



# Sex and Relationship Education Guidance

**Head teachers,  
Teachers & School  
Governors**

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# Introduction

This guidance on sex and relationship education in schools replaces Circular 5/94.

It has been written to take account of the revised National Curriculum, published in September 1999, the need for guidance arising out of the new Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) framework and the Social Exclusion Unit report on teenage pregnancy.

There are many excellent examples where schools have established clear sex education policies in consultation with parents, governors and the wider community, and where they are delivering effective programmes. But there is also much uncertainty about what sex and relationship education is and how it should be taught. This guidance aims to address those areas of uncertainty.

**Sex and relationship education should be firmly rooted in the framework for PSHE.**

- 1.** Effective sex and relationship education is essential if young people are to make responsible and well informed decisions about their lives. It should not be delivered in isolation. It should be firmly rooted within the framework for PSHE and the National Curriculum launched in September 1999, which lie at the heart of our policy to raise standards and expectations for all pupils. (This guidance refers throughout to the PSHE framework, although at Key Stages 1 and 2 this is a combined PSHE and Citizenship framework).
- 2.** The objective of sex and relationship education is to help and support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development. A successful programme, firmly embedded in PSHE, will help young people learn to respect themselves and others and move with confidence from childhood through adolescence into adulthood.
- 3.** The new PSHE framework will help pupils develop the skills and understanding they need to live confident, healthy and independent lives. It will play an important role, alongside other aspects of the curriculum and school life, in helping pupils deal with difficult moral and social questions. The National Healthy School Standard will provide a useful and supportive framework for delivering sex and

relationship education. Effective delivery of sex and relationship education is embedded in the success criteria of the Standard.

4. This is the first time that schools have had a national framework to support work in this area. As part of sex and relationship education, pupils should be taught about the nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children. But the Government recognises – as in the Home Office, Ministerial Group on the Family consultation document “**Supporting Families**”- that there are strong and mutually supportive relationships outside marriage. Therefore pupils should learn the significance of marriage and stable relationships as key building blocks of community and society. Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances.
5. Pupils need also to be given accurate information and helped to develop skills to enable them to understand difference and respect themselves and others and for the purpose also of preventing and removing prejudice. Secondary pupils should learn to understand human sexuality, learn the reasons for delaying sexual activity and the benefits to be gained from such delay, and learn about obtaining appropriate advice on sexual health.
6. Sex and relationship education should contribute to promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and of society and preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.
7. Effective sex and relationship education does not encourage early sexual experimentation. It should teach young people to understand human sexuality and to respect themselves and others. It enables young people to mature, to build up their confidence and self-esteem and understand the reasons for delaying sexual activity. It builds up knowledge and skills which are particularly important today because of the many different and conflicting pressures on young people.
8. The role of a school’s governing body and head teacher in the determination of a school’s policy is crucial. The governing body, in consultation with parents, will be able to develop policies which reflect the parents’ wishes and the community they serve. This guidance also sets out advice on how schools can set in place arrangements so pupils can be protected from inappropriate teaching and materials.

### *What is sex and relationship education?*

9. It is lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional development. It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality, and sexual health. It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this would be inappropriate teaching.

It has three main elements:

- attitudes and values
  - learning the importance of values and individual conscience and moral considerations;
  - learning the value of family life, marriage, and stable and loving relationships for the nurture of children;
  - learning the value of respect, love and care;
  - exploring, considering and understanding moral dilemmas; and
  - developing critical thinking as part of decision-making.
  
- personal and social skills
  - learning to manage emotions and relationships confidently and sensitively;
  - developing self-respect and empathy for others;
  - learning to make choices based on an understanding of difference and with an absence of prejudice;
  - developing an appreciation of the consequences of choices made;
  - managing conflict; and
  - learning how to recognise and avoid exploitation and abuse.
  
- knowledge and understanding
  - learning and understanding physical development at appropriate stages;
  - understanding human sexuality, reproduction, sexual health, emotions and relationships;
  - learning about contraception and the range of local and national sexual health advice, contraception and support services;
  - learning the reasons for delaying sexual activity, and the benefits to be gained from such delay; and
  - the avoidance of unplanned pregnancy.

**10.** This guidance aims to:

- clarify what schools are required to do by law;
- give guidance on some of the issues involved in developing a policy on sex and relationship education;
- show how it should be taught within the PSHE framework;
- guide schools and teachers on some of the sensitive issues schools may have to tackle when teaching sex and relationship education;
- outline some practical strategies for teaching;
- emphasise the importance of working in partnership with parents and the wider community; and
- address some of the issues for schools concerning confidentiality.

Further information about sex and relationship education is available:

- locally through the LEA PSHE advisory service and local Health Promotion Units;
- from a range of national statutory bodies and voluntary organisations such as the Sex Education Forum based at the National Children's Bureau;
- on the Healthy Schools Programme website Wired for Health ([www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk)).

Further information about the Social Exclusion Unit's report on Teenage Pregnancy is available:

- through the Cabinet Office website ([www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm));
- from the Teenage Pregnancy Unit on 020 7972 4574.

# 1 Developing a Policy for Sex and Relationship Education

This section looks at the requirement for schools to have a sex and relationship education policy and some of the specific issues that a policy might need to cover.

Governing bodies and head teachers should consult parents in developing their sex and relationship education policy to ensure that they develop policies which reflect parents' wishes and the culture of the community they serve.

## *What is required?*

- 1.1** All schools must have an up-to-date policy which is made available for inspection and to parents. The policy must:
- define sex and relationship education;
  - describe how sex and relationship education is provided and who is responsible for providing it;
  - say how sex and relationship education is monitored and evaluated;
  - include information about parents' right to withdrawal; and
  - be reviewed regularly.
- 1.2** The Department recommends that sex and relationship education is delivered through the PSHE and Citizenship framework. Schools therefore will want to have an overall policy on PSHE and Citizenship including sex and relationship education. It is also essential that governing bodies involve parents in developing and reviewing their policy. This will ensure that they reflect parents' wishes and the culture of the community the school serves. Governors and parents will need to address the issue of how those who miss lessons on sex and relationship education can catch up on another occasion.
- 1.3** The policy will also need to reflect the views of teachers and pupils. Listening and responding to the views of young people will strengthen their confidence and self-esteem.

## *OFSTED*

- 1.4** OFSTED is statutorily required under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 to evaluate and report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at any school they inspect. This includes evaluating and commenting on a school's sex and relationship education policy.

- 1.5** A new inspection framework has been set in place from January 2000. This reinforces and restates the above requirements of inspection that inspectors must evaluate and report on pupils' personal development, how well the school cares for and provides effective support and advice for all its pupils and how well the school works in partnership with parents. This last part has particular significance in view of the obligation on schools to involve parents in the determination of their sex and relationship education policy.
- 1.6** OFSTED is currently looking at what further advice and training inspectors require to inspect PSHE and Citizenship. It will be issuing further guidance to PSHE inspectors to enable them to discharge OFSTED's statutory functions, taking into account the recommendations from the Teenage Pregnancy report, and the new PSHE and Citizenship framework.

### *Use of materials*

- 1.7** The teaching of some aspects of sex and relationship education might be of concern to teachers and parents. Sensitive issues should be covered by the school's policy and in consultation with parents. Schools of a particular religious ethos may choose to reflect that in their sex and relationship education policy. Research demonstrates that good, comprehensive sex and relationship education does not make young people more likely to enter into sexual activity. Indeed it can help them learn the reasons for, and the benefits to be gained from, delaying such activity.
- 1.8** Materials used in schools must be in accordance with the PSHE framework and the law. Inappropriate images should not be used nor should explicit material not directly related to explanation. Schools should ensure that pupils are protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate, having regard to the age and cultural background of the pupils concerned. Governors and head teachers should discuss with parents and take on board concerns raised, both on materials which are offered to schools and on sensitive material to be used in the classroom. The Department of Health will be issuing guidance to Health Authorities to make clear that any materials they develop for use in schools must be in line with this guidance. Schools will also want to ensure that children are protected from accessing unsuitable materials on the Internet. The Department's "Superhighways Safety" information pack outlines ways that schools can make access to the Internet safe and prevent children from accessing unsuitable material.

### *The National Healthy School Standard*

- 1.9** The National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) was introduced in October 1999 to support and complement the new PSHE framework. Sex and relationship education is one of a number of specific themes which make up the Standard.

The NHSS has specific criteria which ensure that schools can confidently set the context and ethos for the effective delivery of sex and relationship education.

- 1.10** The principle underlying the Standard is that effective sex and relationship education is best achieved through a whole-school approach, which ensures that the school's policy is appropriately set for the age and maturity of the pupils. This includes:
- involving parents and carers;
  - giving staff appropriate training and support; and
  - ensuring that pupils' views are listened to.
- 1.11** Schools are expected to work within a nationally accredited local programme, supported by a local programme co-ordinator. It is hoped that all schools will be working within a nationally accredited programme by March 2002.

### *Primary schools*

- 1.12** The Department recommends that all primary schools should have a sex and relationship education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the children. It should ensure that both boys and girls know about puberty and how a baby is born – as set out in Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Science Curriculum. Section 3 gives further information on what should be taught at these stages and how this should be rooted in the PSHE framework.
- 1.13** All children, including those who develop earlier than the average, need to know about puberty before they experience the onset of physical changes. In the early primary school years, education about relationships needs to focus on friendship, bullying and the building of self-esteem.
- 1.14** Meeting these objectives will require a graduated, age-appropriate programme of sex and relationship education. Teaching methods need to take account of the developmental differences of children and the potential for discussion on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Schools should set a framework for establishing what is appropriate and inappropriate in a whole-class setting. Teachers may require support and training in answering questions that are better not dealt with in front of a whole class.
- 1.15** It is important that the transition year before moving to secondary schools supports pupils' ongoing emotional and physical development effectively. As well as consulting parents more generally about the school's overall policy, primary schools should consult with parents before the transition year about the detailed content of what will be taught. This process should include offering parents

support in talking to their children about sex and relationship education and how to link this with what is being taught in school.

- 1.16** Schools should have clear parameters on what children will be taught in the transition year before moving to secondary school. This should include:
- changes in the body related to puberty, such as periods and voice breaking;
  - when these changes are likely to happen and what issues may cause young people anxiety and how they can deal with these; and
  - how a baby is conceived and born.

### *Secondary schools*

- 1.17** Secondary schools should include in their policy details on how they provide a programme as part of the PSHE framework in addition to the National Science Curriculum topics. Schools should set sex education within a broader base of self-esteem and responsibility for the consequences of one's actions.

- 1.18** Schools should set a framework for establishing what is appropriate and inappropriate in a whole-class setting and how to deal with individual questions (see "Dealing with questions" in section 4).

Secondary schools should:

- teach about relationships, love and care and the responsibilities of parenthood as well as sex;
- focus on boys as much as girls;
- build self-esteem;
- teach the taking on of responsibility and the consequences of one's actions in relation to sexual activity and parenthood;
- provide young people with information about different types of contraception, safe sex and how they can access local sources of further advice and treatment;
- use young people as peer educators, e.g. teenage mothers and fathers;
- give young people a clear understanding of the arguments for delaying sexual activity and resisting pressure;
- link sex and relationship education with issues of peer pressure and other risk-taking behaviour, such as drugs, smoking and alcohol; and
- ensure young people understand how the law applies to sexual relationships.

### *Specific issues which should be addressed when developing a policy*

- 1.19** Sex and relationship education is for all children and young people in school. When developing a policy, schools should consider the needs of all pupils. To

achieve this, schools might need to address some or all of the specific issues outlined below.

- 1.20** Secondary schools should ensure that teachers of sex and relationship education are aware of the Social Exclusion Report on Teenage Pregnancy and the role of effective sex and relationship education in reducing the incidence of teenage conceptions.

### *Relationships*

- 1.21** Young people, when asked about their experiences of sex education at school, often complain about the focus on the physical aspects of reproduction and the lack of any meaningful discussion about feelings, relationships and values. Sex and relationship education set within the framework for PSHE across the four key stages will significantly redress that balance. It will help young people to respect themselves and others, and understand difference. Within the context of talking about relationships, children should be taught about the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and for bringing up children. The Government recognises that there are strong and mutually supportive relationships outside marriage. Therefore, children should learn the significance of marriage and stable relationships as key building blocks of community and society. Teaching in this area needs to be sensitive so as not to stigmatise children on the basis of their home circumstances.

### *Focus on boys and young men as well as girls and young women*

- 1.22** Traditionally the focus has been on girls. Boys may have felt that sex education is not relevant to them and are unable or too embarrassed to ask questions about relationships or sex. Boys are also less likely to talk to their parents about sex and relationships. For these reasons, programmes should focus on boys as much as girls at primary level as well as secondary.
- 1.23** Teachers will need to plan a variety of activities which will help to engage boys as well as girls, matching their different learning styles. Single sex groups may be particularly important for pupils who come from cultures where it is only acceptable to speak about the body in single gender groups.

### *Ethnicity*

- 1.24** Research with families shows that children cannot always rely on their parents to talk to them about puberty or sex. In particular, a range of children from black and other minority ethnic communities are less likely to talk to their parents about sex and relationships. Some young women and young men from some minority ethnic

communities may rely on schools as their main, and sometimes only, source of sex education.

- 1.25** It is therefore important for policies to be both culturally appropriate and inclusive of all children. Primary and secondary schools should consult parents and pupils both on what is included, and on how it is delivered. For example, for some children it is not culturally appropriate to address particular issues in a mixed group. Consulting pupils and their families will help to establish what is appropriate and acceptable for them. Generally, parents appreciate support from the school, if they are consulted and involved.

### *Special educational needs and learning difficulties*

- 1.26** Mainstream schools and special schools have a duty to ensure that children with special educational needs and learning difficulties are properly included in sex and relationship education. Sex and relationship education should help all pupils understand their physical and emotional development and enable them to make positive decisions in their lives.
- 1.27** Some parents and carers of children with special educational needs may find it difficult to accept their children's developing sexuality. Some pupils will be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than their peers, and others may be confused about what is acceptable public behaviour. These children will need help to develop skills to reduce the risks of being abused and exploited, and to learn what sorts of behaviour are, and are not, acceptable.
- 1.28** Schools should ensure that students with special needs in mainstream schools receive sex and relationship education. Teachers may find that they have to be more explicit and plan work in different ways in order to meet the individual needs of children with special educational needs or learning difficulties. It is important to take care not to marginalise sex and relationship education. It is also important that students with special educational needs are not withdrawn from health education so that they can catch up on National Curriculum subjects. Special schools will need to address the specific needs of their pupils.
- 1.29** All staff including ancillary staff, physiotherapists, nurses and carers as well as teachers should follow the school's sex and relationship education policy when working with pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties.

### *Sexual identity and sexual orientation*

- 1.30** It is up to schools to make sure that the needs of all pupils are met in their programmes. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationship education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment is clear that teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support. There should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation.

- 1.31** Sexual orientation and what is taught in schools is an area of concern for some parents. Schools that liaise closely with parents when developing their sex and relationship education policy and programme should be able to reassure parents of the content of the programme and the context in which it will be presented.
- 1.32** Schools need to be able to deal with homophobic bullying. Guidance issued by the Department (Social Inclusion: Pupil Support Circular 10/99) dealt with the unacceptability of and emotional distress and harm caused by bullying in whatever form – be it racial, as a result of a pupil's appearance, related to sexual orientation or for any other reason.

### *Key points*

- All schools must have an up-to-date sex and relationship education policy, drawn up by the governing body, and available to parents and for inspection.
- This should be developed in consultation with parents and the wider community.
- Primary schools should have clear parameters on what children will be taught in the transition year before moving to secondary school, and that parents be consulted.
- Secondary schools' policies must include how they will teach the relevant National Curriculum Science topics and how they will provide sex and relationship education as part of PSHE.
- Policies should be inclusive of all pupils.
- Having a policy in line with this guidance will be a key part of meeting the criteria for sex and relationship education outlined in the National Healthy School Standard.

## 2 Specific Issues when Teaching Sex and Relationship Education

This section looks at some sensitive issues teachers may have to deal with when teaching sex and relationship education. Schools should set out how they intend to cover them in their sex and relationship education policy.

- 2.1** Parents and pupils may need to be reassured that the personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers will not influence the teaching of sex and relationship education within the PSHE framework. Teachers and all those contributing to sex and relationship education are expected to work within an agreed values framework as described in the school's policy, which must be in line with current legislation. Some teachers may need support and training to deliver the programme sensitively and effectively.
- 2.2** Teachers have a responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of their pupils. They are in a particular position of trust. Sexual relationships involving children under 16 are a criminal offence. A sexual relationship between a teacher and any pupil at the same school or college is a breach of that trust. Such behaviour constitutes serious misconduct on the part of the teacher and will invariably result in disciplinary action, often dismissal, by an employer. It may also lead to a teacher being barred from further employment in the education service by the Secretary of State.
- 2.3** The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, before Parliament as at July 2000, contains proposals to create a new offence to protect those under 18 years of age in particular areas from abuse of trust in the form of inappropriate sexual relationships. The new offence will apply to teachers and others in a position of trust. It will be an offence for a teacher to have a sexual relationship with a full-time pupil in the same school, residential school, or further education establishment who is under 18.
- 2.4** The following specific issues would usually need to be addressed in a school's sex and relationship education programme:

### *Puberty*

- 2.5** Boys and girls need to be prepared for puberty. Schools will need to plan the appropriate age to do so, in consultation with parents.

- 2.6** If sex and relationship education is established within a context of PSHE at primary level, as children reach puberty they will know and understand that they will change and develop, and will have confidence in managing the physical and emotional changes. Primary schools should set clear parameters as to what will be taught in a whole class setting and what will be dealt with on an individual basis.

### *Menstruation*

- 2.7** The onset of menstruation can be alarming for girls if they are not prepared. Research shows that about a third of girls are not told about periods by their parents and 10% receive no preparation at all before their first period. As with education about puberty, programmes should include preparation for menstruation (see section 3 on primary and secondary schools).
- 2.8** Schools should also make adequate and sensitive arrangements to help girls cope with menstruation and with requests for sanitary protection.

### *Contraception*

- 2.9** In England in 1998 there were over 100,000 conceptions to teenagers, of which over 8,000 were to girls under 16. This is clearly totally unacceptable. Not only are there obvious risks to health, but this also leads to greater dependence, undermining potential achievement in education and in further employment, placing greater stress on the young person and their family, and denying choices available to others. This puts at risk the broader development of pupils mentioned in paragraph 2 of the introduction. It is therefore appropriate for secondary schools to provide education about contraception.
- 2.10** Knowledge of the different types of contraception, and of access to, and availability of contraception is a major part of the Government's strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy. Effective sex and relationship education in secondary schools has an important role to play in achieving this.
- 2.11** Trained staff in secondary schools should be able to give young people full information about different types of contraception, including emergency contraception and their effectiveness. Pupils may wish to raise further issues with staff arising from discussion in the classroom. Trained teachers can also give pupils – individually and as a class – additional information and guidance on where they can obtain confidential advice, counselling and, where necessary, treatment.
- 2.12** This should be made clear in the school's sex and relationship education policy. Section 7 also refers to the role of health professionals in the school.

**2.13** In addition to what is put in place in a school's sex and relationship education policy to inform and counsel young people on sex and relationships, there will be rare occasions when a primary school teacher is directly approached by a child who is sexually active or contemplating sexual activity. This will always raise child protection issues and sensitive handling will be needed to ensure that a proper balance is struck between the need to observe the law and the need for sensitive counselling and treatment including protection from disclosure to inappropriate adults. Section 7 contains a fuller account of the procedures for handling such cases.

### *Abortion*

**2.14** 38% of teenage pregnancies ended in abortion in 1998 – almost 39,000 abortions. There are strongly held views and religious beliefs about abortion and some schools will apply a particular religious ethos through their sex and relationship education policy to the issue which will enable pupils to consider the moral and personal dilemmas involved. The religious convictions of pupils and their parents should be respected.

**2.15** It is all too easy to create a classroom debate in which pupils' views become polarised and miss the purpose of sex and relationship education in preparing pupils for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life. When abortion is covered within a programme, the challenge is to offer young people the opportunity to explore the dilemmas, enable them to know and understand about abortion, and develop the communication skills to discuss it with parents and health professionals.

**2.16** However, the key task for schools is, through appropriate information and effective advice on contraception and on delaying sexual activity, to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies.

### *Safer Sex and HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)*

**2.17** Teaching about safer sex remains one of the Government's key strategies for reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and STIs and it has particular relevance to the forthcoming Sexual Health Strategy. Since 1995 there have been significant increases in the numbers of diagnoses of genital chlamydial infection, genital warts and gonorrhoea. The rises were steepest in the 16-19 year olds, particularly for chlamydia (over 20% a year). The total number of new cases of STIs in 1998 exceeded 500,000.

**2.18** A survey conducted by National Opinion Poll (1996) indicated that young adults may be becoming complacent about the importance of safer sex, increasing their

risk of infection and unwanted pregnancy or paternity. Strategies for teaching about HIV/AIDS and STIs should include:

- helping pupils clarify their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and STIs;
- teaching them assertiveness skills for negotiating relationships; and
- enabling them to become effective users of services that help prevent/treat STIs and HIV.

**2.19** To reinforce the specific points above, the key messages for all sex educators, including schools, are:

- information and knowledge about HIV/AIDS is vital;
- young people need to understand what is risky behaviour and what is not;
- sex and relationship education should inform young people about condom use and safer sex in general;
- young people need skills to enable them to avoid being pressured into unwanted or unprotected sex (this should link with issues of peer pressure and other risk-taking behaviour such as drugs and alcohol); and
- young people need factual information about safer sex and skills to enable them to negotiate safer sex.

**2.20** STIs are major causes of ill health which can have long-term physical and psychological health consequences. Incidence of STIs continues to rise and the incidence of HIV/AIDS infection remains unacceptably high, particularly for young men. Thirty-nine per cent of those with AIDS in the UK are in their 20s, most of whom will have contracted HIV in their teens.

**2.21** Young people need to be aware of the risks of contracting a STI and how to prevent it. (A recent Health Education Authority study found that one in four young people believed that the pill would protect them from STIs).

**2.22** Although the emphasis in sex and relationship education should be on prevention of infection, through delaying sexual activity and teaching the reasons for safe sex, pupils also need to know about diagnosis and treatment.

### *Key points*

- Sensitive issues should be covered by a school's policy.
- Some teachers may need extra support and training in order to be able to deal with these issues confidently in the classroom.
- Both boys and girls should be prepared for puberty.
- Girls should be prepared for menstruation before their periods start.
- Young people need access to, and precise information about, confidential contraceptive information, advice and services.
- Young people need to be aware of the moral and personal dilemmas involved in abortion and know how to access a relevant agency if necessary.
- Young people need to be aware of the risks of STIs including HIV and know about prevention, diagnosis and treatment.
- Young people need to know not just what safer sex is and why it is important but also how to negotiate it with a partner.

## 3 Sex and Relationship Education within PSHE

This section looks at how sex and relationship education can fit into the Personal, Social and Health Education framework.

- 3.1** Sex and relationship education should be supported by a school's wider curriculum for personal, social and health education. In this way, schools can ensure that pupils:
- receive their sex education in the wider context of relationships; and
  - are prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

### *In primary schools*

- 3.2** The combined PSHE and Citizenship framework at Key Stages 1 and 2 is developed through four broad themes and makes clear what is appropriate in the early primary years and the transition year. The present requirements set out within National Curriculum Science and shown in the box below should be delivered through these four broad themes and within the context of the National Healthy School Standard to ensure effective provision. The four themes are:
- developing confidence and responsibility and making the most of pupils' abilities;
  - preparing to play an active role as citizens;
  - developing a healthier, safer lifestyle; and
  - developing good relationships and respecting differences between people.
- 3.3** At primary school level sex and relationship education should contribute to the foundation of PSHE and Citizenship by ensuring that all children:
- develop confidence in talking, listening and thinking about feelings and relationships;
  - are able to name parts of the body and describe how their bodies work;
  - can protect themselves and ask for help and support; and
  - are prepared for puberty.

## *National Curriculum Science*

### *Key Stage 1*

1. b) that animals including humans, move, feed, grow, use their senses and reproduce
2. a) to recognise and compare the main external parts of the bodies of humans  
f) that humans and animals can produce offspring and these grow into adults
4. a) to recognise similarities and differences between themselves and others and treat others with sensitivity

### *Key Stage 2*

1. a) that the life processes common to humans and other animals include nutrition, growth and reproduction
2. f) about the main stages of the human life cycle

## *In secondary schools*

**3.4** At Key Stages 3 and 4, Citizenship is delivered under a statutory order and PSHE is non-statutory. Despite these differences, some aspects of the four broad themes of Key Stages 1 and 2 and the requirements of Key Stages 3 and 4 of National Curriculum Science (set out in the box below) can still be related to each other and delivered through them. Sex and relationship education delivered through these four broad themes within the context of the National Healthy School Standard will ensure effective and appropriate provision.

**3.5** At secondary school level, sex and relationship education should prepare young people for an adult life in which they can:

- develop positive values and a moral framework that will guide their decisions, judgements and behaviour;
- be aware of their sexuality and understand human sexuality;
- understand the arguments for delaying sexual activity;
- understand the reasons for having protected sex;
- understand the consequences of their actions and behave responsibly within sexual and pastoral relationships;
- have the confidence and self-esteem to value themselves and others and respect for individual conscience and the skills to judge what kind of relationships they want;
- communicate effectively;
- have sufficient information and skills to protect themselves and, where they have one, their partner from unintended/unwanted conceptions, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV;

- avoid being exploited or exploiting others;
- avoid being pressured into unwanted or unprotected sex;
- access confidential sexual health advice, support and if necessary treatment; and
- know how the law applies to sexual relationships.

### *National Curriculum Science*

#### *Key Stage 3*

1. d) that fertilisation in humans... is the fusion of a male and a female cell
2. f) about the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence
- g) about the human reproductive system, including the menstrual cycle and fertilisation
- h) how the foetus develops in the uterus
- n) how the growth and reproduction of bacteria and the replication of viruses can affect health

#### *Key Stage 4*

2. f) The way in which hormonal control occurs, including the effects of sex hormones
- g) some medical uses of hormones, including the control and promotion of fertility
- l) the defence mechanisms of the body
3. d) how sex is determined in humans

## 4 Teaching Strategies for Sex and Relationship Education

This section looks at some practical strategies for teaching sex and relationship education. Schools may already be making use of these in their programmes.

- 4.1** It is essential that schools can help children and young people develop confidence in talking, listening and thinking about sex and relationships. Teachers and other staff may need to overcome their own anxieties and embarrassment to do this effectively. Partnership between school and parents is the key to success. There are a number of teaching strategies that can help this, including:
- establishing ground rules with their pupils;
  - using 'distancing' techniques;
  - knowing how to deal with unexpected questions or comments from pupils;
  - using discussion and project learning methods and appropriate materials; and
  - encouraging reflection.
- 4.2** Some teachers will need training and support, perhaps by team teaching or by inviting visitors from outside services or agencies.

### *Ground rules*

- 4.3** A set of ground rules will help teachers create a safe environment in which they do not feel embarrassed or anxious about unintended or unexpected questions or comments from pupils. Ground rules might be developed as part of the school's sex and relationship education policy or individually with each class or year group. For example, one class worked out this set of ground rules together:
- no one (teacher or pupil) will have to answer a personal question;
  - no one will be forced to take part in a discussion;
  - only the correct names for body parts will be used; and
  - meanings of words will be explained in a sensible and factual way.

### *Distancing techniques*

- 4.4** Teachers can avoid embarrassment and protect pupils' privacy by always depersonalising discussions. For example, role play can be used to help pupils 'act out' situations. Case studies with invented characters, appropriate videos, and visits to theatre in education groups can all help pupils discuss sensitive issues and develop their decision-making skills in a safe environment. Some of these methods are listed below under discussion and project learning.

### *Dealing with questions*

- 4.5** Teachers should establish clear parameters of what is appropriate and inappropriate in a whole class setting. Many teachers are concerned about responding to unexpected questions or comments from pupils in a whole-class situation. Having a set of ground rules should reduce the chances of this happening but teachers will need support and training so that they are prepared for the unexpected. For example:
- If a question is too personal, the teacher should remind the pupil of the ground rules. If the pupil needs further support, the teacher can refer her or him to the appropriate person, such as a school counsellor, school nurse, helpline, or an outside agency or service;
  - If a teacher doesn't know the answer to a question, it is important to acknowledge this, and to suggest that the pupil or teacher or both together research the question later;
  - If a question is too explicit, feels too old for a pupil, is inappropriate for the whole class, or raises concerns about sexual abuse, the teacher should acknowledge it and promise to attend to it later on an individual basis. In this way, the pupil will feel they have been treated with respect, but the rest of the class will not have to listen to personal experience or inappropriate information. To maintain trust and respect the teacher must remember to talk with the pupil later; and
  - If a teacher is concerned that a pupil is at risk of sexual abuse, they should follow the school's child protection procedures.

### *Discussion and project learning*

- 4.6** Research into what makes sex and relationship education effective shows that discussion and project learning encourages learning and is enjoyed by pupils. Pupils take part in a structured activity in which they can:
- draw on previous knowledge to develop more understanding;
  - practise their social and personal skills;
  - consider their beliefs and attitudes about different topics;
  - reflect on their new learning; and
  - plan and shape future action.
- 4.7** Active learning is most effective when pupils are working in groups. Methods include discussion techniques such as the use of circle time in primary schools, case studies and project work.
- 4.8** Teachers should also assess the usefulness of providing factual information in written form for young people to keep for future reference.

## Reflection

**4.9** Reflecting is crucial for learning as it encourages pupils to consolidate what they have learned and to form new understanding, skills and attitudes. Teachers can help pupils reflect on their learning by asking questions like these:

- What was it like doing this discussion today?
- What did you learn from the others, especially those who had a different experience or belief from your own?
- What do you think you will be able to do as a result of this discussion?
- What else do you think you need to think or learn about?

### Key points

- Schools need to help children and young people develop confidence in talking, listening and thinking about sex and relationships.
- Teachers and other staff can use a range of strategies to help them do this, including establishing ground rules, introducing 'distancing' techniques, making use of discussion and project learning, and encouraging reflection.

## 5 Working with Parents

This section looks at how schools can work in partnership with parents when planning and delivering sex and relationship education.

Schools should always seek to work in partnership with parents. This is essential to effective sex and relationship education.

- 5.1** Research shows that children and young people want to receive their initial sex and relationship education from their parents and families, with school and other adults building on this later. But many parents find it difficult to talk to their children about sex and relationships. In particular, fathers rarely take responsibility for giving sex and relationship education to their sons.
- 5.2** The teaching of some aspects of sex and relationship education might nevertheless be of particular concern to some parents. Teachers have a responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils and because teachers therefore act in loco parentis, parents may need to be reassured that the personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers will not influence the teaching of sex and relationship education within the PSHE framework. Teachers and all those contributing to sex and relationship education are expected to work within an agreed values framework as described in the school's policy which must be in line with current legislation.

### *Why parents are so important*

- 5.3** Parents are the key people in:
- teaching their children about sex and relationships;
  - maintaining the culture and ethos of the family;
  - helping their children cope with the emotional and physical aspects of growing up; and
  - preparing them for the challenges and responsibilities that sexual maturity brings.
- 5.4** Parents need support in:
- helping their children learn the correct names of the body;
  - talking with their children about feelings and relationships; and
  - answering questions about growing up, having babies, feeling attraction, sexuality, sex, contraception, relationships and sexual health.

## *Supporting parents*

**5.5** The role of parents as sex educators is emphasised in the Home Office strategy, “**Supporting Families**”, as is their need for support from professionals. The Teenage Pregnancy report also recommends that parents are given more help to talk to their children about sex and relationships. National and local media campaigns will target parents. Each local authority area has a co-ordinator who will encourage schools to identify and develop effective approaches of supporting parents.

## *Consulting parents*

**5.6** Schools should always work in partnership with parents, consulting them regularly on the content of sex and relationship education programmes. Reflection around parents’ own experiences of sex education can often lead to a productive discussion in which teachers and parents can start planning sex and relationship education provision for their children. Parents need to know that the school’s sex and relationship education programme will complement and support their role as parents and that they can be actively involved in the determination of the school’s policy.

## *Parents who withdraw their children*

**5.7** Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of the sex and relationship education provided at school except for those parts included in the statutory National Curriculum (see section 3). Schools should make alternative arrangements in such cases. The DfEE will offer schools a standard pack of information for parents who withdraw their children from sex and relationship education.

### *Key points*

- Parents are the key people in teaching their children about sex, relationships and growing up.
- Many parents find it difficult to talk to their children about sex and relationships.
- Parents need support in their role as sex educators.
- Schools should always work in partnership with parents, consulting them regularly on the content of sex and relationship education programmes.
- Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of sex and relationship education.

## 6 Working with the Wider Community

This section looks at how schools can work in partnership with members of the wider community when planning and delivering sex and relationship education.

- 6.1** Delivery of sex and relationship education is not the sole responsibility of schools. Elements of sex and relationship education are also provided by a range of people in the wider community including health professionals, social workers, youth workers, peer educators and visitors. People in the wider community have much to offer at all levels of planning and delivering sex and relationship education, bringing a new perspective and offering specialised knowledge, experience and resources.
- 6.2** In this section we look at some of the key people who might be involved in delivering sex and relationship education in school. People entering school to help deliver sex and relationship education must be made aware of the school's policy and programme and should abide by it. Parents should also be aware of the involvement of the wider community.

### *Health professionals*

- 6.3** Many schools are already working closely with health professionals in the development and implementation of their sex and relationship education programmes. Health professionals such as doctors and nurses (especially school nurses) have much to offer:
- they can work closely with teachers in supporting sex and relationship education in the school (complementing the role of the teacher);
  - they can help schools work in partnership with parents and make links between the school and other relevant professionals and services such as local GPs, family planning clinics, Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics etc;
  - they can tell pupils about the health services that are available in the area and help them develop the confidence and skills to make good use of them;
  - they can give pupils confidential support and advice, perhaps through services such as drop-in sessions; and
  - they can provide specific and up-to-date knowledge about sexual health and well being and contraception.
- 6.4** Health professionals who are involved in delivering programmes are expected to work within the school's sex and relationship education policy and on the

instructions of the head teacher. However, when they are in their professional role, such as a school nurse in a consultation with an individual pupil, they should follow their own professional codes of conduct (this is the case irrespective of who is paying them). A school's sex and relationship education policy must make this clear to parents.

### *Social workers*

**6.5** Residential and field social workers are working with a major Government initiative, **Quality Protects**, which aims to improve the life chances of children and young people in public care. They are working in partnership with foster carers and parents as well as teachers and health professionals to improve the health and education of children and young people in public care.

### *Youth workers*

**6.6** Youth workers work in a range of contexts from the traditional youth club, to street and outreach work and to young people's confidential advisory services. They have a unique role in that they are often able to develop an open relationship with children and young people within which very effective sex and relationship education and sexual health promotion is possible.

**6.7** It is inappropriate for youth workers, as with any professional, to promote sexual orientation. They will be expected to respect this guidance when dealing with school age children. Individual views should not affect the independent advice given to the young person concerned.

### *Peer education*

**6.8** Peer education usually involves young people who are trained to support and deliver sex and relationship education and can be very popular with young people and teachers. It is a way of providing information in an environment in which young people feel accepted and secure. However, peer education does not seem to have an impact on the development of skills and positive attitudes and values. Peer education can therefore best be used to complement rather than to substitute for sex and relationship education in school.

**6.9** Particular life experiences of the educators can help young people understand how sex and relationships can affect people positively and negatively. Examples include:

- young teenage mothers talking about their experiences of having a child and offering advice and support to their peers;
- young Asian women talking about their experience of learning about sex and relationships at home and from the wider community including school;

- young people talking about their experience of living with HIV; and
- young people who are physically disabled talking to other young people with a disability.

**6.10** Education by peers is not always by young people. In some schools, groups of parents have been trained as peer parent sex educators. They work to support other parents and to help develop school/parent partnerships.

### *Visitors*

**6.11** Visitors to schools have a discrete role and responsibility for providing sex and relationship education both informally and formally. Visitors should complement but never substitute or replace planned provision. It is the PSHE co-ordinator's and teachers' responsibility to plan the curriculum and lessons.

### *Key points*

- Delivery of sex and relationship education is not the sole responsibility of schools. Parents and members of the wider community have much to offer.
- Schools should work effectively in partnership with parents and others in the wider community.
- Health professionals, social workers, youth workers, peer educators, and visitors all have a part to play in delivering sex and relationship education and should abide by the school's policy.

## 7 Confidentiality

This section gives guidance on drawing up a policy on confidentiality and discusses situations in which confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Schools should ensure that they are familiar with the procedures set out in the Department's Child Protection circular 10/95 – "Protecting Children from Abuse: The Role of the Education Service".

- 7.1** Schools must be absolutely clear about the boundaries of their legal and professional roles and responsibilities. A clear and explicit confidentiality policy should ensure good practice throughout the school which both pupils and parents understand. Teachers cannot offer or guarantee absolute confidentiality.
- 7.2** It is only in the most exceptional circumstances that schools should be in the position of having to handle information without parental knowledge. Where younger pupils are involved this will be grounds for serious concern and child protection issues should be addressed.

### *Child protection*

- 7.3** Children cannot learn effectively if they are concerned or frightened about being abused or being the victims of violence in the home. They have a right to expect schools to provide a safe and secure environment. Any fears or worries they bring into the classroom should not go unnoticed by staff. Teachers need to be aware that effective sex and relationship education, which brings an understanding of what is and is not acceptable in a relationship, can lead to disclosure of a child protection issue.
- 7.4** If a member of a school's staff (teaching or non-teaching) suspects that a child is a victim of abuse or they have reason to believe that he/she is at risk of abuse, they should be aware of the procedures for reporting their concerns and to whom they should do so. The main recommendations of Circular 10/95 are that:
- all staff should be alert to signs of abuse and know to whom they should report their concerns or suspicions;
  - all schools and colleges should have child protection policies, which should include procedures to be followed if a member of staff is accused of abuse; and

- all schools and colleges should have a senior member of staff with designated responsibility for child protection, who should receive appropriate training.

**7.5** Joint guidance by DfEE and the Department of Health published in 1999 – “Working Together to Safeguard Children” – sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote children’s welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect.

### *Confidentiality policy*

- 7.6** Schools should consider setting their policy on confidentiality within their sex and relationship education policy. It should include:
- making sure that pupils and parents or carers are aware of the school’s confidentiality policy and how it works in practice;
  - reassuring pupils that their best interests will be maintained;
  - encouraging pupils to talk to their parents or carers and giving them support to do so;
  - ensuring that pupils know that teachers cannot offer unconditional confidentiality;
  - reassuring pupils that, if confidentiality has to be broken, they will be informed first and then supported as appropriate;
  - if there is any possibility of abuse, following the school’s child protection procedure;
  - making sure that pupils are informed of sources of confidential help, for example, the school nurse, counsellor, GP or local young person’s advice service; and
  - using ground rules in lessons.

### *Personal disclosures*

**7.7** Disclosures from pupils may take place at an inappropriate place or time. If this happens, the teacher should talk again individually to the pupil before the end of the school day. The teacher may be able to discuss the issue with an appropriate colleague without giving the name of the pupil. If not, the teacher should follow the school’s confidentiality policy.

### *Primary schools*

**7.8** There may be rare occasions when a primary school teacher is directly approached by a primary age child who is sexually active or is contemplating sexual activity. This should be viewed as a child protection issue. Schools should designate a member of staff to deal with these rare incidents.

- 7.9** In such cases there should be a pathway for dealing with the situation:
- the teacher should approach the designated member of staff (this could be the sex and relationship education teacher, or other member of staff with pastoral responsibility or on-site health professional);
  - the designated member of staff should make sensitive arrangements, in discussion with the child, to ensure that parents or carers are informed; and
  - the designated member of staff should address child protection issues and ensure that help is provided for the child and family.

### *Secondary schools*

**7.10** Effective sex and relationship education should enable and encourage young people to talk to a trusted adult if they are having sex or contemplating doing so. It is desirable, although not always possible, that that person should be their parent or carer. The law allows health professionals to see and in some circumstances to treat young people confidentially, and part of this process includes counselling and discussion about talking to parents. In order to be able to take responsibility for their actions, young people need to be more generally aware of the law in relation to sexual activity and local confidential services.

**7.11** Nonetheless, there may be cases where a teacher learns from an under 16 year old that they are having, or contemplating having, sexual intercourse. In these circumstances, schools ought to be in a position to take steps to ensure that:

- wherever possible, the young person is persuaded to talk to their parent or carer;
- any child protection issues are addressed; and
- that the child has been adequately counselled and informed about contraception, including precise information about where young people can access contraception and advice services.

**7.12** When the teacher who receives the information believes there is a child protection issue to be addressed, they should refer the case to a designated teacher for child protection. They should also make clear to the pupil that they cannot guarantee confidentiality. The teacher should ensure that the pupil understands that if confidentiality has to be broken they will be informed first.

**7.13** It is only in the most exceptional case that schools should be in the position of having to handle such information without parental knowledge, and where younger pupils were involved this would be grounds for serious concern. Head teachers and governors should monitor the frequency of such cases.

### Head teachers and governors

**7.14** Head teachers and governors should monitor the frequency of such cases in their school. If they are frequent this points to deficiencies in young people's awareness of, or confidence in, sources of confidential medical advice and this should be addressed in the school's sex and relationship education programme.

### Health professionals

**7.15** Health professionals are bound by their professional codes of conduct to maintain confidentiality. When working in a classroom situation, they are also bound by relevant school policies. In line with the best practice guidance outlined in Section 4, they will seek to protect privacy and prevent inappropriate personal disclosures in a classroom setting, by negotiating ground rules and using distancing techniques.

**7.16** Outside the teaching situation, health professionals such as school nurses can:

- give one-to-one advice or information to a pupil on a health-related matter including contraception; and
- exercise their own professional judgement as to whether a young person has the maturity to consent to medical treatment including contraceptive treatment. (The criteria for making such a decision are based on the 'Fraser guidelines' and can be found in guidance issued jointly by the Health Education Authority, the British Medical Association, Brook Advisory Centres and others. Any competent young person, regardless of age, can independently seek medical advice and give valid consent to treatment).

**7.17** New guidance for health professionals on confidentiality in providing contraceptive services to under 16s will be issued by the Department of Health in 2000.

### Key points

- Schools should have a clear and explicit confidentiality policy which is advertised to pupils, staff, parents and visitors.
- Teachers cannot offer or guarantee pupils unconditional confidentiality.
- Teachers are not legally bound to inform parents or the head teacher of any disclosure unless the head teacher has specifically requested them to do so.
- Teachers should follow a set procedure if a child under the age of 16 is having, or contemplating having, sex.
- If sexual abuse is suspected, teachers should follow the school's child protection procedures.
- Health professionals are bound by their professional codes of conduct in a one-to-one situation with individual pupils, but in a classroom situation they should follow the school's confidentiality policy.

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