

## Responding to the consultation on relationships and sex education

- The DfE has raised seven questions for consultation. You may respond to as many or as few of the questions as you wish.
- Please note that you are limited to **no more than 250 words** for each question you respond to.
- The following notes under each question are intended to suggest points that you may wish to make, but please respond **in your own words**.
- Questions 1, 2, 5 and 6 ask what are **the three most important subject areas** that should be taught. Subject to space, you may also wish to include some subject areas that it is important that children are NOT taught in ReIEd, RSE and PSHE.

### **1. Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

- The importance of committed, loving parents for a healthy childhood.
- The mutual responsibilities of parents and children: the responsibility of parents to provide a home, food, clothing, education, security for their children, and the responsibility of children to respect and obey their parents.
- How fathers and mothers complement each other by relating to their children in different ways.
- The place of the extended family – the contribution that grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins can make to a stable family life.
- The fact that marriage is associated with a higher degree of stability than other living arrangements, and that stable families in turn contribute to a healthy, cohesive and harmonious society.
- The importance of choosing friends carefully, and valuing the qualities of unselfishness, kindness, politeness, honesty and reliability.
- There are a number of topics that it would not be age-appropriate to address in primary school lessons: e.g. LGBT issues and relationships, pornography, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc.

*Although it is beyond the remit of the present call for evidence, you may wish to express concern that parents are being denied the right to withdraw their children from Relationships Education in primary schools.*

### **2. Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

- The distinction between lust and sexual desire on the one hand and true love on the other. Love runs deeper than feelings and involves commitment, faithfulness and perseverance.
- Rather than be taught about the mechanics of sex and contraception, young people need to be encouraged to develop the qualities they will need in order to build a strong and lasting marriage in later life: e.g. stability, honesty, faithfulness and commitment.
- Schools should be encouraged to establish a counter-cultural ethos in which sexual intimacy is considered and referred to with modesty, respect and restraint. RSE policies should ensure that the accent is placed on sexual activity as an expression of love.
- How history demonstrates the importance of marriage, defined as the lifelong union of one man and one woman, for the nurture of children, and the richness of care provided by the complementarity of care provided by a father and mother.
- The fact that marriage is associated with a much greater degree of stability than cohabitation and other living arrangements.
- The positive reasons for saving sexual intimacy for marriage: it is the surest safeguard against sexually transmitted infections and emotional harm, it provides the most stable context in which to bring children into the world, and leads to a more trusting marriage. Research demonstrates that most parents stay together if they married before having children.
- The reality that sexual promiscuity is a major contributor to family breakdown and divorce. Therefore it is important to exercise self-restraint in relation to sexual desire.
- An approach to RSE that emphasises sexual pleasure and ‘informed choices’ is unlikely to discourage and reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and violence. The focus needs to be turned away from self-gratification to self-giving in the context of a lifelong marriage.
- A strong emphasis on the age of consent and a firm rejection of the idea that sex under 16 can be a legitimate choice for young teenagers.
- The limited effectiveness of barrier contraception as a means of providing protection against the transmission of STIs and the reality that outside of a committed, mutually faithful, lifelong relationship with an uninfected partner, there is no such thing as ‘safe sex’.
- In making RSE accessible to pupils who identify as LGBT, the health risks associated with such lifestyles should be explored.

### **3. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?**

*Apart from warning primary school children about the danger of communicating with strangers online, no matter how friendly they may appear, it would not be age-appropriate to address the subjects of sexting, online grooming and pornography in a class setting. If it becomes apparent that any pupils are involved in such online activity, the issue can be addressed with the pupil and his/her parents privately. We therefore suggest that responses to this question should be limited to RSE in secondary schools.*

- As with younger children, secondary school pupils should also be warned about the dangers of communicating with strangers online.
- Sexual intimacy should be presented as something special, private and that belongs in marriage. In this context, pupils can be helped to view sexting as something that should not be engaged in or tolerated. In no way should sexting be presented as harmless and appropriate when engaged in by children in a ‘consensual relationship’.
- The Sex Education Forum’s view that pornography is not ‘all bad’ and that young people need help in ‘interpreting’ it should be rejected.
- In a classroom setting, the subject of pornography should be treated with sensitivity and restraint, and should be set within a firm moral framework. For some pupils exposure to pornographic images, or an unrestrained discussion of such images, would run the risk of arousing an unhealthy curiosity to search out pornography for themselves.
- The approach adopted by the Lovewise resource *Pornography: dangers and decisions* is to be commended. Aimed at pupils in Years 9-11, it is marked by modesty and restraint. It clearly explains the dangers of pornography, offers practical advice on how to avoid it, and urges young people to seek help if it has already become a problem to them.

**4. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?**

- In view of the particular sensitivities aroused by RSE, it is important that schools should be required to consult with parents and be sensitive to parental wishes and concerns.
- Schools should remain obliged to publish their RSE policy on the school website and make printed copies available upon request. The policy and resources used should be reviewed by the school no less frequently than every three years. All parents should be notified of the review and invited to make their views known both on the *policy* (the general approach) and on *implementation* (syllabus and materials).
- Schools should be required to allow parents to view the resources used in RSE lessons upon request.
- At the beginning of each academic year, schools should be required to notify parents of what they propose to teach in RSE for their child's year group. Parents should be invited to a meeting at the school where a presentation of the material will be given, and further opportunity provided for parents to view the materials used in greater detail. At every point, the school should clearly communicate that parents are entitled to withdraw their children from RSE lessons if they wish to do so.
- Parents should retain the right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons for as long as they bear the legal responsibility for their children's education. This legal right is in line with the fundamental principle of education law that pupils should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents, and that due respect should be paid to the religious and philosophical convictions of parents.
- Given the absence of any evidence that children who are withdrawn from sex education lessons are more likely to engage in sexual harassment and sexual violence or placed at greater risk of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, there is no compelling reason to remove or limit the parental right of withdrawal.

**5. Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.**

*At present, all schools are encouraged to teach Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE), but it is not a compulsory subject in state-funded schools. However, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 provides a power for the Secretary of State to make PSHE, or elements of the subject, mandatory in all schools. The DfE is therefore including two questions about PSHE as part of the present consultation as it considers whether to make it compulsory alongside RelEd and RSE.*

- Most of the components of PSHE are the primary responsibility of parents; for example, nutrition and physical activity, drugs, alcohol and tobacco education, sex and relationships education, emotional health and well-being, safety, and personal finance. We are therefore not convinced that it should be made a compulsory part of the school curriculum.
- The more that schools take to themselves responsibility for these areas, the less parents will be inclined to view them as their responsibility. If PSHE were to become a statutory part of the curriculum, parents might no more consider themselves responsible for these aspects of their children's physical, emotional and social development than they typically regard themselves as responsible for the teaching of English, maths, history and science.
- If the government is serious about encouraging parents to take more, and not less, responsibility for their children, the state, through its schools and other agencies, needs to take care not to undermine them by assuming a parental role.

**6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.**

*You may wish to make some of the same points in relation to PSHE in secondary schools that you made in response to Question 5 in relation to primary schools, possibly adding that, at the discretion of the governing body in consultation with parents, pupils may benefit from lessons covering some or all of the topics suggested below.*

- There may be scope for encouraging secondary schools to teach pupils basic First Aid, and to warn against the dangers of drugs and the irresponsible use of alcohol, though we are not persuaded that these topics should be made compulsory.

**7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?**

- If schools are to engage in meaningful consultation with parents, it is vital that curriculum content is not tightly prescribed. Schools must be left free to respond to parental concerns and sensitivities without being constrained by detailed curriculum requirements.
- If faith schools are to be free to teach according to the tenets of their faith, the regulations and statutory guidance must not insist that schools teach that all lifestyles are equally valid. Also, members of the school community (staff, pupils, parents, and governors) who hold to a faith position, *whether in a faith school or not*, should be able to voice their views without fear of disciplinary action.
- Schools should not be required to teach that gender is fluid or that same-sex marriage is morally equivalent to marriage between a man and a woman. Similarly, schools should be free to teach in line with the tenets on their faith on matters such as sexual abstinence before marriage, contraception and abortion.

### How to respond

Responses should be submitted online at:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/life-skills/pshe-rse-call-for-evidence/>

However, if you are unable to use the online survey, the DfE is able to receive responses by email at:

[PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk)

or by post at: RSE & PSHE Team, Department for Education,  
Sanctuary Buildings, 2nd Floor, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

**Please note that the call for evidence closes at 11.59pm on 12 February 2018.**