

Sex education for babies and toddlers?

by Marita Brune-Koch

Kindergartens offer rooms for children to masturbate undisturbed. Such reports keep appearing in the press. The kindergartens did not come up with such methods of early sexualisation themselves. Rather, they are based on the WHO guidelines "Standards for Health Education in Europe". According to these, parents and teachers should be encouraged to explore sexuality with children "from birth".

Even toddlers should be taught about the "pleasure" of masturbation and encouraged to "explore their gender identity". It is postulated that children have sexual feelings and needs from birth and that it is the responsibility of adults to teach children to recognise and act on them. How can these ideas be looked at from a scientific perspective.

Dr. PhD Markus Hoffmann, a developmental psychologist who has been working in the fields of counselling, therapy and education all around sexuality for 30 years, gave an interview on radio "Kontrafunk".

"There is no scientific consensus at all," explains Dr. Hoffmann in relation to the claim that sex education is needed for babies and toddlers.¹ What is empirically proven and has been scientifically researched for years, on the other hand, is that children need attachment and not pleasure experiences. He does not dispute that sexual impulses can also be observed in children. However, the crucial point is that children who are "insecurely attached, who are anxious, who tend to grow up in children's homes, who have experienced very early separation from their parents, tend to self-stimulate more than children who are securely attached and do not show such self-stimulation, including masturbation."

In his opinion, the WHO standards ascribe a sexuality to the child "that does not reflect reality at all." In great detail he explains how a child reacts when the bond with the mother or father becomes insecure, how the mother or father can gently reassure the child when they fear a loss of attachment, but also how they can help the child to bear temporary absences. According to Hoff-



"On the other hand, it has been empirically proven and scientifically researched for years that children need attachment and not pleasure experiences." (Picture KEYSTONE/WESTEND61/IRINA HESS)

mann, these processes are crucial for the development of a person's identity.

There are many studies that show children with emotionally secure attachments develop good and varied ways of reassuring themselves. However, children "who do not experience reassuring, who do not receive regulation [with the help of their mother or father, editor's note], tend to self-stimulate. This can be eating, but it can also be stimulating one's own body, which also includes sexual acts.

Whereby, as many studies show, we very rarely see complete masturbation in children. They may realise that the genital area in particular gives them pleasure in some way through friction, etc., but they don't do it explicitly because they don't really understand their own physical sexuality. And that's why we mainly find a behaviour of full masturbation in children who are actually very severely traumatised or who have experienced very severe attachment losses."

Hoffmann describes how kindergarten teachers who ask for advice because children are masturbating usually get the answer to set up a room for the child where they can do it undisturbed. When he, as a psychologist, asks about when this behaviour occurred, he often learns of serious disturbances in the family, for example, that the behaviour occurred when the father left the family.

Hoffmann emphasises that it is important “to pay attention to the background and to ask questions.”, If you support self-reassurance in the form of masturbation instead of working towards relationship regulation, a loss of attachment threatens to become chronic.

Long-term studies show that due to the wrong reaction to attachment disorders, “at some point in 10, 12, 13 years, structurally severely disturbed children’ develop, that is, children who are not stable in their emotional regulation, who cannot deal with frustrations, and who often fail in their careers, or who are so perfectionist that they eventually suffer a burnout.

These are children who, at the age of 14 or 15, already show first drug problems, or else engage in early sexuality at high risk, also with a high health hazard, or bring about a teenage pregnancy. We know from long-term studies that children with weak attachments and children who show masturbatory behaviour at a very early age that problems will develop.”

What would be an appropriate sex education up to puberty?

Hoffmann explains that we know what children are interested in when it comes to sexuality. “Of course, erections and feelings of pleasure occur in the genitals, this is something completely normal. The child also discovers its own body and wants to know how the body works. This should also be part of sex education in kindergarten and primary school.” He rejects the WHO recommendation that children should be educated about love relationships by the age of six at the latest.

He argues: “A child does not eroticise others or does not attach others sexually, nor does it believe that others have sexual thoughts. Rather, a child is interested in questions such as where do I come from, what is a birth like, how have I actually come into being, and how did I grow up in the womb. Children are interested in the general form of love. At the age of 8 or 9, they begin to understand that sperms, eggs, mum, dad and love make up a family and are the conditions for procreation. Before that, children do not think about the whole area of sexuality in any complex way but find it curious at most.

This means that education about the body, an accompaniment of sexual phenomena that are happening, making things transparent: What is

actually the background, a real help in the development of the child and a healthy knowledge about where I come from and where I am going, what is life and how it comes about – that would actually be enough for the child, it doesn’t really need more. Everything else is too much for the child, because it also overwhelms the child’s imagination.”

Pushing Organisations

Ideas of sex education, as promoted by the WHO, are mainly implemented in kindergartens, and less in primary schools. Special extracurricular organisations carry these topics into the kindergartens, he cites for example in Germany *Pro Familia* and the *Dortmunder Institut für Sexualpädagogik*. In Switzerland, organisations such as the gay association *Pink-Cross*, or the *Transgender Network Switzerland* are pushing into kindergartens and schools.

“Why is the WHO doing this at all?”

“Kontrafunk” asks the expert. His answer is revealing: Behind these demands and ideas is the pleasure principle taken as absolute. “I would like to put it very carefully, but there is a hint of a cultural struggle. For example, *Sven Lewandowsky*, who is one of the sociologists moving around in this area of WHO standards, says: “For us it was very important to set the pleasure principle as absolute because that allowed us to distinguish ourselves, from a restrictive, masturbation-prohibiting ecclesiastical, Christian sexual morality”.

That means it is all about the pleasure principle as the only principle of sexuality. That means that if I have a desire now and I want to fulfil it with someone, then that should be possible. It’s my human right, that’s when the buzzwords of sexual citizenship etc. come into play. This is a cultural struggle going on in the background. Thus, it is correct to say that a new understanding of sexuality is being transported into people.”

And the consequences? “If children – we have cases here in our sexual counselling – if they focus on sexuality from a very early age exclusively in terms of masturbation and autosexuality, then a larger picture of an adequate sexuality in a family, in a marriage, in faithfulness, in a dialogue with a lifelong partner can hardly develop. It is because these forms of autosexuality, to

which masturbation belong, ultimately partialise this form of maturation so strongly, that a kind of script develops in the person, a kind of sexual programme that might exclude higher levels of maturity.

Therefore, it may be argued from a psychological point of view that a new human being shall be created, who sexually ticks in a completely different way, and above all, who is released from procreation, and who can also engage in sexuality independently of gender and love.”

The question arises for us: Do we want such a new human being? Do we want our children to be educated in this way? If we answer this in the negative, we must prevent such concepts from being implemented in our public educational institutions.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

¹ Dr. PhD *Markus Hoffmann* in an interview with the broadcaster “Kontrafunk”, “Lehrerzimmer” (teachers’ staff room), on 5 Dezember 2024. All quotes are taken from this interview.