Nobody may use bad words about another person's body as that may hurt and give bad feelings.

THE THREE-STEP RULE

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD KNOW
Help the child learn the Three-Step Rule.
If you get a bad feeling in some situations or when someone touches you:
1. Say NO.
2. Get away.
3. Go to a grown-up person you know and trust, and tell about it.

WHAT A CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO
The child knows what to do if the situation is scary or gives a bad feeling.
The child is able to recognize a bad touch or uneasy closeness.
The child is able to say no.
The child knows how to ask for help.

HOW A CHILD SHOULD FEEL ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY
The child has the right to self-defence.
Grown-ups help the child to follow the Three-Step Rule.
The child can and may ask grown-ups for help.
It is a good idea to tell a safe grown-up if a touch gave you a bad feeling.

vaestoliitto.fi/lapsijasexualisuus

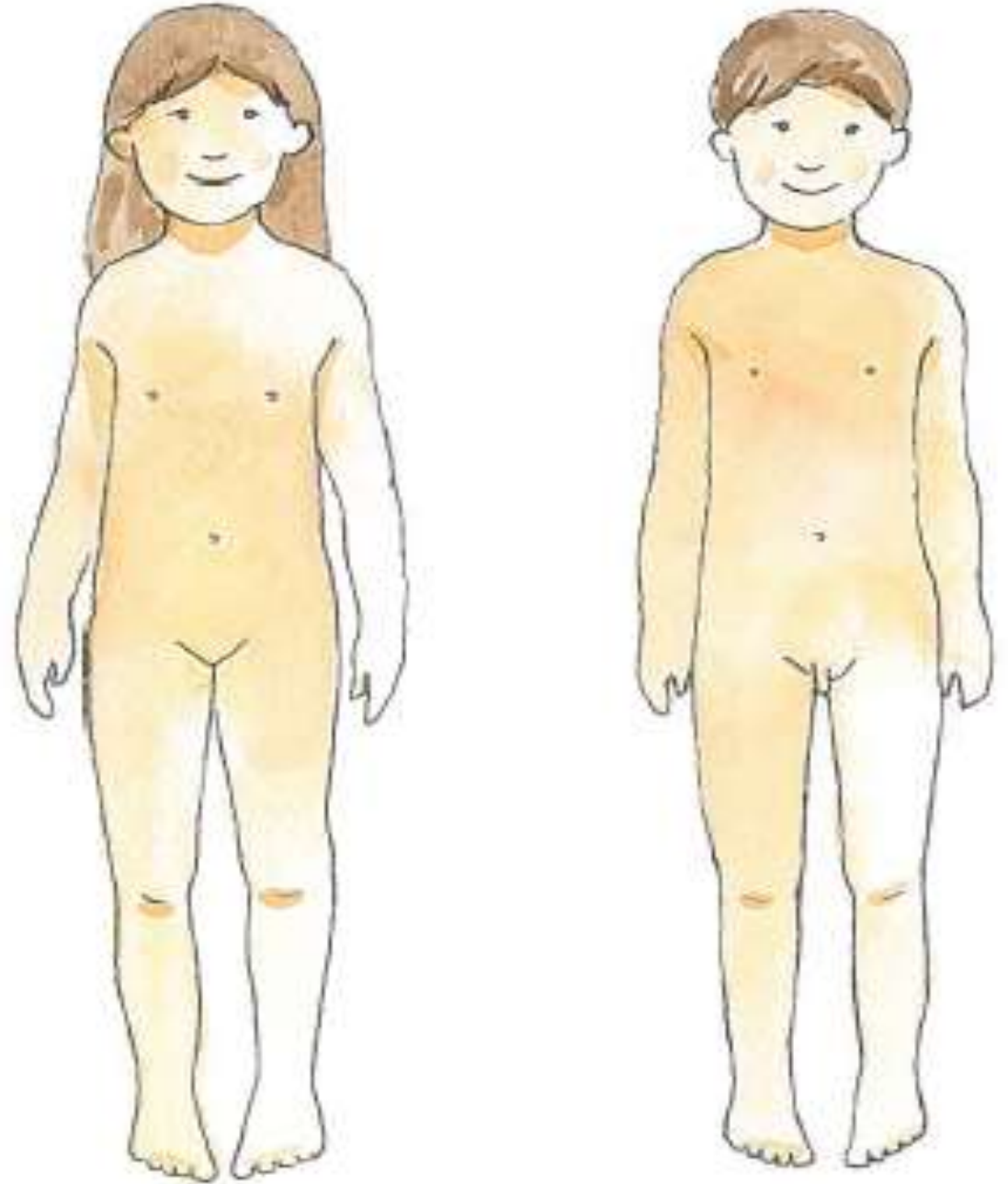
Väestöliitto PLAIN ENGLISH Emma & Elias

<https://www.hyvakysymys.fi/artikkeli/turvataidot-ja-lapsen-keho-juliste/>

BASED ON WHO'S
Standards for
Sexuality Education
in Europe

Knowledge

- **Names to all body parts**
- **Bodies are diverse**
- **Hygiene**



Skills

If someone touches or behaves towards you in an unpleasant way



- 1. Say NO!**
- 2. Go away!**
- 3. Tell an adult you trust!**



Positive attitude



- **My body is my own!**
- **Different kind of bodies are equal and must be respected**
- **All body parts are important and worthy**
- **Under the swimsuit are the most own and valuable places**

POSTER: Age-appropriate SE For 7-12 y-olds

- a) Development of the child. ->
- b) What the child may do or ask? ->
- c) What can you do to support and guide the child?

BASED ON WHO'S
Standards for
Sexuality Education
in Europe

Svedish, Finnish



HEI, MITÄ MINUSSA TAPAHTUU?
Lapsen seksuaaliterveys

12-14-vuotiaat

10-12-vuotiaat

7-9-vuotiaat

15.9.2019 **29**

Väestöliitto
Folkhälsan

What it is?



How to deal with?



Online DATABASE 'Child and sexuality'

Remember feelings



Choose own words



www.vaestoliitto.fi/lapsijaseksuaalisuus
www.hyvakysymys.fi/lapsijaseksuaalisuus

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Holistic SE in PICTURE BOOKS and a HANDBOOK

BASED ON WHO'S
Standards for
Education



Relationships

Relationships: Affection; Gender roles; Different families (adoption, one parent family); Playing with dolls (love, sex, getting married); Kiss tag (rights, touching, own will).

Body: Own body, names of body parts; Different bodies; Nudity; Hygiene; Poo and pee; "Playing doctor"; Masturbation.

Fertility, reproduction, pregnancy, delivery: Baby – closeness, emotions; Baby inside a mother's tummy; Different ways to born; "When I was a baby" **Raisa Cacciatore /Finland**



Body



Reproduction



- **Handbook for professionals "Body and play"**
- **Content based on our surveys**
- **Written by 17 experts**
- **Research / Knowledge / Skills**

Training Days for Professionals:

- Participatory training for professionals dealing with 0 – 6 year olds in daycare and health services
- Lectures (video taped to web page)
- "Learning cafe" group works
- Follow up contacts with Supervised chat's and questionnaire



Raisa Cacciatore /Finland

Published in WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA:

Training matters: A framework for core competencies of sexuality educators. Training of sexuality educators: examples of good practice across the European region. Case Finland. 2017

Training Day for Professionals 2015



BASED ON WHO'S
Standards for
Sexuality Education
in Europe

Our experience: a powerful implementation requires

- **official instructions**
- **involvement of the daycare principals**
- **involvement of parents**

What we do in future?



Two projects:

- “Body, Emotions, Safety”
- ”Body and play”

“Body, Emotions, Safety” 2019–2021

- **Funded by Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA) / The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (lottery funds)**
- **to create practical tools for kindergartens together with Early education teachers, Parents and 3–6–y–olds.**



FUNDING CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AND
HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

“Body, Emotions, Safety” 2019–2021

- **Training model = Open online course including all produced materials,, three languages**
- **Evaluation of the programme & implementation & outcome/impact, focusing on wellbeing (developing self-esteem, security skills, social skills and a positive body image).**
- **Daycare units in Southern Finland**

“Body, Emotions, Safety” Results:

- A model of Childhood SE for 3–6–y–olds
- Materials, videos etc.
- A tool to Child impact assessment
- An assessed participatory method for children, parents, teachers
- An assessed Parents’ evening model
- All materials free online, (easy reading Finnish, Swedish, Sami)



“Body, Emotions, Safety” A model for Childhood SE

Focusing on the development of the child’s

- **Self-esteem**
- **Safety skills**
- **Social skills**
- **Positive body-image**



”Body and play” 2019-2020

- **Funded by: Finnish National Agency of Education**
- **Teachers of 3-8-y-olds (n=40-50)**



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HANDBOOK for kindergarten teachers ”Body and play” 2016

Aim

- 1. To enhance the teachers skills to provide SE for young children**
 - 2. To enhance the work against harassment (including sexual harassment), violence and bullying.**
- > Children's emotional and social skills improve and respectful interactions are supported.**

Training takes place in North-Finland (Lapland)

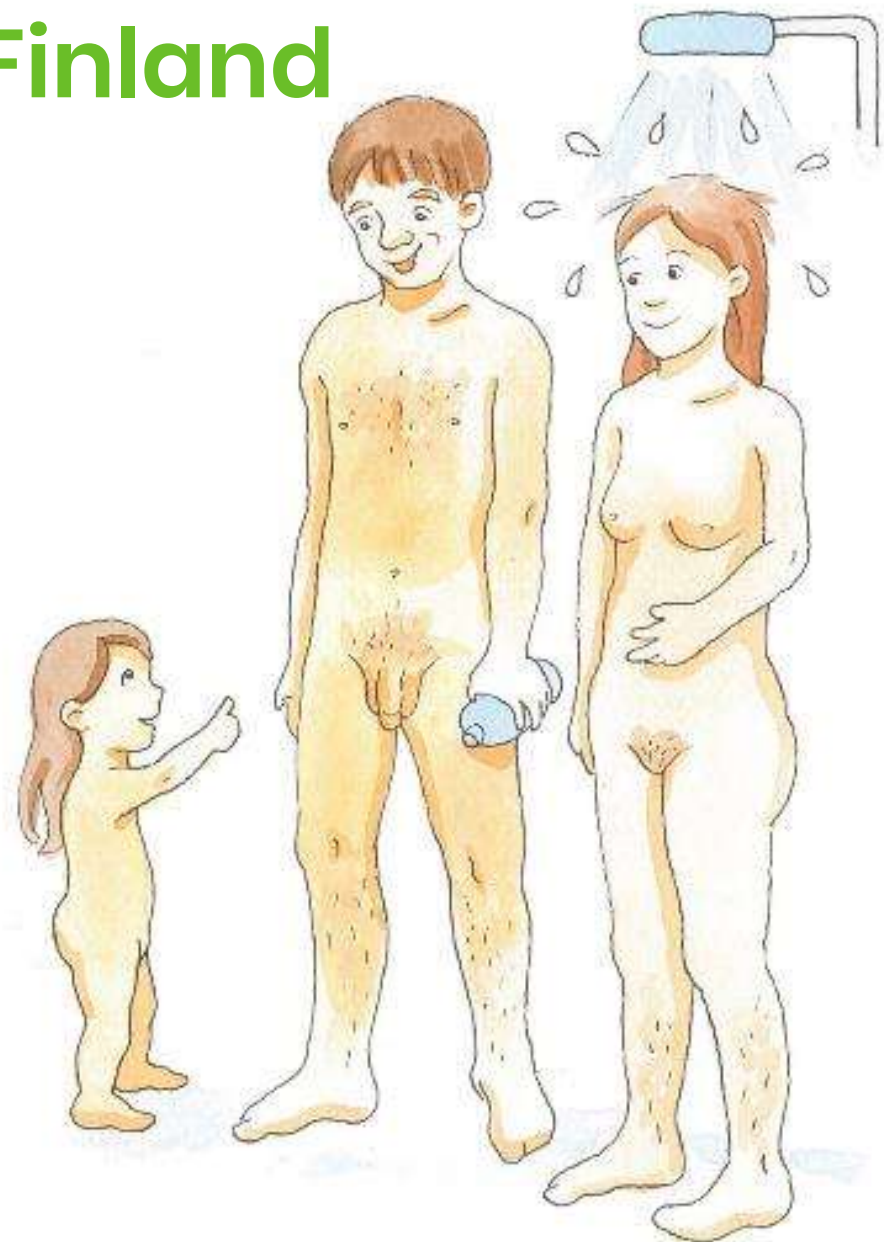
Results:

- **10 ECTS credits online education:
4 modules**
- **6 local contact days (incl.
Introduction & parents evening)
(at both cities)**
- **All materials free online**



General situation in Finland

- Good feedback, apart from some single negative comments
- Atmosphere in Finland around SE open-minded (Sauna!)
- Väestöliitto is a trusted organization
- Before any delivering / advocacy we studied the needs, obstacles, fears, & risks -> constructed positive, empathic responses.



The Lutheran Church Advisory Board for Family affairs unit

- Direct contact with the Lutheran Church (Lutheran 70%, Orthodox 1.1%, others 1.7%, none 27.4%)
- Church is supportive to SE
- Confessional schools teach SE





THANK YOU !

Laura Cacciatore, 4

"A woman in love"

Raisa Cacciatore /Finland