



# Definitions for Relationships and Sex Education

**Legislation passed in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires that all primary schools in England provide Relationships Education and all secondary schools provide Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). In addition, Health Education will be mandatory in all state-funded primary and secondary schools. Primary schools are encouraged, but not mandated to provide sex education.**

The legislation gives parents a right to request to excuse their child from sex education in primary and secondary school, but not from Relationships Education or Health Education. Parents cannot withdraw children from science. Maintained schools must follow National Curriculum Science.

Statutory guidance on Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education (RSHE) (2019) requires that all schools must have a policy on Relationships Education and RSE, stating that within their policy schools should:

- Define Relationships Education (primary)
- Define any sex education they choose to teach other

than that covered in the science curriculum (primary)

- Define RSE (secondary)

Schools therefore need to be able to draw a line between Relationships Education and sex education in order to implement the parental right to request their child is excused from sex education.

Government guidance does not provide a definition for sex education, Relationships education, RSE or Health Education. Statutory guidance sets out content for primary Relationships Education in a series of tables listing what pupils should know 'by the end of primary'. There is no equivalent for sex education content. There is reference to sex education in primary schools in paragraph 67, which refers to sex education as including how a baby is conceived and born:

*'The Department continues to recommend therefore that all primary schools should have a sex education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the pupils. It should ensure that both boys and girls are prepared for the changes that adolescence brings and – drawing on knowledge of the human life cycle set out in the national curriculum for science – how a baby is conceived and born'. (paragraph 67, statutory guidance on RSHE, 2019)'*

Content for secondary RSE is set out in tables listing what pupils should know 'by the end of secondary'. This is a combined subject with no separate heading for sex education, but one section of the table is focused on intimate and sexual relationships including sexual health.



## TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS IN NAVIGATING DEFINITIONS THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDES:

- A table exploring what may constitute sex education and where this content might be placed in the curriculum
- Some principles for how to approach definitions
- Sample definitions of Relationships Education and sex education

*"The legislation gives parents a right to request to excuse their child from sex education in primary and secondary school, but not from Relationships Education or Health Education."*

Table 1: Teaching points that might be considered to be

Curriculum	Notes on statutory content and placing this learning in the curriculum	Main subject location(s)	Phase to introduce
Naming main external body parts (including correct terms for genitali	<p>Naming main external body parts is in Year 1 National Curriculum Science. The science programme of study does not list parts of the body to teach and does not prohibit teaching any parts.</p> <p>The structure and function of the male and reproductive organs are covered in more detail (internal and external) in National Curriculum Science Key Stage 3.</p> <p>Naming genitalia will also be part of learning about changing adolescent body under Health Education.</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Science</p> <p>Health Education</p>	Primary
Learning about privacy of genitalia.	This is safeguarding and also compatible with the interpretation of Relationships education.	Relationships Education	Primary
<p>Sexual reproduction in humans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sperm and egg needed to make a baby</li> <li>- Conception, including IVF</li> <li>- Sexual intercourse</li> <li>- Birth</li> </ul>	<p>This can be covered in science, building on a sequence of learning in science about reproduction. However, National Curriculum Science treats human reproduction as optional content when covering sexual reproduction in animals.</p> <p>When learning about human sexual reproduction in science pupils might also be given context – see below.</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>And / or</p> <p>Sex education</p>	Primary
<p>Context of human sexual reproduction and sexual intercourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reproduction is adult; requires physical and emotional maturity,</li> <li>- Legal age of consent to sex</li> </ul>	<p>This context can be covered to some extent whether human reproduction is taught in science or as part of sex education.</p> <p>Relationships Education includes that pupils should know: 'that families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability'.</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>And / or</p> <p>Sex education</p>	Primary

Curriculum	Notes on statutory content and placing this learning in the curriculum	Main subject location(s)	Phase to introduce
<p>Contraception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Types of contraception and how it works</li> </ul>	<p>'The facts about the full range of contraceptive choices, efficacy and options available' is under secondary RSE subheading intimate and sexual relationships including sexual health.</p> <p>Covered in National Curriculum Science: Key Stage 4 science includes 'hormones in human reproduction, hormonal and non-hormonal methods of contraception'.</p> <p>Note: Contraception can be used for medical reasons separate from preventing conception, and this could come up as part of Health Education in relation to changing adolescent body and menstrual wellbeing.</p>	<p>Sex Education</p> <p>Science</p> <p>Health education</p>	<p>Secondary, though basic concept can be explained at primary.</p>
<p>Sexually Transmitted Infections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transmission</li> <li>- Prevention including safer sex</li> <li>- Testing</li> </ul>	<p>STIs are part of secondary RSE subheading 'intimate and sexual relationships including sexual health', which covers transmission, prevention, safer sex and testing.</p> <p>STIs are included in National Curriculum Science at Key Stage 4 ('communicable diseases including sexually transmitted infections in human including HIV/AIDS').</p> <p>STIs could be covered as part of Health Education, where it would be more likely that STIs are given as examples of bacteria and viruses as part of secondary Health Education: 'about personal hygiene, germs including bacteria, viruses, how they are spread, treatment and prevention of infection, and about antibiotics'.</p>	<p>Sex Education</p> <p>Science</p> <p>Health education</p>	<p>Secondary, though basic concept can be explained at primary.</p>
<p>Human sexual response and sexual feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What happens physically e.g. increased heart-rate, pupils dilate, how erections occur, production of vaginal mucus as part of sexual response, hormones, sexual attraction</li> <li>- Orgasm, sexual pleasure</li> <li>- Masturbation</li> <li>- Managing sexual feelings and sexual desires, which cannot always be acted on</li> </ul>	<p>Not specifically covered in Government RSHE guidance.</p> <p>Aspects of human sexual response relate to human sexual reproduction, which may be covered in secondary science which includes 'the structure and function of the male and female reproductive organs' at Key Stage 3.</p> <p>Aspects of human sexual response are likely to be touched on as part of puberty under Health Education, 'changing adolescent body'.</p>	<p>Sex Education</p> <p>Science</p> <p>Health education</p>	<p>Secondary, though basic concepts such as what it feels like to fancy someone and that masturbation begins during puberty for many people might be covered at primary</p>

Curriculum	Notes on statutory content and placing this learning in the curriculum	Main subject location(s)	Phase to introduce
Human sexuality, sexual identity, including sexual orientation.	This is an overarching concept to support secondary sex education.  Government guidance expects that LGBT content is integrated and that LGBT is covered in secondary.	Sex education, but with some natural overlap with Relationships Education.	Secondary, though concepts such as what it feels like to fancy someone can be covered at primary and must be taught inclusively.
Choices relating to sex - why people have sex - influences on having sex - sexual competencies (communication with partner, readiness, safer sex)	There are several references to understanding choices relating to sex under secondary RSE sub-section: 'intimate and sexual relationships including sexual health'.	Sex education but with some natural overlap with Relationships Education e.g.	Secondary
Definitions of sex and the law: - What is sex - What are sexual activities - Sexual consent - Sex and the law	Secondary RSE includes sexual consent under 'Being safe', both definitions: 'the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent', and consent in relationships: 'how people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent, and how and when consent can be withdrawn (in all contexts, including online)'.  It is important that pupils have sufficient information to define sex and sexual activities to understand sex and the law.	Sex education but with some natural overlap with Relationships Education e.g. 'how people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others'.	Secondary, but some aspects of the law need to be covered at primary sufficient that children understand that there are laws relating to sex, and rules about our bodies – see Relationships Education 'Being Safe'.
Pornography	Secondary RSE includes under 'Online and media', pupils should know 'that specifically sexually explicit material e.g. pornography presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours...'	Sex education but with some natural overlap with Relationships Education.	Secondary, but at primary pupils need to know basic rules re seeking help from an adult if they encounter images or videos of people naked online.

## PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDED APPROACHES TO DEFINING SEX EDUCATION

### 1. Transparency

Transparency about the curriculum is essential. Expanding other curriculum subjects for the purpose of containing sex education and reducing sex education that would be subject to the parent right to request their child is excused could be said to lack transparency. However, providing the science, health, safeguarding and relationships context to sex education is very important. It is therefore important to be fully transparent about wherever sex education content is placed.

### 2. Accept the overlapping nature of content

Pupils will not see boundaries between science, health, safeguarding, relationships and sex. Children and young people are naturally curious and will ask questions that flow from any line of inquiry. It is important to accept that there is a natural overlap between subjects. Schools will want to manage this so that they can support parents wishing to withdraw from sex education, but must not feel they will have done wrong in allowing connections to be made between related content.

### 3. Safeguarding

Pupils need basic knowledge about the privacy of their bodies and genitalia in particular to support safeguarding. Schools may choose to adopt a school-wide policy on consistent use of correct terms for genitalia as part of safeguarding practice. This is not sex education.

### 4. Learning about the law

Pupils need to gain an understanding that a range of sexual activities is subject to laws on sexual consent. Too often, children have not recognised sexual abuse has taken place until they begin secondary sex education. It may be useful for schools to highlight where they are specifically teaching about the law relating to sex.

### 5. Science

Knowledge of the human life cycle is important as a foundation for understanding growth from baby

to child through to puberty and sexual maturity. Learning that some animals reproduce sexually is covered in National Curriculum Science at Key Stage 2, and human sexual reproduction can optionally be included here. There is no statutory requirement to define sex education taught within science, but being clear about the approach taken in a school supports transparency.

### 6. Emphasise the child's right to sex education

Children have a right to education about human sexuality, reproductive health and rights. If this is not provided by the school it is helpful to emphasise that this right still needs to be met.

### 7. Be clear about research evidence

Sex education does not result in earlier sex, the opposite is true. Reassurance may be needed around this.

### 8. Aim to minimise withdrawal and maximise understanding and support

Overall, the aim is to minimise parental withdrawal from school sex education, and maximise parental understanding of school curriculum and parental participation in their child's education. Transparency around how schools approach sex education can support this. Once sex education is defined and specific lessons identified that contain sex education schools could discuss with parents that they could withdraw their child from part rather than all of sex education.

### 9. Aims and values

Engagement with parents, pupils and staff can help schools to identify their aims for sex education, Relationships Education and RSE, which should be aligned with the school ethos. This may include finding shared values, such as wanting to take a positive view of human sexuality.

### 10. Explore options for which teaching resources are used in sex education and explain how concepts are taught

Choices about resources are important and can result in higher levels of participation in sex education. It can be helpful to demonstrate how resources are used in practice as this may dispel concerns about what sex education involves in the classroom.

## MODEL DEFINITIONS

Statutory guidance requires that all schools have a written policy for Relationships Education and RSE. The notes and model definitions provided here originate from the Sex Education Forum and can be adapted for individual schools.

### Sex Education

*Sex education\* is learning about the physical, social, legal and emotional aspects of human sexuality and behaviour, including human reproduction. This includes conception and contraception, safer sex, sexually transmitted infections and sexual health.*

Additional statements could be provided by the school, adapting from the examples below:

*\*Aspects of sex education are covered in the context of learning about lifecycles (in science). When learning about infections and their prevention (in Health Education) there may be reference to sexually transmitted infections.*

*\*To safeguard pupils, factual information about the law relating to, for example, rights to access sexual health services, will be provided to pupils. [school to consider how / when this information is provided, in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education].*

### Relationships education

#### Primary

*Relationships education is learning about the physical, social, legal and emotional aspects of human relationships including friendships, family life and relationships with other children and adults. Relationships education supports children to be safe, happy and healthy in their interactions with others now and in the future.*

#### Secondary

*Relationships education is learning about the physical, social, legal and emotional aspects of human relationships including friendships, intimate, sexual and committed relationships and family life. Relationships education supports children to be safe, happy and healthy in their interactions with others now and in the future.*

### Subject integration

*In our school we take the approach that Relationships and Sex Education are best approached in an integrated way. We will take care to highlight lessons that contain what we define as sex education so that we can respect the wishes of parents who have withdrawn their children from this content. Simultaneously, we will seek to nurture children's curiosity about the world around them, supporting their development and their respect for themselves and each other.*

Note: Primary schools in particular may want to highlight an example of integration, or connections made

between Relationships Education and sex education, for example, when teaching about how a baby is born to also discuss the care that families give to babies.

### Relationships and sex education – combined definition currently used by Sex Education Forum

*Relationships and sex education (RSE) is learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health. It should equip children and young people with the information, skills and positive values to have safe, fulfilling relationships, to enjoy their sexuality and to take responsibility for their sexual health and well-being.*

#### About the Sex Education Forum

The Sex Education Forum is the leading national authority on RSE, founded in 1987 and part of the National Children's Bureau (NCB) family.

Our work is based on ten evidence-based principles for good quality RSE.

We regularly consult young people about RSE and continually support schools to develop their RSE practice through training and a nationwide network of members who receive regular bulletins and access resources via our website.