



Department
for Education

Tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence through Relationships, Sex and Health Education

Month 2022

**DRAFT – STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL AND NOT TO BE
CIRCULATED FURTHER**

Contents

SoS Foreword	4
Purpose of this guidance	5
Why do we need this guidance?	5
Ofsted	7
Supporting an effective whole school approach	8
Example: Developing a cross-curricular whole school approach	10
Cross-curricular learning	11
Example: using literacy in primary to develop RSHE concepts	11
Example: using English literature in secondary to reinforce RSHE concepts	11
Workforce and training	13
Example: building teachers' confidence	14
Curriculum planning	16
Example: planning age-appropriate teaching about the impact of the online world on relationships	17
Involving pupils in curriculum design	20
Example: involving pupils in curriculum design	20
Creating a safe and respectful space for learning	21
Teaching about gender and power	23
Example: teaching about gender and power in a way that is inspiring for boys	23
The importance of learning and practicing social and emotional skills	25
Example: Supporting primary pupils to develop empathy	25
Example: supporting secondary pupils to develop empathy	26
Incorporating active learning and reflective practice	27
Challenging harmful assumptions with confidence	28
Example: exploring the impact of sexual harassment	28
Example: addressing challenging comments	29
Example: inspiring boys to be agents of change	30
LGBT inclusivity	31
Teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	33
Faith, language and cultural differences	35
Example – cultural and faith inclusivity	35

Working with parents and the local community	37
Example: Working with parents in a culturally diverse school	37
Teaching topics which feel awkward or uncomfortable	38
Using external resources	39
Example: using external resources effectively	39
Safeguarding and reporting	40
Annex: Other useful documents	41


SoS Foreword

Our work to address sexual harassment and sexual violence has been sparked by the testimonies of survivors, including on websites like Everyone's Invited, along with the data within Ofsted's [review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#).

Young people must not be left to fix these problems alone. The roots of sexual violence, which is predominantly directed towards women and girls, are complex, including harmful gendered stereotypes and gender inequalities.

We must begin by modelling the relationships we want to see, and challenging our own assumptions towards people who are different from us, thinking not just about gender and sex but also about race, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion. While the victims of sexual harassment and violence are overwhelmingly women and girls, we must recognise that not all perpetrators are male and not all victims are female. We need to think about the impact of racism and homophobia on abusive behaviours. And we need to pay attention to vulnerability, including the vulnerability of young people with special education needs or disabilities.

This work does not just rest on schools, and certainly does not just rest on relationships education. Throughout all of this work, the voices of children and young people must be central. We need to start by listening.

Our response to Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges has been immediate and multi-faceted: we have published updated guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education, and we have  revised our behaviour guidance to ensure that all children are in a calm and supportive environment.

This government has put in place a series of measures to address sexual harassment and sexual violence and ensure that victims and survivors of all ages are supported. The Government's [tackling Violence against Women and Girls strategy](#) sets out the progress we have made so far, including the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act and new criminal offences for harassment including upskirting and revenge porn.

Along with broader societal changes, schools play a critical role in supporting young people to develop the skills needed to develop healthy, positive relationships, and in shaping the expectations that young people have for their current and future relationships. We know that many schools have responded swiftly to Ofsted's review and developed transformational relationships education curricula.

Purpose of this guidance

The [Relationships, Sex and Health Education \(RSHE\) statutory guidance](#) sets out the legal requirements for teaching RSHE, as well as outlining key principles and content to be covered at different stages of education. This non-statutory guidance offers some more practical, evidence-based suggestions for supporting children and young people to develop healthy, respectful and kind relationships, and for tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence. This guidance is part of the Government's response to Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges.


This guidance has been written based on extensive input from classroom teachers who are already pioneering best practice in teaching relationships education. The guidance has also been informed by a comprehensive literature review and by user testing with teachers.

The sections on Ofsted, Supporting a whole-school approach, cross-curricular learning and Workforce and training will be particularly useful for school leaders.

Pupils say “RSE would be better if schools did more about things related to abuse instead of just teaching the biological facts about the body” (SEF young people's poll)

Pupils say it would help to have “more education on casual sexual harassment, to stop the normalisation of it. “ (SEF young people's poll)

Why do we need this guidance?

Children want to learn more about relationships. This was a clear message from our research with young people  [PPLP data]

“More about relationships” – Female, year 11.

“I want to learn about relationships a lot more” – Female, year 9.

“I would like to learn more about what is a healthy relationship” – Female, year 7.

“How to make a great relationship” – Male, year 9.

“Explain how a relationship can be built, and why it is like that” – Male, year 7.

“What to expect in a relationship” – Male, year 11.

We know from Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges that young people would like schools to do more to address sexual harassment and violence and to teach about healthy relationships.

Ofsted's survey of young people aged 13 and above, which informed their review, found that 79% of girls and 38% of boys have experienced sexual assault. Other forms of harmful behaviours like sexist name calling (e.g. "slag" or "slut") are so prevalent that they can be normalised within school culture.¹

Ofsted found that online forms of sexual abuse are increasingly prevalent, with 88% of girls and 49% of boys reporting being sent unwanted sexual images and 80% of girls and 40% of boys pressured to provide sexual images of themselves.

Large-scale surveys have found that:

- almost one out of three girls between 16 and 18 reported non-desired sexual touching in school settings
- more than 4 out of 10 girls between 14 and 17 reported having suffered sexual violence in partner relationships
- more than 70% of young people between 16 and 18 years old reported sexual name-calling at least a few times a week (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

Additionally, almost 1 out of 3 teachers in the UK reported witnessing sexual harassment in their school at least once a week, and over 60% reported observing sexist language on a weekly basis in their school (UK Feminista and National Education Union, 2017).

Ofsted

Ofsted's [review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#) recommended:

“a carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. This should include time for open discussion of topics that children and young people tell us they find particularly difficult, such as consent and the sending of ‘nudes’”.

The review found that:

- Pupils would welcome more complex teaching about consent, and said that they could deal with more challenging content than teachers realised.
- Young people would like more teaching about consent in established relationships
- Teaching needs to be explicit about what counts as unacceptable behaviour.
- Parents want more support in talking to their children about these issues, and Ofsted found a particular gap in parents’ understanding of online sexual abuse.
- Unwanted sexual language is normalised in schools and can be effectively addressed through RSHE.

How your school addresses harmful sexual behaviour, including through the curriculum, will form an important part of Ofsted inspections.

Paragraph 67 of the Ofsted inspection handbook states that during section 5 inspections, Ofsted will look at how leaders ensure that their school’s culture addresses harmful sexual behaviour.

Inspectors will expect schools to assume that sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence are happening in the community, and potentially in the school, even when there are no specific reports, and put in place a whole-school approach to address them. Schools should have appropriate, clear and well-communicated school-wide policies in place that make it clear that sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence (including sexualised language) are unacceptable. Those policies should be consistently reflected throughout the school (see paragraphs 235, 251 and 314 to 316).

Supporting an effective whole school approach

As leaders, you will be responsible for setting a positive ethos within the school which supports respectful relationships and creates a culture in which all children are safe to learn. As part of this ethos, teachers will avoid the use of scare tactics in lessons or assemblies, which might leave pupils feeling unwilling to participate or to vocalise their own assumptions or beliefs. While pupils need to understand the law around sexual violence and sexual harassment, a strong or exclusive focus on the law and criminal behaviour may dissuade pupils from speaking honestly and seeking help.

Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges noted that culture change begins with an environment in which staff model respectful behaviour.¹ Relationships education should be clearly aligned with the ethos and values that are modelled within the school.

A supportive school culture will teach children and young people how to respectfully negotiate difference and disagreement, and encourage children and young people to appropriately challenge authority and understand their own boundaries.

Policies within the school should flow from the school's ethos and align with what pupils are learning within relationships education, including behaviour and discipline / relationship policies, safeguarding and reporting policies. This will include:

- Considering how to involve pupils in the development of relevant policies – see the section on involving pupils in curriculum design for practical suggestions for how pupils might be involved.
- All schools must have regard to statutory safeguarding guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education which is clear that governing bodies and proprietors should ensure they facilitate a whole school approach to safeguarding. This means involving everyone in the school and ensuring that safeguarding and child protection underpin all relevant aspects of process and policy development.
- Developing and implementing behaviour policies, in line with the DfE's Behaviour in Schools guidance, which create an environment in which everyone is treated respectfully, feels safe and that they belong, shaming is always avoided and all pupils are treated with dignity
- Ensuring that school behaviour policies are clear about what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence, that pupils know how to seek help and report concerns, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously, and understand the

¹ "Leaders should take a whole-school/college approach to developing a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are recognised and addressed. To achieve this, schools and colleges need to create an environment where staff model respectful and appropriate behaviour, where children and young people are clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and where they are confident to ask for help and support when they need it."

processes that will be followed when concerns are reported. Paragraph 235 of the Ofsted inspection handbook states that Ofsted expects schools to have effective behaviour policies in place regarding harmful sexual behaviour. The policies should include details of appropriate sanctions that should be consistently applied and that reflect the messages that are taught across the curriculum.

- Identifying and addressing barriers to reporting safeguarding concerns within the student population and ensuring that staff are able to recognise the signs of abuse and respond appropriately.
- Developing conflict resolution processes which enable children and young people to develop skills in communicating and recognising boundaries, while also being aware of the sensitivities around asking victims to directly confront perpetrators without adequate support.
- Being mindful of any victim-blaming language, and being aware that language that blames or shames victims can be subtle.

Whole school messages about behaviour policies and safeguarding should be coordinated with relevant RSHE lessons. For example, given the evidence about the age at which young people experience different forms of sexual harassment, it may be appropriate to ensure that all pupils from the beginning of their secondary school education understand the consequences of violating school rules or the law, including not sharing unsolicited sexual imagery and not requesting nudes. This can be supplemented by discussions within RSHE about why these rules are important and how they relate to human rights.

Consider how to build in relevant topics including respect, consent, boundaries, into school assemblies and other whole school events like whole school reading time. Be aware that focusing on the dangers and risks of sex and sexual relationships, without giving a more complete picture, could potentially shake pupils' trust in the learning they receive.

Within your curriculum planning, look for opportunities for cross-curricular learning about the key topics within relationships education, including understanding consent, respect, and stereotypes and prejudice. We know that books can shape pupils behaviour around violence, and that texts which portray specific views on gender roles have the ability to encourage or discourage violence, including sexual violence.

Find opportunities to celebrate historical characters or characters from literature who model empowerment even in the face of prejudice or marginalisation. Evidence shows that when topics within relationships education are reinforced through the teaching of other subjects including social studies, English, PE, maths, music and art, this can contribute to an affirming and inclusive school environment.

Example: Developing a cross-curricular whole school approach

In school X, pupils have weekly Personal, Social, Health Education lessons, but each curriculum and year team have also worked to embed RSHE strands into the medium-term planning for each subject. Inclusivity is promoted throughout the school curriculum, and teachers ensure that literature is representative and diverse, including LGBT and other marginalised characters.

A weekly assembly for all children focusses on mental health and wellbeing, including elements of RSHE, bringing in core foundational concepts such as autonomy, respect and kindness. The school finds regular opportunities to signpost pupils to sources of support both inside and outside school, and to give information to pupils about who they can report concerns to.

The school takes a joyful approach to whole school relationships education, finding opportunities to celebrate empowerment and positive relationships within assemblies and other whole-school events. Pupils are taught why we celebrate historical figures (such as Martin Luther King) who have said 'no' to behaviours that disrespected others or more recent figures (such as Malala Yousefzai, Greta Thunberg) and how they often had to keep on saying 'no' for a while before they were heard; these examples are used to emphasise why it's important for our self-esteem to not allow others to wear us down if we feel strongly about our 'no'. These examples are used as a springboard for discussing the importance of respecting other people's views and consent.

Pupils are aware of the long-term benefits of healthy positive relationships and appropriate self-expression within relationships. Assemblies are not used to shame pupils, but are opportunities to highlight the importance of healthy relationships and give pupils examples of the pleasure and happiness that healthy relationships can provide.

Cross-curricular learning

Curriculum planning should look for opportunities to reinforce RSHE learning and practice relevant skills in other areas of the curriculum, including literacy, English literature, history, sociology, physical education. Within team sports, for example, there is great potential for experiential learning of relationships skills in a context where some young people will be more receptive than they are when sitting in a classroom. Teachers might use set texts in English literature to illustrate non-consensual behaviour or, for more advanced pupils, to discuss cultural norms which might perpetuate gendered power dynamics.

Example: using literacy in primary to develop RSHE concepts

School X incorporated the book 'NO! Don't Touch Me There' by Nomthi Odukoya into their literacy curriculum. Teachers used this book to talk to pupils about their bodies, improper behaviour and the importance of boundaries and privacy. The narrative facilitated conversations around abuse (using age-appropriate language) and the importance of children talking to their trusted adult if they felt uncomfortable.

Other books studied in literacy which included relationships, friendships, and risk-taking were mapped to coincide with RSHE lessons so that the behaviours of characters or themes could be explored together.

Example: using English literature in secondary to reinforce RSHE concepts

School X developed their scheme of work on 'Of Mice and Men' in Key Stage 4 English Literature to promote discussion around sexism in relation to Curley's wife (who is unnamed), racism towards Crooks, and ableism in Lennie. Teachers discuss derogatory language and discriminatory attitudes to women/girls through analysis of Curley's wife, who is called a bitch, a tart, jailbait, skank, tramp and compared to Candy's dog. Teachers use the marriage as an example to discuss coercive control and gaslighting. Further discussions can draw out the importance of communication, love and respect in relationships and identify what help is available to escape a physically or mentally abusive relationship or coercive control.

Fiction writing, drama games, oracy techniques and art might be used to support the development of emotional intelligence as a key ingredient of respectful relationships. For example, you might encourage younger pupils, in their creative writing, to identify emotions like anxiety, unhappiness, and loneliness. You might encourage older pupils to demonstrate their understanding of peer pressure, reputational risk, vulnerability, and the

impact of social isolation. Teaching about emotions is also a part of mandatory health education.

History lessons might include content which contextualises discussions of power imbalances for primary pupils, and misogyny and sexual violence for secondary pupils. This content can be explicitly linked back to relationships education and sexual abuse in particular. In subjects such as history or politics, teachers weave in learning about conflict resolution, using relevant political conflicts as a springboard for an examination of conflict resolution in personal relationships; this is critical in establishing the difference between trying to understand another's perspective, seeking to encourage another's participation in a positive way, and asking them to compromise their core values.

Workforce and training

In considering who best to teach content on healthy relationships, sexual harassment and sexual violence, you will need to think about the existing skills and interests of your teaching staff. Consider staff who already have a background or interest in related topics such as ethics, psychology, sociology or psychotherapy. Diversity among teaching staff will both support effective learning and also avoid a default in which women take the lead on these subjects.

The Ofsted review was clear that effective RSHE teaching will require expertise from a trained PSHE / RSHE lead for curriculum planning and that RSHE teachers should have adequate training and knowledge. There is strong evidence that effective, up-to-date, and regular training is essential to delivering high quality RSHE including training on:

- how to approach subjects that might feel uncomfortable for teachers or their pupils
- being confident answering hard questions
- establishing rapport in the classroom while introducing sensitive topics.

Evidence shows that consistent and validated training is needed to increase the confidence and the understanding of contemporary issues (e.g., online abuse and relationships) of teachers and other professionals. Practical and experiential training is likely to support teachers' confidence and ability.

All staff are involved in teaching and modelling healthy relationships, whether or not they are classroom RSHE teachers and regardless of the age or subject they teach. You can ensure that messages are consistent by ensuring that all staff within the school understand the key principles of healthy relationships. Regular training for teaching staff will help maintain a focus on high-quality relationships education and modelling healthy relationships, as well as ensuring that staff are up to date. Bias training for staff will also help address any harmful or prejudiced assumptions. You can support a healthy school culture by ensuring that all staff have support to understand their own relationship patterns and to recognise their crucial role in modelling healthy relationships.

You can support teachers also by celebrating the expertise of RSHE teachers within the school, recognising the richness and complexity of these subjects.

Providing all staff with the time and opportunity to reflect on the content they are teaching, as well as to challenge their own assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices, can support a healthy school culture.

Be aware that many members of your workforce are likely to have had adverse experiences, including sexual violence and sexual harassment. It is important to acknowledge the lived experience of staff and ensure that there is support for teachers, including signposting to local services. Teachers should have plenty of notice of the content they are expected to cover and be given an early opportunity to raise any

concerns or issues. Similarly, pupils should know the topics in advance. You should not expect teachers to deliver topics which they may find traumatising because of previous experiences, and should actively protect staff wellbeing in these cases.

Ensure that you have a staff team that is supported and feels confident and excited to deliver this work and that adequate support as well as training is in place for staff. As well as ongoing, regular training opportunities, you can use teaching practice and teacher role plays to support formal training. Mentoring and other activities can help build teachers' confidence. Ensure that all teachers are aware of reporting procedures. You should be mindful of the importance of creating a culture in which staff can express their reservations about the content to be taught, and say when they are not feeling confident to teach, so that problems can be addressed.

Example: building teachers' confidence

As part of their work to address sexual harassment, school X conducted a survey to establish current levels of staff knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver RSHE. The survey asked what support teachers would find useful, with options including internal/external training, coaching and mentoring, team teaching and observing other staff. The survey revealed gaps in teachers' confidence to challenge discriminatory language and answer difficult questions. The school delivered whole school staff training focused specifically on these skills. The RSHE lead set up a shared drive for staff to share anecdotes, good practice and ideas, to encourage a partnership approach. Less confident staff were given access to coaching or mentoring sessions with the RSHE lead. The survey is to be repeated annually.

For relationships education to be effective, it needs to be delivered by staff who are equipped to handle difficult questions and tackle harmful assumptions.

Pupils say: “they try too much to not talk about ‘taboo’ topics but that’s exactly the issue, the less we speak on issues then the less educated everyone is on these topics.” (SEF young people’s poll)

Tips for SLT/RSHE leads

Don't assume that all staff understand the importance of teaching controversial topics within relationships education. An open conversation in which staff have an opportunity to express reservations may be a good opportunity to challenge teachers' assumptions.

Some teachers will lack confidence to discuss difficult topics: encourage more experienced teachers to be visible and offer to model, team teach, and observe lessons. In some cases, it may be helpful to bring in external expertise, and this should be appropriately integrated into regular lessons.

Local authority teams including neighbourhoods, safeguarding and public health teams can provide localised support and data, along with local violence reduction units and school nursing teams.

Curriculum planning

You are free to determine how to deliver RSHE content effectively within your school. However you should take into account the evidence that RSHE teaching is more effective if delivered regularly throughout the school year, rather than in short bursts of intensive learning, such as drop-down days.

Pupils say they want “More time to develop an understanding of it all, instead of rushing the whole subject to get it over and done with. “ (SEF young people’s poll)

Paragraph 251 of the Ofsted inspection handbook states that Ofsted will expect the school’s relationships, sex and health education curriculum (and wider curriculum) to specifically address sexual harassment, online abuse and sexual violence. The curriculum should also address safeguarding risks (including online risks), issues of consent, and what constitutes a healthy relationship both online and offline.

Curriculum planning will be most effective when based on a clear articulation of the aims and principles of RSHE education, taking the RSHE statutory guidance into account. RSHE leads should consider the role of RSHE in the school, being clear about the impact on pupils and their mental health now and later. Principles might include being fully inclusive, responsive to the needs of all pupils, pro-active, non-judgmental and aiming to reduce sexual violence. Aims and principles can link to over-arching objectives of the course as a whole.

The section of this guidance on involving pupils in curriculum design includes suggestions for how you might work collaboratively with pupils to identify priorities within the school / student body, for example through school councils.

RSHE will be most effective when planned as a spiral curriculum: a curriculum in which topics are revisited over the child’s school years in increasing depth to reinforce knowledge, using prior knowledge to inform future learning. For example, in early years and Key Stage 1 pupils might be introduced to the concept of emotional self-awareness, and discuss how important it is to recognise when something makes them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. At secondary, pupils might apply this knowledge specifically to relationships involving sexual content or sexual activity.

You should tailor your curriculum planning to take account of the particular needs and abilities of your pupils. For example, when discussing forms of sexual harassment that we know affect pupils from a young age, such as sharing unwanted sexual images, and engaging in unwanted sexual language, you should take into account data about the ages at which young people are affected by these issues. You should also consider data about the age at which young people are likely to view pornography and other online content.

A recent BBFC report found that 51% of 11 to 13 year-olds, 66% of 14 to 15 year-olds, 79% of 16 to 17 year-olds had viewed pornography. Over 60% of 11-13 year olds who had viewed pornography said that this had been unintentional.

Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges found evidence that suggests access to technology and the sharing of inappropriate images (e.g. sending nudes) and videos are also issues in primary schools.

In Ofsted's questionnaire of more than 800 young people aged 13 and above, high proportions of girls said that the following types of harmful sexual behaviours happened "a lot" or "sometimes" between people their age:

- sexist name-calling (92%)
- rumours about their sexual activity (81%)
- unwanted or inappropriate comments of a sexual nature (80%)
- being sent pictures or videos they did not want to see (88%)
- being put under pressure to provide sexual images of themselves (80%)
- having pictures or videos that they sent being shared more widely without their knowledge or consent (73%)
- being photographed or videoed without their knowledge or consent (59%)
- having pictures or videos of themselves that they did not know about being circulated (51%)
- sexual assault of any kind (79%)
- feeling pressured to do sexual things that they did not want to (68%)
- unwanted touching (64%)

Example: planning age-appropriate teaching about the impact of the online world on relationships

School X is an all through school which teaches about positive relationships directly, and also addresses the stereotypes and normative assumptions within media and the online world. Starting in early years and continuing throughout primary, the school provides strong examples of positive relationships, including friendships and later on romantic relationships within literature and films. The school discusses in a joyful way with young people what makes their relationships fun and happy. From early years, pupils are also encouraged to identify stereotypes and assumptions in books and other media. This is approached in a positive, fun way, with pupils empowered to create their own culture which is free from stereotypes and prejudices.

In secondary, the PSHE lead is keen to add an academic dimension to the relationships education curriculum, as pupil voice has shown that a significant number of students do not value this subject, preferring to spend time instead on subjects which lead to externally-accredited qualifications. The PSHE lead looks for opportunities in the RSHE curriculum to draw links with other subjects including history, and to draw out relevant

themes from set texts in English literature. At Key Stage 3 pupils explore the impact of mainstream media on friendships and the way we treat others generally.

The PSHE lead has planned a curriculum that discusses online depictions of sexual relationships, including those represented in pornography and social media. Pupils examine academic research about the impact of pornography on real-life romantic / sexual relationships, and are introduced to high-level vocabulary that can be used to explore the impact of pornography on consent and personal boundaries, such as desensitisation, sexual scripts, pseudo-soothers and instrumentalising. The teachers have high levels of training and are able to discuss how sexual scripts within pornography can shape our culture and expectations about sex and relationships. The PSHE lead is clear about separating academic learning about pornography and online media from sex education content.

This lesson is supplemented at the school debating club, where pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 have developed their own topics for debate, including the extent to which the mainstream media (such as social media, computer games and music videos) can be said to have changed ideas around consent and boundaries within romantic or sexual relationships. Pupils reflect on their understanding of what “normal” romantic or sexual behaviour is, and how this might impact their understanding of consent. For example, if it’s normal to kiss on a first date, does this mean that you don’t have to check whether kissing is welcome before you kiss someone you’re on a date with? If you think it’s normal to send nudes to a girlfriend, does this mean you don’t need to check if that’s okay before you do so?

As well as taking into account relevant data, you should also take into account your own understanding of the particular circumstances of your pupils, including religious and cultural backgrounds. As stated in the statutory guidance, these topics must be taught sensitively and inclusively, with respect to the backgrounds and beliefs of pupils and parents. Early conversations with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) can help shape the curriculum and support pupils who may be particularly impacted by content or may have experienced related traumas.

Your RSHE planning should ensure that you have a strong narrative which the whole school community can understand, so that pupils, parents and teachers can see how learning will progress over the pupil’s school career. Involving parents in curriculum planning can both help bring parents on board and also support the crucial role of parents in modelling and teaching about healthy relationships at home. Curriculum planning should give consideration to the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Effective RSHE planning will require teachers to regularly assess their pupils’ knowledge and progress, which may be through quizzes which cover important content, or through reflective exercises. Assessment should also look at pupil’s progress, to help teachers

identify the impact of their teaching. RSHE leads will also want to regularly review and assess the content and delivery of the curriculum.

Pupils will engage more actively with the topics when foundational learning has been effective, and pupils have a grounding in concepts from philosophy or psychology, such as autonomy, respect, dignity, and attachment theory. We know that experiential learning is vital for effective learning in these subjects.

Pupils say “RSE would be better if schools did more about things related to abuse instead of just teaching the biological facts about the body” (SEF young people’s poll)

Pupils say it would help to have “more education on casual sexual harassment, to stop the normalisation of it. “ (SEF young people’s poll)

Involving pupils in curriculum design

A strong RSHE curriculum which effectively supports healthy relationships and addresses sexual harassment and sexual violence will respond to the specific concerns of pupils within the school. Similarly, lessons will be most effective if they clearly relate to the lived experience of children and young people, including those with SEND or who identify as LGBT. Involve pupils in designing the curriculum and in questions about how the curriculum is delivered, including external speakers. Testing the vocabulary and approach with a group of young people can both support high quality curriculum planning and also give pupils a sense of ownership over the curriculum. Pupil involvement in curriculum design can also be incorporated into RSHE lessons, by devoting time to a small group discussion within a lesson to review RSHE provision.

Example: involving pupils in curriculum design

School X used an extra-curricular group focused on empowerment for female pupils as a focus group to learn about pupils' experiences of sexual harassment, and to co-create a questionnaire to be completed by all pupils in the school. The questionnaire asked pupils about attitudes and behaviours in relation to romantic or sexual relationships. The questionnaire also asked pupils about the physical school environment and how safe they feel in different school spaces. Pupils supported the staff to ensure vocabulary was accessible and questions reflected their concerns, whilst staff worked to ensure the questionnaire was as inclusive as possible. The school staggered questionnaire completion to ensure that the safeguarding team could respond to any resulting disclosures.

The questionnaire revealed confusion among pupils about what constitutes sexual harassment and what to do about it. The school then worked with a diverse group of pupils to develop a reporting policy, and to refine relationships education lessons focusing on sexual harassment. The school decided to repeat the questionnaire every three years to inform curriculum planning and to add discursive working groups of pupils every year and adapt the curriculum in light of these discussions to meet the needs of pupils and ensure that the course is constantly responsive to their needs.

School X timetables weekly lessons for all year groups in which RSHE is taught. Staff presented their relevant lesson plans to the girls' group to check the vocabulary and approach. The lessons were then taught to every year group during their timetabled lesson.

The school followed up with staff training addressing the findings of the questionnaire and clarifying what constitutes sexual harassment, as well as communicating the 'student friendly' policy to staff and pupils.

Creating a safe and respectful space for learning

“I feel that instead of scaring us off and make us feel like sex and sexual relationships are a really bad thing/disgusting, they should talk more about what to do in that situation, when to know if it’s the right thing, what might happen after sexual activities or before, and how it’s normal to want to do things like that. Instead of treating us like 5 year olds all the time and never wanting to “open up” about sex and sexual activities, making it awkward for us and maybe for some making us feel like what we feel is not normal” – Female, year 10.
[PPLP data]

There is evidence that some pupils (mainly girls) feel they can’t discuss their thoughts freely in RSHE lessons because of embarrassment and fear of their classmates’ remarks. Relationships Education lessons are an opportunity for you to model key relationship skills within the classroom, including respect for boundaries and consent. Be aware that pupils who exhibit harmful behaviour or who have exhibited harmful behaviour may themselves be victims of abuse. Teachers should think carefully about the impact on pupils who have experienced trauma of any materials or examples they might introduce, and make sure that pupils know in advance what will be covered. Pupils should also understand the limits on confidentiality.

Teaching tips

Empower pupils, showing healthy bodies and healthy relationships so that pupils feel empowered to make healthy choices and to build positive relationships.

Develop safe classroom practices, including collectively agreeing principles for the session, creating space to ask questions, and thinking carefully about seating arrangements. There should be space for pupils to ask questions, laugh and have fun, and pupils should have the right to pass if asked a question they are uncomfortable with.

Avoid using anonymous question boxes or anonymous surveys to minimise the risk that pupils will use these forums to make disclosures which can't be followed up. Where you feel it is important to provide an opportunity for anonymous comments, pupils should be clear about the specific purpose, and understand that the school will not be able to follow up any anonymous disclosures.

Assume that there are pupils in your classroom who have personal experience of the topics being discussed, as victims or as perpetrators, and ensure that there is adequate support for pupils who may have distressing experiences. This should include making clear how pupils can access support, as well as explaining to pupils how reports will be treated.

Distancing techniques can support the discussion of sensitive topics without drawing on personal experience: consider using scenarios, drama game techniques, texts studied in English, TV programmes or films, or characters can be developed with pupils.

Careful curriculum sequencing ensures that foundational concepts like respect and autonomy are introduced early, so that pupils have a chance to challenge their own assumptions early in their learning.

Avoid shaming pupils in their responses both as part of lessons in RSHE and within the wider school environment.

Avoid the use of scare tactics in lessons or assemblies, which might leave pupils feeling unwilling to participate or to vocalise their own assumptions or beliefs. For example, a strong focus on the law may dissuade pupils from speaking honestly and seeking help. Schools should place an emphasis on seeking help from trusted adults, even when you have broken the law. Use positive framing where possible, encouraging pupils to understand how learning can support their capacity to have healthy relationships.

Reference safe places to seek support and further guidance, including trusted adults, internal support mechanisms and external organisations.

Teaching about gender and power

Understanding gender and the social construction of roles and stereotypes should be a core part of relationships and sex education. There is evidence that it is these gender norms that support the underlying assumptions about what is or what is not acceptable sexual behaviour. Evidence suggests that effective relationships education to prevent sexual harassment will include exploring expressions of gender, cultural expectations, stereotypes, and gender inequalities and power imbalances.

To effectively address the stereotypes that underpin sexual violence requires a whole school approach as set out in section above,, including school policies which recognise the disempowerment of women and other minorities, and a cross-curricular approach to relationships education, including looking at the stereotypes and gendered assumptions within literature. Effective relationships education will equip pupils to respect diversity.

Deconstructing harmful gender stereotypes from early years education is an essential foundation for addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is also essential to address the assumption that boys and men can't be victims of sexual abuse. In Ofsted's review, for example, nearly half of the boys aged 13 or over who completed the questionnaire said that being sent sexual images or videos they did not want to see was something that happened 'a lot' or 'sometimes' to them or their peers.

In-class debates about physical and sexual violence can help pupils recognise harmful ideals of masculinity and identify them in their own lives. The Government Equalities Office's [research report on Changing Gender Norms: Engaging with Men and Boys](#) concludes that "Norms of masculinity are a central factor in the continued pervasiveness of violence against women and girls, with expectations of superiority, power and entitlement over women seemingly continuing to be influential in perceptions of what it means to be a man."

To understand how our culture affects our expectations of sex and relationships, effective teaching will support pupils to identify and understand the impact of gender stereotypes and gender inequality in literature, comics, online material, games, and at an age and stage appropriate point in the curriculum, pornography.

Example: teaching about gender and power in a way that is inspiring for boys

Secondary school X school recognises that while it is important that children understand that the majority of the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment are female, it is important to avoid alienating boys or seeing all boys as potential perpetrators. The school has carefully planned lessons on gender, power and misogyny so that boys in particular are empowered to take responsibility for reflecting on and where necessary challenging their understanding of masculinity and gender equality, without shaming boys or giving

the impression that violence is a part of being male. Teachers are clear that we will all have some harmful attitudes towards others, and that our role is to challenge these attitudes which often come from our culture.

The school focuses on inspiring boys, supporting them to feel a part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. For example, boys are encouraged to see how they can be compassionate allies, and teachers take on the role of provocateur, challenging assumptions in a positive, confident and non-shaming way. All pupils are taught how gendered power imbalances and patriarchy can negatively impact everyone, including boys, and sustain a culture of sexual violence.

The teacher explores case studies and scenarios which have a range of examples of sexual harassment and violence, involving a range of people with different genders. The teacher also makes clear that anybody, regardless of race, faith, gender and sexual orientation can perpetrate or be a victim of sexual harassment or violence.

The importance of learning and practicing social and emotional skills

Evidence suggests that school environments that promote sharing, empathy, and emotional expression contribute to reducing risks of perpetration, but also to the creation of more supportive spaces for students.

There is evidence also that socio-emotional learning within RSHE, including learning empathy, respect, communication, positive self-image (including body image) can improve academic and behavioural outcomes. More specifically, such teaching contributes to pupils' ability to acknowledge own and others' emotions, manage and express their feelings and show empathy. Participating in socio-emotional learning results in pupils having better social behaviours, fewer behavioural problems overall and lower emotional distress.

Relationships education should include a focus on developing healthy communication skills as a foundation for building the skills to communicate within intimate or sexual situations, where verbal and non-verbal communication can be more difficult and feelings can change rapidly. Interactive exercises can encourage pupils to develop social and emotional skills. Providing pupils with opportunities to exercise their skills, including through supporting the real life decisions they will make at school, can promote skill development.

Sensitivity is needed to create exercises which develop empathy regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence while maintaining a safe space for pupils who have experienced trauma and abusive behaviour. Exercises inviting pupils to imagine themselves in the shoes of a victim may be re-traumatising.

Role play exercises can also be difficult for many pupils – it is safer to read and/or discuss sexual harassment scripts than to include any element of acting, particularly for older pupils who are more likely to have experienced or perpetrated sexual harassment or violence. You can also support conversations based on literature that all of the students have read, clips from popular TV programmes, and use of open statements to stimulate discussion.

Some pupils may need a tailored approach to developing empathy skills and understanding non-verbal communication depending on learning needs, disabilities, or neurodivergence.

Example: Supporting primary pupils to develop empathy

School X is a primary school that wanted to find ways to support the development of student's empathy skills. They opted to develop a set of characters that represented all communities within the school and wider communities, with each character representing

different school values, different family set ups and faiths, hobbies and interests within the community.

The characters were introduced in Year 1 with written scenarios which referenced each character who “grew up” with the students from Year 1 through to Year 6. New situations or scenarios were posed where the characters were bystanders to different situations, students then could advise or guide the characters around how to respond to each situation, weaving in drama activities, oracy techniques and speaking and listening activities to develop pupils’ skills to collaborate together.

The school also used wider research around addressing Mental Health and using Wellbeing methods and Character Education guidance to support pupils’ understanding and skill in developing empathy including rewarding students when values were demonstrated to others and celebrating effort.

Example: supporting secondary pupils to develop empathy

School X uses short sexual harassment scenarios in RSE for KS3 and 4. Pupils are asked to discuss how it might feel to be on the receiving end of catcalls, for example, unwanted touch on the Tube, or repeated remarks about the desirability of their body parts by fellow pupils.

Teachers encourage pupils to explore how it feels to be viewed as an object for another’s pleasure, instead of as an individual. With older pupils this is related directly to sexual harassment scenarios. Younger pupils are asked to reflect on this more generally with regard to the media and how an element of objectification is almost expected by society, which normalises such behaviour and dulls our empathy.

Incorporating active learning and reflective practice

Effective relationships education will employ a variety of teaching methods, from direct instruction to participative, skills-based practice. There is a range of evidence that shows the need for active learning to develop social and emotional skills and to prevent unsafe behaviour. Effective approaches to developing skills will have explicit learning goals. Skills will be learned sequentially through small steps, and teaching techniques will allow pupils plenty of opportunities to practice skills.

Effective teaching will also provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on their learning and on their own behaviours and assumptions. Opportunities for reflection should be planned into lessons, and you should give consideration to how to create a safe space for reflection looking at the advice in section X. As discussed in the section “workforce and training”, teachers will also need opportunities for reflection on their own assumptions and learning.

Pupils say: “I think talking in smaller groups or individually would be better as people would open up instead of feeling embarrassed.” (SEF young people’s poll)

Teaching tips

Give children and young people choices where appropriate about how to reflect. Not all pupils will feel comfortable with a reflective process within a group setting.

Vary activities, including not only group discussion but also for example reflective writing exercises, short story writing, or especially in early years painting or drawing to reflect on concepts introduced through teaching.

Reflective practices should be tailored to the ability of pupils, and teachers should consider how they might use assistive technology.

Challenging harmful assumptions with confidence

The process of tackling harmful or prejudiced assumptions and beliefs needs to start from primary. Evidence suggests that stereotypical and harmful biases can be disrupted during a child's formative years, starting in early primary with the introduction of concepts including gender equality and social justice. Introducing pupils to the concept of human rights from early years can also empower young people to address unfairness and inequality, as well as challenging harmful behaviour.

Pupils should understand that the RSHE classroom is a learning environment, in which it's ok to make mistakes and pupils will not be shamed for articulating their beliefs or exploring opinions they have heard from others.

It is the teacher's responsibility to create an environment in which pupils who hold harmful beliefs or assumptions can express those beliefs and learn to challenge them, understanding that cultural assumptions are powerful and we are all likely to hold some beliefs which we might change our minds about once we have had the chance to learn and reflect. RSHE teaching consequently involves a difficult balancing act, in which teachers need the skills to challenge without shaming, while also creating a safe space for all pupils, some of whom may have suffered as a consequence of the beliefs under discussion

Clear guidance from SLT / the SLT lead can empower teachers to facilitate safe discussions about harmful, prejudiced or misogynistic assumptions rather than closing such discussions down.

One of the most effective ways for teachers to challenge harmful assumptions or behaviour is to discuss the short and long-term impact of sexual harassment and abuse.

Pupils would like RSHE “To teach boys about the impact of sexualised comments and sexual harassment on girls” – Female, year 8. [PPLP data]

Example: exploring the impact of sexual harassment

After conducting single and mixed sex working groups on sexual abuse, pupils in School X reported that engagement with the short- and long-term effects of sexual harassment was particularly impactful. In class, pupils are encouraged to discuss what these effects might be and to use these to create their own case studies, working on examples of sexual harassment such as cat-calling, sending nudes, unwanted staring, unwanted sexual attention. The teacher guides pupils to consider issues like trust, self-esteem, body image and sexual fulfilment. This exercise forms part of broader learning about consent and healthy, respectful relationships.

Example: addressing challenging comments

The RSHE lead in Secondary School X received feedback that staff didn't feel confident to address challenging comments from pupils during RSHE sessions. For example, a year 9 female pupil said that being asked for nudes makes people feel desirable. A year 11 pupil commented that sometimes women might lead a man on, and you can't change your mind half-way through.

To ensure that all group members feel safe, the RSHE lead reinforced the need for staff to develop robust group agreements with pupils and to use these to guide behaviour in sessions.

Teachers worked together to identify the questions that may be asked in advance of the lessons and appropriate responses to these questions.

The teacher uses open questions, such as "why did you use that language / why do you think you hold that belief", considering their own body language and tone of voice to avoid shaming. Where necessary, the teacher is clear that some comments are not acceptable, and may make reference to the law.

Staff also considered some useful phrases around RSHE themes such as consent that could be used by all staff to reinforce key messages and counter misinformation or negative attitudes, for example, "consent needs to be freely given and people are free to change their mind at any time". The school allowed sufficient lesson time to explore these messages in more detail, asking pupils to consider why it is important for people to be free to change their minds and bringing in examples from everyday life to encourage young people to question their beliefs. For example: if you agree to watch a film with a friend, but then you find the film boring or even unpleasant, is it ok to say "sorry I've changed my mind about this one"? If your friend changes their mind, how might you feel, and how might you manage your own feelings in a way that is respectful to your friend?

The RSHE lead encouraged staff to use a questioning approach where appropriate to explore statements in more depth. For example, in response to the year 9 pupil's comment about nudes: "that's an interesting comment about desirability, I wonder why that would be? What else could make someone feel desirable?". Teachers were empowered to acknowledge that these are valid feelings, but also explore to with the class the fact that other young people may feel very differently about requests for nudes. This approach allows pupils to explore and think more deeply, without shaming pupils who might have shared nudes. The question could be a springboard for discussing the impact of persistent asking and why persistent asking can be a form of sexual harassment. The RSHE lead also recognised the importance of discussing foundational concepts such as self-esteem, peer pressure, and power imbalances in young years. The RSHE lead ensured that there was sufficient lesson time in younger year groups for exploring how self-esteem can be built in a number of healthy ways.

Example: inspiring boys to be agents of change

School X is adopting ‘active bystander’ teaching around sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence with the aim of shifting social norms that allow normalisation of harmful behaviour. This programme runs alongside teaching on definitions and examples of these behaviours and relevant laws and school policies. Age-appropriate scenarios and scripts are used to explore potential damage caused by problematic language and behaviour in these areas, and to examine how pupils can safely intervene to redirect a situation. Where this may not be safe, they are invited to examine how conversations later may support potential victims and challenge perpetrators in ways that encourage them to change. The range of motivations for a perpetrator are discussed (from ignorance to selfishness to deliberate desire to harm) along with the range of potential reactions a victim may experience; it is made clear that judgemental approaches do not benefit the community.

The school takes opportunities to inspire boys to be allies, by highlighting positive examples of boys and men taking action, and also show-casing global action to promote and recognise boys and men as agents and beneficiaries of changes. For example, pupils learn that at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2021, the UK along with most other States globally signed up to the Agreed Conclusions which recognises men and boys as “strategic partners and allies in the promotion of women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as the elimination of violence and in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”

LGBT inclusivity

Every aspect of RSHE should be as inclusive as possible, and every topic should be taught in a way that makes it clear that it is relevant to every pupil. There is evidence that teaching LGBT issues as a separate set of topics which highlights differences and vulnerability may act as a reinforcement for inequality and stereotypes. All language and approaches and case studies should be as inclusive as possible. While primaries are not required to cover LGBT, we strongly recommend that all teaching is inclusive and representative of the pupils. You may want to seek advice from external organisations with relevant experience, such as [Galop](#).

We know that young people who identify as LGBT are significantly more likely to say that RSHE lessons are not at all useful.² Evidence shows that heteronormative RSHE distances pupils for whom these frameworks seem irrelevant. The Ofsted inspection handbook makes clear that schools should be alert to factors that increase a child's vulnerability, including that girls and LGBT children are at greater risk of exploitation and / or of feeling unable to report abuse. It is important also to note that homophobia and transphobia may be the cause of some sexual bullying, harassment and violence.

Relationships education will be effective when all pupils feel that it is relevant to their lives and experiences, and the Ofsted review noted that this does not always happen.³ For example, when you're teaching about consent, it should be clear that everyone can be a perpetrator or a victim, no matter their gender or sexuality.

“We never do anything about same sex relationships. How will we ever feel completely accepted and equal if we don't get taught how to manage our own sexual relationships in school and how to stay safe when in same sex relationships” – Female, year 11. [PPLP data]

You can model respect for difference by providing a range of examples of people in different kinds of relationships and not defaulting to heterosexual examples of relationships, and by not making assumptions about your pupils. This will include recognising the diversity of families that children come from and that family circumstances can change. Using literature and other examples which include LGBT characters increases connectedness and empathy. Evidence suggests that curricula that

² The Sex and relationships education and sexual risk-taking report, based on data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England 2 (LSYPE2), and its predecessor LSYPE1 found that nearly 1 in 5 young people described the sex and relationships education they received as 'not at all useful'. Young people of a minority sexual orientation (i.e. gay, lesbian, bisexual or other), and those with disabilities were among those who were significantly more likely to say their lessons were 'not at all useful'. NOT YET PUBLISHED.

³ “Some children and young people noted that RSHE lessons were not inclusive enough and only focused on heterosexual relationships.”

are inclusive of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions reduce homophobic bullying and harassment and increase safety for LGBT pupils.

Teaching tips

Wherever possible, provide inclusive examples of loving relationships, families. Provide visual materials and learning space with diverse examples of vocabulary, relationships and families. This will set the tone for conversations to be more inclusive and representative of the pupils within that class.

Pupils can be encouraged to identify stereotypes around sex and relationships (including racialised sexual harassment, or prejudice about LGBT relationships) from social media, popular music lyrics, and tv. This encourages pupils to lead the conversation and deconstruct these assumptions.

A member of staff has explicit responsibility for diversity and inclusion, and pupil diversity and inclusion ambassadors can also support.

Teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The Ofsted inspection handbook is clear that providing effective pastoral support includes being alert to factors which increase a child's vulnerability, including having additional needs. Young people with disabilities are more likely to say that RSHE lessons are not at all useful. Specific information on teaching RSHE to pupils with SEND, including establishing appropriate ground rules, involving parents, grouping pupils, and assessing readiness for a topic, can be found in the teacher training module on [Teaching RSHE to pupils with SEND](#). You may also want to seek advice from organisations with relevant expertise such as [nasen](#), and [Mencap](#).

Curriculum planning will need to consider how to equip all pupils with the vocabulary and understanding needed to identify and report abusive behaviour.

You will need to give consideration to the specific learning needs of your pupils. This will include considering how to tailor material or reflective exercises to be accessible to pupils with identified special education needs and disabilities, while still providing challenging and stretching learning. This will also involve thinking more widely about neurodivergence as well as drawing on the strengths and unique abilities of each pupil in your classroom.

Evidence shows that pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may lack the opportunities their peers have to cover any gaps in their sex or relationships education. ASD pupils may need specific teaching about concepts which other pupils would pick up from their peers, for example, "dirty talk", which ASD pupils may take literally. Some ASD pupils may have a lower understanding of what could constitute inappropriate sexualised behaviour, which might result in stalking or harassing behaviour which the pupil does not understand the impact of, and so ensuring that children understand what kind of behaviour is appropriate is important.

Children with learning disabilities appear to be over-represented amongst children who sexually harm others. Institutional and wider societal discomfort with the idea of disabled children's sexuality, as well as misconception that a disability causes an individual to be asexual or 'childlike', or aggressively and uncontrollably sexual, can play a role in this over-representation.

There is also a consensus that disabled children are at a greater risk of sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers, and most estimates put this increased risk at around three times that of nondisabled children⁴


Young people with SEND are more vulnerable to exploitation, social isolation, bullying, mental health problems, obesity, and premature death from preventable causes. Often, they are not seen as having valid needs around healthy intimacy, which can lead to problems as they reach adulthood.

Children with learning difficulties and SEND may need additional resources and support for their learning. To best identify the specific needs of children with SEND you should consider collaborating with other organisations including local authorities and specialist health / sexual health services.

⁴ IICSA report The residential schools investigation (iicsa.org.uk) - page three - "Children with disabilities are three times more likely to experience sexual abuse than other children. "

Faith, language and cultural differences

RSHE teaching will be most effective when the faith and cultural background of pupils is taken into account. It will also be important to take into account pupils' views on how their faith or cultural background affects their experience of relationships and relationships education. For more support in teaching effective RSHE that draws on and supports faith teachings, you may wish to draw on the expertise of the [Association of Muslim Schools](#), the [Catholic Education Service](#), the [Board of Deputies of British Jews](#) or the [Church of England](#), among others.

 The RSHE statutory guidance sets out our expectations in detail, including that in all schools the religious background of pupils should be taken into account, so that topics are appropriately handled. The guidance states that schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious. The guidance is also clear that in all schools, teaching should reflect the law (including the Equality Act 2010) as it applies to relationships, so that young people clearly understand what the law allows and does not allow, and the wider legal implications of decisions they may make.

Pupils with English as an additional language may need extra support to understand complex vocabulary in relationships education, and to facilitate any disclosures you will need to ensure that all pupils understand the correct terms for body parts.

Example – cultural and faith inclusivity

School X is a secondary school with a diverse school population with a higher than average number of pupils with English as an additional language. A large number of pupils identify as practising Muslims or Sikhs alongside smaller numbers of pupils who practise Hinduism and Christianity. Many parents are concerned that the RSHE curriculum contravenes religious teachings. School leaders have consulted staff and religious leaders within the community to understand accepted religious teachings on issues presented within the RSHE curriculum. With this understanding, staff can confidently field questions or concerns raised by parents or pupils as part of the RSHE curriculum delivery. Conversations are grounded in common concerns, including the importance of keeping children safe and allowing them to make their own decisions. The school maintains a high level of contact with parents right from the beginning of their RSHE planning, ensuring that parents understand and endorse the principles and aims of the RSHE curriculum.

The school recognised that some common issues raised by pupils were cultural and not religious – including beliefs about periods and virginity. In lessons, some pupils spoke of experiences unique to their cultural upbringing. It is essential that teachers explore the intersectionality of experience when teaching RSHE – understanding cultural and faith

backgrounds of pupils, so that pupils feel both seen and represented in the curriculum they experience.

In Key Stage 2, pupils are taught The Equality Act 2010 and the nine protected characteristics, alongside the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Teachers have become adept, through in-house training, at how to interweave links to this legislation into their RSHE lessons. Because pupils are secure in their understanding of diversity and differing world views, they can apply this to new topics, understanding there is no 'one-size-fits-all' response. Within lessons, pupils have freedom and flexibility in their method of participation.

Choice of language in RSHE lessons is impartial and factual, using the phrase 'In some cultures...' to facilitate discussion. Teachers should avoid making assumptions about pupils' religious beliefs or cultural backgrounds, recognising the diversity of beliefs within all faiths and cultures.

Working with parents and the local community

The RSHE statutory guidance requires schools to develop a policy for teaching RSHE and to consult with parents about their plans. Relationships education will be most effective when supported by parents and the local community, and when important messages are backed up by pupils' parents. Schools can foster trust and support among the parent community by focusing on building strong relationships with parents and modelling effective and open communication. Practical advice on working with diverse communities including different cultures and religions can be found in the Child Sex Abuse Centre's report on [Improving responses to the sexual abuse of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children](#). In particular, this document contains useful information about addressing unconscious bias and developing cultural competency.

Example: Working with parents in a culturally diverse school

In school X, a recent Stop RSHE campaign has heightened concern among parents about RSHE, and created mistrust between the school and community. The school fostered cultural competence among staff by building strong relationships with pupils and families, gaining a strong understanding and contextual knowledge of the cohort demographic.

Parents expressed a keen interest to be informed about the RSHE curriculum and the school arranged regular and accessible consultation events to discuss topics in advance of teaching. In initial consultation meetings, senior leaders worked with parents to identify the many areas that families have common, such as struggles with monitoring children's internet use and relationships online. The school is careful to link relationships education clearly with common shared human, educational and religious values such as honesty and respect. Teachers have created short 5 minute videos featuring pupils and staff, to share with parents before each half term, linked to the RSHE topic for that term.

The school set up a working group of parents reflecting the school's demographic spectrum, meeting each half term to look at resources and curriculum intent for the coming weeks, giving input to senior leaders around cultural sensitivity. This ensured that the RSHE lead looked carefully at diversifying the resources, including English texts, to cover a broad range of cultures and faiths.

Teaching topics which feel awkward or uncomfortable

You might feel uncomfortable about some of the topics to be discussed. Accessing support where available from other teachers / mentors within the school can help you prepare for topics which might cause discomfort. Appropriate training can show how these topics can be rich, fascinating and exciting to teach. However, be aware of your own boundaries. You should not as a teacher be required to discuss specific topics which are distressing to you because of your own experience and you should not be asked to explain why. You may also feel uncomfortable if you are asked to teach subjects which are unfamiliar to you and should request the training and support that you need to feel comfortable teaching these topics.

Teaching tips

Access whatever support is available from your wider staff team and SLT to support your own comfort in the classroom. The section of this guidance on workforce and training describes the support schools should have in place. If you feel comfortable to do so, you may want to acknowledge any awkwardness with pupils, and contextualise this, explaining that sometimes we can feel awkward or embarrassed talking about topics such as sexual harassment or sexual violence.

This models emotional intelligence and self-awareness, as well as giving pupils permission to feel and acknowledge their own awkwardness or embarrassment. Discuss, as a group, techniques for reducing embarrassment or discomfort, including giving everyone the tools to say “pass” if asked a direct question they are uncomfortable answering.

In line with safeguarding practice, avoid disclosing personal traumatic experiences as this does not model careful boundaries to pupils. Pupils’ learning can be better supported using depersonalised examples and scenarios. This also ensures that your wellbeing is protected.

Using external resources

The RSHE implementation guidance '[Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum](#)' contains useful advice about how to effectively use external resources, in line with the law about political impartiality and the [political impartiality in schools guidance](#). It is the responsibility of schools to ensure that all external resources are fit for purpose and age and stage appropriate.

External resources are effective when they are integrated into pupils' learning, rather than delivered as stand-alone lessons or examples.

Example: using external resources effectively

School X has employed the use of a video resource to teach about sexual harassment, showing discussions by young people of relevant topics. This enables pupils to hear about the personal experiences of other young people, without compromising the privacy or safety of staff members. School X uses the resource in learning tutor time covering topics around mental health and wellbeing and the same resource is used in RSHE lessons. The classroom teacher leads a structured discussion based on the video clips.

For example, as part of this discussion, the teacher asks: What happened, was this sexual harassment or violence? Why? What could Person A do next? Who could support them? Why might they not report? How to overcome this? Signpost sources of support. What could Person B do next? etc.

Safeguarding and reporting


Teachers should ensure that all pupils are aware in advance of teaching specific subjects, of the most appropriate way to report their own experiences of sexual harassment or violence or other concerns. You might for example support a whole school approach to safeguarding with an RSHE lesson at the start of each year on safeguarding and reporting – making clear how to report concerns, what the processes are, and what the local sources of support are. Pupils should also understand the impact of making false reports. Pupils should know who they can talk to about concerns about their own behaviour, and what the consequences and support for them will be if they self-report perpetration. Pupils should be made aware that the RSHE classroom is not a safe space for reporting their experiences. Where possible, pupils should be consulted about the best processes around reporting sexual harassment or sexual violence. Policies should be clear to avoid victim blaming – for example not blaming or challenging children for putting themselves in a situation where they have suffered abuse (e.g. being on an age-restricted social media platform when under 13), and not sending victims home or removing victims from a class. Be aware that zero tolerance policies can prevent pupils from reporting.

Part 5 of [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) sets how schools and colleges should respond to all reports and concerns of child on child sexual violence and sexual harassment. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that, all staff undergo safeguarding and child protection training (including online safety) at induction and that this is integrated, aligned and considered as part of the whole school or college approach to safeguarding, and wider staff training and curriculum planning. The training should be regular updated. Children should be taught about safeguarding, including in relation to online safety. Further resources can be found in the guidance on [sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#). [Link also to be provided to the DSL hub]

It is effective safeguarding practice for the designated safeguarding lead (and their deputies) to have a good understanding of harmful sexual behaviour. This could form part of their safeguarding training. This will aid in planning preventative education, implementing preventative measures, drafting and implementing an effective child protection policy and incorporating the approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment into the whole school or college's approach to safeguarding.

Annex: Other useful documents

This guidance should be read alongside:

- Behaviour in Schools guidance (forthcoming)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#),
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)
- [Child exploitation disruption toolkit](#)
- [RSHE statutory guidance](#)
- [RSHE implementation guidance](#)
- Respectful School Communities Toolkit
- [Prevent guidance](#)
- Online safety  guidance
- Domestic abuse statutory guidance (forthcoming)
- Guidance for designated safeguarding leads (forthcoming)
- [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#)

You may also want to make reference to:

- The United Nation's [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women | OHCHR](#)
- The World Health Organisation's [RESPECT Seven strategies to prevent violence against women](#)
- The UN [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW)
- The European Union's Commission-funded interactive model of [Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence](#)



Department
for Education

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