



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Āwhina Hunga Whara

MATES & DATES

Focus Groups – A summary

INTRODUCTION

During February and March 2014, ACC held focus groups and individual interviews with parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, youth workers, public health nurses and students.

The purpose was to find out what young people currently know about having healthy relationships, and how to prevent sexual and dating violence; what their experiences have been with learning about similar subjects at school; where else young people are getting information about relationships; and what all groups of people spoken to would like to see being taught on these subjects in schools.

The feedback helped inform the development of Mates & Dates, ACC's new secondary school-based healthy relationships programme piloted in eight schools in Term 3 of 2014.

This is a summary of the focus groups held and feedback received.

WHO WE SPOKE TO

Focus groups and individual interviews were held in Auckland, Wellington, Otaki, Paraparaumu, Lower Hutt, Cromwell, Alexandra and Wanaka.

The focus groups and interviews were run by the Mates & Dates content developers, project manager and ACC's lead marketing advisor. A list of participant numbers and demographics is included as Appendix 1.

The focus groups and interviews were not intended to be a nationally representative sample but we went to some effort to make sure we heard diverse views from people with a range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

We also selected schools, areas and organisations from different parts of the country. Focus groups and interviews were arranged utilising existing networks and word-of-mouth.

Focus groups were held with:

- young people still in secondary school or who had recently left, including a specific focus group with Rainbow Youth¹
- parents of students in schools decile 4-10

¹Rainbow Youth is an Auckland-based organisation that provides support, information, advocacy and education for queer and transgender young people and their families.

- health and PE teachers (schools in decile 4-10)
- a group of young people formed to support survivors in schools affected by the 'Roast Busters'² incidents
- people supporting young people (guidance counsellors, youth workers, public health nurses)

Participants were asked to complete a consent form and were provided with information about the sensitivity of the subjects to be discussed. They were advised they could stop or remove themselves from the discussion at any time. Information on how to seek help after sexual assault or abuse was provided to all participants.

Young people were asked to tell us what they were currently learning about relationships and how it was working; what they wanted to learn about and how. We also tested some of the proposed programme exercises to ensure what we were developing was appropriate for a range of young people.

Parents were asked what they wanted to see their sons and daughters learning about relationships; what they thought was influencing young people's views of relationships; and how they would like to see a programme teaching skills in healthy relationships run.

Teachers, guidance counsellors, youth workers and public health nurses were asked where young people currently get information about relationships; and what they thought young people should be learning about. Teachers were also asked about their views on how a programme should fit within the curriculum.

²The Roast Busters are a group of Auckland men, aged 17 and 18, who bragged about their alleged sexual activities online, including with drunk underage girls, and were subsequently investigated by the New Zealand Police.

“They tried to make it jokey but then it was too awkward to ask questions.”

THEMES

Young people

- Many young people don't know what consent is, let alone how to seek or give it.
- They aren't currently getting the information they need in the form they want it in.
- They want practical skills, not just information, and they want more focus on the emotional side of relationships not just the physical.
- Many described the sex education they're currently getting as a negative learning experience.
- They want a range of factual resources, and to know how to get help or more information.
- They'd prefer a healthy relationships programme not be taught by their teachers but by trained professionals they can relate to.
- They want to see healthy relationships skills taught at every level - years 9-13 - but also want age-appropriate content.

Parents

- Parents worry their kids are getting (mis)information about intimate relationships from social media, the internet and pornography.
- They also worry about the impacts of alcohol.
- They sometimes find it hard to talk to young people about relationships, sex and sexual and dating violence, and want guidance and advice.
- They want the programme taught by experts, but also want the school to be involved and to be asked for their consent.
- They want information for both themselves and their kids on how to access more information or help.

“I tried to talk to the guidance counsellor about bullying (about sexuality) and got told it was best to keep quiet.”

Teachers, guidance counsellors, youth workers and public health nurses

- Teachers and other professionals are also concerned that young people are getting information from unreliable sources like the internet.
- They have mixed views on the health curriculum but want a programme with curriculum links.
- There are lots of gaps in what is being taught and to whom.
- They want a whole school approach - involving the whole community so they can reinforce the same messages.
- They too worry about the influence of alcohol.
- They worry about how social media has changed the way young people interact with each other.
- They also worry about distorted perceptions of reality around sex and pornography.
- They want the programme taught by people other than teachers.
- They want resources for parents and kids to access after the programme has ended.

THE DETAIL

Please note the following contains verbatim comments, some of which include swear words and strong language.

Young people

Young people told us they aren't currently getting the information they need in the form they want in. They want more information and to learn practical skills, and they want that learning to happen in different ways.

Many of the young people we spoke to didn't know what consent was, let alone how to seek or give it. They want that information, and they want to understand concepts like moral versus ethical versus legal consent.

The focus of existing relationship education is on the physical - very little information is provided on the emotional aspects. And that doesn't meet their needs - they want information on how to have healthy platonic friendships.

‘It's too focused on the physical.’

“‘Don't pressure people into sex' is as far as it goes.”

“What's consent?”

“It's limited to bullying”

“Teach young kids about friendship – often things get misinterpreted eg: boy/girl friendships.”

What they are largely taught, when they have access to information at all, are the mechanics and biology of sex, and many describe it as a negative learning experience – either because of the format or the content.

“I was at a religious school and it was a shaming experience.”

“Information was too mainstream.”

“I don’t think we should learn sex positions in year 9.”

“There is a double standard – boys are taught safe sex; girls are taught no sex.”

“My teacher admitted to being a virgin.”

“The teacher checked out by putting on a movie which we didn’t watch.”

“They tried to make it jokey but then it was too awkward to ask questions.”

“The teacher was embarrassed which made us uncomfortable.”

“There was a question box and someone asked ‘how do you wank?’ and the teacher demonstrated.”

“They showed an old creepy video.”

Young people want to learn broader information and skills on how to have healthy relationships of all kinds – not just dating relationships – and they want more facts on what sexual and dating violence is and how to prevent it.

The young people we spoke to want straightforward information they can use, delivered in a friendly style.

“Matter of fact delivery.”

“Make sure it’s not vague about sexuality.”

“They try to tame it down but kids need real info.”

“I want to discuss social constructs.”

“I want to hear about what the other gender says about this.”

“Knowing about our rights.”

“Why things are okay/not okay/ and what could be changed.”

“Learn to be more open-minded within relationships.”

“Information about healthy platonic relationships.”

“Life skills, how to identify what is good.”

“It’s important to talk about pornography.”

“Communication – things are often misinterpreted.”

Because they aren’t getting the information they want and need at school, young people are seeking that knowledge elsewhere.

“I look online but what’s there is hypersexual.”

“We look at movies.”

“I got most of the info from my older sisters.”

Young people think they aren’t the only ones who need to learn more.

“In English class (talking about a book) a kid said ‘that bitch deserved to get raped’ and he only got pulled up for saying ‘bitch’.”

“Teachers let students say obscene things like ‘I totally raped that test’.”

“They tell you not to say ‘fuck’ but let ‘faggot’ slide.”

“I tried to talk to the guidance counsellor about bullying (about sexuality) and got told it was best to keep quiet.”

Many young people talked about how awkward or unpleasant their learning experiences have been in the past. For that reason, they are keen on such programmes being taught by experts/trained professionals – people they can relate to – rather than teachers.

They want those professionals to create an environment in which all participants, regardless of gender, feel comfortable about taking part in the exercises and asking questions. They suggested splitting into gender groups for some exercises.

“It’s awkward to go from sex ed to maths with the same teacher.”

"Someone we can relate to."

"An external person would take the pressure off the teacher."

"(It would be) less awkward if peer-led."

How and when the programme is delivered is also important to them. They are clear that how to have healthy relationships and how to keep themselves safe needs to be taught at every level years 9-13. Some want to start talking about sex from year 9, and some don't, but they all want the content to be age appropriate.

"It has to be more than one or two sessions."

"It's important to be every year. By 15 they will have already had bad relationships."

"Keep it going past year 10."

"Contracts should have confidentiality in place."

"I don't want to have to write this stuff down."

"Working in groups would be hard if you didn't know them."

"I'd want to be split by gender for some things... but consider trans."

"Monitor group discussions – kids will say inappropriate things and make others uncomfortable."

Young people want resources and places to go for more information or help once they've had time to think things through, or when they can ask questions privately.

"Private question time with the person who delivered the programme."

"Email might make it easier and we can think things through."

"Links to other support services in the area – not just teachers and the school counsellor."

"Info in the guidance counsellor's office."

"A list of websites or places to get help."

"If using a question box, get someone to vet the questions first."

"Phone helplines can be daunting."

"Not an app, a website would be more useful."

"ACC gives it credibility and makes it more likely parents will give consent."

"Facebook could be useful."

Finally, they think having a multi-year healthy relationships programme like Mates & Dates is a good idea.

"It's like immunisation. If some kids don't get immunised, it fucks it up for the rest of us."

"It's good for kids to know the programme is government-funded."

"ACC gives it credibility and makes it more likely parents will give consent."

Parents

Parents told us they are concerned their kids are getting their information about intimate relationships from social media, the internet and pornography.

Many are particularly worried about social media and its impact on young people and how they are having relationships.

"They are getting a lot of information via social media."

"Kids have a new 'normal' driven by social media and media, expectations set by things that are not real life."

"They just think things are about enjoyment and don't think about what it means." (about videos on Facebook of kids fighting in the playground.)

"They don't think things through – like Snapchat – what's out there can't be taken back."

"Losing their virginity is a huge issue, it's almost glorified but not in a good way."

"Kids share so much – there are no privacy levels."

"Boys send dick pix to girls, and girls save them to use as blackmail."

"They get themselves in a tangle by flippant comments on Facebook or text that they have to deal with in the real world."

"Relationships don't seem to be a big thing. It's more about hooking up."

"They are driven by the need to be accepted. For boys, it's a lot of (one-)upmanship, keeping cool, often trying to keep up."

Parents are also worried about access to online materials/information, especially pornography, and many talked about the negative impacts of sexting,

the posting of explicit materials online and on social media.

“They need to understand the law about digital things and porn.”

“There’s a lot of misinformation around about sexual practices, technicalities, passed around students.”

“Things that aren’t porn like ads and videos are being deliberately made to look like porn.”

“Kids are desensitised.”

“Their expectations are set by things that are not real life.”

“Give them context. Show them porn is not real, that people don’t actually have sex like that.”

“Porn has become normal – these images are normalised.”

Parents are also worried about the influence of alcohol on young people’s relationships. Many raised concerns about alcohol and what can happen when young people drink too much.

“Alcohol is a big influence. Saying no is too low a barrier when alcohol is involved. They should understand that they have to get a yes.”

They told us they can find it hard to talk to their kids, and other young people, about relationships, sex and preventing sexual and dating violence. They want guidance and resources to help them have those conversations.

“A brochure would be good – how to talk to kids, what to look for, what the jargon is, so we don’t kill the conversation by using the wrong words.”

“Give us scenarios that we can use to talk to our kids for example what to say when watching Game of Thrones with them and there’s an explicit scene – prompts of things to say like ‘is that situation right?’”

“What to do if my son discloses. I wouldn’t know how to react. And first reactions are often not the best”

“If I tried to talk to her about this, she’d just go ‘Muuuuuuuum’ and run off.”

“Tools to use so we don’t say the wrong thing.”

Parents are clear about what they want a school-based healthy relationships programme to cover.

Consent

“Consent.”

“That it’s okay to say no. Kids fear people finding out that they said no – you need to turn this into a positive thing, Now you keep quiet if you didn’t do it, whereas previously you kept quiet if you did.”

“If someone is saying no, how to hear this and take it on-board.”

Communication

“How to talk about what they want without feeling weird.”

“How to debate about double standards.”

“How to communicate – communication as a foundation for what consent means.”

“Needs to teach them how to be verbally assertive, how to fight back using their minds.”

“Kids need to learn how to press ‘pause’ in the heat of the moment....how to ask for five minutes to think about if they really want it to go any further.”

How to get help

“Teach them how to recognise when a friend is in an unhealthy relationship and how to say something, what to say.”

“They need to know how to look out for each other in risky situations because they will take risks.”

“They need practical things to do at parties if they see something going on that is not right, know when to ring their parents or another adult.”

“Skills on what to do if a friend tells them something happened to them, how to help their friend tell someone who can help.”

Being sexual

“Understand that it’s okay to say no. I think they think everyone is doing it and also that some of them are saying they are when they aren’t.”

“That what’s appropriate for you isn’t necessarily appropriate for others.”

“That you can just be friends.”

“That not everyone is actually doing it.”

“What to do if they have feelings for the same gender.”

“I think it’s hard when in the heat of the moment to stop. Some sentences they can use to stop things.”

Media, social media and /pornography

“The difference between fantasy and reality.”

“Stereotypes of teenagers (that they see on TV and in movies). Show them they are not real.”

“I’d want them to know how to respond if they see something wrong on Facebook, know when they should tell someone.”

“That what they see on videos is not real, that type of relationship/sexuality is not real – it’s become normalised.”

Consequences

“It’s real – show them it could be them or their sister.”

“Consequences – they don’t think things through like sending Snapchats.”

“Consequences – emotional, physical, risks, legal, personal.”

“That it’s not okay to share all the gory details on Facebook. They need to know the consequences of sharing so much.”

“It would be good to have a discussion on the impacts of not telling someone – on them and on others – the person could do the same thing to someone else.”

Emotional intelligence

“Self-esteem for girls so they don’t feel like they have to have relationships. I’m too good for this.”

“I’d like them to be empowered to have healthy relationships before they embark on the sexual relationships.”

“For the boys, being able to stand up to mates without pressure, make choices and own their actions. How to grow into good men and debunk some of the stereotypes about what a man means, treating a woman well. They don’t know how to be good men, to be good friends.”

“Teach them about feelings, how to deal with negative emotions.”

“Respect and empathy.”

“Boundaries are the main thing they should learn – how to establish their own and empower them to tell others what they are, and also to understand that everyone’s boundaries are different.”

“Respect for other people.”

Keeping themselves safe

“How to identify when they are being manipulated.”

“Skills on how to get yourself out of an unsafe situation, different scenarios.”

“Kids need confidence to not participate in things they think are wrong.”

“Should have a clear definition of what sexual violence is. I don’t think they understand what it is. They think it’s just a man raping a woman.”

Parents have strong views on how a programme should be taught – ideally by experts.

“It would be good if it wasn’t teachers.”

“Take out the link to someone they have to see every day.”

"It needs to be in their language. Teachers can't talk in that way."

"Understand the culture of the school – like if someone has been raped."

"Focus on the positive, not just on fear and bad things."

“Make sure discussions don't make them feel blamed or shamed. ”

"It should be about values not violence."

"My kids hate powerpoint. You have to cater to the kids – visual, graphic, interactive."

"A way to opt out without drawing attention to herself (if triggered)."

"Is there an option for single sex schools to partner with another school and have co-ed classes?"

"Most teachers are not good at this. I would want my son to say it was awesome."

Parents want their kid's school to be involved in any healthy relationships programme, to be asked for their consent, and for schools to be the ones who communicate with them about the programme.

"If I had questions, I would call the Dean."

"I'd want to know what my kid was going to get out of it."

"It would be good if parents could go to an information session."

"I'd expect to hear from the school in the usual way."

"I'd want an overview of the programme."

"(I'd want to know) who has endorsed it."

"I'd want to know the qualifications of the people teaching it."

"There should be information that would make religious parents comfortable, so they don't just automatically opt out."

Parents asked for resources for both themselves and their kids on how to access more information or help if they need it.

They were particularly keen for their kids to receive guidance about who they could talk to confidentially, how to have such conversations and what to do if that person doesn't help them – where to go next.

For parents who were aware their son or daughter was a survivor of sexual abuse, the need for information to prepare them to take part in the programme was highlighted.

For themselves

"If something came up, I'd like to talk to the person who ran the course. If it was just a question, I'd call the school."

"A list of all the places to go for help."

"Information to parents on identifying triggers, unsafe situations."

"A website or 0800 number where I can get more information."

“We need to know how to talk about it and keep talking about it. It makes a huge difference to talk about things, that it's not taboo. ”

“Right now I would have no idea where to go for help.. ”

For their kids

"There should be support available for kids that need it."

"What to do if you tell someone and they don't help you."

"Person who delivered it should be available for follow up."

“Make sure there is a hand-out at the end of the sessions for those who zone out, are embarrassed or just don't take it in – something else that they might look at. ”

"Let the kids know that they can talk to other adults, not just their parents. Remind them about their aunty or mum's friend. It's important that they don't think they are alone."

"There should be hand-out for kids – it might be three weeks later that they want the information or want to talk."

"That there would be support available for the kids afterwards if they needed it."

Some other final thoughts from parents included:

"I just wish it could be compulsory."

"Some parents are just not interested – how are you going to get to them?"

“Let’s teach our kids to be safe. Not teach our daughters they need to keep themselves safe.”

“I’m happy my (ACC) levies are being used for this. It’s really needed.”

Teachers, guidance counsellors, youth workers and public health nurses

Teachers and other professionals echoed much of what parents said – that young people are getting their information about relationships from unreliable sources like the internet.

“They get information from the internet or their friends.”

“Everything they see is so sexualised. Pop stars do such raunchy things.”

“The peers are the people who affect who they end up going with – who they hang out with. The influences of that group is massive.”

“Relationship modeling is often not positive.”

“Our kids are seeing a lot of dysfunctional relationships.”

“There are such big gaps that kids are learning about sex from porn.”

“Parents need information about technology. They think an iPod touch is just for playing music (and don’t realise kids can use it to get online).”

Like parents, they talked about the influence of peers on young people and how social media has changed the way young people are interacting with each other.

“Everything is shared in an instant before they even think about it.”

“Kids are chatting to strangers online because they are lonely and sad.”

“Information spreads so quickly, and the person being talked about really struggles to cope.”

“Kids will go straight to the internet to get information and assurance.”

Like parents, they expressed concern about the influence and impact of alcohol use amongst young people. They were clear that it impaired decision-making, and that there was very little education around alcohol targeted to young people. They wanted to see discussion of the role of alcohol, and what can happen in an environment when people are drunk.

They also shared parents’ concerns about the distorted perceptions of reality around sex and pornography

“Alcohol and synthetic drugs are definitely impairing decision-making.”

“With alcohol, choice goes out the window; that’s where the violence comes in.”

“There are different levels of porn, a lot of music videos are pornographic. Pop stars are doing such raunchy things. We need to teach them to question ‘is this right?’”

“We have to show them that those people in porn are humans, not just things.”

“(They need to learn) why it makes it hard to make responsible decisions, what to do in this situation.”

“As a society, we have lost our filters. Suddenly everything is alright, anything goes.”

“There is so much risk-taking when alcohol is involved, Dutch courage – parents supplying the alcohol don’t understand the risks and consequences.”

“Girls are pressuring boys much more now and drinking just as much.”

“They think ‘this is what I should be doing’ even though sometimes it makes them uncomfortable, they think it’s normal. Boys and girls feel pressured to do the things they see (on porn) and it’s never talked about so they never know it’s real or normal.”

Teachers had mixed views on the health curriculum, but impressed upon us the importance of ensuring any new healthy relationships programme had curriculum links.

“The health curriculum is not strong enough to give them the skills they need.”

“There is no consistency in the health curriculum. Schools should not be able to opt out.”

“Not sure health has moved with the times – especially with social media and that’s where these kids live.”

“One-off sessions don’t work.”

“If you don’t have curriculum alignment schools will find it hard to fit in.”

“The timetable won’t allow additional classes in senior school.”

“Assessments would help.”

Like parents, teachers want to see the programme taught by trained professionals.

“It’s hard to move from condoms to maths.”

Teachers and other professionals had similar views to the parents we spoke to on the need to fill gaps in young people’s knowledge and understanding about how to have healthy relationships.

“The majority do not cope particularly well in relationships. They either barrel into being an old married couple or they hook-up, not sure how that goes, and it’s quite scary.”

“Hooking up is going on in our junior school.”

“Young people struggle to identify who they are. This influences and makes it hard to have healthy relationships. Self-esteem and belonging are missing and they seek it from relationships.”

“Kids know how they want to be treated – they know what they want but they don’t know how to behave.”

“Sometimes I don’t feel like they have the permission to say no – in any situations before and leading up to relationships.”

“Their perception of different sexual acts is distorted.”

“There is challenge about access to safe information for kids who want to come out, so they resort to the internet and are hugely vulnerable.”

“Build solid foundations of values, so their sensor will go off if they see something not okay.”

“Communication skills – they can say things without a filter on Facebook or text but can’t have a conversation about it.”

“How to make sense of the sexualised images they see.”

They too were clear about what they’d like to see students taught in a healthy relationships programme.

“These kids don’t have dinner with their family around the table every night, they don’t know how to get to know someone, how to have a conversation with people.”

“How to end a relationship. Breakdown of relationships seems to trigger the worst fall-out and increase suicide risk.”

“Boys get left out of hearing that not everyone is doing it.”

“To report things. There is a view here that ‘I was pissed and can’t really remember, so it doesn’t really matter’.”

“How to identify a safe adult to talk to.”

“That it’s okay not to have a relationship. Girls ask me if it’s normal not to want a boyfriend?”

Teachers and other professionals spoken to in rural areas pointed out some of the differences and unique challenges that geographical isolation can bring including greater reliance on the internet for information – especially for LGBTIQ kids – and less segregation between age groups.

“Kids in Central like to party. There are more private parties, not so much going to pubs etc due to being isolated.”

“In a smaller town, everyone knows what is happening.”

“Older kids that don’t go away to uni end up socialising with younger kids, often they cement the friendship by buying them alcohol.”

“Young people of all ages are socialising together, going to the same parties. There are 14-year-olds going to parties with 18 and 19 year olds. Age groups are not as segregated as in cities.”

“Lack of public transport and isolation exposes them to risk – at a party, if their ride falls through, they can either stay or take a ride they don’t feel safe about, or walk home alone. None of these are safe. They can’t leave or leave unsafely.”

“Parents leave kids alone at 14 and think their rule of ‘if you’re pissed, don’t go past the front gate’ is enough.”

“The nearest place for them to go out is Queenstown, which is a totally different environment. Our slightly naïve young people go and encounter much more worldly travellers.”

Like parents, they wanted to make sure we let young people know how to get help if they need it – for either themselves or their friends.

“How to identify a safe person to talk to – an aunty, teacher, your friend’s parents. Show them who they can talk to if they can’t talk to their parents. ”

They acknowledged there are lots of gaps in what is being taught and to whom. And they were keen on the whole school approach – involving the whole community so they can reinforce the same messages.

“We should all be asking about relationships when we see them so they know it’s normal to talk about and perpetrators know that people are talking and they won’t get away with it.”

“A night class for everyone involved. Give topics to talk about on the way home, next time you see each other.”

“A column in the newsletter or newspaper that is the same as the kids are learning.”

“Show the kids the people in the community who can help them by inviting them into the class so they can see them.”

“We need access to consistent materials. It’s important that the teacher, counsellor and nurse are saying the same thing.”

“This shouldn’t rely on schools choosing to do it, like in response to a bad event or because they have a difficult year. They should have to do it. ”

APPENDIX 1

Wellington parents focus group

Seven parents of five girls and six boys aged between 13 and 18 attending Wellington College, Wellington Girls' College and Queen Margaret College, all decile 10.

Kapiti coast parents focus group

Five parents of boys and girls aged between 14 - 19 who attend Kapiti College and Paraparaumu College, both decile 8.

Teacher interviews

PE/Health Teacher and Year 9 Dean, urban decile 7 school.

Focus group of guidance counsellors and youth public health nurses

Seven participants covering five high schools in the Central Otago region, ranging from decile 4 - 10.

Focus group of parents, guidance counsellor, health teacher, youth workers

12 participants associated with Mt Aspiring College in Wanaka, a decile 10 school.

Focus group of pastoral care/teachers group

Eight participants associated with Otaki College, a decile 4 school.

Focus group of parents

Seven participants - all Mums - of students at Otaki College, a decile 4 school.

Dunedin parents' focus group

Eight parents of boys and girls aged between 13 and 18, not all in Dunedin, and one foster parent.

Interview of parent with daughter in year 12 at Onslow College, Wellington, a decile 10 school.

Interview of parent with 16-year-old son at Onslow College, Wellington, a decile 10 school.

Focus group of 17-19 year-old members of group set up to support survivors in schools affected by Roast Busters. There were eight participants.

Focus group at Rainbow Youth

20 participants aged between 16 and 18. Rainbow Youth is an Auckland-based organisation that provides support, information, advocacy and education for queer and transgender young people and their families.

Focus group at VIBE youth health centre

10 participants aged between 16 and 20. VIBE offers free health and support services to young people in the Hutt Valley. Local Hutt Valley schools range from decile 2 to 10.