

# Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Parent/carer FAQs for Hertfordshire Secondary schools

## Why is there new guidance on Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education from the Department of Education?

Before this development, the Department for Education's guidance to schools on Relationships and Sex Education was last updated in 2000, and it clearly no longer accurately reflects the world we live in.

The new guidance was finalised and passed into law by Parliament in 2019, with overwhelming support in both houses. It aims to create a curriculum that:

- fosters pupils respect for themselves and others;
- promotes equality and values difference;
- educates pupils about positive relationships;
- helps pupils understand how their actions can impact on their health, wellbeing and safety.

It also aims to meet the needs of all pupils, whatever their developing identity and family circumstances, and to prepare them for life and work in modern Britain.

The guidance states: *'These subjects represent a huge opportunity to help our children and young people develop. The knowledge and attributes gained will support their own, and others', wellbeing and attainment and help young people to become successful and happy adults who make a meaningful contribution to society.'*

In a great many schools, this curriculum will be delivered through the schools existing Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education or other life skills programme and will require very little change.

## When will the new guidance on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education be delivered in schools?

The guidance comes into effect from September 2020, when it will be statutory that:

- all secondary schools in England teach Relationships and Sex Education
- all secondary schools in England teach Health Education

The Government is encouraging schools to use 2019-20 to review and develop their curriculum.

## Do faith schools have to teach Relationships and Sex Education?

Yes. The new legislation makes Relationships and Sex Education a compulsory requirement in all secondary schools. This includes maintained schools, academies, special schools, free schools, and independent schools.

Faith schools recognise the importance of providing the best possible support to their pupils to prepare them for the challenges that life will bring. As one example, The Church of England welcomes the new legislation as it supports their faith vision:

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*"In Church of England schools, and in all schools, we want young people to flourish and to gain every opportunity to live fulfilled lives. For Church schools, RSE is about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, healthy relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health..."*

## **What has changed from the previous requirements regarding the delivery of sex education?**

Nothing at all.

## **Who will be delivering the sex education teaching?**

In secondary schools, it will be members of the school staff who know the pupils. Visitors may also contribute to the curriculum, but schools will always ensure their messages and approaches are in line with the school values and policy.

## **Will teaching about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) encourage early sexual behaviour?**

RSE does not encourage early sexual experimentation. Young people who have received effective RSE are more likely to delay their first experience of sex and are less likely to engage in risky sexual practices. RSE teaches young people to understand human sexuality and to respect themselves and others. It enables young people to mature, build their confidence and self-esteem and understand the reasons for delaying sexual activity.

The curriculum also enables young people to understand how the law applies to relationships. In particular, this includes understanding the age of consent and the nature of consent. It helps young people to understand their responsibilities within a relationship and how to recognise an abusive or exploitative relationship.

## **Does the Department for Education's guidance state exactly what needs to be taught?**

The guidance sets out the key learning that pupils must receive by the end of Year 11. Schools will decide exactly how they teach the curriculum and what resources they will use. Information about this should be in the school policy.

## **What are the key themes that will be taught in Relationships and Sex Education in secondary school?**

Families  
Respectful relationships, including friendships  
Online and media  
Being safe  
Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

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## What values underpin Relationships and Sex Education?

The core values include:

- the importance of stable, loving relationships
- respect for all
- rights, responsibilities and the law
- equality
- acceptance of diversity
- kindness
- generosity
- honesty

## What are the key themes that will be taught in Health Education?

Mental wellbeing  
Internet safety and harms  
Physical health and fitness  
Healthy eating  
Drugs, alcohol and tobacco  
Health and prevention  
Basic first aid  
Changing adolescent body

## Will I be consulted before these subjects are taught?

Yes. Schools will engage and consult with parents/carers when developing and reviewing their policies for Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education. Parents/carers are encouraged to take up the opportunities when they are offered. Schools may consult parents/carers in different ways, so you may be invited to a consultation meeting or to give your views through surveys, for example. There will be opportunities to find out the content that is in the curriculum, to see examples of materials the school will use and to ask questions and share any concerns.

Schools will listen to parent/ carer views, but they will then make decisions as to how they will proceed. Every school must deliver the statutory curriculum content, so parent/carer consultation does not provide a parent/carer veto on curriculum content. Exactly how the curriculum is taught is ultimately a decision for the school.

## Can I request my child is excused from Relationships Education?

No, parents/carers will not be able to withdraw their child from any part of the curriculum that the school designates Relationships Education.

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### **Can I request my child is excused from Health Education?**

No. Parents will not be able to withdraw their child from Health Education in secondary school. Health Education includes teaching about the changing adolescent body in a timely way to ensure young people are prepared for changes they will experience before they happen.

### **Can I request my child is excused from the Sex Education curriculum?**

Yes. Parents/carers will be able to request that their child is excused from those parts of lessons that are defined as sex education in the school policy. It is hoped that when parents/carers have opportunities to find out more about what will be taught and how, very few parents/carers will want to do this.

Parents/carers should note that the science curriculum includes human reproduction. Discussion of sex within relationships education, therefore, provides opportunities to set this learning in the context of meaningful relationships, personal values, health and safety.

Parents/carers requesting to excuse their child from sex education will be invited to discuss their concerns with a member of staff and asked to specify which particular aspects of sex education content they wish to withdraw their child from.

Parents/carers have this right until three terms before the term in which the young person becomes 16 years old. At this point young people have a right to make their own decision and to opt into sex education.

### **Will excusing my child from sex education mean they will not learn about sex?**

No. The school cannot guarantee that pupils will not learn about sex from other sources outside the classroom. There are many places that children and young people can get information from including: parents/carers, peers, older siblings and the internet. The accuracy of the information they access will be variable.

The delivery of Sex Education within RSE ensures that what pupils learn is age and developmentally appropriate, addresses their real questions and is based on important values and the law.

### **Can I request my child is excused from the elements of sex education taught through the science curriculum?**

No. Parents/carers do not have a right to excuse their child from any part of the science curriculum, including lessons about reproduction and human development.

### **Can I request my child is excused from lessons about the changing adolescent body and puberty?**

No. Parents/carers cannot excuse their child from elements of Health Education. They can only excuse their child from what the school defines as 'sex education' in their policy.

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## **There have been protests in the news about the new curriculum being LGBT-inclusive. Can I excuse my child from lessons about LGBT people and relationships?**

No. The purpose of the Relationships Education curriculum is to educate pupils, age appropriately, about relationships and diversity in the world they live in. It is important that pupils know that different families and individuals exist and are respected under the law.

LGBT-inclusive curriculum content is not new: it has been a requirement for all schools under the Equality Act 2010. The new Relationships Education curriculum reinforces this by clarifying that the lessons young people receive in school must be inclusive of diverse families and be relevant to all pupils. The teaching must promote equality and respect, present material that is accurate and balanced, and it must be underpinned by legal rights and responsibilities. Content related to LGBT people will therefore be fully integrated into the curriculum, rather than being delivered in stand-alone lessons. Parents/carers will not be able to excuse their child from this.

## **Will family diversity be represented?**

Yes. Families, both in school and in the wider world, sometimes look different from a child's own family. Pupils will be taught that British society values diversity and that all families deserve respect. Families are characterised by love and care, even though this may be expressed through different traditions and values.

In schools, learning about families must be inclusive. The Relationships Education curriculum must allow every child the right to see their family represented and all pupils must be confident and safe to speak about who they live with and who cares for them.

## **What will my role as a parent/carer be in Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education? Will our family values be undermined by the curriculum in any way?**

Parents/carers are partners with the school in this important area of education, helping to keep children safe and supporting them to thrive. Schools will inform parents/carers about what is being taught across each year group, so that parents/carers can support the learning at home before or after lessons. This gives families the opportunity to talk about their own values, experiences and perspectives. The Government recognises in the guidance that: *'parents are the first teachers of their children. They have the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.'*

## **Will schools teach about a range of relationships: marriage, civil partnerships, relationships outside of marriage and same sex relationships?**

Yes. The curriculum enables young people to understand the importance of a stable, secure and loving environment for family life and will include the range of different family types that can provide this. Teaching will therefore represent the full range of committed and mutually supportive stable relationships in our society, including religious and civil marriages, civil partnerships, and relationships outside of formal commitment. The range of families represented will include step families, same-sex parents, grandparents as parents, adoptive families, and more.

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## When will this guidance be reviewed again by the DfE?

The guidance is set to be reviewed in 2022.

For more information, advice and training about the introduction of the new Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education curriculum, please contact the Herts for Learning Wellbeing team at [wellbeing@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:wellbeing@hertsforlearning.co.uk) or visit [hertsforlearning.co.uk](https://hertsforlearning.co.uk)

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