

Quick guide to relationships and sex education: What it is, what it aims to achieve, what the research says

What is relationships and sex education?

Relationships and sex education is learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of human development, relationships, sexuality, wellbeing and sexual health.

What does relationships and sex education (RSE) aim to achieve?

Developmentally appropriate RSE aims to:

- Help children and young people to understand and take care of their physical health;
- Improve children and young people's emotional well-being and mental health;
- Safeguard children and young people by supporting them to report harmful behaviour, including online;
- Inform children and young people of their rights and responsibilities in society, leading to greater community cohesion and appreciation of independence and interdependence within relationships;
- Develop emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills, including around gender equity and power dynamics in relationships;
- Reduce harmful behaviour, including sexual violence and relationship abuse, stigma and discrimination;
- Help children and young people to develop positive relationships with themselves and others, based on respect and equality.

What does the research evidence say?

Independent and published research from a wide range of academic and credible sources in the UK and internationally demonstrate that RSE contributes to improved physical and mental health for children and young people.

When they have received RSE, young people are:

- More likely to seek help or speak out;
- More likely to practice safe sex and have improved health outcomes;

- More likely to have consented to first sex, and for first sex to happen at an older age;
- More likely to have an understanding of digital safety in regard to relationships and sex;
- More knowledgeable and aware of discrimination, gender equity and sexual rights;
- Less likely to be a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence.

What makes RSE most effective?

RSE is most effective when teachers (and other educators) receive evidence based training about RSE and when home and school are involved.

Information taught in RSE must be medically and factually accurate and up-to-date; scare tactics should not be used and lessons need to be timely and responsive to children and young people's needs as they are growing up. There should be opportunities to ask questions and explore different views and opinions.

Children and young people say they want more and better RSE from school and from their families.

- For further information about the research on RSE see our full briefing at www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/evidence
- For information about Government requirements for RSE see www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education

About the Sex Education Forum

The Sex Education Forum is the voice of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in England. As a national charity, we promote and protect the physical and mental health of children and young people by improving their access to RSE. To find out more and join our RSE community visit:

www.sexeducationforum.org.uk