

It is a privilege to speak to you today about the importance of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education for children.

I don't think I need to list all the well-established benefits in detail, but to briefly name them:

Body autonomy and self-awareness

Understanding consent

Healthy relationships

Resilience and confidence

Better communication with caregivers and teachers

Gender equality and respect for diversity

Early intervention opportunities

Still, while these are all vital, I want to draw your attention to what I believe is one of the most transformative effects of comprehensive sexuality education: **the increased likelihood of recognizing and disclosing abuse.**

Too often, the conversation around this kind of education is framed as a Preventative strategy the idea that if children know their bodies and their boundaries, they will be less likely to become victims of sexual abuse. And while there may be some truth to that, I invite us to consider what that really implies.

Are we suggesting that victims could have done something to prevent their own abuse?

Sexual abuse is never the victim's responsibility. It is not something that happens because of what someone did or didn't do — it is something that is done *to* them. And if adults can fall victim to such harm, how can we expect children to prevent it?

That's why I want to focus on something far more realistic — and powerful: **equipping children.** Giving them the language, the understanding, and the trust to recognize when something is wrong and to feel safe enough to speak up.

Research shows that children who receive comprehensive sexuality education are up to five times more likely to disclose sexual abuse. That is a staggering difference — and a life-saving one. This kind of education also empowers parents, teachers, and other trusted adults to better recognize the signs of abuse and respond appropriately.

I speak from personal experience. At the age of 11, it was *because* of a school-based sexuality education program that I came to understand that I was being sexually abused by my father. It gave me the words. It gave me the awareness. And eventually, it gave me the courage to ask for help.

This is the true value of comprehensive sexuality education: not only does it help children understand their bodies and their rights, but it creates the conditions where abuse can be recognized — and stopped.

Let us not underestimate the power of that, and let us work together, across Europe, to ensure that every child has access to the tools, the language, and the safety they deserve.

Thank you.