

Curriculum Design Tool for RSE



Working together for quality
relationships and sex education

This tool has been created to support educators in designing developmental, spiral and comprehensive programmes of relationships and sex education (RSE) which start early in primary school and continue throughout secondary education and beyond.

What is sex and relationships education?

Sex and relationships education (SRE) 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 values to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships and to take responsibility for their sexual health and well-being.

Why did we develop this tool?

Educators and others interested in RSE often ask us what should be included in RSE and when each topic should begin. This tool maps out the core content of a comprehensive RSE programme by age and stage and shows how core concepts are developed and revisited with increasing complexity. By presenting the tool as questions that children and young people want to explore it helps keep the focus on the needs of pupils and how they will be met.

What evidence is the tool based on?

The Sex Education Forum created this tool based on international evidence about what constitutes comprehensive RSE. We mapped the questions against the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (2009) and we are in the process of mapping it against the updated UNESCO guidance (2018).

How is the tool structured?

The tool is made up of questions to help you understand what children want to learn about at each developmental stage. Questions are grouped under thematic subheadings (though these do not need to be an organising structure for your programme). The questions are not exhaustive, but they sketch out the key areas that need to be included in any good quality RSE programme.

How can the tool be used?

The tool can be used to audit your existing RSE programme or to develop a completely new programme. It can be used as a starting point to build a programme of study, a unit of work or to plan learning objectives for an individual lesson.

We also recommend consulting pupils to ensure the curriculum meets their particular needs. Pupils can help to prioritise which questions they want to explore in curriculum time. Prioritising will help if there is insufficient time to cover everything and may be particularly helpful in planning for RSE with young people aged 16 and above.

Sharing this tool with parents, staff and governors can help promote understanding about what RSE really involves, and also models the type of language that can be used with pupils at different ages.

Ages 3 -6

At this age children are interested in the differences between boys and girls, naming body parts, where babies come from, and friends and family. What areas of the body are private and should not be touched and who they can talk to if they are worried are also important.

Questions to help you understand what children want to learn about are listed in themes below.

Relationships

- Who is in my family?
- How are other families similar or different to mine?
- What does my family do for me?
- What do I like about my friend?
- What does my friend like about me?
- What can other people do to make me feel good?
- Who do I look after?
- Why shouldn't I tease other people?

My body

- Why are girls' and boys' bodies different?
- What do we call the different parts of girls' and boys' bodies?

Life cycles

- Where do babies come from?
- How much have I changed since I was a baby?
- How are other children similar and different to me?

Keeping safe & looking after myself

- Which parts of my body are private?
- When is it OK to let someone touch me?
- How can I say 'no' if I don't want someone to touch me?
- Who should I tell if someone wants to touch my private parts?

People who help me

- Who can I ask if I need to know something?
- Who can I go to if I am worried about something?

Ages 7-8

At this age children are interested in the changing nature of friendships, the emotional and physical changes of growing up, similarities and differences between boys and girls, coping with strong emotions and how babies are made from eggs and sperm. How to look after our bodies and how to be safe and healthy are also important.

Questions to help you understand what children want to learn about are listed in themes below.

Relationships

How have my relationships changed as I have grown up?
Why do friendships change?
How can I be a good friend?
Why can it be fun to have a friend who is different to me?
What are some of the bad ways people can behave towards one another?
How do I know when I am being bullied?
What do I do if I am being bullied?
How can I make up with my friend when we have fallen out?
Why are some parents married and some not?

My body

How has my body changed since I was a baby?
Why is my body changing?
Why are some children growing quicker than others?
Why are some girls in my class taller than the boys? How do girls and boys grow differently?
Why are we all different? Is it ok to be different?
What are similarities and differences between boys and girls?
Should boys and girls behave differently?

Feelings

What makes me feel good?
What makes me feel bad?
How do I know how other people are feeling?
Why are my feelings changing as I get older?
How do I feel about growing up and changing?
How can I cope with strong feelings?

Keeping safe & looking after myself

What are good habits for looking after my growing body?
What do I do if someone wants me to do something dangerous, wrong or makes me feel uncomfortable?
When is it good or bad to keep secrets?

Life cycles

Why does having a baby need a male and a female?
What are eggs and sperm?
How do different animals have babies?
How do different animals look after their babies before and after birth?
What happens when people get older?

People who help me

Who can I talk to if I feel anxious or unhappy?
Where can I find information about growing up?

Ages 9-10

At this age children are interested in knowing about love and the different kinds of families, they will be curious about puberty and sexual feelings and changing body image. They will want more details about conception, how babies develop and are born and why families are important for having babies. They will be interested in knowing about how people can get diseases including HIV, from sex and how they can be prevented. They will also want to know who they can talk to if they want help or advice and information about puberty and sex.

Questions to help you understand what children want to learn about are listed in themes below.

Relationships

What are the important relationships in my life now?
What is love? How do we show love to one another?
Can people of the same sex love one another? Is this ok?
What are the different kinds of families and partnerships?
What do the words 'lesbian' and 'gay' mean?
Why does calling someone 'gay' count as bullying?
What should I do if someone is being bullied or abused?
Are boys and girls expected to behave differently in relationships? Why?
Can some relationships be harmful?
Why are families important for having babies and bringing them up?

My body

What is puberty?
Does everyone go through it? At what age?
What body changes do boys and girls go through at puberty?
Why are some girls 'tomboys' and some boys a bit 'girly'?
Is my body normal? What is a 'normal' body?
How will my body change as I get older?

Feelings and attitudes

What kinds of feelings come with puberty?
What are sexual feelings?
What are wet dreams?
What is masturbation? Is it normal?
How can I cope with these different feelings and mood swings?
How can I say 'no' to someone without hurting their feelings?
What should I do if my family or friends don't see things the way I do?
What do families from other cultures and religions think about growing up?
Can I believe everything I see on the TV about perfect bodies/relationship/girls and boys....to be true?

Lifecycles/ human reproduction

What is sex?
What is sexual intercourse?
How many sperm does a man produce?
How many eggs does a woman have?
How do sperm reach the egg to make a baby?
Does conception always occur or can it be prevented?
How do families with same-sex parents have babies?
How does the baby develop?
How is the baby born?
What does a new baby need to keep it happy and healthy?

Keeping safe & looking after myself

How can I look after my body now I am going through puberty?
How can girls manage periods (menstruation)?
How can people get diseases from sex and can they be prevented?
What is HIV, how do you get it and how can you protect yourself from it?

People who help me/getting help and advice

Who can I talk to if I want help or advice?
Where can I find information about puberty and sex?
How can I find reliable information about these things safely on the internet?

Ages 11-13

At this age most young people will be entering puberty and will be interested in hormones, how they will be affected by them, the menstrual cycle, wet dreams, erections, fertility, pregnancy - how it can be avoided, and safer sex. They may also be wondering if their physical development is 'normal'. They will want to know about the difference between sexual attraction and love and whether it is normal to be attracted or in love with someone of the same gender. Young people will be asking questions about relationships, when is the right time to have sex, how to avoid pressure and where they can get more information if they need it, including the best websites, confidential services etc.

Questions to help you understand what young people want to learn about are listed in themes below.

Relationships

What makes a relationship happy or unhappy?
Why do relationships change during adolescence?
How can I cope with changing relationships with my family and friends?
Why do people get married or have a civil partnership?
What can I do about family and friendship break-up?
What are the qualities I should look for in a partner?
Should everyone have a boyfriend or girlfriend at my age?
At what age is it legal to have sex? At what age is it legal to get married/ or have a civil partnership?
How do I know when I am ready to have sex/be intimate with my boyfriend/girlfriend?
Do males and females have different expectations in relationships?
What does it mean to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?
What is the difference between transvestite and trans-sexual?
What is acceptable touching and behaviour amongst my peers?

My body

Am I normal? What is normal for my age? If I am a late-developer, will I catch up?
Why do the media show so many pictures of thin/muscle/ perfect celebrities? Should we all look like this?
People say our hormones are raging during adolescence - what effect do they have on the body?
How do hormones affect boys and girls differently?
What is the menstrual cycle and how does it affect fertility?
Why do boys get erections?
What is the menopause, when does it happen in a woman's life and do men go through it too?
What is happening to my body when I get sexually excited?
What is an orgasm and how can I have one?
Do males and females experience orgasm in the same way?
What are normal bodily fluids secreted from penis and vagina?

Feelings and attitudes

What is the difference between sexual attraction and love?
How will I know if I am in love?
Is it normal to be attracted or in love with someone of the same gender? Does this mean I am gay or lesbian?
Do you have to have sex to show someone you love them?
What should I do if I feel I am being pressured into having sex?
Is everybody doing it?
In my community being a teenage parent is acceptable- is this wrong?
My religion says that being gay or having sex before is marriage is wrong, what should I think?

Keeping safe and looking after my sexual health

What is safer sex?
Should everyone who is sexually active carry condoms?
What infections can be caught from having sex? What are the symptoms? What is the impact on your health?
What is HIV and AIDS, how do you get it? Is it always through sex?
How do women get pregnant and how does the baby develop?
Does sex always lead to pregnancy? How can conception be prevented?
Are there ways of enjoying sex that don't risk pregnancy or infection?
What are the different methods of contraception? Are some easier to use than others?
When should emergency contraception be used?
Who should be responsible for contraception/safer sex in a relationship?
If someone is on the pill, why do they have to use a condom as well?
Does drinking alcohol or using drugs affect my decisions about behaviour?

People who can help me/Sources of help and advice

If I think I have a sexually transmitted infection, where can I get it treated?

If a woman gets pregnant, what choices does she have?

What are the best websites on sex and relationships for young people?

How can I find out about local contraception and sexual health services, and what should I expect from them?

Can I see a nurse or doctor in private?

Ages 14-16

At this age some young people will either be sexually experimental or know friends who are. They will be interested to know what they should expect of a partner and how to talk to them. They will need more information on contraception, sexual health and how to access services. They will want to know about different types of relationships and homophobia. They may want to know about how to cope with strong feelings and how to cope with the pressures to have sex. They will start to ask questions about parenthood and may like to know how they can talk to their own parents or a trusted adult. They will also be interested in other influences on sexual decision making such as the law, different cultures and religious beliefs, pornography, the media and the effects of drugs and alcohol.

Questions to help you understand what young people want to learn about are listed in themes below.

Relationships

- What should I expect of my partner in a sexual relationship?
- What can I do to make a sexual relationship more enjoyable?
- Do people try to control or exploit one another through sexual relationships?
- How can I recognise when this might be happening and respond to it?
- What is the most effective way to resist pressure from friends or partner to do things I don't want to do?
- How can I help a friend in an abusive relationship?
- What is homophobia, what effect does it have on people and what can I do if I or a friend experiences it?
- What is most important to me in my relationships with friends, family and sexual partner?
- What are the causes of conflict in young people's relationships with friends, family and peers and how can we deal with it?
- What communication skills would help me in my relationships?
- When is the right time to become a parent?
- What responsibilities do parents have and what skills do they need?
- How can young people cope with family break-up, divorce and bereavement and who can provide support?
- What are the challenges of being a single parent? What help is available to single parents?
- What is the best way to challenge bullying and prejudice?

Feelings and attitudes

- How can I cope with strong feelings such as anger, sadness, desire and love?
- What are the biggest influences on me and my friends sexual behaviour and health?
- What do different cultures and religions believe about sex and relationships?
- How does how I feel about my body affect my self esteem and my relationship with others?
- Pornography is easy to access on the internet - does it show what real sexual relationships are like/should be like?
- Why do people stereotype gays and lesbians/ male, females and transgender/ and stigmatise people with STIs such as HIV?

Keeping safe and looking after my sexual health

- What are the different types of contraception, their advantages and disadvantages, and how can I choose between them?
- Are all methods of contraception also protection against sexually transmitted infections including HIV? What are the risks of different sexual activities?
- Should I be responsible for contraception in a relationship? Can I negotiate this with my partner or should I trust them?
- I know that alcohol and drugs may affect sexual choices and behaviour - how can I reduce the risks from this?
- How do I use a condom and does it affect sexual performance?

People who can help me/sources of help and advice

- What are my rights as a young person to information, sexual health services and confidentiality?
- What is the full range of services, help and information available to me, where can I find out about them and how can I make the most of these services?
- I'd like to talk to my parents or a trusted adult about sex and relationships - what is the best way to go about this?
- If a woman gets pregnant, what choices does she have and what influences these choices?
- What are the laws on sexual offences?

Ages 16 & Beyond

At this age young people are at the legal age of consent and many, but not all, will be in intimate relationships and will be interested to know about the challenges of long-term commitments and the qualities needed for successful loving relationships. They will be interested in what issues can be difficult to talk about in intimate relationships, for example sexual pleasure and contraception and how this can be addressed.

They will be interested to know more about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Young people at this age will need more information on sexual risk, pregnancy, sexual health, fertility and infertility. They will be keen to discuss gender stereotyping, violence, exploitation, the law, and discrimination. Learning about the relationship between self esteem and body image and how to challenge negative messages from peers, the media and society is also important.

Questions to help you understand what young people want to learn about are listed in themes below.

Relationships

- What are the challenges of long-term commitments and the qualities needed for successful loving relationships?
- What issues can be difficult to talk about in intimate relationships for example sexual pleasure and contraception and how can this be addressed?
- What is the psychological and emotional impact of relationships breaking up, loss, grief and death? What help and support is available?
- How can I be assertive in communicating with others?
- How can I be a better listener?
- What is the experience like of 'coming out' about being gay, lesbian or bisexual to family and friends?
- What is the experience like of disclosing positive HIV status to a sexual partner, family and friends?
- What are some of the challenges of parenting?
- How can parents and wider families support children in their social and emotional development?
- How do I think children should be educated about sex and relationships?
- How can power in a relationship be affected by gender?

What does transgender mean and how can I challenge transphobia?

Influences on behaviour

- What is the impact of culture and law in determining what is considered acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour in society and how has this changed over time?
- Do peer norms impact on the use of condoms and contraceptives?
- What is the impact of the media on self-esteem and expectations about our bodies, sex and relationships?
- How can negative messages from our peers, the media and society be challenged?
- Does pornography present particular values in relation to power, gender and sexual behaviour?
- What forms of pornography are illegal?
- What protection does the law offer in protecting against discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation?

Feelings and attitudes

- What are realistic and unrealistic standards for bodily appearance?
- How can bodily appearance be changed and what is the impact of plastic surgery?
- How are bodily appearance, self-esteem and behaviour linked?
- How can I recognise depression and mental health problems linked to poor self-esteem?
- Is there such a thing as self-esteem that is too high?
- What are gender norms and attitudes to gender equality in different cultures?
- What are my personal values about gender roles and gender equality?

Keeping safe and looking after my sexual health

- What is the difference between efficacy and effectiveness of contraceptive methods?
- What are the pregnancy, STI and HIV risks of anal and oral sex and of non-penetrative sexual activity?
- What are the dangers of erotic asphyxiation?
- How does sexual functioning and reproductive capacity vary across our lives?
- What are some of the causes and impacts of infertility and what

fertility treatment options are available?

Is it problematic to use alcohol and drugs to increase sexual confidence and reduce sexual inhibitions?

What are some of the key signs of sexual exploitation?

People who can help me/Sources of help and advice

Do I know how to access sexual health services in my local area including services for contraception, abortion and counselling?

How can I stand up for the right to affordable and confidential health services?

How can I confidently give information to peers about sexual health and services available to them?