

Guidance for educators

Relationship and sex education (RSE)

The Department for Education's policy statement³, published in March 2017, explains the government's intention to amend the Children and Social Work Bill to introduce statutory:

- relationships education in primary schools
- relationships and sex education in secondary schools
- PSHE in all schools

It also outlines the need for statutory guidance and education, to address risks to children which have grown in prevalence in recent years, including online pornography, sexting and staying safe online. After a period of consultation, the Government has announced plans to make health education compulsory as well as new reformed relationships education in primary schools and relationships and sex education in secondary schools.⁴ The new curriculum will focus on the following themes, with the intention to make it statutory in schools as of September 2020:

- different types of relationships, including friendships, family relationships, dealing with strangers and, at secondary school, intimate relationships
- how to recognise, understand and build healthy relationships, including self-respect and respect for others, commitment, tolerance, boundaries and consent, and how to manage conflict, and also how to recognise unhealthy relationships
- factual knowledge, at secondary school, around sex, sexual health, and sexuality
- how online pornography may affect health and wellbeing, including mental health and relationships

What is high quality relationship and sex education?

The principles of high quality RSE in all schools⁵ – including those with a religious character – are that relationships and sex education:

- is a partnership between home and school
- ensures children and young people's views are actively sought to influence lesson planning and teaching
- starts early and is relevant to pupils at each stage in their development and maturity
- is taught by people who are trained and confident in talking about issues such as healthy and unhealthy relationships, equality, pleasure, respect, abuse, sexuality, gender identity, sex and consent

Knowledge and understanding

- includes the acquisition of knowledge, the development of life skills and respectful attitudes and values
- has sufficient time to cover a wide range of topics, with a strong emphasis on relationships, consent, rights, responsibilities to others, negotiation and communication skills, and accessing services
- helps pupils understand on and offline safety, consent, violence and exploitation

Factual

- is both medically and factually correct and treats sex as a normal and pleasurable fact of life
- teaches pupils about the law and their rights to confidentiality even if they are under 16, and is linked to school-based and community health services and organisations

Inclusive

- is inclusive of difference: gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, culture, age, faith or belief, or other life experience
- uses active learning methods, and is rigorously planned, assessed and evaluated
- helps pupils understand a range of views and beliefs about relationships and sex in society including some of the mixed messages about gender, sex and sexuality from different sources including the media
- promotes equality in relationships, recognises and challenges gender inequality and reflects girls' and boys' different experiences and needs

"I think we need education that shows us what you see [in pornography] isn't what actually happens. It's not real life."

Young person, Childnet focus group



3. www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-rse-and-pshe

4. www.gov.uk/government/news/new-relationships-and-health-education-in-schools

5. www.pshe-association.org.uk/sites/default/files/SRE%20for%20the%2021st%20Century%20-%20FINAL.pdf_0.pdf

What is high quality relationship and sex education? (Continued)

It contributes to:

- a positive ethos and environment for learning
- safeguarding pupils (Children Act 2004), promoting their emotional wellbeing, and improving their ability to achieve in school
- a better understanding of diversity and inclusion, a reduction in gender-based and homophobic prejudice, bullying and violence and an understanding of the difference between consenting and exploitative relationships
- helping pupils keep themselves safe from harm, both on and offline, enjoy their relationships and build confidence in accessing services if they need help and advice
- reducing early sexual activity, teenage conceptions, sexually transmitted infections, sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence and bullying

How do I address these topics within a faith school?

Young people from all faiths and backgrounds are entitled to a strong RSE curriculum which guides them through the journey from adolescence to adulthood; enabling them to form healthy relationships and explore their own sexual awareness safely, including in the online world. RSE should always be developed in partnership with parents and the wider community and should be sensitive to the range of different values and beliefs we have within a multi-cultural and multi-faith society. The Sex Education Forum outlines the underlying principles for RSE within faith schools in their factsheet 'Faith, values and sex and relationships education'⁶, stating that RSE should:

- be relevant to young people and support them in learning about different faiths/ cultures and is underpinned by values promoting equality and respect
- provide young people with opportunities to understand the law and healthy issues in relation to sex, sexuality and sexual health
- Value diversity and anti-discriminatory practice

Understanding how relationships work and developing relationship skills gives a context for understanding human sexuality and sexual health. This is consistent, for example, with the Catholic Church's view that the purpose of RSE (Southwark, 2016, p. 3) is to secure "an adequate knowledge of the nature and importance of sexuality and of the harmonious and integral development of the person towards psychological maturity, with full spiritual maturity in view, to which all believers are called."

Schools of a religious character should refer to curriculum guidance provided at diocesan and church level nationally, for example:

- **The National Society for Promoting Religious Education RSE guidance for Anglican schools**⁷
- **The Catholic Diocese of Southwark's Education Service 'Education in Human Love Diocesan Policy for Relationship and Sex Education' in Catholic schools**⁸
- **The Muslim Council of Britain 'Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools' guidance, which gives good practice advice for RSE (chapter 10)**⁹

How do we keep Senior Leadership Teams, Governing Boards and Management Committees informed and engaged with RSE?

It is important that all members of the school community are engaged with RSE in order to make sure it is inclusive, effective and embedded within the ethos of the school. Draft guidance published for the Department for Education in Feb 2019¹⁰ states that 'As well as fulfilling their legal obligations, the governing boards or management committee should also make sure that:

- all pupils make progress in achieving the expected educational outcomes;
- the subjects are well led, effectively managed and well planned;
- the quality of provision is subject to regular and effective self-evaluation;
- teaching is delivered in ways that are accessible to all pupils with SEND;
- clear information is provided for parents on the subject content and the right to request that their child is withdrawn; and,

6. schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/schools/files/folders/folders/documents/healthyschools/Faith,%20values%20and%20SRE%20-%20Sex%20Education%20Forum%20Factsheet.pdf

7. www.churchofengland.org/education/church-schools-academies/curriculum-and-religious-education.asp

8. www.educationcommission.org.uk/SiteFiles/892.pdf

9. www.religionlaw.co.uk/MCBSchoolsreport07.pdf

10. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781150/Draft_guidance_Relationships_Education__Relationships_and_Sex_Education__RSE__and_Health_Education2.pdf

- the subjects are resourced, staffed and timetabled in a way that ensures that the school can fulfil its legal obligations.’

In order to effectively meet these requirements, the Sex Education Forum have provided a number of resources which can support your school:

- **Roadmap to statutory RSE** - This resource will help your school in preparing to provide high quality RSE
- **Principles of good RSE** - This resource sets out 12 principles of good RSE which have been led by research and are supported by a wide range of organisations including NSPCC, Barnardo’s, The Children’s Society and NCB, and the following education unions: ASCL, NASUWT, NEU, NAHT, UNISON and Voice
- **Whole school RSE audit tool** - This resource will help your school to self-audit your current provision for RSE and quickly identify areas of strength and those which need to be developed
- **Curriculum Design Tool** - This tool has been created to support educators in designing developmental, spiral and comprehensive curriculum programmes of study for RSE

Handling sensitive and controversial issues

The topics discussed through RSE are likely to bring up some sensitive and controversial issues which could be challenging for a teacher to manage. Whilst young people must never be expected to discuss anything they feel uncomfortable with, it may be that they will want to discuss high profile cases or even draw on personal/peer experience and it is vital that they do so in a climate of trust, cooperation and support.

The PSHE Association outlined good practice when handling sensitive issues in their ‘Handling sensitive or controversial issues’ resource¹¹, which states teachers should:

- work with pupils to establish ground rules and link PSHE education into the whole-school approach to supporting pupil welfare
- offer some opportunities for pupils to discuss issues confidentially in small groups as well as with the whole class
- be sensitive to the needs and experience of each pupil; remembering that some pupils may have direct experience of these issues
- make pupils aware of sources of information and support both inside and outside the school

You may wish to use a range of techniques to support class discussions around these sensitive topics, such as:

- same sex discussions – it may be more comfortable for the students/school/ parents if lessons are held in same sex groups taught by a teacher of the same sex. This may not be necessary for all lessons.
- distancing techniques – Using stories, TV programmes/characters, role play and scenarios based on real situations can provide fictional characters and storylines that stimulate discussion whilst ‘de-personalising’ any content

Some discussions or questions which young people raise might not feel appropriate for the session or may need more consideration before answering. In these cases you may wish to use one of the following techniques to pause the discussion:

- **‘Save it for later’** – Display a question wall or box in which questions, themes or topics which may not be appropriate for that lesson can be saved for future lessons or follow up discussions.
- **‘Oops and ouch’** - This method can be used if young people are discussing controversial issues which have the potential to cause offense. Anyone who finds a comment offensive or worrying can respond with ‘ouch’ and the speaker follows on by saying ‘oops’ and is given an opportunity to further explain their viewpoint. This method helps to avoid misunderstandings or possible resentment to form.
- **‘Time out’** - You could call a ‘time out’ when young people are showing signs of fatigue and or stress; this will provide them with a brief break and can give you an opportunity to take stock of the situation and decide how to proceed.
- **‘Pause and park’** - You may wish to hit the pause button on particular discussions and ‘park’ them until a later date. Try to give the young people an idea of when this discussion will be ‘unpaused’, this might be after the lesson, during a break or even after discussion with another member of staff.

11. www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/handling-sensitive-or-controversial-issues-through

Support for the whole school community

It is important that support networks are communicated with young people.

School – Ensure young people know who they can go to within the school with specific worries or concerns. You may wish to display this information with photographs in key areas of the school, e.g. reception, lunch hall, tutor rooms, toilets.

Childline - www.childline.org.uk – A free, confidential service for children under the age of 19 to obtain counselling support online, via email or the phone – 0800 11 11

The Mix - www.themix.org.uk – A free and confidential multi-channel service for young people aged between 13-25 years old – 0808 808 4994

Young Minds – youngminds.org.uk - A mental health and wellbeing charity that offers support and guidance for young people through their website

Papyrus - www.papyrus-uk.org – A free and confidential helpline for young people who may be contemplating harming themselves or committing suicide – 0800 068 4141

Respect Phone Line - respectphonenumber.org.uk - A confidential and anonymous helpline for anyone concerned about their violence and/or abuse towards a partner or ex-partner – 0808 802 4040

Youth Access - www.youthaccess.org.uk – Finding access to local counselling services for young people

