



Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education

Parent/carers FAQs for SDBE schools

Why is there new guidance on RSE and Health Education from the Department of Education (DfE)?

The DfE's previous guidance to schools on Relationships and Sex Education was last updated in 2000. It no longer accurately reflects the world we live in.

The new guidance was passed by Parliament with overwhelming support in both houses. It aims to create a curriculum that:

- fosters pupils' respect for themselves and others;
- promotes equality and values difference;
- educates pupils about positive relationships;
- helps pupils to understand how their actions can impact on their own health, wellbeing and safety, and also impact on others.

It also aims to meet the needs of all pupils, support their developing identity and prepare them for life and work in modern Britain.

The DfE guidance states: *'These subjects represent a huge opportunity to help our children and young people develop. The knowledge and attributes gained will support their own, and others', wellbeing and attainment and help young people to become successful and happy adults who make a meaningful contribution to society.'*

The Church of England agrees and promotes,

“...an emphasis on enabling pupils to develop the skills, knowledge, understanding, language and confidence to seek help, as needed, for themselves or others.”

In a great many schools, this curriculum will be delivered through the school's existing Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education or other life skills programme and will require very little change.

What is the church's view on Relationships Education (primary), Relationships and Sex Education (secondary) and Health Education (cross phase) – collectively RSHE?

The Church of England welcomes this development as it supports our faith vision.

“In Church of England schools, and in all schools, we want young people to flourish and to gain every opportunity to live fulfilled lives. For Church schools, RSE is about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, healthy relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health. It is also about the spiritual and moral aspects of relationships within a context of a Christian vision for the purpose of life.”

Do faith schools have to teach the new curriculum?

Yes. The new legislation which comes into force in September 2020 will make the curriculum a compulsory requirement in all primary, secondary and special schools. This includes maintained schools, academies, free schools, and independent schools.

When will the requirement to deliver Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education begin?

The requirements comes into effect from September 2020, when it will be statutory that:

- All primary schools teach Relationships Education
- All secondary schools teach RSE
- All schools teach Health Education

The DfE is encouraging schools to use 2019-20 to review and develop their curriculum.

What will my role as a parent/carer be in RSHE teaching? Will our family or faith values be undermined by the curriculum in any way?

Parents/carers are partners with the school in this important area of education, helping to keep children safe and supporting them to thrive. Schools will inform parents/carers about what is being taught and when, so that parents/carers can support the learning at home before or after lessons. This gives families the opportunity to talk about their own values, experiences and perspectives The government recognises in the guidance that: *‘parents are the first teachers of their children. They have the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.’*

The Church of England agrees that,

“The role of parents and carers in the development of children’s understanding about relationships is vital and they hold the responsibility of ensuring their children grow and mature into healthy relationships.”

Will I be consulted before these subjects are taught?

Yes. Schools are required to engage and consult with parents/carers when developing and reviewing their policies for Relationships Education and RSE, and parents/carers

are encouraged to take up the opportunities when they are offered. Schools may consult parents/carers in different ways, so you may be invited to a consultation meeting or to give your views in other ways, such as through surveys. There will be opportunities to find out the content that is in the curriculum, to see examples of materials the school will use and to ask questions and share any concerns.

Schools will listen to parent and carer views, but they will then make decisions as to how they will proceed. Every school must deliver the statutory curriculum content, so parent/carer consultation does not provide an opportunity to veto any curriculum content. Exactly how the curriculum is taught is ultimately a decision for the school.

What values underpin Relationships and Sex Education teaching?

The core values include:

- the importance of stable, loving relationships
- respect for all
- rights, responsibilities and the law
- equality
- acceptance of diversity
- that violence and coercion are never acceptable in relationships
- kindness
- generosity
- honesty

The Church of England stresses that,

“Relationships Education and RSE must be inclusive and meet the needs of all pupils.”

Does the DfE guidance state exactly what needs to be taught?

The guidance sets out the key learning that pupils must receive by the end of their primary and secondary school education. Schools will decide exactly how they teach the curriculum and what resources they will use. Information about this should be in the school policy.

What are the key themes that will be taught in Relationships Education in primary school?

Families and people who care for me
Caring friendships
Respectful relationships
Online relationships
Being safe

What are the key themes that will be taught in Relationships and Sex Education in secondary school?

Families
Respectful relationships, including friendships
Online and media
Being safe
Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

Can I request my child is excused from Relationships Education?

No. Parents/carers will not be able to withdraw their child from Relationships Education in primary, secondary school or special schools.

What are the key themes that will be taught in Health Education in primary and secondary schools?

Mental wellbeing
Internet safety and harms
Physical health and fitness
Healthy eating
Drugs, alcohol and tobacco
Health and prevention
Basic first aid
Changing adolescent body

Can I request my child is excused from Health Education?

No. Parents will not be able to withdraw their child from Health Education in primary, secondary or special schools. Health Education includes the teaching of the changing adolescent body in a timely way to ensure children and young people are prepared for changes they will experience before they happen.

Will primary schools have to teach sex education? Isn't this too young?

Many primary schools currently teach sex education (which goes beyond the science curriculum), and it is strongly recommended by the DfE that this continues. The decision about if and when to teach sex education remains a decision that individual primary schools must make. Schools will inform parents where in the curriculum this will happen. You can discuss with the school what they propose to teach and how.

What has changed from the previous requirements regarding the delivery of sex education?

Nothing at all.

Who will deliver the Sex Education curriculum?

In primary phase schools this will usually be the class teacher. In secondary phase schools it may be the form tutor or a member the PSHE teaching team. Visitors may also contribute to the curriculum, but schools will always ensure their messages and approaches are in line with the school values and policy.

Will teaching about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) encourage early sexual behaviour?

RSE does not encourage early sexual experimentation. Research shows that young people who have received effective RSE are more likely to delay their first experience of sex and are less likely to engage in risky sexual practices. RSE teaches young people to understand human sexuality and to respect themselves and others. It enables young people to mature, build their confidence and self-esteem and understand the reasons for delaying sexual activity.

The curriculum also enables young people to understand how the law applies to relationships. In particular, this includes understanding the age of consent and the nature of consent. It helps young people to understand their responsibilities within a relationship and how to recognise an abusive or exploitative relationship. The Church of England's view is that,

“Relationships and sex are good gifts of God and should bring joy. In our experience, young people most desire to learn about (and have modelled for them) good, healthy relationships. They want to learn how to secure, develop and sustain healthy relationships and how to be able to recognise when and how relationships go wrong. They must be prepared for the opportunities, challenges and responsibilities of being in relationship with other people. Relationships education and RSE must give pupils the understanding, vocabulary and strategies they require to keep themselves safe and to thrive within good, stable long-term relationships of all kinds.”

Can I request my child is excused from the sex education curriculum?

Yes. In all schools, parents/carers will be able to request that their child is excused from those parts of lessons that are defined as sex education in the school policy. The Church of England hopes that when parents/carers take opportunities to find out more about what will be taught and how, extremely few parents/carers will want to do this. Church guidance to schools emphasises that they should,

“...make sure that pupils are not withdrawn from sex education for reasons based on a misunderstanding of the subject.”

The science curriculum includes human reproduction. Discussion of sex in a Relationships Education context provides opportunities to set this learning in the context of meaningful and respectful relationships, personal values, health and safety.

Parents/carers requesting to excuse their child from sex education will be invited to discuss their concerns with a member of staff. If at this point they still wish to excuse their child they will be asked to specify which aspects of sex education content they wish to withdraw their child from.

Parents have this right until three terms before the term in which the young person becomes 16 years old. At this point young people have a right to make their own decision and to opt into sex education.

Will excusing my child from sex education mean they will not learn about sex?

No. The school cannot guarantee that pupils will not learn about sex from other sources outside the classroom. There are many places that children and young people can get information from including: parents/carers, peers, older siblings, films, television and the internet. The accuracy of the information they access will be variable. The Church of England recognises that:

“If pupils are not offered effective relationship and sex education that allows them to have their questions answered and is informative they may find their information elsewhere (e.g. from pornography or inappropriate websites and forums).”

The delivery of Sex Education alongside Relationships Education ensures that what pupils learn is age and developmentally appropriate, addresses their real questions and is based on important values and the law.

Can I request my child is excused from the elements of sex education taught in the science curriculum?

No. Parents/carers do not have a right to excuse their child from any part of the science curriculum, including lessons about reproduction and human development.

Can I request my child is excused from lessons about the changing adolescent body and puberty (including teaching about wet dreams and periods)?

No. Parents/carers cannot excuse their child from elements of Health Education. They can only excuse their child from what the school defines as ‘sex education’ in their policy. The Church of England agrees that,

“The curriculum should offer opportunities for pupils to learn to value themselves and their bodies.”

There have been protests in the news about the new curriculum being LGBT-inclusive.

Can I excuse my child from lessons about LGBT people and relationships?

No. The purpose of the RSHE curriculum is to educate pupils, age appropriately, about relationships and diversity in the world they live in. It is important that pupils know that different families and individuals exist and are respected under the law.

The Church of England's guidance to schools states that,

"If any school is not educating pupils to understand the rights of all people to live freely within their sexual orientation or gender identity without discrimination they would be failing in their duty to prepare their pupils to live in modern Britain."

LGBT-inclusive curriculum content is not new: it remains a requirement for all schools under the Equality Act 2010. The new RSHE curriculum reinforces this by clarifying that the lessons children receive in school must be inclusive of diverse families and individuals and it must be relevant to all pupils. The teaching must promote equality and respect, present material that is accurate and balanced and it must be underpinned by legal rights and responsibilities. Content related to LGBT people will therefore be fully integrated into the curriculum rather than being delivered in stand-alone lessons. Parents and carers will not be able to excuse their child from LGBT inclusion.

The Church of England recognises that,

"The hallmark of authentic, life-giving relationships is recognition of the sacredness of the other so that all are welcomed wholeheartedly and with reverence. Each person in all their unique difference should be able to thrive, irrespective of physical appearance, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic background, academic ability, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity."

Will family diversity be represented?

Yes. Families, both in school and in the wider world, sometimes look different from a child's own family. Pupils will be taught that British society values diversity and that all families deserve respect. Families are characterised by love and care, even though this may be expressed through different traditions and values.

In schools, learning about families must be inclusive. The RSE curriculum must allow every child the right to see families like theirs represented and all pupils must be confident and safe to speak about who they live with and who cares for them.

The Church of England advises schools that,

"RSE ... should seek to develop understanding that there are a variety of relationships and family patterns in the modern world."

Will schools teach about a range of relationships: marriage, civil partnerships, relationships outside of marriage and same sex relationships?

Yes. The curriculum enables children to understand the importance of a stable, secure and loving environment for family life. Different family types provide this. Teaching will therefore represent the full range of committed and supportive relationships in our society, including religious and civil marriages, civil partnerships, and relationships outside of marriage. The range of families represented will include step families, same-sex parents, grandparents as parents, adoptive and foster families, and more.

When will this guidance be reviewed again by the DfE?

The guidance is set to be reviewed in 2022