**What is Mandatory Relationship and Sex Education (RSE)**

**in secondary schools?**

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

The government’s decision to make [RSE mandatory in schools](https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/RSE_Hub%20briefing%20document_Final.pdf) is to support the development of your child’s health and wellbeing. Helping children to keep happy, safe, and healthy, and able to navigate challenges and opportunities in life. Schools will have a flexible approach to delivering this programme, and can ensure the content is developmentally appropriate, and include an approach that is sensitive to the needs and religious backgrounds of its pupils.

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

**What is secondary school RSE?**

Secondary schools will cover a range of topics that are age appropriate, and build on learning from Key Stage 2. In years 7 and 8 some of this focus will be on transitioning from primary to secondary school, and will include puberty, healthy relationships, online safety, and body image. More in depth subjects such as pressure, consent, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and sex and the law being added as children move into Key Stages 3 and 4. By the end of secondary school, pupils will have been taught content on:

• Families

• Puberty

• Respectful relationships, including friendships and consent

• Online media

• Being safe

• Intimate relationships, including sexual health

Please look at the following link for further information: [Government’s guide for secondary school parents](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/812594/RSE_secondary_schools_guide_for_parents.pdf).

You may feel happy that your child is being taught about families, respectful relationships and being safe but some parents are nervous about the topics related to sexual health. At some point in our lives, most people will have relationships and it is important that young people have all the information they need to make educated and safe decisions when it comes to sexual and intimate relationships. The content includes learning about the facts related to sexual and reproductive health, as well as having the choice to delay sex, and manage pressures.

Can you think back to what your sex education was like growing up? Many of us would have wanted to have been provided with information and education that was factual, and age-appropriate and delivered in a safe environment.

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

In secondary school parents will still have the right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education (but not relationships education), up until 3 terms before the child turns 16. After this time the child has the choice of receiving sex education with or without parental consent. Remember that if your child is taken out of these lessons, they may hear about the lessons from their friends or peers but in a way that is not fully accurate, they may also have questions that will need answering at home.

The science curriculum covers topics such as reproduction and human development, this is a compulsory subject and children cannot be withdrawn from these lessons. For more information please see the Department for Education guidance [insert link].[[1]](#footnote-1)

**What can I do at home to support my child’s RSE lessons?**

Sexuality is part of natural development and children and young people will have lots of questions about these changes physically and emotionally. Often young people tell us that they would like to hear about this information at school and in the home.

The key is to open up an ongoing dialogue with them. This is best done by moving away from the idea of having ‘the talk’ and developing a relationship where children of all ages feel that they can check in with you as their knowledge increases and as their bodies change.

It’s good to let our children talk to us about what they have learnt and spend a lot of our time listening, and reinforcing their new knowledge with praise and acceptance when we can. Having conversations related to personal safety and relationships, whilst we are in the car, on a walk, or playing a game, can make children feel able to open up in a way that feels natural, without being put on the spot.

There is help and support for you to feel equipped about answering questions that your child might ask you following a RSE lesson, you can increase your knowledge through [Brook Learn](https://www.brook.org.uk/brook-learn/) offering free e-learning and free resources.

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/805781/Relationships\_Education\_\_Relationships\_and\_Sex\_Education\_\_RSE\_\_and\_Health\_Education.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)