

We want to help you to understand what mandatory RSE will mean for your child. You may have heard on the news that relationships education in primary schools and relationships and sex education in secondary schools is becoming a compulsory subject.

The government's decision to make [RSE mandatory in schools](#) is to support the development of your child's health and wellbeing. Helping children to keep happy, safe, and healthy, and able to navigate challenges and opportunities in life. Schools will have a flexible approach to delivering this programme, and can ensure the content is developmentally appropriate, and include an approach that is sensitive to the needs and religious backgrounds of its pupils.

RSE has been welcomed by schools, parents and healthcare professionals across the country, however we know that parents have questions and some may have anxieties that we hope to address in this blog.

Relationship education in primary schools

Relationships education explores the principles of positive relationships through teaching about the characteristics and fundamental building blocks of family, friendships and relationships. Starting with topics about what friendship is, what family means, and who can support them. Children will also be taught about other topics like kindness and respect.

Future topics will explore; everyday consent, appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, puberty and periods, personal safety including online. Relationships education supports children to feel ready for the changes ahead.

RSE prepares children for the transition into adolescence and eventually adulthood, teaching respect for other people's human rights and valuing people from different religions, ethnic backgrounds, abilities and sexualities.

Everyone in the UK is protected under the Equality Act 2010. The Act uses the term "protected characteristics" to refer to aspects of a person's identity protected by law. The characteristics that are protected by the Equality Act are: race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment. The PSHE guidance reminds schools of their duty under the Equality Act to ensure no pupils experience discrimination or harassment.

Can I withdraw my child from these lessons if I don't agree with them?

Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their children from sex education, but not relationships or health education.

Some primary schools might decide to teach sex education (and many already do), and you can talk to your school about this content. Parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some, or all of, sex education delivered as part of RSE. It's important to remember that if your child is taken out of these lessons, they

may hear about the lessons from their friends or peers but in a way that is not fully accurate, they may also have questions that will need answering at home.

The science curriculum covers topics such as reproduction and human development, this is compulsory learning, and children cannot be withdrawn from these lessons.

In secondary school, parents will still have the right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education (but not relationships education), up until 3 terms before the child turns 16. After that the child has the choice of receiving sex education with or without parental consent. For more information visit the Department for Education [link].¹

Learning about online safety as part of relationships education

Children explore the principles of keeping safe online within relationships education. This includes how to recognise risks, and where to report issues. Unfortunately, children (all genders) can be targeted and groomed online across an array of platforms including gaming, social media, and messaging apps. These lessons will support children to understand acceptable behaviours online, but also who to talk to if they experience anything worrying online.

Whilst we understand the online world can be a positive place, it's important for parents to keep up-to-date with the opportunities and risks of children using the internet.

What can I do at home to support my child's relationships education?

The role of parents/carers in the development of their children's understanding about relationships is vital. Parents are the first teachers of their children, they have a significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.

Sexuality is part of natural development, and as children grow up they will have questions, which can sometimes make us feel a bit awkward. The key is to open up an ongoing dialogue, and move away from the idea of having 'the talk'. Try to develop relationships where children of all ages feel that they can check in with you as their knowledge increases, and as their bodies change.

There is help for you to feel equipped about supporting your child's learning about relationships education. You can expand your knowledge for example about puberty, through [Brook Learn](#) offering free e-learning and resources.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-sex-and-health-education-guides-for-schools?utm_source=4e32b008-7c1e-40eb-b0ee-d3d05e10d9a7&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate