

play. To accommodate these needs, the hour-long sessions alternate periods of seated listening or conversation and movement.

Kindergartners and first graders are intuitive, imaginative, and curious about everything! This includes their bodies, their relationships, and their faith. They like stories and want to know how things work. Many, but not all, are beginning to learn to read and write. This curriculum recognizes that not all children in this age group have those abilities. In most of the class and HomeLink activities, children are encouraged to read and write with the support of their parents and caregivers. Children in this age range enjoy playing with words and naming things, so Our Whole Lives includes many songs, name games, and stories.

Five- to seven-year-old children are usually social and enjoy being with other children. They are learning the give and take of friendship, and they understand that others have a sense of self. As they learn to reflect on their own viewpoints, they realize that others have viewpoints too.

These children interact frequently with adults outside the family circle—with neighbors, teachers, bus drivers, babysitters, and healthcare providers, in religious communities, community organizations, and elsewhere. They are ready for these relationships, which help them know they are cared for and valued by people in addition to their parents and caregivers.

Children develop a sense of their sexuality and basic values about sexuality during the first five years of life. During ages five to seven, they gain an increasing awareness of the concepts of gender, race, and ability. They also learn that other children live in families that may be similar to or different from their own. They are curious about their bodies, other bodies, and bodily functions. They have questions about pregnancy and childbirth, wondering, “How did I get here? Where did I come from?” They may mimic or experiment with sexual language. It is typical and healthy for them to be curious about their own and others’ naked bodies and genitals, and they often explore their own genitals through masturbation.

Children this age can recognize stereotypes and other expressions of racism and ableism in their immediate world, so we encourage facilitators to remember their responsibility to actively teach anti-bias. Here are some strategies to do that:

In all activities, highlight that physical diversity among people is desirable, and that all colors, shades, and shapes of people are beautiful. Talk about differences in a tone of delight and interest. Create a vocabulary that encourages children to look at themselves and others and admire their sameness and their uniqueness. Just as we do not wait until a child asks questions about how to read before planning how to provide a range of literacy learning opportunities, anti-bias education is the teacher’s responsibility, not the child’s, to initiate. Caution—never single out one specific child when you do activities about the physical characteristics linked to racial identity. Every activity should be about all of the children, as everyone has a racial identity. Moreover, doing activities about all children reinforces that differences and similarities can be found within each racial identity group as well as across groups. (Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, 2nd ed. [Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009]. Used with permission.)

Parents, caregivers, and teachers of five- to seven-year-olds can testify to the many questions these children have about themselves and the world around them. The ways parents, caregivers, and others respond to these questions sends messages to children about themselves as sexual beings. These responses can provide the foundation for promoting and fostering healthy attitudes and behaviors in sexuality education. Because of the conflicting views of sexuality that children encounter in our culture, it is essential that parents provide their religious perspective on sexuality from an early age. Children are exposed earlier and earlier to images of sexuality within our society. They need a framework with which to understand these issues within the context of the faith and values central to the people of the United Church of Christ. For more information about the UCC and Our Whole Lives, please visit ucc.org/owl.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Our Whole Lives is guided by the following two principles: parents and caregivers have primary responsibility for their children's sexuality education, and sexuality education happens through open and honest communication among adults and their children. A church offering an Our Whole Lives program has a responsibility to provide resources that help these adults talk about sexuality with their children. In this way, parents and caregivers and the faith community become partners. For simplicity, this program refers to all loving adult caregivers, such as grandparents, aunts, and foster parents, as parents and caregivers. Any loving adult caregiver can be an effective sexuality educator.

Because we do not live in a non-racist and non-ableist society, adults in a child's life are also responsible for initiating anti-bias education regarding race and ability. Adults are often silent about these issues at a time when children are trying to make sense of their experiences, and this silence leads to miseducation about sexuality, race, ability, and the intersections among them. The following articles can help lift the silence and start conversations:

- "How to Talk to Your Kid About Disabilities," by Caroline Bologna, huffpost.com
- "Teaching Young Children about Race: A Guide for Parents and Teachers," by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards. teachingforchange.org/teaching-about-race

Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K–1 begins with a Program Information Meeting to introduce the curriculum and answer parents' and caregivers' initial questions. Those who enroll their children in the program then attend a mandatory Parent/Caregiver Orientation while their children are in a simultaneous orientation, followed by a combined parent/caregiver and child orientation. In this way, adults and their children begin the program together and adults gain a deeper understanding of the program content. HomeLinks, which are provided to parents and caregivers after each workshop, are also helpful in supporting conversations at home.

Each parent's and caregiver's commitment to and participation in this program enhances their child's knowledge, skills, and values related to sexuality education. As a facilitator, you will become a trusted partner in the process.