



Department  
for Education

# **Draft Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health education**

**Statutory guidance for governing bodies,  
proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior  
leadership teams, teachers**

## Foreword from the Secretary of State for Education

We know that parents are their children's primary educators, but high-quality Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) can play a vital role in making sure that families feel supported and have peace of mind that their children are safe and being equipped with the skills they need to succeed. We also know schools want more clarity on the right age to teach certain topics.

This update reflects that, even in the short time since RSHE was made statutory, the world in which children are growing up has become increasingly complex, both online and in the day-to-day, and that is having a profound effect on their lives, including how they build relationships.

We have therefore acted to put in place safeguards to keep children safe in an increasingly complex world, especially after reports of pupils being taught inappropriate content in schools.

As children start to approach adulthood, we need to give them the tools to keep themselves safe and to flourish. This relies on them getting the right information at the right time, so that they know about the risks and how to avoid them, but also making sure that they are not exposed to too much too soon, taking away the innocence of childhood. That is a very difficult balance to get right.

That is why this updated guidance includes clear age limits for the teaching of the most sensitive content and specifies that the contested topic of gender identity should not be taught. And it reinforces the vital principle that parents have right to know about everything their children are being taught and be given proper chance to understand and discuss it.

We have been through a thorough process of engaging colleagues from across government, stakeholders, parents, young people and teachers in the review. We also considered advice from an independent expert panel, who generously gave their time and shared their invaluable experience and knowledge to support the review. Their recommendations prompted a sequencing of the content in the guidance so that children are not taught content they are too young to understand.

Through RSHE we hope to give our children the best possible start to developing their emotional and physical health and building supportive, successful relationships. This guidance has the best interests of children at its core and puts common sense at the heart of what should be taught. I hope it helps teachers and parents to support their children to thrive.

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
What is the status of this guidance? .....	3
About this guidance .....	4
Who this guidance is for .....	4
Related guidance.....	5
Developing a policy .....	6
Guiding principles for relationships and sex education .....	7
Developing a curriculum, choosing resources and working with external agencies .....	7
Openness with parents, and parents’ right to request withdrawal from sex education.....	8
Governors and Trustees .....	10
Teaching about the law .....	10
Equality.....	11
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender content .....	12
Religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character .....	13
Addressing prejudice, sexual harassment and sexual violence .....	13
Managing difficult questions.....	15
Age limits and flexibility .....	15
Curriculum Content.....	17
Relationships education (Primary) .....	17
Sex Education (Primary) .....	21
Relationships and Sex Education (RSE): Secondary .....	22
Health and wellbeing .....	29
Health and wellbeing: Primary .....	29
Health and wellbeing: Secondary.....	33
Annex A Regulations .....	39
Annex B Government resources .....	40

## Introduction

1. To embrace the challenges of creating a happy and successful adult life, pupils need knowledge that will enable them to make informed and ethical decisions about their wellbeing, health and relationships. High quality, evidence-based teaching of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) can help prepare pupils for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life, and can promote pupils' moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development. Effective teaching will support young people to cultivate positive character traits, including resilience, self-worth, self-respect, honesty, integrity, courage, kindness, and trustworthiness.

2. The duties on schools in this area are set out in legislation.<sup>1</sup> The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, made under sections 34 and 35 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, make relationships education compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education and relationships and sex education (RSE) compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education.<sup>2</sup> They also make health education compulsory in all schools, except independent schools. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) continues to be compulsory in independent schools. Parents<sup>3</sup> have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE.

3. The subjects are part of the basic school curriculum, which allows schools flexibility in developing their planned programme, integrated within a broad and balanced curriculum. Key aspects of RSHE are in scope for Ofsted inspection; for example, through inspectors' consideration of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## What is the status of this guidance?

4. This is statutory guidance from the Department for Education issued under Section 80A of the Education Act 2002 and section 403 of the Education Act 1996 – further details are in Annex A.

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<sup>1</sup> Maintained schools and academies are required to provide a curriculum which is broad and balanced in accordance with Section 78 of the Education Act 2002. Part I of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 requires independent schools other than academies to make provision for PSHE (paragraph 2(2)(d)), and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society (paragraph 2(2)(i)). Part 2 of the Schedule requires independent schools (including academies) to meet the standard relating to the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development of pupils.

<sup>2</sup> For ease of reference, this guidance refers to primary schools and secondary schools, but the statutory requirements refer to pupils receiving primary/secondary education.

<sup>3</sup> The word parents is used henceforth to mean both parents and carers.

5. Schools<sup>4</sup> must have regard to the guidance, and where they depart from those parts of the guidance which state that they should (or should not) do something they will need to have good reasons for doing so.

## About this guidance

6. This document contains information on what schools **should** do and sets out the legal duties with which schools **must** comply when teaching relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education.

7. Unless otherwise specified, 'school' means all schools, whether maintained, non-maintained or independent schools, including academies and free schools, non-maintained special schools, maintained special schools and alternative provision, including pupil referral units.

8. This guidance updates the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health education Statutory Guidance 2019. This guidance will be kept under review.

## Who this guidance is for

9. This statutory guidance applies to all schools, and is therefore aimed at:
- governing bodies of maintained schools (including schools with a sixth form) and non-maintained special schools (including residential special schools);
  - trustees or directors of academies and free schools;
  - proprietors of independent schools (including academies and free schools);
  - providers of alternative provision, including AP Academies and AP Free Schools;
  - management committees of pupil referral units (PRUs);
  - teachers, other school staff and school nurses;
  - head teachers, principals and senior leadership teams;
  - diocese and other faith representatives; and
  - for reference, relevant local authority staff.

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<sup>4</sup> Guidance on health education does not apply to independent schools, which must meet the Independent School Standards as set out in the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. However, they may find the sections on health education helpful. It does, however, apply to academies and free schools.

10. Pupil referral units (PRUs), alternative provision (AP) academies and free schools, and independent schools that provide AP, are required to make provision for relationships education, RSE and health education in the same way as mainstream schools; and they must have regard to this guidance in delivering their programme. In teaching these subjects in PRUs, AP academies and free schools, and independent<sup>5</sup> AP schools, specific thought should be given to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of the pupils and what adjustments might be needed.

11. The statutory requirements do not apply to sixth form colleges, 16-19 academies or Further Education (FE) colleges,<sup>6</sup> although we would encourage them to support students by offering these subjects. These settings may find the principles helpful, especially in supporting pupils in the transition to FE.

## Related guidance

12. The guidance should be read in conjunction with:
- [National curriculum in England: citizenship, religious education, computing, science and physical education programmes of study](#)
  - [Keeping children safe in education](#) (statutory guidance)
  - [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) (statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children)
  - [Behaviour in schools](#) (advice for schools, including advice for appropriate behaviour between pupils)
  - [Equality Act 2010: advice for schools](#)
  - [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#) (statutory guidance)
  - [Alternative Provision](#) (statutory guidance)
  - [Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools](#) (advice for schools)
  - [Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing](#). (guidance for schools and colleges)
  - [Preventing and Tackling Bullying](#)
  - [Teaching Online Safety in Schools](#)
  - [The Equality and Human Rights Commission Advice and Guidance](#) (provides advice on avoiding discrimination in a variety of educational contexts)

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<sup>5</sup> Independent schools do not have to have regard to the guidance on health education, although they may find it helpful in planning.

<sup>6</sup> Further education and sixth form colleges that provide full time education for 14-16-year olds are required to follow Department for Education guidance which covers a number of areas including the curriculum. From September 2020, these included the subjects of relationships and sex education and health education, and such providers need to follow this guidance.

- [Promoting Fundamental British Values as part of SMSC in schools](#) (guidance for maintained schools on promoting basic important British values as part of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC))
- [SMSC requirements for independent schools](#) (guidance for independent schools on how they should support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development).
- [Guidance for schools on colleges on gender questioning children](#) (currently in draft, to be finalised after consultation).

## Developing a policy

13. All schools must have an up-to-date written policy for relationships education or, where they teach sex education, for RSE, and must consult parents when they develop and review their policy. Listening and responding to the views of pupils will strengthen the policy and ensure that it meets their needs. Schools must provide a copy of the policy free of charge to anyone who asks for one and publish the policy on the school website.<sup>7</sup>

14. The policy should:

- Differentiate between relationships and sex education where applicable. Relationships education should not include topics which involve explaining different forms of sexual activity. This includes discussions of forms of abuse that involve explaining details of sexual activity, for example rape. In secondary schools, RSE will often address aspects of relationships and sex education in an integrated way within a single topic, but the policy should clearly differentiate relationships and sex education so that parents are clear what they can request to withdraw their children from.
- Set out what sex education topics will be taught and in what years (some primaries may not teach any sex education topics).
- Include information about a parent's right to request that their child is excused from sex education.
- Set out the subject content, how and when it is taught, who is responsible for teaching it and any external providers involved.
- Explain how content will be made accessible to all pupils, including those with SEND.
- Describe how the subject is monitored and evaluated.
- Set out how parents can view curriculum materials.
- Explain how teachers will answer questions that relate to content that is restricted to older children, that relates to topics in sex education that the school does not cover (in primary) or relates to sex education from which the child has been withdrawn.
- Explain how the policy has been produced, who approves the policy, and how and when it will be reviewed.

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<sup>7</sup> If a school does not have a website, they should ensure that the policy is available by other means.

## Guiding principles for relationships and sex education

15. Schools should develop a curriculum with the following five key principles in mind:
- a. RSHE should teach children about the law, in addition to the importance of tolerance and respect for everyone in the school community and beyond.
  - b. The curriculum should seek to keep children safe and informed about growing up and the challenges this may present, how relationships develop and how to be safe once sexually active. It should enable topics to be taught appropriately by a trusted adult and help ensure that prevention of harm and early intervention are supported.
  - c. Schools should follow the age limits set out in the guidance to ensure pupils don't learn about sensitive topics earlier than is necessary or at an inappropriate stage of their development.
  - d. Schools should be transparent with parents about all materials used in RSE, and all materials should be available to parents, as described in the section on openness with parents below.
  - e. Parents have a right to request that their children are withdrawn from sex education.

## Developing a curriculum, choosing resources and working with external agencies

16. Schools have significant freedom to implement this guidance in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum, in line with the age limits set out below for content which is sensitive.

17. A school's curriculum should be in line with pupil need. Effective teaching will break down core knowledge into manageable and well-sequenced units, including opportunities for pupils to embed new knowledge so that it can be used confidently in real life situations. The curriculum should build on knowledge pupils have previously acquired, with regular feedback provided on pupil progress. Lessons should ensure that all pupils are challenged, and assessments should identify where pupils need extra support or intervention.

18. The lead teacher will need to work closely with colleagues in related curriculum areas to ensure relationships education, RSE and health education programmes complement, and do not duplicate, content covered in national curriculum<sup>8</sup> subjects such as citizenship, science, computing and PE.

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<sup>8</sup> The national curriculum does not apply to academies or independent schools.



19. Working with external organisations can enhance delivery of these subjects, bringing in specialist knowledge and different ways of engaging with young people. Schools are responsible for checking the credentials of any visitor or visiting organisation. Schools should ask to see materials and a lesson plan in advance, and should seek the views of parents, making sure that all materials can be viewed (see section on openness with parents below).

20. Examples of resources funded by the Government to complement classroom teaching are listed in Annex B. It is ultimately the school's responsibility to ensure resources and teaching materials are appropriate for the age and maturity of pupils, are accessible for all pupils, including those with SEND, fit with their planned programme and policy, and are sensitive to pupils' needs.

21. It is important to agree how confidentiality will work in any lesson, and that any visitor understands how safeguarding reports should be dealt with in line with school policy. Further information for teachers in handling potential safeguarding or child protection reports is on pages 14-15.

## **Openness with parents, and parents' right to request withdrawal from sex education**

22. Parents are the first educators of their children, and schools should make sure parents are aware of what is being taught in RSHE. Schools should use a range of strategies to build relationships with parents on these subjects – for example by inviting parents into school to discuss the curriculum and the importance of RSHE for wellbeing and safety, to discuss any concerns, and to support parents in managing conversations with their children.

23. Schools should, at minimum, provide parents with a representative sample of the resources that they plan to use, enabling parents to continue conversations started in class, and should ensure that parents are able to view all curriculum materials used to teach RSHE on request. Parents are not able to veto curriculum content, but it is right that they are able to see what their children are being taught, especially in relation to sensitive topics, and schools should respond positively to requests from parents to see material that has not already been shared.

24. There is a strong public interest in parents being able to see all materials used in RSHE teaching if they would like to, and schools should not agree to any contractual restrictions on showing parents this content. Schools should communicate to providers that they are legally obliged to have regard to this statutory guidance, including the expectation that all content can be shared with parents.

25. Where contractual clauses exist that seek to prevent schools sharing resources with parents at all, they are void and unenforceable. This is because they contradict the clear public policy interest of ensuring that parents are aware of what their children are being taught in sex and relationships education.

26. Where copyright law applies, schools must comply with it when sharing resources with parents. It is best practice to share materials via a “parent portal” or, if this is not possible, through a presentation. When schools make documents available to parents, they should acknowledge the provider’s authorship and include a statement, that parents agree to as a condition of access, that the content should not be copied or shared further except as authorised under copyright law. Where relevant and possible, IT systems should also be in place to prevent downloading.

27. Where parents are unable to view materials via a “parent portal”, or cannot attend a presentation, schools can provide copies of materials to parents to take home, providing parents agree to a similar statement that they will not copy the content or share it further except as authorised under copyright law. One of the key principles of this guidance is that schools should be transparent with parents about all materials used in RSHE, and all materials should be available to parents. It is therefore vital that parents have confidence in what is being taught to their children and it is important that parents have the ability to discuss and analyse the contents.

28. Parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE. Pupils are not able to request to withdraw. Parents do not have the right to withdraw their pupils from topics taught as part of the science curriculum, including science topics related to puberty or sexual reproduction.

29. Parents do not have the right to request withdrawal from relationships education, but relationships education should not include topics which involve explaining different forms of sexual activity. However, relationships education may include topics related to preventing sexual abuse, for example sharing inappropriate material online, providing teachers do not describe the nature of any sexual activity involved. Safeguarding information may require young people to understand different parts of the body, but this should not include descriptions of sexual activity.

30. Before granting any request for withdrawal from sex education, it is good practice for the head teacher to discuss the request with parents, and the child if appropriate, to understand the request and to clarify the nature and purpose of the curriculum. This is likely to include discussing the benefits of sex education, and any detrimental effects of withdrawal, including social and emotional impacts on the child, and the likelihood that the child will hear their peers’ version of what was said in class, which may not be accurate. Schools will want to document this process to ensure a record is kept.

31. Head teachers must automatically grant a request to withdraw a pupil from any sex education delivered in primary schools, other than as part of the science curriculum. In secondary, headteachers should only refuse a request in exceptional circumstances, for example because of a pupil's specific vulnerability. From three terms before the pupil turns 16, a pupil can choose to opt back into sex education even if their parent has requested withdrawal. For example, if a pupil turns 16 during the autumn term, the pupil can opt back into sex education at any time after the start of the previous autumn term.

32. If a pupil is excused from sex education, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that the pupil receives appropriate, purposeful education during the period of withdrawal.

## **Governors and Trustees**

33. As well as fulfilling their legal obligations, governing boards should also make sure that:

- all pupils make progress in achieving the expected educational outcomes;
- teaching is accessible to all pupils with SEND;
- curriculum content and teaching materials are aligned with this statutory guidance; and
- clear information is provided for parents on the subject content, teaching materials and external providers, and on the right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education.

34. Foundation governors and trustees of faith academy trusts will also have wider responsibilities in relation to maintaining and developing the religious ethos of the schools.

## **Teaching about the law**

35. There will be a range of opinions regarding topics within RSE. The starting principle should be that any applicable law should be taught in a factual way so that pupils are clear on their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Pupils should understand that the age of criminal responsibility is ten.

36. Pupils should be made aware of the relevant legal provisions when relevant topics are being taught, including for example those relating to:

- marriage, including forced marriage;
- consent, including the age of consent;
- violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, stalking, rape, sexual offences, female genital mutilation (FGM), 'virginity testing' and hymenoplasty;

- sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation, including public sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour;
- the Online Safety Act;
- online behaviours including image and information sharing (including ‘sexting’, youth-produced sexual imagery, nudes, etc, and including AI-generated sexual imagery and deepfakes). Pupils should understand the law about online sexual harassment and online sexual abuse including grooming and sextortion;
- pornography;
- abortion;
- protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation);
- substance misuse;
- gambling;
- violence and exploitation by gangs;
- carrying knives;
- extremism/radicalisation;
- criminal exploitation (for example, through gang involvement or ‘county lines’ drugs operations);
- hate crime.

## Equality

37. Schools are required to comply with relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including the [Public sector equality duty \(PSED\)](#) (s.149), when teaching RSHE.<sup>9</sup> Further guidance is available for schools in [The Equality Act 2010 and Schools](#) advice.

38. Schools must ensure topics in RSHE are taught in a way which does not discriminate against pupils or amount to harassment.

39. Pupils should learn about the law relating to the protected characteristics by the end of their secondary education. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sex.

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<sup>9</sup> Equality Act provisions in relation to schools are in Part 6, Chapter 1. Independent schools that are not academies are not subject to the PSED.

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender content**

40. Pupils should understand the importance of equality and respect and should learn about the protected characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender reassignment, by the end of their secondary education.

### **Sexual orientation**

41. We expect the majority of primary schools to teach about healthy loving relationships. Primary schools have discretion over whether to discuss sexual orientation or families with same-sex parents. At secondary, there should be an equal opportunity to explore the features of stable and healthy same-sex relationships, and secondary schools should ensure that this content is integrated into RSHE programmes of study rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson.

42. Pupils should also be taught the facts and the law about sex, sexual orientation and sexual health.

### **Gender Reassignment**

43. Pupils should also be taught the law about gender reassignment. Schools should be clear that an individual must be 18 before they can legally reassign their gender. This means that a child's legal sex will always be the same as their biological sex and, at school, boys cannot be legally classified as girls or vice versa.

44. If a child is questioning their gender, schools should refer to the guidance for schools and colleges on gender questioning pupils for more information.

45. Schools should not teach about the broader concept of gender identity. Gender identity is a highly contested and complex subject. It is a sense a person may have of their own gender, whether male, female or a number of other categories. This may or may not be the same as their biological sex. Many people do not consider that they or others have a separate gender identity.

46. If asked about the topic of gender identity, schools should teach the facts about biological sex and not use any materials that present contested views as fact, including the view that gender is a spectrum. Material suggesting that someone's gender is determined by their interests or clothing choices should not be used as it risks leading pupils who do not comply with sex stereotypes to question their gender when they might not have done so otherwise. Where schools decide to use external resources, they should avoid materials that use cartoons or diagrams that oversimplify this complex concept or that could be interpreted as being aimed at younger children. Schools should consult parents on the content of external resources on this topic in advance and make all materials available to them on request.

## **Religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character**

47. RSHE should be sensitive to the religious background of pupils, and schools must ensure they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics.

48. All schools may teach about faith perspectives on these topics. In particular, schools with a religious character may teach their distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are contentious. For example, the school may wish to reflect on faith teachings about certain topics as well as how their faith institutions may support people in matters of relationships and sex. However, where RE is delivered in conjunction with RSHE, schools should ensure that content is differentiated for pupils so that it is clear where they are being taught content that reflects religious belief.

## **Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**

49. Relationships education, RSE and health education must be differentiated to ensure these subjects are accessible for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, including in special schools, and prepare pupils for adulthood,<sup>10</sup> as set out in the SEND code of practice.

50. Schools should be aware that pupils with SEND may be more vulnerable than their peers to harmful sexual behaviour, sexual abuse, exploitation, bullying and other issues. RSHE can be particularly important for these pupils, particularly those with social, emotional and mental health needs or learning disabilities.

## **Addressing prejudice, sexual harassment and sexual violence**

51. Pupils should learn about harmful sexual behaviours, that sexual violence and sexual harassment are never acceptable, and can include a wide range of unwanted behaviours, including sexual innuendos, suggestive comments, questions about a person's sex life and sexual advances. Pupils should be clear about the law in relation to sexual violence and harassment, whether it occurs online or offline, including that stalking, indecent exposure (including online), upskirting and any sexual harassment involving physical contact are crimes in England and Wales, and that people can be prosecuted for this behaviour. Pupils should understand that anyone can be a victim of sexual violence, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or another protected characteristic and that the victim is never to blame.

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<sup>10</sup> "Preparing for adulthood" outcomes are set out at section 7.38 of the SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years.

52. It is important to foster respectful relationships between boys and girls, and schools should be alive to issues such as everyday sexism, misogyny, homophobia and sex stereotypes, and should take action to build a culture where any occurrences are identified and tackled. Staff have an important role to play in modelling positive behaviours and avoiding language that might perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Pupils should understand the importance of challenging harmful beliefs and attitudes and should understand that sexism and misogyny can be linked to violence against women and girls. Where misogynistic ideas are expressed at school, staff should challenge the ideas, rather than the person expressing them, and support pupils to reflect on their attitudes.<sup>11</sup>

53. Some pupils may be exposed to harmful behaviours, including online, which may normalise harmful or violent sexual behaviours. This can include exposure to sexist and misogynistic influencers, which may normalise sexual harassment and abuse. Teachers should be aware of risk factors such as existing vulnerabilities, bullying, peer pressure, or low self-esteem, that may make some boys more vulnerable to harmful online content and encourage pupils to consider how this content may be harmful to both men and women. It is essential that generalisations are not made, and pupils should have the opportunity to identify positive male role models and understand that most boys and young men are respectful to girls and young women and each other.

54. Discussions about sensitive topics in RSHE can lead to increased safeguarding reports. All staff should know what to do if they have concerns that a pupil is being abused or neglected or have witnessed abuse.<sup>12</sup> Where lessons are delivered by external agencies, schools must agree in advance of the session how a safeguarding report would be dealt with by the external visitor. Staff should also be aware of mandatory reporting duties, including regarding FGM,<sup>13</sup> and that virginity testing and hymenoplasty became illegal in 2022.<sup>14</sup> The Government is also introducing a new law which will create a legal requirement for anyone in regulated activity relating to children in England, including teachers, to report it if they are made aware a child is being sexually abused.

55. Teachers should adopt an approach which creates a safe environment for pupils to discuss these topics outside of the classroom. However, the welfare of the child is paramount and schools should have regard to the statutory guidance [Keeping children safe in education](#). Staff with concerns about a child's welfare should consider making a referral to local authority children's social care and should do this immediately if there is a

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<sup>11</sup> Guidance and resources for teachers and school staff to help challenge these harmful behaviours can be found here - [Guidance and resources for teachers and school staff | ENOUGH](#)

<sup>12</sup> Resources to help teachers and school staff identify the signs and indicators of child sexual abuse can be found here - [Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse](#)

<sup>13</sup> The FGM mandatory reporting duty requires regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales to report 'known' cases of FGM in under 18s which they identify in the course of their professional work to the police. Guidance can be found here - [Mandatory Reporting of Female Genital Mutilation – procedural information](#)

<sup>14</sup> Guidance on hymenoplasty and virginity testing can be found here - [Virginity testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance](#)

concern that the child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so (subject to the mandatory reporting duties set out at paragraph 54). Staff should handle personal information with due care and know how to manage the requirement to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality. This means only involving those who need to be involved, such as the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or deputy) and children's social care. Staff should never promise a child that they will not tell anyone about a report of abuse, as this may ultimately not be in the best interests of the child. It is equally important that children understand how confidentiality will be handled in a lesson and what might happen if they choose to make a report, about themselves or a peer.

56. It is good practice to involve the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or a deputy) in anything that is safeguarding-related in the context of these subjects. They will potentially have knowledge of trusted, high-quality local support that could be engaged, links to the police and other agencies and the knowledge of any local issues, which it may be appropriate to address in lessons.

## **Managing difficult questions**

57. Pupils may ask questions related to topics which go beyond any sex education covered by the school, or which cover age-restricted content. The school's policy should explain how teachers will handle such questions, with an emphasis on supporting the child. This may include asking a pupil to speak to their parents or a trusted adult, signposting to support services where needed, and recognising that children whose questions go unanswered might instead turn to inappropriate sources of information, including online. Teachers may require support and training in handling questions that are better not dealt with in the classroom.

## **Age limits and flexibility**

58. The age limits in this guidance seek to ensure that, as content is introduced that is designed to prepare young people to stay safe and keep others safe, children are not introduced too early to concepts that they may not have the maturity to grasp, or which may be distressing. Age limits are focused on topics which, even when presented in a careful and well-intentioned way, may inadvertently give the message to young people that they could or should be engaging in or exploring adult activities rather than enjoying childhood.

59. Schools should seek to follow these age limits at all times. However, flexibility may be necessary in order to respond promptly to issues which pose an imminent safeguarding risk to their pupils. In certain circumstances, schools may decide to teach age-limited topics earlier, provided it is necessary do so in order to safeguard pupils and provided that teaching is limited to the essential facts, without going into unnecessary detail. Parents must be informed in these cases and appropriate safeguarding measures



put in place. For example, if a primary school becomes aware that pupils are circulating pornographic material on social media, or if a secondary school becomes aware of a problem with sexual abuse in Key Stage 3, it would be appropriate for the school to address this with pupils in order to tackle the behaviour promptly, make them aware of the risks and consequences and prevent it from happening in future. However, this does not mean schools should go into the details of the sexual acts in question.

60. It is essential that schools inform parents in advance where they plan to teach a topic earlier than set out in this guidance.

# Curriculum Content

## Relationships education (Primary)

61. The focus in primary school should be on teaching the fundamental characteristics of positive relationships, strengthening the understanding that children will be developing at home. Primary schools should take account of the age limits in the secondary RSHE curriculum tables, to ensure that no inappropriate content is taught.

62. Relationships education in primary should equip pupils to recognise and report abuse. Pupils should understand how to identify where boundaries have been violated, in all contexts, including online. In primary schools, this can be delivered by focusing on boundaries, privacy, and children's rights over their own bodies. Pupils should be able to recognise emotional, physical and sexual abuse, though without getting into the detail of sexual acts. In addition, pupils should understand how bullying can intensify, and become abusive (for example, using derogatory terms related to someone's sex). Pupils should know how to report concerns and seek advice. While teaching children how to stay safe, including online, teachers should be clear that being a victim of abuse is never the fault of the child.

63. Schools can most commonly refer to families with a mother and a father when discussing families, but should be sensitive to pupils' circumstances, recognising that some children may have a different structure of support around them. For example, looked after children or young carers. Families of many forms provide a nurturing environment for children, and can include single parent families, same-sex parents, families headed by grandparents, kinship carers, adoptive parents and foster parents/carers. Care should be taken to ensure that children are not stigmatised based on their home circumstances and needs.

## By the end of primary school:

<p><b>Families and people who care for me</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. that families are important for children growing up because they provide love, security and stability.</li> <li>2. the characteristics of healthy family life, including commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members, the importance of spending time together and sharing each other's lives.</li> <li>3. that others' families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children's families are also characterised by love and care.</li> <li>4. that stable, caring relationships are at the heart of happy families, and are important for children's security as they grow up.</li> <li>5. that marriage<sup>15</sup> represents a formal and legally recognised commitment of two people to each other which is intended to be lifelong.</li> <li>6. how to recognise if family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe, and how to seek help or advice from others if needed.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Caring friendships</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.</li> <li>2. that through no fault of their own, not every child will have the friends they would like, that most people feel lonely at some point and that there is no shame in feeling lonely or talking about it.</li> <li>3. the characteristics of healthy relationships that lead to happiness and security, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, generosity, trust, sharing interests and experiences, and support with problems and difficulties.</li> <li>4. how to recognise relationships that are less positive</li> <li>5. that healthy friendships are positive and welcoming towards others, and do not make others feel lonely or excluded.</li> </ol>

<sup>15</sup> Marriage in England and Wales is available to both opposite sex and same sex couples. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 extended marriage to same sex couples in England and Wales. The ceremony through which a couple get married may be civil or religious.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. that most friendships have ups and downs, and that these can often be worked through so that the friendship is repaired or even strengthened, how to manage conflict, and that resorting to violence is never right.</li> <li>7. how to recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, how to handle these situations, and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed.</li> </ol>
<b>Respectful relationships</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the importance of respecting others, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or make different choices or have different preferences or beliefs.</li> <li>2. practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships.</li> <li>3. the conventions of courtesy and manners.</li> <li>4. the importance of self-respect and how this links to their own happiness.</li> <li>5. that they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show respect to others, including those in positions of authority.</li> <li>6. about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders (primarily reporting bullying to an adult), and how to get help.</li> <li>7. what a stereotype is, how stereotypes can be unfair, negative, destructive or lead to bullying and how to challenge a stereotype.</li> <li>8. the importance of respecting boundaries, including understanding permission-seeking and giving in relationships with friends, peers and adults.</li> </ol>
<b>Online relationships</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. that people sometimes behave differently online, and that this can lead to dangerous situations. For example, someone pretending to be someone they are not, or an adult presenting as a child, to get another person to do something for them that they don't want to do, or shouldn't do.</li> <li>2. that children should be respectful in online interactions, and the same principles apply to online relationships as to face-to-face relationships, including when we are anonymous.</li> </ol>

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|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. the rules and principles for keeping safe online, how to recognise risks, harmful content and contact, and how to report them.</li><li>4. how to critically consider their online friendships and sources of information including awareness of the risks associated with people they have never met.</li><li>5. how information and data is shared and used online, including the risks of sending images and information (without discussing details of sexual imagery).</li><li>6. about online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be circulated online and that once a picture or words has been circulated there is no way of deleting it everywhere and no control over where it ends up.</li><li>7. that there is a minimum age for joining social media sites (normally age 13) in part to protect children from inappropriate content or unsafe contact with older social media users, who may be strangers, including other children and adults.</li><li>8. the importance of avoiding putting pressure on others to share information and images online, and strategies for resisting peer pressure. This should be covered without discussing details of sexual imagery.</li><li>9. who to go to for advice and support when they feel worried or concerned about something they have seen or engaged with online. Pupils should understand what they should do if they see something online that makes them feel worried. Pornography should not be referenced in primary education.</li></ol> |
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<b>Being safe</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. what sorts of boundaries are appropriate in friendships with peers and others (including in a digital context). This can include learning about boundaries in play and in negotiations about space, toys, books, resources and so on.</li> <li>2. about the concept of privacy and its implications for both children and adults; including that it is not always right to keep secrets if they relate to being safe.</li> <li>3. that each person's body belongs to them, and the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe contact, including physical contact.</li> <li>4. how to respond safely and appropriately to adults they may encounter (in all contexts, including online), including those they do and do not know.</li> <li>5. how to recognise and report feelings of being unsafe or feeling bad about any adult.</li> <li>6. how to ask for advice or help for themselves or others, and to keep trying until they are heard.</li> <li>7. how to report concerns or abuse, and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so.</li> <li>8. where to get advice e.g. family, school and/or other sources.</li> </ol>
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## Sex Education (Primary)

71. The aim of teaching aspects of sex education in primary is not to prepare pupils for sexual activity in later life. It should only focus on giving pupils the information they need to understand human reproduction and for their own safety. To ensure the content does not go beyond this, schools should take account of the age restrictions set out in the secondary RSHE curriculum tables, which are clear that some topics should not be taught before secondary school.

72. Sex education is not compulsory in primary schools, but the Department recommends that primaries teach sex education in years 5 or 6 (this should be taught no earlier than year 5) in line with what pupils learn about conception and birth as part of the national curriculum for science. The national curriculum for science includes subject content in related areas, such as the main external body parts, the human body as it grows from birth to old age (including puberty) and reproduction in some plants and animals. Schools may also cover human reproduction in the science curriculum, but

where they do so, this should be in line with the factual description of conception in the science curriculum.

73. Primary schools should consult parents about the detailed content of anything that is to be taught in sex education. This process should include offering parents support in talking to their children about sex education and how to link this with what is being taught in school.

## Relationships and Sex Education (RSE): Secondary

74. RSE in secondary should provide a clear progression from primary relationships education, supporting parents to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, including the knowledge they may need in later life to avoid sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies.

75. Effective RSE focuses on respect for oneself and others and does not encourage or normalise early sexual experimentation. By supporting confidence and self-esteem, RSE will enable young people to make their own choices about whether or when to develop safe, fulfilling and healthy sexual relationships, and to resist pressure to have sex.

76. RSE in secondary will cover a range of topics, including topics related to abusive behaviour. Different forms of abuse should be addressed sensitively and clearly at appropriate ages as set out below. For pupils who are experiencing, or have experienced unhealthy or unsafe relationships, including at home, the school may have an important role as a place of consistency and safety where pupils can find support.

77. When teaching sensitive topics, teachers can use approaches such as distancing techniques, setting ground rules with the class to help manage sensitive discussion, and using question boxes to allow pupils to raise issues anonymously.

### By the end of secondary school:

**Schools should continue to develop knowledge on topics specified for primary as required and in addition cover the following content by the end of secondary:**

<b>Families</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. that there are different types of committed, stable relationships.</li><li>2. how these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children.</li><li>3. what marriage is, including its legal status, e.g. that marriage carries legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting</li></ol>
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	<p>or who have married, for example, in an unregistered religious ceremony.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and that forced marriage and marrying before the age of 18 is illegal.<sup>16</sup></li><li>5. the characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships.</li><li>6. how families and relationships change over time, including through birth, death, separation and new relationships.</li><li>7. the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising children, including the characteristics of successful parenting and the importance of the early years of a child's life for brain development.</li><li>8. how to determine whether other children, adults or sources of information are trustworthy, how to judge when a relationship is unsafe (and to recognise this in others' relationships); and, how to seek help or advice, including reporting concerns about others, if needed.</li></ol>
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<sup>16</sup> [Age of Marriage Act 2023](#)



<p><b>Respectful relationships, including friendships</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the characteristics of positive and healthy relationships of all kinds, online and offline, including romantic relationships. For example, pupils should understand the role of consent, trust, mutual respect, honesty, kindness, loyalty, shared interests and outlooks, generosity, boundaries, privacy, and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships.</li> <li>2. that fixated, obsessive, unwanted and repeated behaviours can be criminal, and where to get help if needed.</li> <li>3. the practical steps they can take to improve or support respectful relationships.</li> <li>4. how stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender reassignment, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice).</li> <li>5. that they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show respect to others, including people in positions of authority, as well as tolerance of other people's beliefs.</li> <li>6. about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help.</li> <li>7. the legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality, and that everyone is unique and equal.</li> <li>8. what constitutes harmful sexual behaviour and why, and that such behaviour is unacceptable, emphasising that it is never the fault of the person experiencing it. <b>This should not be taught before year 7.</b></li> <li>9. that some types of behaviour, including within relationships, are criminal, including violent behaviour and emotional abuse, such as controlling or coercive behaviour.<sup>17</sup> <b>Schools should not, however, teach about the details of violent abuse before Y9 as it is important that pupils are not introduced to distressing concepts when they are too young to understand them.</b></li> </ol>
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<sup>17</sup> [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

<p><b>Online and media</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online, including that the same expectations of behaviour apply in all contexts, including online.</li> <li>2. about online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be circulated online and that once a picture or words has been circulated there is no way of deleting it everywhere and no control over where it ends up.</li> <li>3. not to provide material to others that they would not want to be distributed further and not to pass on personal material which is sent to them. Pupils should understand the serious risks of sending material to others.</li> <li>4. what to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online.<sup>18</sup></li> <li>5. about circulating images and information and how to safely report to trusted adults the non-consensual creation or distribution of an intimate image. Pupils should understand that making, keeping or sending naked or sexual images of someone under 18 is a crime, even if the photo is of themselves or of someone who has consented, and even if the image was created by the child and/or using AI generated imagery. Pupils should understand the potentially serious consequences of asking for naked, semi-naked or sexual images, including the potential for criminal charges and severe penalties including imprisonment. <b>This topic should not be taught before year 7.</b></li> <li>6. the impact of viewing harmful content, including pornography, that presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others, and can negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners. This can affect pupils who see pornographic content accidentally as well as those who see it deliberately. <b>The risks of inappropriate online content can be discussed in an age-appropriate way from year 7, however, the details of sexual acts should not be discussed before year 9.</b></li> <li>7. how information and data is generated, collected, shared and used online.</li> <li>8. the characteristics of social media, including that social media users may say things in more extreme ways than they might in face-to-face situations, and that some users present highly exaggerated or idealised profiles of themselves online.</li> </ol>
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<sup>18</sup> For example, see Report Remove. [Report Remove \(iwf.org.uk\)](https://www.iwf.org.uk)

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|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>9. that websites may share personal data about their users, and information collected on their internet use, for commercial purposes (i.e. to enable targeted advertising).</li><li>10. that criminals can operate online scams, for example using fake websites or emails to extort money or valuable personal information. This information can be used to the detriment of the person or wider society.</li></ol> |
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<p><b>Being safe</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how to recognise, respect and communicate boundaries in relationships, including in early romantic relationships (in all contexts, including online) such as kissing or touching.</li> <li>2. the concepts and laws relating to harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment, revenge porn, upskirting and taking/sharing intimate sexual photographs without consent, public sexual harassment, and unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching. <b>This should not be taught before year 7.</b></li> <li>3. The concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, grooming, stalking, and forced marriage. <b>This should not be taught before year 7.</b></li> <li>4. The concept and laws relating to sexual violence, including rape and sexual assault. <b>Whilst it's important for pupils to understand the key principles around sexual offences and violence, for example the importance of understanding what consent means, schools should not teach about this in any sexually explicit way before year 9.</b></li> <li>5. the physical and emotional damage which can be caused by female genital mutilation (FGM), virginity testing and hymenoplasty, where to find support, and the law around these areas. This should include that it is a criminal offence to perform or assist in the performance of FGM, virginity testing or hymenoplasty, or fail to protect a person under 16 for whom someone is responsible from FGM, or to take girls who are UK nationals abroad for FGM, regardless of whether it is lawful in that country. <b>This should not be taught before year 9, except for where schools have identified a greater risk of FGM at an earlier age or have pupils who have been affected by FGM and need support.</b></li> <li>6. the concepts and laws relating to domestic abuse including controlling or coercive behaviour, emotional, sexual, economic or physical abuse, and violent or threatening behaviour<sup>19</sup>. <b>Schools should not teach about the details of violent abuse before year 9 as it is important that pupils are not introduced to distressing concepts when they are too young to understand them.</b></li> <li>7. how to seek support for worrying or abusive behaviour in themselves or others, including information on where to report abuse.</li> </ol>
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<sup>19</sup> The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) recognised children who see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse, and are related to either the victim of the abusive behaviour, or the perpetrator, as victims of domestic abuse in their own right (part 1 section 3). The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory](#) guidance is designed to support statutory and non-statutory bodies working with victims of domestic abuse, including children.

<p><b>Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health</b></p>	<p><b>Explicit discussion of the details of sexual acts should not be taught before year 9 and should only take place insofar as it is necessary to teach the topics below.</b></p> <p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the law about the age of consent, that they have a choice about whether to have sex, that many young people wait until they are older, and that people of all ages can enjoy intimate and romantic relationships without sex.</li> <li>2. about sexual consent and their capacity to give or withhold consent at any time, even if initially given, as well as the considerations that people might take into account prior to sexual activity, e.g. the law, faith and family values.</li> <li>3. that all aspects of health can be affected by choices they make in sex and relationships, positively or negatively, e.g. physical, emotional, mental, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.</li> <li>4. That some sexual behaviours can be harmful and that there are a range of strategies for identifying, resisting and understanding sexual pressure, including from peers, and how to avoid putting sexual pressure on others.</li> <li>5. the facts about the full range of contraceptive choices, efficacy and options available.</li> <li>6. that there are choices in relation to pregnancy. Pupils should be given medically and legally accurate and impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help.</li> <li>7. how the different sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDs, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing.</li> <li>8. about the prevalence of STIs, the impact they can have on those who contract them and key facts about treatment.</li> <li>9. how the use of alcohol and drugs can lead people to take risks in their sexual behaviour.</li> <li>10. how to get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment.</li> </ol>
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## Health and wellbeing

78. The aim of teaching about health and wellbeing is to enable pupils to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing, to understand the links between physical and mental health, to recognise problems in themselves or others and to seek support when needed. Schools should support pupils to develop strategies for self-regulation, perseverance and determination, even in the face of setbacks.

79. Effective teaching should aim to reduce stigma attached to health issues, in particular relating to mental health, and discourage the pejorative use of language related to ill health. Schools should promote openness, so that pupils can check their understanding and seek any necessary help and advice.

80. Curriculum content related to puberty and menstruation should be complemented by sensitive arrangements to help girls prepare for and manage menstruation, including with requests for period products. Schools should use appropriate language such as period pads and menstrual products instead of sanitary items or feminine hygiene products. Both secondary and primary state-maintained schools in England can access free period products via the [DfE's period product scheme](#).

### Health and wellbeing: Primary

81. Health education in primary starts with the benefits and importance of daily exercise, good nutrition and sufficient sleep, and supports pupils to develop emotional awareness. Schools should emphasise the relationships between physical health and mental wellbeing, and the benefits of physical exercise and time spent outdoors.

#### By the end of primary school:

<b>General wellbeing</b>	<p>Pupils should understand</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. the benefits of physical exercise, time outdoors, and helping others for wellbeing and happiness. Simple self-care techniques, including the importance of rest, time spent with friends and family and hobbies, interests and community participation.</li><li>2. the importance of promoting general wellbeing and physical health.</li><li>3. the range and scale of emotions (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) that they might experience in different situations. Pupils should understand that worrying and feeling down are normal and affect everyone at different times and are not in themselves a sign of a mental health condition.</li></ol>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. how to recognise feelings and use varied vocabulary to talk about their own and others' feelings.</li> <li>5. how to judge whether what they are feeling and how they are behaving is appropriate and proportionate.</li> <li>6. that isolation and loneliness can affect children, and the benefits of seeking support.</li> <li>7. that bullying (including cyberbullying) has a negative and often lasting impact on mental wellbeing.</li> <li>8. that change and loss, including bereavement, can provoke a range of feelings; that grief is a natural response to bereavement, and everyone grieves differently.</li> <li>9. where and how to seek support (including recognising the triggers for seeking support), including who in school they should speak to if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions (including issues arising online).</li> <li>10. that it is common to experience mental health problems, and early support can help resolve problems.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Online safety and harms</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. that for many people the internet is an integral part of life and has many benefits as part of a healthy life including meaningful offline relationships.</li> <li>2. about the benefits of rationing time spent online, the risks of excessive time spent on electronic devices and the impact of positive and negative content online on their own and others' mental and physical wellbeing.</li> <li>3. how to consider the impact of their online behaviour on others, and how to recognise and display respectful behaviour online,</li> <li>4. the importance of keeping personal information private.</li> <li>5. why social media, some apps, computer games and online gaming, including gambling sites, are age restricted. <b>This should not be taught before year 3.</b></li> <li>6. the risks relating to online gaming, video game monetisation, scams, fraud and other financial harms, and that gaming can become addictive. <b>This should not be taught before year 3.</b></li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. how to take a critical approach to what they see and read online and make responsible decisions about which content, including content on social media and apps, is appropriate for them.</li> <li>8. that the internet can be a negative place where online abuse, bullying and harassment can take place, which can have a negative impact on wellbeing. <b>In discussing this, care should be taken to avoid exposing children to concepts which may not be appropriate for them.</b></li> <li>9. how to understand the information they find online, including from search engines, and know how information is selected and targeted.</li> <li>10. that they have rights in relation to sharing personal data, privacy and consent.</li> <li>11. where and how to report concerns and get support with issues online.</li> </ol>
<b>Physical health and fitness</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the characteristics and mental and physical benefits of an active lifestyle.</li> <li>2. the importance of building regular exercise into daily and weekly routines and how to achieve this; for example, walking or cycling to school, a daily active mile or other forms of regular, vigorous exercise.</li> <li>3. the risks associated with an inactive lifestyle (including obesity).</li> <li>4. how and when to seek support including which adults to speak to in school if they are worried about their health.</li> </ol>
<b>Healthy eating</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. what constitutes a healthy diet (including understanding calories and other nutritional content).</li> <li>2. the principles of planning and preparing a range of healthy meals.</li> <li>3. the characteristics of a poor diet and risks associated with unhealthy eating (including, for example, obesity and tooth decay) and other behaviours (e.g. the impact of alcohol on diet or health).</li> </ol>



<b>Drugs, alcohol, tobacco and vaping</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the facts about legal and illegal harmful substances and associated risks, including smoking, vaping, alcohol use and drug-taking.</li> </ol>
<b>Health protection and prevention</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how to recognise early signs of physical illness, such as weight loss, or unexplained changes to the body.</li> <li>2. about safe and unsafe exposure to the sun, and how to reduce the risk of sun damage, including skin cancer.</li> <li>3. the importance of sufficient good quality sleep for health and the impact of poor sleep on weight, mood and ability to learn.</li> <li>4. about dental health and the benefits of good oral hygiene and inter-dental cleaning, including regular check-ups at the dentist.</li> <li>5. about personal hygiene and germs including bacteria, viruses, how they are spread and treated, and the importance of handwashing.</li> <li>6. the facts and science relating to allergies, immunisation and vaccination.</li> </ol>
<b>Personal safety</b>	<p>Pupils should know:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. about hazards (including fire risks) that may cause harm, injury or risk and ways to reduce risks.</li> <li>2. how to recognise risk and keep safe around roads, railways and water, including the water safety code.</li> </ol>
<b>Basic first aid</b>	<p>Pupils should know:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how to make a clear and efficient call to emergency services if necessary, including the importance of reporting incidents rather than filming them.</li> <li>2. concepts of basic first aid, for example dealing with common injuries and ailments, including head injuries.</li> </ol>
<b>Developing bodies</b>	<p><b>This should not be taught before year 4.</b></p> <p>Pupils should know:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. about growth, change and the changing adolescent body, This topic should include the human lifecycle. Puberty should be mentioned as a stage in this process.</li> <li>2. the key facts about the menstrual cycle, including physical and emotional changes.</li> </ol>

## Health and wellbeing: Secondary

82. Teaching in secondary should build on primary content, supporting pupils to understand their changing bodies and their feelings, how to protect their own health and wellbeing, and when a physical or mental health issue requires attention. Schools may also choose to teach about issues such as eating disorders<sup>20</sup> and self-harm. It is important that schools ensure teachers are properly equipped to lead discussions about these topics, including what to do if a pupil makes a disclosure.

83. In teaching about mental health and wellbeing within the RSHE curriculum, schools may wish to talk to young people about the prevention of suicide, including how to identify warning signs and where and how to seek help.

84. Many aspects of suicide are addressed throughout the mental wellbeing curriculum. Starting in primary school, it includes recognising and talking about emotions and judging whether what they are feeling, and how they are behaving, is appropriate and proportionate. Isolation, loneliness and bullying are recognised as negatively affecting children and they should always be able to discuss their feelings with an adult. Simple self-care techniques and knowing where and how to seek support for themselves and others, are part of the curriculum.

85. If addressing suicide prevention directly, teaching should focus on equipping pupils to recognise when they, or someone they know, needs support and where they can seek help if they have concerns. This should include details on which adults in school (e.g. school nurses), and externally can help. Teachers should use language and content that is accurate, straightforward and appropriate to the level of understanding of the class. They should take particular care to avoid discussing instructions or methods of self-harm or suicide and avoid using emotive language, videos or images. Given the sensitivity and complexity of content on suicide prevention, direct references to suicide should not be made before **year 8**.

86. If teachers have concerns about a specific pupil in relation to eating disorders, self-harm or suicidal ideation or attempts, or a pupil discloses information, they must follow safeguarding procedures.

**Schools should continue to develop knowledge on topics specified for primary as required and in addition cover the following content by the end of secondary:**

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<sup>20</sup> Eating disorders can be taught about in a safe and sensitive way. It should be recognised that it is a specialised area and schools should use qualified support or advice as needed. Schools may consider accessing support from the NHS or local specialist services who may be able to provide advice and CPD for teachers.

<p><b>Mental wellbeing</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how to talk about their emotions accurately and sensitively, using appropriate vocabulary.</li> <li>2. that happiness is linked to being connected to others. Pupils should be supported to understand what makes them feel lonely, while recognising that loneliness is for most people an inevitable part of life and is not something to be ashamed of.</li> <li>3. how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing concerns.</li> <li>4. common types of mental ill health (e.g. anxiety and depression), including factual information about the prevalence and characteristics of more serious mental health conditions. Pupils should understand that worrying and feeling down are normal and affect everyone at different times and are not in themselves a sign of a mental health condition.</li> <li>5. how to critically evaluate when something they do or are involved in has a positive or negative effect on their own or others' mental health.</li> <li>6. the benefits and importance of physical exercise, time outdoors, community participation and voluntary and service-based activities for mental wellbeing and happiness.</li> <li>7. that gambling can lead to serious mental health harms, including anxiety, depression, and suicide, and that some gambling products are more likely to cause these harms than others.</li> </ol>
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<p><b>Online safety and harms</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. about the benefits of rationing time spent online, the risks of excessive time spent on electronic devices and the impact of positive and negative content online on their own and others' mental and physical wellbeing.</li> <li>2. the similarities and differences between the online world and the physical world, including: the impact of unhealthy or obsessive comparison with others online (including through setting unrealistic expectations for body image), how people may curate a specific image of their life online, the impact of over-reliance on online relationships including social media.</li> <li>3. the risks related to online gambling and gambling content within gaming, including addiction and the accumulation of debt, how advertising and information is targeted at them and how to be a discerning consumer of information online.</li> <li>4. how to identify harmful behaviours online (including bullying, abuse or harassment) and how to report, or find support, if they have been affected by those behaviours.</li> <li>5. About the prevalence of deepfakes, including videos and photos, how deepfakes can be used maliciously as well as for entertainment, the harms that can be caused by deepfakes and how to identify them.</li> <li>6. the risks of illegal behaviours online, including drug and knife supply or the sale of drugs online.</li> <li>7. the serious risks of viewing online content that promotes self-harm and suicide, including how to safely report this material and how to access support after viewing it.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Physical health and fitness</b></p>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the characteristics of a healthy lifestyle, including physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight, including the links between an inactive lifestyle and ill health, including cancer and cardiovascular ill-health.</li> <li>2. factual information about the prevalence and characteristics of more serious health conditions.</li> <li>3. that physical activity can promote wellbeing and combat stress.</li> <li>4. the science relating to blood, organ and stem cell donation.</li> </ol>

<b>Healthy eating</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how to maintain healthy eating and the links between a poor diet and health risks, including tooth decay and cancer.</li> </ol>
<b>Drugs, alcohol tobacco and vaping</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the facts about which drugs are illegal, the risks of taking illegal drugs, and potential health implications including the link to mental health.</li> <li>2. the law relating to the supply and possession of illegal substances.</li> <li>3. the physical and psychological risks associated with alcohol consumption and what constitutes low risk alcohol consumption in adulthood.</li> <li>4. the physical and psychological consequences of addiction, including alcohol dependency.</li> <li>5. the dangers of drugs which are prescribed but still present serious health risks.</li> <li>6. the facts about the multiple serious harms from smoking tobacco (particularly the link to lung cancer), the benefits of quitting and how to access support to do so.</li> <li>7. the facts about the risks of nicotine and non-nicotine vaping, including potential harm to the developing adolescent brain.</li> </ol>
<b>Health protection and prevention</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. about personal hygiene, germs including bacteria, viruses, how they are spread, treatment and prevention of infection, and about antibiotics.</li> <li>2. about dental health and the benefits of good oral hygiene and interdental cleaning including healthy eating and regular check-ups at the dentist.</li> <li>3. how and when to self-care for minor ailments, and the role of pharmacists as knowledgeable healthcare professionals.</li> <li>4. the benefits of regular self-examination and screening.</li> <li>5. the facts and science relating to immunisation, vaccination and antimicrobial resistance.</li> <li>6. the importance of sufficient good quality sleep for good health, the importance of screen-free time before bed and removing</li> </ol>

	<p>phones from the bedroom, and how a lack of sleep can affect weight, mood and ability to learn.</p> <p>7. How to navigate their local healthcare system: what a GP is, when to use A&amp;E / minor injuries, accessing sexual health and family planning clinics, the role of local pharmacies.</p> <p>8. the importance of healthy behaviours before and during pregnancy, including pelvic floor health, information on miscarriage and pregnancy loss, and how to access care and support.</p>
<b>Personal safety</b>	<p>Pupils should know:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. how to identify risk and manage personal safety in increasingly independent situations, including around roads, railways and water (including the water safety code), and in unfamiliar social or work settings (for example the first time a young person goes on holiday without their parents).</li> <li>2. how to recognise and manage peer influence in relation to risk-taking behaviour and personal safety.</li> <li>3. facts and the law around carrying knives and knife crime.</li> </ol>
<b>Basic first aid</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. basic treatment for common injuries and ailments.</li> <li>2. life-saving skills, including how to administer CPR.<sup>21</sup></li> <li>3. the purpose of defibrillators and when one might be needed.</li> </ol>
<b>Developing bodies</b>	<p>Pupils should know</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the main changes which take place in males and females, and the implications for emotional and physical health.</li> <li>2. the key facts about puberty, the changing adolescent body, including brain development.</li> <li>3. about menstrual and gynaecological health, including what is an average period, period problems such as premenstrual syndrome, heavy menstrual bleeding, endometriosis, and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), and when to seek help from healthcare professionals.</li> </ol>

<sup>21</sup> Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation is usually best taught after 12 years old.

	<p>4. the facts about reproductive health, including fertility and menopause, and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women.</p>
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## **Annex A Regulations**

### **Relationships education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health education**

The Relationships education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health education (England) Regulations 2019 are made under sections 34 and 35 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and provide that pupils receiving primary education must be taught relationships education, pupils receiving secondary education must be taught RSE and that all primary and secondary pupils must be taught health education. The subjects of relationships education and RSE must be taught in all maintained schools, academies and independent schools. This includes pupil referral units, maintained special schools, special academies, and non-maintained special schools. All schools, except independent schools, must make provision for health education.

To give effect to the duty in section 34 of the 2017 Act and the power in section 35 of that Act, the Relationships education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health education (England) Regulations 2019 amend existing provisions in the Education Act 1996 and the Education Act 2002 and insert new provisions into the Education (Pupil Referral Units) (Application of Enactments) (England) Regulations 2007, the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and the Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015. The provisions include a requirement for the Secretary of State to publish guidance on relationships education, RSE, and health education; require schools to have regard to that guidance; require schools to make a statement of policy on their provision of relationships education and RSE; and set out the circumstances in which a pupil is to be excused from RSE.

The regulations and guidance in relation to health education do not apply to independent schools – they will continue to make provision for the health education element of PSHE under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.



## Annex B Government resources

Teacher training modules developed by the Department for Education and subject matter experts across all topics within the RSHE curriculum: [Teaching about relationships, sex and health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

These subjects support many cross-government strategies of which schools will want to be aware. Whilst we have not referenced all strategies or supporting documents, we have included some of the key areas below.

- [Transforming children and young people's mental health provision](#) green paper. The green paper announced new support in and near schools and colleges to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- [From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives](#). Sets out how the government and its partners, at local, national and international levels, will take new action to tackle drug misuse and the harms it causes.
- The Children's Commissioner [Digital 5 A Day](#) provides a simple framework that reflects the concerns of parents as well as children's behaviours and needs.
- The [Working together to safeguarding children](#) statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children,
- The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) statutory guidance which is intended to increase awareness and inform the response to domestic abuse, also conveying standards and promotes best practice.
- Statutory guidance on FGM and forced marriage, including on the mandatory reporting duty which applies to teachers
- Government aims to significantly reduce England's rate of childhood obesity within the next ten years. The [childhood obesity plan](#) sets out the approach to reduce childhood obesity.
- [Guidance](#) from the Chief Medical Office (CMO) on how much physical activity people should be doing, along with supporting documents.
- The [Teenage Pregnancy prevention framework](#) provides evidence based guidance for local authorities, including the important role of RSE and links to local sexual health services.
- the Department of Health and Social Care's [Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England supports the prevention of early, unplanned pregnancy](#).
- [Reproductive health - a public health issue](#). A consensus statement, data and women's experiences, covering reproductive health through the life course, from menstruation to menopause. (PHE. 2018)

- The cross-government [loneliness strategy](#), which sets out the Government's vision for supporting individuals, businesses and communities to build and maintain strong relationships.
- [Children's health: migrant health guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). The Children's health: migrant health guide contains advice and guidance on the health needs of migrant patients for healthcare practitioners.
- [The Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy](#), which sets out the Government's whole-system response to all forms of child sexual abuse.
- [Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse](#). Practice resources to help professionals identify, respond and support children and young people who have been sexually abused.
- Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people>
- Better Health (NHS) have produced a website for teachers which covers a broad range of health and relationships issues in a format which is accessible for young people, targeted at primary and secondary age pupils. This includes Every Mind Matters resources for lessons which are accredited by the NHS and PSHE Association: [Mental wellbeing | Overview | PHE School Zone](#)
- Home Office guidance and resources for teachers and school staff on responding to and preventing abuse in a school setting, as well as resources for teaching about sexual harassment and sexual abuse, including preventing violence against women and girls: [Guidance and resources for teachers and school staff | ENOUGH](#)
- The National Crime Agency have developed lesson plans that explore the risks involved in committing cyber crime and help students to recognise and avoid the techniques used to manipulate young people online: [National Crime Agency: Exploring Cybercrime \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](#)

## Curriculum

- The Department for Education [page](#) brings together all existing information available to schools on the teaching of the RSHE curriculum. Including [teacher training modules](#), which aim to help teachers identify the core knowledge pupils may be taught as part of RSHE and parent guides and guidance in engaging parents on Relationships education.
- Schools may also wish to see a series of DfE [sexual harassment webinars](#) covering domestic abuse, pornography and sexual exploitation: <https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-4/dfesexualharassmentwebinars>
- [Non-statutory framework for Citizenship KS 1 and 2](#) (Non-statutory programme of study).

- Schools may wish to draw on the Citizenship programme of study in their planning.
- [Oak National Academy](#), the independent provider of freely available online curriculum and lesson resources, will be developing curriculum materials to make sure every school can access high-quality, compliant resources which will build on what is already available for schools.

## **Data to understand the health and wellbeing needs of the local school-age population**

- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network brings together a range of publicly available data, information, reports, tools and resources on child and maternal health into one easily accessible hub.
- It includes school-age health profiles and young people's health profiles.
- The indicators allow areas to see how they perform against the national average and against other local areas. These tools, accompanied by local health intelligence, will be useful in supporting schools to identify and respond to the particular health and wellbeing needs of their local school-age population.
- There are also early years health profiles.

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